



Consumer and Community Participation Fact Sheet P04: Identifying Appropriate Consumer and Community Members

Planning and careful consideration of consumer and community participation will ensure that the correct resources and the right people are in place to support consumer and community participation having real impact on the project.

- Involve consumers and community members as early as possible in the research cycle.
- The method of consumer and community participation will influence the number of people who participate in the research project; ideally there will always be at least two consumers and community members involved.
- Work with consumers and community members to decide what is the right number of people for your project.

Deciding if consumers and community members of steering groups can also be participants in the research can be a dilemma. It is important for each research project to consider issues about ethics, confidentiality and bias.

Decide who should be involved

- Consumers and community members
- Members (including carers) of the consumer or community group that you are researching.
- Organisations which represent consumer or community groups.
- Members of relevant support groups.

Getting the right consumers and community members for the project

Following the steps below will help all parties understand what they can contribute and what they want from involvement. This may overcome any potential conflicts.

- Draft a plain language summary of the project. This may change once researchers, consumers and community members have met (see Fact Sheet M11).
- Draft a role description and Terms of Reference for the project which, like the plain language summary, should be open to changes.
- Budget for payment of expenses and/or honorarium, discuss this with consumers and community members.
- Advertise expressions of interest for the roles.
- Contact all applicants to discuss their potential involvement in the project: Explain that research can be a long and slow process.
- Contact all applicants, even unsuccessful ones; explain why they have not been successful. Contacting all applicants helps to build networks as people may wish to be involved in future projects.



Planning considerations

- Consider what support or training may be required by this consumer and community group
- Who will be responsible for supporting consumers and community members?
- Budget for the cost of venue and refreshments if required.
- Pull together a pack of information for the consumers and community members. This could include;
 - Information about the research organisation.
 - The National Health and Medical Research Council Statement on Consumer and Community Participation in Health and Medical Research.
 - The policy on consumer and community participation.
 - Draft a plain language summary of the research project and any other relevant information.
 - Draft Terms of Reference for the group.

Tips for researchers
People who are not involved in research may not understand that research can be a long drawn-out process. It is important to be upfront about time expectations so people can commit to long-term participation.