



Co-research: Our learning and recommendations

1. Paid or volunteer researchers

Within the Ageing Better programmes, co-production in research involved volunteer researchers supported by professional researchers and non-academic staff (see section 5 for more detail). The role of researcher was unpaid and the learning in this toolkit therefore centres on this as a voluntary position. This role will therefore be described as 'volunteer researcher' throughout this document.

However many of the insights can be transferable to paid researcher roles, and the decision about whether the research role is paid or voluntary is important. This decision depends on a number of factors including the research timescales, the importance of diversity, the culture of the organisations involved (whether they have a culture of involving and supporting volunteers) and the finances available.

Whether the co-produced research role is voluntary or paid, these individuals may be able to build up a better relationship with research participants compared to professional researchers (see previous section for a distinction between these terms). This may particularly be the case if they have similar ways of talking/writing to research participants and are perceived to share similar life experiences, potentially helping research participants to feel more comfortable and 'open up'. In these cases, different perspectives might be gathered compared to when research is undertaken by a professional researcher.

Similarly, whether the role is voluntary or paid is also likely to affect power dynamics; in some cases a paid researcher may feel they have more influence over the work than a volunteer researcher, yet in other cases the opposite may be true and it may be the volunteer researchers who feel they have more independence and power to shape the direction of the research.

Sections 1.1 and 1.2 outline some points to consider regarding whether the co-produced research role is voluntary or paid.

1.1 Volunteer researchers

- When co-produced research involves volunteers it allows the volunteer researchers to have greater freedom and choice about the tasks they choose to carry out and their availability.

- Involving volunteer researchers is financially more affordable for the commissioning organisation, however it is important that volunteer researchers are not used as a cheap workforce. If the position is voluntary,

it should be because volunteer researchers can bring additional value to a co-produced research project.

- Involving volunteer researchers brings with it a commitment to supporting and nurturing the volunteers including through training, strong communication systems, opportunities for recognition, payment of expenses incurred as part of the role and support from paid staff (see section 5 for more detail).

- A certain level of turnover should be expected amongst volunteer researchers and planned for in advance in order to keep to timescales and prevent the remaining volunteer researchers from feeling overburdened.

1.2 Paid researchers

- In some cases having volunteer researchers can make it more difficult for the commissioning organisation to plan the overall research work and align it to external deadlines, for example if there are tasks which no volunteer researcher wishes to undertake, or if there is significant drop out of the volunteer researchers at short notice. When the role is paid, it is possible that these issues may be less likely to occur.

- An individual may be willing to commit fewer hours or have more limited availability when the researcher role is voluntary compared to if it is paid. This would then affect the timescales of the research.

- Paid researchers could possibly be expected to take on greater responsibility for their own administration than volunteer researchers, ensuring that tasks can be completed without additional paid administrative support.

- A volunteer researcher role is dependent on individuals being able to donate their time for free (the Bristol Ageing Better volunteer researchers, for example, were mostly retired). Many people might be excellent at co-produced research but are not in a financial position to offer their time for free, leading to a potential lack of diversity within the team of volunteer researchers. Offering a paid role overcomes this financial barrier.

- However payment can also bring its own complications depending on the individual's financial circumstances, for example relating to Universal Credit payments or tax implications. If the role is paid then clear administrative systems need to be in place, with options carefully explained.

Having a combination of volunteer and paid researchers would likely also raise

complex issues to navigate, for example through impacting on team dynamics. Any organisation wishing to undertake co-produced research with a combination of volunteer and paid researchers would likely need to give careful thought to how this is managed in a way that is transparent and fair.

As mentioned, the Ageing Better programmes involved co-produced research roles that were voluntary, rather than paid. Our learning and recommendations are therefore based on this specific experience, and as a result this toolkit focuses on volunteer researchers.

2. The role of academic/research institutions within co-produced research

When co-producing research, it is valuable to work closely with a university, college or other academic/research institution as a partner in the co-production process. However the specific role of this academic/research institution and the level of research support provided will vary depending on how the co-produced research project is structured and what the research will be used for.

In some cases, a public or voluntary sector organisation may take a lead role in the co-produced research project, acting as the main support to the volunteer researchers with a lower level of input from an academic/research institution. In other cases, the two may be equal partners in working with and supporting the volunteer researchers together; this was the case with Bristol Ageing Better and the University of the West of England. Alternatively, it may be the academic/research institution that works more closely with the volunteer researchers; this was the case with Ageing Well Torbay and SERIO at the University of Plymouth.

Academic/research institutions can more easily provide training and support related to the content of the research (e.g. research methods, ethical approval) as well as advice when research challenges arise. Some academic/research institutions will have expertise in public involvement and co-production and may therefore already have experience in this field.

Academic/research support comes at a financial cost but will likely increase the credibility and validity of the research in the eyes of the public and other audiences. It may also give the volunteer researchers more confidence that

their hard work will be recognised, and not dismissed as “anecdotal” – and may therefore increase their commitment to the project.

3. Research design and development

The process of research design and development can be challenging and significantly influences where the project sits on the spectrum of co-production.

Throughout this process, it needs to be clear which decisions are flexible and open to influence by the volunteer researchers and which decisions are fixed by the commissioning organisation or other pre-defined research restrictions (e.g. broad research questions, timescales, who can/cannot be interviewed).

Similarly, there needs to be transparency about the purpose of each task, the methods used and how the findings are designed to make a difference. Without this clarity, openness and feedback at each stage, volunteer researchers are likely to feel frustrated and demotivated, and potentially drop out of the project.

3.1 Striking the balance between role structure and flexibility

It is important to find a balance at the outset between having a volunteer researcher role that is clear and pre-defined and one which allows for flexibility and shaping by the volunteer researchers themselves.

- A role description can help to create a structure, however if this is pre-defined without any input from the volunteer researchers themselves then it will not be genuine co-production. It is best to create the role description together at the beginning, with the option to update this later in the future if necessary.
 - Within the role description, the volunteer researchers should have an equal seat at the table when deciding what, when, where and how the research is undertaken.
 - If there will be a phase where the role is trialed and adjusted, be transparent about this from the beginning.
 - Similarly, it would be useful to think ahead about whether you would like
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the volunteer researchers to be involved in the dissemination of the research findings or whether their involvement will stop once the research itself is complete, and to communicate this to the volunteer researchers as early as possible (ideally within the initial discussions about the role description).

- Plan in advance how the volunteer researchers will be involved from the moment they are recruited – how are you going to make sure they stay engaged and momentum is maintained? How will you start the process of planning together and making collective decisions (for example about the training that might be valuable and the skills that the team can share between themselves)?

The volunteer researchers need to be genuinely interested in what they are doing.

- Find out individual interests and motivations so that you can tap into this passion and try to adapt the role around these interests, for example an issue they would like to explore within the community. Recognise that each individual will have a different motivation for being involved in co-produced research.

- It can be valuable to undertake a skills audit. This helps to make sure that existing skills can be used when appropriate and when the volunteer researcher wishes, however existing skills should not dictate who each task is done by.

- Some volunteer researchers may wish to build upon their existing skills and previous experience, while others may instead prefer to try out something completely new and distance themselves from any task that is too similar to their previous employment.

- Where something is not possible (for example due to academic ethical approval), this should be made clear from the beginning.

Try to give the volunteer researchers as much choice as possible about what they do and how they do it, finding training if someone wants to do something but is new to it or lacking confidence. Working in pairs or small teams can also help to build confidence.

- Make it clear that the contribution is flexible and can fit around other activities and personal commitments, which may change over the course of the research project.

- However, this freedom also needs to be balanced with a suitable level of

academic/research steer so that volunteer researchers feel supported rather than burdened.

-Volunteer researchers should feel able to withdraw from some or all research activities if they do not feel interested or are unable to commit the necessary time.

It can often be tricky to strike this balance between structure and flexibility, particularly when the role involves external deadlines or funding requirements, as flexibility can alter the timescales of the research and unintentionally place a burden on others.

"I do want to do something useful, but it's also about me and what I want and what I find is satisfying and what isn't... so I've chosen stuff that I find is stimulating and interesting and you're always learning about yourself as you go along, which is very interesting"

-Volunteer Community Researcher, Bristol



Community Researchers Event, Bristol, May 2019

3.2 Clear expectations and agreements

Are there any minimum criteria that need to be met for a volunteer researcher to be involved? For example, how can transport barriers be overcome? Will volunteer researchers need certain pieces of IT equipment at home? How can they be given access to these? What training or support can be provided for practical skills and to meet any other minimum criteria for the role e.g. IT skills?

Volunteer agreements (or other agreements such as a Memorandum of Understanding) can be useful in making sure expectations are clear.

- Volunteer agreements help everyone involved to know what they are signing up to, the commitment required and the amount of support they will receive. In particular, realistic timescales for the completion of the work need to be carefully negotiated (for example taking into account holidays, potential for absence due to illness, family/carer commitments and participant availability).

- It also creates transparency about the purpose and boundaries of the role; those involved in co-produced research should not be viewed as a free workforce.

- It can be a useful chance to openly discuss what type of communication and support works best for individuals, for example whether they would like one-to-one support meetings.

- These written agreements may need to be amended and possibly made more specific as the role evolves, for example changing from a looser framework at the start to a more detailed agreement once the volunteer researchers are in place and the role is underway.

It is also important to set clear expectations about research ethics, boundaries and other relevant processes from the beginning, for example regarding lone working, safeguarding, ethics and confidentiality.

Keep a record of meeting notes so that decisions and actions can be referred back to easily. These records also help new volunteer researchers joining the project at a later date to understand what has happened previously.

3.3 Establishing the key outcomes, purpose and audience for the research

Although it should be open to change, it is important to establish the key outcomes and purpose for the co-research early on in the project, along with the audience that any research findings will be directed towards.

- What is the overall question we are trying to find the answer to?

- Why do we want to do the research? What will the impact and purpose be?

- What research restrictions have already been set (e.g. when applying for the research funding)?

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- Why would the research be of interest to other people?
 - Who is the audience for the research findings? Who is interested in the outcomes of this work?
 - What will the end product look like? What format and style will it take?
 - What timescale are we working to?
 - Who would we want to involve in the research process?
 - Do we have the right people involved in designing the research? Who else do we need around the table to design a co-produced piece of research?

In addition to outlining these aspects for the overall research project, it is also important to establish them for each piece of work undertaken so that volunteer researchers know how their work will be used and can use this knowledge to guide their research. Knowing the purpose of the research and how the findings will be used also greatly affects the motivation and enthusiasm of volunteer researchers.

It is particularly important to be clear about the target audience for the research and to tailor the content towards this audience in a way that is concise and easy for them to understand. Direct, detailed conversations about this content can ensure there is a common understanding between all parties and that the research findings are valuable for the audiences identified. For example, will you produce a research report? If so, what format and style will this take? How academic will it be? How long will it be? What type of language will it use?

That said, these factors should be open to change and new purposes and audiences may emerge during the course of the research depending on the findings, which is why it is so important to build in flexibility.

3.4 Engagement with research participants

Being clear about the purpose, audience and key outcomes also has great value for the research participants. The volunteer researchers have an ethical responsibility to participants, which includes making sure that the research findings are used to have an impact (i.e. the participant is giving up their time for a useful purpose). If the volunteer researchers are unclear about the purpose and audience for the research, it will be more difficult to get engagement from the research participants, as well as being an inconsiderate use of participants' time.

The research design should be clear about whether volunteer researchers are able to interview participants whom they know. This situation is less likely to occur in larger cities, but particularly needs to be considered for areas with smaller populations. This decision may influence the recruitment of the volunteer researchers.

“It is a privilege to have met and engaged with individuals and groups, who have, in their many and various ways demonstrated the resilience of the human spirit, as well as retaining the ability to smile, whilst finding a new and better way forward. They are trailblazers!”

-Volunteer Citizen Evaluator, Torbay

“It’s been lovely to meet some of the people who have been involved with the projects we are evaluating and to find out how it’s impacted on their lives; it’s heart-warming to know that some of these projects are bringing such positive outcomes for the people.”

-Volunteer Citizen Evaluator, Torbay



Community Researchers August 2016

3.5 'Insider' / 'Outsider' volunteer researchers

There have long been academic debates about 'insider' and 'outsider' researchers and the impact of this on the research produced. An 'insider' researcher is someone considered to part of the community or group being researched, whereas an 'outsider' researcher is someone considered to be external to the group being studied.

However individuals within a community being studied are never all the same and therefore there is always a debate about the extent to which the research is really being co-produced with members of the community. Can it be co-produced with any member of the public, or does it specifically need to include those who represent the community being studied? What definition of 'community' or 'group' are you using? How important is being an 'insider' or 'outsider' researcher to the particular research question at hand and the research design/development process as a whole? These issues need to be teased out by the commissioning organisation and academic/research institution before the volunteer researchers are recruited.

For example within Bristol Ageing Better the volunteer researchers were all aged over 50, and therefore could be considered 'insider' volunteer researchers for this age group. Some also lived and were actively involved in the neighbourhood that was the subject of their research. However a lack of ethnic and cultural diversity within the team, along with many living outside of the neighbourhood they were studying, meant that they could equally be considered 'outsider' volunteer researchers who do not represent the same communities that they are researching.

It might be beneficial for research to be conducted by a mix of volunteer researchers from 'inside' and 'outside' the community being studied.

4. Recruitment of volunteer researchers

Linked to the 'insider' / 'outsider' debate mentioned in section 3.5 is the question of diversity and the value of volunteer researchers having backgrounds or experiences in common with research participants, in order to understand cultural sensitivities and build up trust. During recruitment and throughout the research project it is important to be mindful about diversity within the volunteer researcher team, and the perspectives which may or may not be considered during research and analysis as a result.

There are many aspects of diversity to consider including age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, educational background, language fluency, upbringing, familiarity with the local community, research experience, and many more. Many of these are not visual and cannot be guessed through appearance.

The make-up of the team will be influenced by the demographics of the local area (e.g. where the commissioning organisation or academic/research institution is located) and whether the role is voluntary or paid.

When recruiting for volunteer researchers, first impressions count – try to capture the imagination, and therefore the commitment, of possible volunteer researchers by ‘appealing to hearts and minds’. Focus on how they can contribute using their individual strengths, leaving the academic terms and technical parts until later in the process.

“Volunteering as a BAB [Bristol Ageing Better] Community Researcher let me use my experience and skills to the benefit of people my own age in my own city.”

-Volunteer Community Researcher, Bristol

Below are three aspects to consider in order to encourage diversity within a volunteer researcher team.

4.1 Volunteer researcher role title

The title of the volunteer researcher role will influence who decides to apply for it and therefore the diversity of the volunteer researcher team.

- Role titles within the Ageing Better programmes included ‘Community Explorers’, ‘Story Catchers’, ‘Citizen Evaluators’, ‘Peer Researchers’, ‘Volunteer Listeners’, ‘Volunteer Co-Researchers’ and ‘Community Researchers’.

- The role titles of ‘researcher’ or ‘evaluator’ may be seen as intimidating and off-putting for some individuals, particularly those with little formal education or who do not have a background in research.

- However this may not always be the case, and others may find these role titles empowering. There is no single term which will appeal to everyone.

- Similarly, the choice of role title may also have an impact on the expectations of the research participants.

-Take time at the start to carefully consider what the role will be called. It can be valuable to consult with others about this, for example local community groups.

-Be open to changing what the role is called in the future if it no longer matches what the role evolves into or you have not attracted a diverse range of volunteer researchers.

“I love the title Citizen Evaluator, it feels empowering. Anyone in any walk of life can become one. It’s almost like you are the authority in your own field of your experience! We are all citizens of the world!”

-Volunteer Citizen Evaluator, Torbay

4.2 Language used within the role advert for volunteer researchers

In addition to the role title, the language used in the advert will also affect the diversity of the researcher team by influencing who comes forward in the first place.

-An emphasis on useful skills or interests rather than experience or qualifications could be made explicit in the advert.

-It may be useful to state that you are looking for people with a certain background or characteristic in order for the team to reflect the local population.

-Examples of the financial and training support offered (for example whether transport costs will be covered or full training provided) may also help to encourage a diverse range of applicants, particularly those with no previous research experience or with low IT confidence.

-Emphasise whether ongoing training, support and mentoring will be available throughout the project.

-The language used in the advert should match the function of the role and may vary depending whether the volunteer researchers would be undertaking interviews/focus groups, data analysis, evaluating against certain outcomes and writing up reports.

-Similarly, it will also vary according to whether the volunteer researchers are aiming to be as impartial as they can (for example academic research) or

whether they are speaking directly from their own experience and worldview as a representative from their community (for example a less academic 'storytelling' approach).

4.3 Advertising channels and recruitment methods

Where you choose to promote the research opportunity will affect who applies for it. This part of the process requires time, patience and proactive effort. It should therefore be started early so that it is not rushed, especially if there are other deadlines for it to coincide with.

-Widespread promotion channels may include radio, social media, press releases in local newspapers, adult education centres, libraries, cafes, volunteer agencies, adult social services, citywide forums or word of mouth.

-However to increase the likelihood of a diverse volunteer researcher team, try going beyond those who come forward immediately and recruit directly within the communities that you want to reach.

An advert used by Bristol Ageing Better to recruit volunteer researchers, 2014



Bristol Ageing Better

Volunteer Community Researchers Wanted

The Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) partnership is looking to recruit retired or senior volunteers to undertake research into the lives of older people. The partnership is developing a wide range of actions to address loneliness in older people in Bristol and wants to train and support a group of community researchers to explore these issues. More information about BAB can be found on its web site www.bristolageingbetter.org.uk

Research tasks are expected to be varied and to range from advising on research questions to helping with community audits of neighbourhood resources. You will receive initial training and support organised through Professor Robin Means of the University of the West of England. All expenses will be paid.

This is an exciting opportunity to get involved in making a big difference to older people in Bristol. It is an ideal opportunity for 'people who like people' to gain some new skills whilst at the same time doing something very useful for the community.

Robin will be holding briefing sessions on both **11th March (10am to 12)** and **19th March (2pm to 4)** (venues to be announced) to help people decide if they want to get involved. If you wish to come to one of these please send your contact details (e mail, postal address or 'phone) to:

Ruth Richardson
Age UK Bristol

E: ruthrichardson@ageukbristol.org.uk
Tel: 0117 929 7537

We look forward to hearing from you

Organisations and individuals working together to reduce isolation and loneliness amongst older people across Bristol

- This might involve using similar techniques to those used by community development workers (e.g. having a pop-up stall in certain neighbourhoods or going into local shops, cafés, barbers, community centres or religious venues).
- It can also involve promoting the opportunity through local community organisations or other individuals who act as 'gatekeepers' to certain communities (e.g. for a certain ethnic minority group or for people with a certain disability).
- However, it is important to remember that not all aspects of diversity have a local community organisation available for members to join (for example diversity of educational background) and that, where these do exist, there are many individuals who are not involved in them.

An advert used by University of Plymouth to recruit volunteer researchers, 2016






Plymouth University is looking for volunteers in Torbay to help evaluate a £15million programme aimed at tackling social isolation and loneliness among older people in the Torbay area.

Tuesday 21st June 2016

Researchers at Plymouth University are looking for volunteers from the local community to become Citizen Evaluators to help them evaluate 'Ageing Well Torbay,' a local programme running in Torbay until 2021.

The government-funded programme seeks to address loneliness and isolation in older people. It is one of 14 across the country that makes up the Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better programme, funded by the Big Lottery.

As with all parts of the Ageing Well programme older people's involvement will be a key feature of the evaluation. Plymouth University are now hoping to recruit a team of Citizen Evaluators, people, aged 50+ who live / work in the Torquay, Paignton and or Brixham area to work alongside them in evaluating services and activities, such as the creation of support networks and 'live well' initiatives to help shape the way Ageing Well Torbay is delivered in the future.

Forty-five percent of Torbay's population is over 50, and it is estimated that 6,000 of these residents are isolated because of reasons such as retirement, the loss of a loved one, low income, poor health, lack of transport and mobility issues.

The Ageing Well Torbay programme aims to tackle these issues by creating a sense of neighbourliness and reconnecting older people with friends, their communities and where they live. The programme also aims to increase a sense of personal value and purpose among the elderly community, encouraging them to view older age as an opportunity.

Plymouth University will provide full training and on-going support to the Citizen Evaluator team. As a minimum the researchers are looking for people who can commit one day a month to research activities which may include designing research activities, conducting fieldwork and analysing and reporting data. "We're looking for people who like to communicate and have good listening skills" says Lisa Mills, Research Manager at Plymouth University. "You don't have to have a background in research or evaluation as we will provide all the necessary training but you must enjoy meeting new people and working as part of a team." If this sounds like you, then get in touch with Lisa by calling 01752 588942 to express your interest and find out more information.

It may be useful to offer a face-to-face information session or informal discussion about the role for those who are interested in finding out more. These discussions should make sure potential volunteer researchers understand what the role involves. However, this should not be a selection process; it is important to be willing to accept, train and support anyone who is interested in the role regardless of their background and experience.

Some volunteer researchers are likely to drop-out over time, for a wide range of reasons, so it is not usually necessary to set a maximum limit on the number of volunteer researchers who can be involved at the start. Be prepared for turnover and plan how to incorporate new volunteer researchers into the existing team.

5. Support, communication and training

It is vital that co-produced research involves a package of support. The organisation must also, however, have the leadership to develop an organisational culture which recognises the volunteer as an equal who can legitimately ask to draw on the organisational resources and expect a timely response to such requests.

High-quality support at the most basic level has three aspects:

- ‘Technical’ support for the whole research process.
- Ensuring the wellbeing of the volunteers and maximizing the social context of their work.
- Administrative support.

“I was so grateful for the “heavy lifting” done by office staff at Bristol Ageing Better and our academics – from the production of either paper or digital copies of documents on request, and booking meeting rooms, to making initial contacts with research participants where appropriate, drafting outlines for reports and presentations where we were invited then to add our own contributions, and

providing timely ongoing critiques to fine-tune our research. This support left me free to focus on doing what I signed up for – to make a useful contribution to the research project itself.”

-Volunteer Community Researcher, Bristol

This section unpicks what support might mean, and the importance of getting communication and training right. Some further insights can be found in the ‘Who’s involved and when in a project’ box in section 7.

5.1 Budget for support

A good package of support should be backed by an adequate budget. Below are some examples of what a budget should include:

- Staffing costs.
- Volunteer expenses, including travel costs.
- Volunteer recruitment, including widespread advertising and promotional events.
- Volunteer recognition and appreciation events (e.g. a meal).
- Interpreter and translation services.
- Equipment (e.g. tablets, printers, voice recorders).
- Training.
- Printing and photocopying.
- Running meetings (do not forget the importance of biscuits!).
- Reports and production costs of the final research product (e.g. a report).

Staff costs need to be considered because providing support takes time. ‘Support’ as an add-on to an already overstretched employee’s workload is unlikely to work well. You need to be clear, for example, that staff have the time to read reports, comment on drafts, provide information on request, as well as building up relevant networks through which the research can later be disseminated.

Volunteer expenses are also an important issue. Those who volunteer can often feel embarrassed about claiming expenses, resulting in 'hidden' costs for the volunteer researcher such as for travel, stationery and printer ink. Establish a culture where all volunteer researchers are proactively encouraged to claim all of their expenses. This can be done through introducing a regular process, for example sending a monthly reminder for expense claims to be submitted or handing out forms at any face-to-face meeting. An alternative option may be to consider giving each volunteer researcher an expenses budget.

5.2 Communication

Strong working relationships are key to any package of support during co-produced research.

- There should be mutual respect between the volunteer researchers and the organisations they work with, taking an asset-based approach which recognises the variety of skills, backgrounds and experiences which people bring.
- How the support is organised should be transparent to the volunteers; they need to know who they should contact about any particular issue, and there should be clear accountability.
- It helps to have a culture within your organisation of all staff in the team being willing to assist the volunteer researchers.
- Changes in staff can also affect a research project, as it takes time for the volunteer researchers to get to know and trust someone new.
- Support should be timely. Having to wait a long time for feedback or publication of a research product (e.g. a report) can be disheartening for the volunteer researchers.

“What really made a difference to our experience was the culture in BAB [Bristol Ageing Better]. We knew that if we rang up, whoever we spoke to would be helpful, they’d know who we were and ensure that anything we needed was done. We were always treated as valued members of the team.”

-Volunteer Community Researcher, Bristol

Communication methods should be established which work for the individuals involved.

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- Contact should be regular while also respectful of the volunteer researchers' other commitments.
 - Depending what works for the group, it may be useful to set meeting dates in advance or explore the option of having online meetings or telephone conference calls.
 - When meetings are in-person, they should be held in a venue which is both physically accessible and easy to access via public transport, ideally also with car parking available.
 - Records of meetings are essential to make sure ideas are followed up, progress is made and those not able to attend are kept up-to-date.
 - Discussions should be frank and regularly cover the needs and expectations of all parties in order to keep maintaining a common understanding around roles and responsibilities.
 - It might also work well to hold informal drop-in sessions to discuss things face-to-face.

This communication should involve effective 'feedback loops':

-Feedback about the quality and content of the research:

- It is valuable to create opportunities for volunteer researchers to regularly discuss the research findings as they emerge, for example reflecting on whether they could have done anything differently in a certain interview, or if there are other angles of the research they could explore.
- This regular academic feedback is particularly valuable considering that most of the volunteer researchers will have no previous research experience.

-Feedback about the impact of the research findings:

- It is important to regularly share information with volunteer researchers about the impact of their research including how it has been used and shared with other stakeholders, actions taken as a result and the wider impact of this.
 - This helps to enhance volunteer researchers' understanding of their contributions and to maintain motivation and enthusiasm about the impact they are having.
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-One suggestion is to build this into a systematic 'You Said, We Did' (or 'You Found and Reported, We Did') sharing of information to provide this feedback in a timely manner.

-Feeding in other useful information:

-The volunteer researchers are often in positions to pick up additional information or issues of concern which fall outside of the research remit but still provide valuable insights for the commissioning organisation or academic/research institution, acting as a 'bridge' between these organisations and research participants.

"It's been great to feel part of the BAB [Bristol Ageing Better] team and I really appreciate the thoughtful and constructive guidance from the UWE [University of the West of England] team."

-Volunteer Community Researcher, Bristol

5.3 Training and support

Many people who have had no or little experience of doing research can make a huge contribution to co-produced research, and the right training helps them to feel confident in the role. Below are ways of overcoming potential barriers to participation in a co-research project:

-Full training should be provided so that anyone can be a volunteer researcher without needing previous experience.

-It is important to meet with each volunteer researcher individually at the start of their involvement to discuss any particular support needs or preferences they have, including related to sight, hearing, mobility, finances or time.

-Having this direct conversation at an early stage allows the project to take these needs and preferences into account, introducing working practices which work for all volunteer researchers without specific individuals feeling embarrassment.

-The world of research can involve a whole new language to become familiar with. It might be useful to provide a glossary of key words the volunteer researchers might come across, including terms about research methods and terms specific to the organisation, project or community being focused on.



Community Researchers Event, Bristol, May 2019

“Research work is new to me, so it has been a learning curve, very challenging sometimes but also enjoyable. It has been inspiring meeting other retirees and all those involved in BAB [Bristol Ageing Better] and its projects.”

-Volunteer Community Researcher, Bristol

“Meeting with the team has been genuinely a positive experience. Despite my health issues, as a volunteer they have treated me as an equal and they’ve gone out of their way to accommodate me.”

-Volunteer Citizen Evaluator, Torbay

Training should be timely and ideally occur shortly before it is required to be used, in order to build on skills learnt.

-Training about research questions, interviewing, focus groups, safeguarding, note taking and ethics are likely to be useful depending on the role and the volunteer researchers’ previous experience.

-Holding an initial programme of appropriate training close together at the start of the role can help to build momentum, but it does need to be followed up with further training as the research progresses. Training should soon be followed by opportunities to apply the new knowledge and skills, otherwise momentum and confidence may be lost.

-The training should follow a logical sequence, building upon knowledge each session. It works well if the training can focus on practical tips and be directly applicable to the tasks the volunteer researchers will carry out.

-Regularly ask the volunteer researchers what they would like training on and have an appropriate budget to be able to facilitate this.

“It’s giving me a sense of achievement, brushing up on my counselling skills and something else to put on my life’s C.V!”

-Volunteer Citizen Evaluator, Torbay

Some of the training topics undertaken by volunteer researchers within the Ageing Better programmes include:

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| -Introduction to project evaluation. | -Appreciative enquiry. |
| -Key ethical issues: consent, confidentiality, anonymity. | -Narrative interviewing. |
| -Lone working and working in teams. | -Social return on investment. |
| -Introduction to interviewing techniques. | -Introduction to SPSS and data spreadsheets. |
| -Developing research questions. | -Research and community development. |
| -Evaluation approaches for the community and voluntary sector. | -Data recording and data protection. |
| -Developing case studies. | -Structuring reports. |
| -Introduction to ethnography. | -Reflexive practice for researchers. |
| | -Qualitative data analysis. |

“I found the training in ethics and interview techniques fascinating, and they complimented my experience of chairing meetings and public speaking.”

-Volunteer Citizen Evaluator, Torbay

Outline

Why do we evaluate existing and new projects?

Why is it important and what are the benefits?

How do we plan an evaluation?

The aim of today's workshop is to generate discussion and provide answers to these and other questions. After attending the workshop it is expected that you will:

- Be aware of different approaches to designing an evaluation for a range of potential audiences
- Appreciate the benefits & limitations of different types of evaluation
- Practiced creating a project logic model and an evaluation plan
- Know where to access further resources & support

...some assumptions and some limitations about today

Bristol Ageing Better Narrative Interviewing Training Session

21st February 2018

Aim of the session:

- General introduction to narrative interviewing (theory and practice)
- Map out how narrative interviews could be used in BAB evaluations

A brief background to narrative interviews:

Stories, or narratives, help us make sense of our experience and knowledge; we are natural story tellers. Narrative interviews aim to explore an individuals' story about a significant event or object in their life and/or social context; in BAB this may focus on peoples' experience of isolation and loneliness, attending groups or interventions or being part of delivering services. In narrating, people recall an object/feature/event, put this into a sequence and find possible explanations for it; can think of narration as having both episodic and semantic components. As narrative interviews are open-ended they allow the respondent's story to be made visible. What is selected and what is not selected to share is in the hands of the interviewee. Interviews can be conducted alongside arts based/creative methods, the important part is finding a way to explore a persons' lived experience.

It can be useful to create opportunities for the volunteer researchers to share knowledge and learning between themselves. Ways to achieve this include having allocated time to discuss this during meetings and building in opportunities for the volunteer researchers to socialise informally.

It is important to work with each volunteer researcher individually to make sure they are supported and encouraged to make the role their own. This might involve one-to-one mentoring or creating peer-support between volunteer researchers.

One aspect of success within co-produced research is developing a group of engaged and passionate individuals who are equipped with the skills to continue pursuing other research projects in the future if desired.

“We have been guided, trained and fully supported in all we have done, by the Research Team from the University of Plymouth. They have encouraged us to make full use of our varied strengths, and even got us into role-play! This really brought us together as a team.”

-Volunteer Citizen Evaluator, Torbay

5.4 Team cohesion and support between volunteer researchers

Strong bonds within the team of volunteer researchers can improve the quality and enjoyment of the role, as well as potentially help to make sure any issues or concerns are shared and addressed in a timely manner. Team cohesion can be encouraged through working on a project in pairs or small groups. It can also be encouraged through building social interaction into training sessions; Torbay found that facilitated role-play activities within training sessions helped to build team cohesion as well as being useful preparation for research interviews.

It is valuable for the volunteer researchers to regularly have organised opportunities to meet by themselves without the presence of the commissioning organisation or academic/research institution. These opportunities allow the volunteer researchers to check-in with each other directly, provide peer-support and resolve any challenges at an early stage before they escalate.

If new volunteer researchers are recruited at a later stage in the project then it is important for them to feel included in the team and equally valued. It may help for existing volunteer researchers to act as mentors for newer ones, or to

'buddy up' for a particular part of the research project.



8 of the 11 BAB Community Researchers, 2019

“Being a volunteer involved in co-production with BAB [Bristol Ageing Better] has been a very enjoyable experience. I have made new relationships and friendships, and I’ve gained in confidence. And the things that I’ve learned I’ve been able to take into other areas of my life.”

-Volunteer Community Researcher, Bristol

“I've learnt new skills and revived old ones but the best part has been working together with others in the team on things we care about and making new friendships.”

-Volunteer Community Researcher, Bristol

5.5 Recognition and appreciation of volunteer researchers

Remember that the team of researchers are all volunteers and are choosing to give up their time for free (possibly a very large number of hours).

- These contributions should be recognised and appreciated, for example through thank you messages or events.

- Research can involve a lot of pressure, particularly when there are specific deadlines or content requirements.

-Care should be taken to reduce unwanted pressures on volunteer researchers and, if necessary, take these pressures on within a paid role. Make sure that the role does not start to feel like a job, and that it continues to meet individuals' motivations for taking part.

6. Summary of key recommendations

1. Carefully consider whether the role of researcher will be voluntary or paid. This is an important decision with implications for diversity, research content and project timescales.
 2. When co-producing research, it is valuable to work closely with a university, college or other academic/research institution. However the amount of academic involvement and support depends on the nature of the research and how the co-produced research project is structured.
 3. It is vital that co-produced research involves a package of support. High-quality support includes 'technical' support for the whole research process, support for the wellbeing of the volunteer researchers, and administrative support. Providing support takes time; it is unlikely to work well as an 'add-on' to an already overstretched employee's workload, so ensure you have sufficient staff capacity for this.
 4. Be mindful of diversity when recruiting volunteer researchers and throughout the research process. The diversity of the volunteer researcher team will affect the perspectives considered during the research and analysis. Encourage diversity by considering the role title, the language used in the volunteer researcher role advert and the recruitment methods used. This part of the process requires time, patience and proactive effort; it should therefore be started early.
 5. Plan in advance how the volunteer researchers will be involved from the moment they are recruited – how will you keep them engaged and maintain momentum?
 6. Volunteer agreements and a role description can help to make sure expectations are clear, however these should be designed together with volunteer researchers where possible and open to change.
 7. Find out the interests, motivations, skills and support needs of each volunteer researcher so that you can adapt the role around them and be as inclusive as possible. Appropriate and timely training, both at the start of the
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role and on an ongoing basis, is very important.

8. Try to give the volunteer researchers a large amount of choice regarding what they do and how they do it, identifying training if someone wants to do something but is new to it or lacking confidence. However, this freedom and flexibility needs to be balanced with a suitable level of academic /research steer so that volunteer researchers feel supported rather than burdened.
 9. Be clear and transparent with the volunteer researchers throughout the research process, including about which decisions are open to influence by the volunteer researchers (and which decisions are fixed by the commissioning organisation or external factors), the purpose of each task, the methods used and how the findings will make a difference.
 10. Establish the key outcomes and purpose for the co-research early on in the project, along with the audience that any research findings will be directed towards. In addition to outlining these aspects for the overall research project, it is also important to establish them for each specific piece of work undertaken.
 11. Any research content produced should be tailored to the audience in a way that is concise and easy for them to understand. Direct, detailed conversations about this content can ensure there is a common understanding between all parties and that the research produced is valuable to the target audiences identified.
 12. Communication methods should be established which work for the individuals involved. Contact should be regular while also respectful of the volunteer researchers' other commitments. It should regularly involve discussing the needs and expectations of all parties in order to keep maintaining a common understanding and consensus around roles and responsibilities.
 13. This communication should involve effective 'feedback loops'. It is valuable to provide ongoing feedback about the quality and content of the research, for example reflecting on whether the volunteer researchers could do anything differently during future interviews. It is also important to keep the volunteer researchers informed about the impact of the research including how it has been used and shared with other stakeholders, actions taken as a result and the wider impact of this.
 14. Strong bonds within the team of volunteer researchers can improve the quality and enjoyment of the role, as well as help to make sure any issues or concerns are shared and addressed in a timely manner. Team cohesion can be encouraged through working on a project in pairs or small groups, building
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social interaction into training sessions, and having regular formal opportunities for volunteer researchers to meet by themselves.

7. Further reading

1. [‘A map of resources for co-producing research in health and social care’](#) by National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Arc West and People in Health West of England.

Particularly the following two sections:

Page 5. Guiding Principles

- Sharing power** – the research is jointly owned and people work together to achieve a joint understanding, people are working together in more equal relationships.
- Including all perspectives and skills** – making sure the research team includes all those who can make a contribution, involving diverse stakeholders and being accessible and inclusive.
- Respecting and valuing the knowledge of all** those working together on the research, building on people’s assets and the experiences they bring – everyone is of equal importance.
- Reciprocity and mutuality** – everybody benefits from working together, valuing everyone and supporting their potential.
- Building and maintaining relationships and sharing learning** – an emphasis on relationships is key to sharing power.
- Joint understanding** and consensus and clarity over roles and responsibilities (INVOLVE, 2018).

Page 9. Who’s involved and when in a project.

When thinking about how to involve people, you will need to consider:

- Co-production adds time to a research project to build relationships and trust and understand the priorities and norms of different communities. This time must be costed appropriately.

- Sometimes co-production may happen at just some stages of a research process.
- Have clear roles for everyone and enable people to use their strengths and skills. Co-production shouldn't be about everybody doing everything.
- Academic leadership in co-produced projects requires negotiation and socio-political skills, not just technical research skills (Campbell and Vanderhoven, 2016).
- Provide opportunities for people to develop skills and share expertise. Include a training budget.
- Keeping group membership stable can be helpful, but this can be difficult if you are working with people who have health conditions that fluctuate and may impact the extent to which they can get involved. It is important to discuss the extent to which people want to get involved, and manage and review what support people need to keep being involved if they want to be. Have regular conversations about this and think about how to support people.
- Can you involve a balance of people with different backgrounds and expertise? McPin suggest for example, a group with 3 practitioners, 3 people with experience of mental health issues and 3 researchers (while acknowledging people can have multiple expertise) (McPin, 2019).
- Have research decision-making roles distributed across the research team (Gillard et al., 2012). Decision-making needs to involve those who'll be affected by decisions, and those who are willing to take those decisions. Information needs to be shared to make decisions. Clear communication about which decisions can be co-produced is essential, as is understanding the implications of decisions for the project (Goldsmith et al., 2019).

2. **'Co-production – knowledge that matters'** by N8 Research Partnership.

3. **'Co-production in social care: what is it and how to do it- at a glance'** by Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE).

4. **'The value of small community-led equalities research projects'** by Ambition for Ageing, Greater Manchester.

5. **'A spatial approach to working with marginalised communities'** by Ambition for Ageing, Greater Manchester.

6. **'Co-Researchers' self evaluation of first year experience working on the Brightlife project'** by University of Chester (Brightlife Cheshire evaluation team).
7. **'Evaluation of Co-Researcher training: Executive summary'** by University of Chester (Brightlife Cheshire evaluation team).
8. **'Our First Two Years'** by Ageing Well Torbay and Citizen Evaluators.
9. **'Bristol Ageing Better Community Researchers: Interim report on five years of learning and achievements'** by UWE Bristol and BAB Community Researchers.
10. **'Bristol Ageing Better Learning Event: Community Researchers'** by Bristol Ageing Better.
11. **'Volunteer Listeners'** by Time to Shine, Leeds.
12. **'Learning Together: The LAT Community Explorers Project'** by Leicester Vaughan College and Leicester Ageing Together.



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