



A Practical Guide to Planning an Engagement Strategy for your Global Health Research funding application

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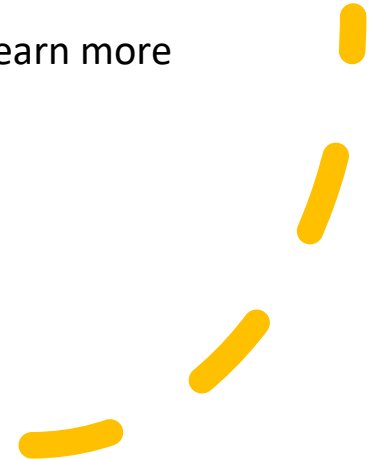
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Planning CEI Guide

This guide is intended to support the preparation of a Community Engagement and Involvement (CEI) strategy

It is aimed at:

- Researchers who are planning an engagement strategy for a funding application
- Public/Community Engagement leads who are planning engagement strategies for a specific piece of research
- Anyone who is new to CEI and wants to learn more about it





Defining CEI

- There are a variety of terms used by different individuals and organisations to talk about engaging non-researchers with health research
- This guide uses '**Community Engagement and Involvement (CEI)**' as an over-arching term to describe activities that ensure research is conducted in collaboration with the communities and the public

Introduction

CEI is increasingly seen as an essential component of research with many global health funding agencies demanding that engagement is fully integrated into any proposed research, from the pre-application research design stage, all the way through to the dissemination of findings

This means that for applications to be competitive, applicants must show that they have engaged communities and relevant stakeholders whilst preparing the application and also describe a thoughtful and appropriate engagement strategy that is integrated into the research

“NIHR champions CEI as a core principle of its global health research portfolio, alongside equitable partnerships and local research capacity strengthening. All applicants for NIHR global health research funding are required to plan for and undertake active and participatory CEI”

nhr.ac.uk

“Wellcome believes that the research we support is improved by being ethical, open, and engaged. To support this, we encourage you to use an engaged research approach and to outline this in your funding application. You should detail activities, budget and importance to your research as part of your proposal.”

wellcome.org

Funders are supportive of CEI that aims for everyone to work together in more **equal partnerships, sharing responsibility and power** throughout the course of a research study



This guide will help you identify who you should work with, what goals engagement can have, and the most appropriate methods

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1. CEI during the research planning stage

“How have you involved patients, participants, patient advocacy groups or communities in developing your proposal? What ongoing involvement will they have in the research? (200 words)”

Wellcome Discovery Award application form 6/23

As you can see from this example grant application question, funders want to see that the proposed research has been informed by the engagement of stakeholders, community members and patients

In some cases, funders will ask you to provide evidence and specific examples of how community engagement influenced the proposal

Engaging communities in the planning stages of a research proposal is important because:



You can find out if your proposed plan and procedures are acceptable and feasible



You can uncover potential challenges or concerns in advance and make a joint plan for how to address them



It will help you to plan your engagement strategy, identify other important individuals or groups in the community who can advise on the study and support the process



Exploring local knowledge, culture and lived-experience can influence the research question and improve the design of the study



Thinking about how your research findings could be useful in different contexts, to different groups, will ensure that the research has the greatest impact in the future

Engagement to feed into a proposal

Engaging stakeholders and communities to feed into a proposal is important but need not be expensive or difficult to do

Here are some ideas for engagement work prior to application submission:

- Describe any previous research or engagement you have done related to the proposal, and how it has contributed into your current ideas, research and engagement plans
- If necessary, prepare materials (for example PowerPoint slides, handouts etc.) to help you describe your proposed research to a range of people
- Decide on important stakeholders who might be able to provide advice on your study including any challenges you might encounter and how you might solve them. They might include engagement staff, hospital managers, nurses, doctors, community members. Arrange meetings with them to share ideas
- Ask your colleagues if there are any existing community groups you could consult, for example, your institution may already have a Patient Advisory Group, who meet regularly. Other groups might include Community Advisory Boards, Young People's Advisory Groups, County Health management team and others. You might be able to arrange a slot within their meeting agenda
- If proposals require a broader public view, you might consider public surveys or focus group discussions, but these are likely to have time and cost implications
- Make notes of any suggestions or feedback you receive from these activities



Questions to ask stakeholders and community members

- Q Is the study locally relevant? Do you feel that the research is important to do?
- Q Are the study and its procedures acceptable? Do the benefits of the research outweigh the risks?
- Q What are your main concerns about the research? Can these concerns be addressed, and can the risks be minimised?
- Q Will people take part? Will it be possible to recruit the necessary number of participants in the allocated time, and what is the best way to do this? What would be reasonable compensation?
- Q How can the study and its implementation can be improved?
- Q How should stakeholders and the public be engaged? Are there relevant cultural trends or interests that should be accounted for?



Evidence of engagement to include in a proposal

- Document all the concerns, questions and suggestions raised
- Document how you responded to each concern, question and suggestion
- Make a note of all the suggestions which have informed your research and engagement plans and include this in your proposal

Remember that you might not be able to take all suggestions on board. Take time to discuss and explain to stakeholders and community members why some suggestions might be feasible, and some might not

2. Values and principles

Your CEI strategy should outline your ***ethos and approach*** to engagement and describe your commitment to working in a collaborative way with communities or patients

The process of determining priorities for CEI can help you and your team to agree a set of shared values and principles. Examples include:

Ensuring a high ethical standard in every phase of the project

Working with transparency and openness

Respecting the culture, knowledge and trends within the community

Building a practice of shared decision-making

Inclusion of all perspectives and views

Joint ownership of CEI outputs

Inclusivity: account for experiences of marginalisation, discrimination and inequality within the groups you work with

Making sure everyone benefits from working together

3. Whom to engage and involve

Begin by thinking about whom you could work with on your CEI strategy. This should include potential new partners as well as groups you want to engage:

Identifying Stakeholders

Consider key stakeholders or those with a particular interest in your research, who could contribute to its success. Start by identifying all the relevant individuals and groups, consider their potential interest in, and influence on, your work. This process will help you understand where different stakeholder groups fall in your priorities, so that you can better focus your CEI activities

Types of professionals, experts and organisations

Think about who you could collaborate with to increase the quality of your CEI work. This could include forming new partnerships with groups or professionals from outside of research, such as charities, community organisations or creative industries

If you are a researcher, consider working with a CEI expert or professional with experience in participatory engagement methods to bring relevant skills, knowledge and expertise to the work. It may make sense for this person to manage the CEI part of your research study

Community, patient and public groups

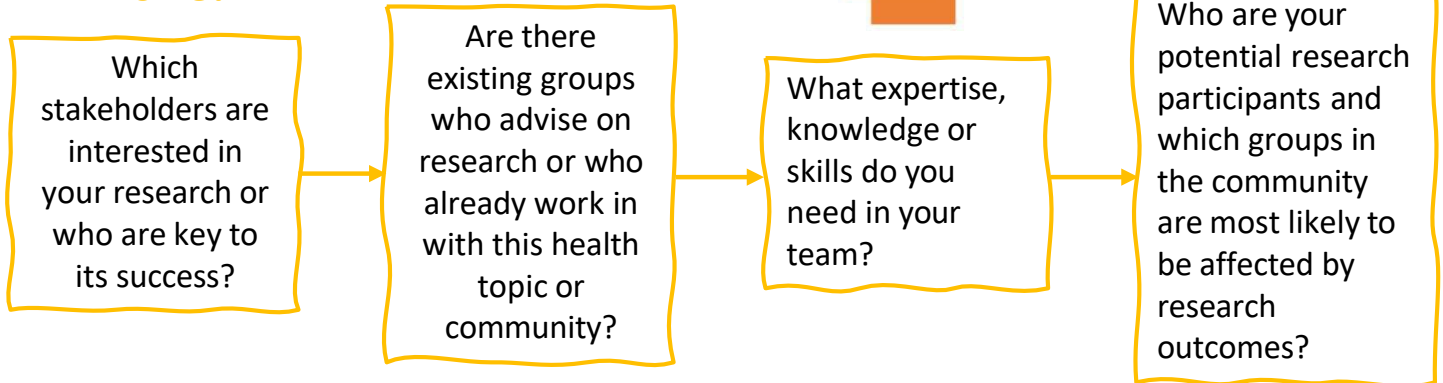
When identifying important stakeholders, it is likely that you will determine which communities, members of the public, or patients are most important to your work. Considering what characteristics define them as a group can help you to think of *ways* of reaching them and *how* to engage them

4. Thinking through your approach

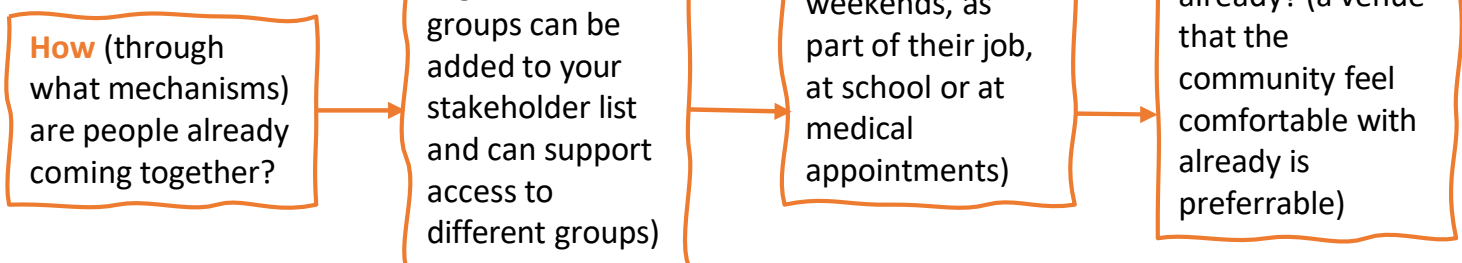
This graphic outlines some questions to ask to help determine whom to engage and how, and gives some possible outcomes of CEI



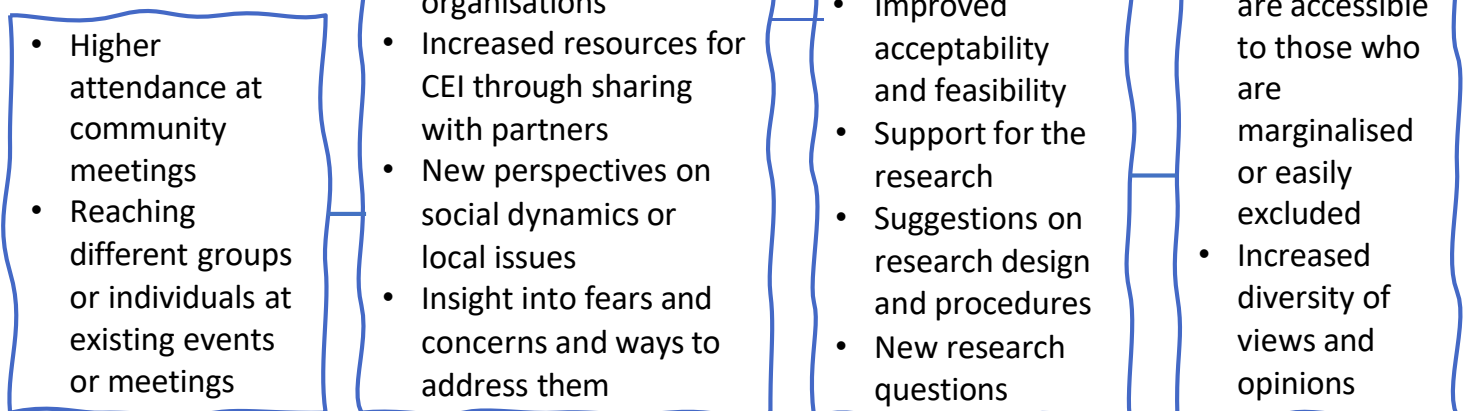
Whom do I engage and involve?



How do I reach communities, patients or public?



What are some possible outcomes of CEI?



**** Please see Appendix 1 for a full table giving possible example answers to each question ****

5. Goals and methods of CEI

In your proposal, you will need to articulate the **goals or aims** of the CEI, and from these goals, you can start thinking about the **activities or methods** for engaging and involving communities

The table below gives some example goals of engagement and activities which can address them:

Goal	Possible activity
To inform the community about the research for general awareness raising or for study recruitment	Radio/TV interviews/adverts Social media, Facebook, WhatsApp, X Posters and leaflets in public places Giving talks to community groups, community theatre, lab tours Short film or animation at existing event
To gather input into research implementation, consent forms, communication	Holding meetings with a Community Advisory Board Initiating a Patient Advisory Group to co-create resources Talking to research participants regularly and gathering feedback Talking to health stakeholders
To gain a better understanding of the health topic, patient experience, local community or social issues	Carry out an online consultation or social media sharing project Work with a local community organisation to gather information Support community members to document their stories Talk to health workers/community nurses

Goal	Possible activity
To create opportunities to listen and respond to community views concerns and rumours about the research	Holding meetings with Community Advisory Board Hold community meetings Supporting a Patient Advocacy Group Talking to research participants regularly Asking an existing group to support a community meeting (e.g. church group or youth group)
Providing a community benefit for hosting research	Planning activities to support a particular group e.g. planning career discussions with school students Health improvement talks and activities Discussing appropriate benefits with the Community Advisory Board Consulting local leaders or gatekeepers on possible benefits Training courses for community health workers or field workers
Stimulating public dialogue about research	Hosting a "science cafe" or "a pint of science" Collaborating on an arts project and exhibition exploring the issues Collaborate on a community theatre project
To build new partnerships and collaborations to support improved future CEI and research	Work on a sustainable partnership with local community organisation or health charity Discuss sharing resources and supporting each other's work
To support your research findings being used in policy making	Support community representatives to attend formal meetings to present community-focused evidence about an issue Community or patients tell their stories through media which are then presented to decision makers



Remember that these are not the only goals and activities, you can be creative in thinking of new approaches and ideally work with the community so they can lead on the best methods of engagement

Feedback to your research

All these CEI activities are going to elicit public and community views, opinions, concerns and suggestions about the research

To ensure that CEI continues to feed into improving the quality of the research, it is important to think about and plan:

how you will document these views, concerns and suggestions,

how you will communicate them to the research team,

how the research team will respond to them, and

how to give feedback about the response to the community

6. Creating your CEI proposal

Funders are likely to ask you to present a plan for ongoing engagement with stakeholders, communities or the public throughout the duration of the study

They will want to know:

WHO is doing the work (the staff in your team who are planning and implementing the engagement activities)

WHICH partner organisations might be needed to support engagement activities. Sometimes, research teams partner with community organisations and it is important to clearly define their role

WHAT you will deliver (the CEI methods you will use)

HOW you will document the work and monitor and evaluate your progress

And importantly the **BUDGET** you are requesting for CEI

Remember to include in your proposal:

- **Learning from what has been done before**

It can be useful to find out what engagement has been done before in your research area by asking colleagues or searching online. Your proposal should make it clear that you are aware of other projects which have used similar CEI methods or perhaps worked within the same health topic with the same community. This could include collaboration with social scientists or other academics who have greater understanding of cultural dynamics, knowledge systems and community approaches to tackling health challenges



Mesh provides a [resource database](#) for looking at previous CEI work by health topic, method or geography

- **Preparation work you have already done**

Describe any work you have already done identifying stakeholders, building relationships with partners and understanding key dynamics in the community. You may have done this as part of the engagement to feed into your proposal (as described in section 1). This will help funding proposal reviewers get a sense of whether you have chosen appropriate CEI methods/approaches and have the right partners on board – and importantly how they have informed the work already



- **Define clear objectives, with appropriate activities to achieve them**

Any work you have put into establishing relationships with your CEI partners and agreeing a set of principles, aims and objectives will prove to be very useful as you author your proposal. Articulate these aims and objectives clearly. Describe in detail how each activity will address the objectives

- **Outline roles, methods and timescales**

Your proposal should directly describe who will be involved in planning and delivering the CEI activities including how their knowledge and skills will be used. Be clear about your methods, the timescales involved and what will be delivered

- **An evaluation of your CEI**

You should also describe how you will measure your success (and who will be responsible for measuring it) and how you will share the learning generated both with stakeholders, peers and others working in CEI

- **Be flexible in your planning and ready for change**

For all the careful planning you do, you must always be open to adaptation and change as the work progresses. CEI does not always work out the way you want it to and you may need to adjust your thinking or methods accordingly

7. Allocating resources

Allocating resources to different parts of CEI work and putting together a budget is essential especially if you are submitting a funding proposal for it.

Some things to consider:

Recruiting for CEI

Consider types of skills and qualities carefully when selecting CEI staff and planning their training. This could include their awareness of local languages and customs, and the proposed research and institutional policies. Also consider their ability to facilitate discussions, plan activities, discuss research with stakeholders at various levels, budget and account for engagement activities, and ability to document outcomes

Prevent tensions by openly planning budget allocation

Relationship tensions will appear where a partner feels they are not being appropriately compensated for their work on a CEI activity. Clear communication about roles and responsibilities when planning activities is important, and agreeing how funding will be allocated should form a key part of this



Clear and respectful budget communication

Power dynamics can be set in place through a budget breakdown for CEI work which can unwittingly indicate the relative value of different expertise and knowledge. Your organisation/institution will likely have guidelines or rules about rates of pay for certain roles, so consult your colleagues in Human Resources

Clear and respectful communication up-front can prevent any potential tension. Be transparent when it comes to pay for staff and partners - and ensure everyone agrees that pay is fair for each organisation or individual before you finalise the budget and submit it



Check your funder's guidelines

Each funder has different rules and requirements with some costs being allowed and others not. Ineligible costs can include organisation overheads, salary on-costs, certain types of insurance or purchasing certain items or equipment. Check the guidelines carefully for the funder you are applying to.

Questions to ask when allocating budget

Formative work

Will you need to carry out further scoping or assessment work before you begin to improve the design of your activities or your understanding of the landscape? Your CEI prior to application submission will feed into this

Practicalities

Do you need to pay room hire, buy equipment, ensure those participating have food and refreshments? What materials are needed? Have you allocated transport costs? Think about those without any other financial support and if you can try to reduce any barriers to them participating

Timescales

Will the resources cover the whole project including sharing the findings and learning plus any future follow-up?



Evaluating CEI

Have you resourced the monitoring and evaluation plan? For example, you could pay an independent consultant with expertise in evaluation and measuring impact to carry it out

Contingency

Have you added contingency funds to allow you to adapt and change as the project develops? Check the application guidelines for an acceptable level of contingency in the budget

Payment for community members

Will you compensate the community members for their time participating in CEI, offering stipends, expenses or other costs?

Payment to community members can be a contentious topic (for CEI partners and the community themselves) so consider this carefully before the activities begin



8. Top tips

Here are some final considerations or tips for planning excellent CEI



Ensure you are taking an inclusive approach: How can you ensure broad representation, including groups often marginalised from community decision-making?



Be aware of power dynamics: If you are leading the project and hold the funding, community partners may feel they do not have equal power when it comes to decision making. In a funding proposal it is helpful to outline how you will ensure transparency and openness and build a sense of shared decision-making and purpose



You might need to develop tools, leaflets, graphics, films or PowerPoint slides to help you explain the proposed study and remember that not all groups or individuals will be familiar with the idea of doing research or what it is for – so explain that first!



During the planning stage, it's important to keep in mind that talking about research can raise all kinds of expectations, so emphasise that the funding for the proposed work is not yet guaranteed



Make sure that your engagement team are adequately trained (See NIHR & Mesh's free course [*An Introduction and Practical Guide to Community Engagement and Involvement in Global Health Research*](#))



Think about how you will monitor your progress, measure the success of your CEI and share your learning. Your own learning and that of your team are valuable impacts too, so don't forget to capture it and share it with your peers



Make your activities as sustainable as possible. Think carefully about how your activities could be planned to support lasting changes for the individuals, communities and organisations that you work with

9. Summary

This guide has outlined how to plan a Community Engagement and Involvement (CEI) strategy for a grant application

In summary, your proposal should include:



CEI and scoping work you have done to feed into the proposal



How your research proposal has been influenced by CEI



Your team's ethos and approach to CEI



Who you will work with including team members, experts, stakeholders and community, patient and public groups



Your agreed goals or aims for the CEI



What engagement methods you will use and the activities you will deliver in what timescale



How you will document, monitor and evaluate your CEI work and share this learning



What resources/funding you require and a breakdown of costs

Finally, remember to read all application guidance carefully to ensure that you have provided all the information that the funder requires

10. Appendix 1

This table gives example answers to the questions on slide 12 ‘Thinking through your approach’

Who do I engage and involve?	Which stakeholders are interested in your research or who are key to its success?	Are there existing groups who advise on research or who already work in with this health topic or community?	What expertise, knowledge or skills do you need in your team?	Who are your potential research participants and which groups in the community are most likely to be affected by research outcomes?
Example answers	<p>Hospital-based research Ministry of Health officers Hospital/clinic lead Key clinicians</p> <p>Community-based research Local leaders e.g. mayor/chief Education officer NGO/CBO leads</p>	<p>Hospital-based research Patient groups Local Hospital research committee Nurses/clinician groups Local health management groups/committees</p> <p>Community-based research Community Advisory Boards NGOs and CBOs Community Advocacy Groups</p>	<p>CEI professionals Lived-experience or service-user representatives Education advisers Monitoring & evaluation experts Filmmaker or participatory arts practitioner Professional facilitator</p>	<p>People who live in the local area Women’s groups Religious leaders Community leaders Hospital staff Patients or those living with a condition Carers or parents Those at risk of illness or health condition Young people Ethnic minority groups</p>

How do I reach communities, patients or public?	How (through what mechanisms) are people already coming together?	Who are they working with already? (these organisations can be added to your stakeholder list)	When are they coming together? (in leisure time at weekends, as part of their job, at school or at medical appointments)	Where are they connecting or gathering already? (a venue that the community feel comfortable with already is preferable)
Example answers	Community Advisory Board Village Council Patient Support Groups Cinema screenings Online forums Medical appointments	NGO or Health Charity Youth Group Church or religious group Advocacy or Activist Organisations	If you organise new meeting or workshop, ensure it is on a suitable day and time. Or ask to join an existing meeting	Online on a social media group Church Village hall shopping centre local market School health clinic Theatre festivals or fayres



Remember that these are not the only answers to these questions, you can be creative in thinking of new approaches and ideally work with the community so they can lead on the best methods of engagement