



# Low-cost and upstream engagement for research funding applications

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# Low-cost and upstream engagement

In this guide and in the context of a research project, 'upstream' is defined as the planning stages before any research has been done and during the process of putting together a funding proposal. Often, at this planning stage there is limited or no funding for upstream stakeholder, community or public engagement. This guide aims at inspiring ideas on how to conduct engagement to feed into a funding proposal, where limited resources and budget are available.

This guide will be useful for:

- Researchers who are preparing a funding application
- Public/Community Engagement staff
- Anyone who is new to CEI and wants to learn more about it

# Increased emphasis on upstream engagement

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*“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 any proposed research has been informed by engagement with appropriate stakeholders, community members and/or 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 explore if your proposed plan and procedures are acceptable and feasible.



You can uncover potential challenges or concerns in advance and incorporate local insights into the research design



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

# A word of caution about upstream engagement

- Talking to stakeholders and members of a community or the public before any funding has been awarded may raise expectations:
  - That the research will definitely go ahead
  - That engagement will result in benefits such as future employment or participation in the proposed research
- Therefore, in any discussions during the pre-funding period, it is important to emphasise that:
  - While the proposed research may be very important, there is no guarantee that it will be funded. It is also important to be open and truthful about any possible benefits such as employment, which might arise, **if the proposal is funded.**



## Upstream 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 Teams and others. You might be able to arrange a slot within their meeting agendas
- 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

# Who might be important to engage with?



Brainstorm with you team to work out who might be important to talk to: (some will be more relevant than others)

- Health stakeholders: Ministry of health staff, hospital managers, nurses' group, community health workers, critical care staff
- Patient groups: for example, HIV support group
- Other stakeholders: education officers, school principals, mayors and other local leaders, religious leaders
- Community groups: NGOs, women's groups
- Existing community or youth advisory boards

# A range of low-cost methods to share and discuss the planned work



Focus group discussion with relevant community members, for example, college students

If there are engagement practitioners working in your area or institution, consult them on who might be appropriate to engage and what might be appropriate ways of engaging them.



Meeting with local health/education stakeholders



Meeting with local non-governmental organization lead



Discussion with local hospital manager, or nurses' group



Social media platforms might present a means to get views from a broader public. Consult with your team on the appropriateness of these approaches



Emails, phone calls and virtual meetings are all very convenient ways of talking to individuals and groups



Organise a meeting with community advisory board (if one already exists)



# What might be useful questions to ask?



## 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 key concerns, questions and suggestions
- 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 may be appropriate and feasible, and some may not

## This table summarises ways of ‘thinking through your approach’

<b>How do I reach communities, patients or public?</b>	<b>How</b> (through what mechanisms) are people already coming together?	<b>Who</b> are they working with already? (these organisations can be added to your stakeholder list)	<b>When</b> are they coming together? (in leisure time at weekends, as part of their job, at school or at medical appointments)	<b>Where</b> 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 clinics Theatres
		Community Advisory Boards NGOs and CBOs Community Advocacy Groups		condition Young people Ethnic minority groups
<b>How do I reach communities, patients or public?</b>	<b>How</b> (through what mechanisms) are people already coming together?	<b>Who</b> are they working with already? (these organisations can be added to your stakeholder list)	<b>When</b> are they coming together? (in leisure time at weekends, as part of their job, at school or at medical appointments)	<b>Where</b> are they connecting or gathering already? (a venue that the community feel comfortable with already is preferable)
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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