

Health and Care Research Wales

Public Involvement Community

Problem Solving Procedure

This document includes the procedure on how to deal with:

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Introduction

Whilst the involvement of volunteers is usually a positive experience for all concerned, sometimes things go wrong within any volunteer programme. The aim is usually to handle difficult situations on an informal basis if possible, by talking to those concerned, clarifying issues and reaching consensus.

However, sometimes this is not sufficient. Organisations are advised by the Wales Centre for Voluntary Action (WCVA) to have in place 'problem solving procedures' which are specific to volunteers.

The following procedure is based on this advice. Other documents used in its development include: historical documents dealing with complaints and concerns regarding Research Ethics Committees in Wales (2012), a Code of Conduct developed with legal and public involvement advice (2014) and examples from England that can be found on the INVOLVE website.

The Health and Care Research Wales Support and Delivery Centre Public Involvement and Engagement Team manage and support the registration of members of the public to a public involvement community. Members of the public who register with the public involvement community are able to access support and advice from the team and submit expressions of interest (EOI) to become involved with advertised opportunities. The advertised opportunities are developed following requests from health and social care researchers for members of the public to be involved in their research, this could be for any of the stages of the research cycle from development of an idea to dissemination of results. The opportunities available are wide-ranging varying from a one-off questionnaire to a commitment to regular meetings over a number of years.

Payment for time is often offered and, if accepted, the true definition of volunteering does not apply. Volunteering is generally considered as altruistic where individuals or groups provide services for no financial gain. However, as there is no contractual or employment implications, public involvement is considered to be aligned with volunteering. As the members of the public are not employed or considered as staff then any host organisation's policies or procedures for employees/staff concerns or complaints will not be applicable. Host organisations may be the NHS, local authority, academic institution, charity or third sector organisation.

When a member of the public submits an EOI to be involved in an opportunity then consent to a 'Public Involvement Agreement' is required (Appendix 1). Those leading the opportunity (usually researchers) are advised to be aware of the agreement and to consider what process their host organisation has in place to deal with concerns or problems relating to volunteers. This should also involve an awareness of supporting documents such as terms of reference, codes of conduct or role descriptions.

As with all use of personal identifiable information, data protection regulations should be adhered to when following any problem solving procedure.

Gross misconduct

If there is serious misconduct such as assault, theft or a safeguarding issue it may be appropriate to involve other agencies such as the police.

In cases of gross misconduct a member of the public should be asked formally to stop their involvement while a formal enquiry takes place.

The following are examples of gross misconduct in relation to public involvement:

- Inappropriate sexual behaviour
- Harassment or bullying

- Breach of confidentiality
- Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Falsification of documents

Formal enquiry

The formal enquiry should take the form of a meeting to be chaired by a senior member of staff (from the host organisation or Health and Care Research Wales Head of Communications, Engagement and Involvement). There should be a formal letter of invite to the member of the public who has the right to be accompanied by a family member or friend. All evidence will be considered and the chair's decision will be final.

Public concerns about how they have been treated

There may however be occasion when a member of the public has concerns about how they have been treated either by another member of the public, a member of staff, or an organisation. The following stages are advised:

First stage: Concerns are raised verbally and dealt with (consider keeping a record). If the concerns cannot be resolved then move to the second stage.

Second stage: Concerns should be reported by the member of public in writing. This could be to their contact in the host organisation. If it is to Health and Care Research Wales then this should be addressed to:

By email: research-involvement@wales.nhs.uk

By post to:

Public Involvement and Engagement Team
Health and Care Research Wales Support and Delivery Centre
Castlebridge 4
15-19 Cowbridge Road East
CF11 9AB

A formal reply should be received suggesting how the issue will be resolved in seven working days. If not resolved then move to the third stage.

Third stage: An interview is held with the Senior Manager for Public Involvement and Engagement and the member of the public who can be accompanied by a family member or friend. If the issue is not resolved move to the fourth stage.

Fourth stage: member of the public has a right to appeal to the Head of Communications, Engagement and Involvement whose decision will be considered final.

All stages should be fully documented.

Concerns about a member of the public's capability or conduct

There may also be occasions when concerns are raised about a member of the public's capability, for example they fail to attend meeting or are late/leave early. Or, a member of the public's conduct could cause concern, for example they are disrespectful, or make racist comments.

First stage: In situations where a member of the public's capability or conduct is a concern, an informal discussion should take place, raising concerns with the member of the public and a plan for supervision or training considered (consider keeping a record). If the concern is still not resolved move to the second stage. In the situation where a member of the public has failed to attend meetings or respond to repeated emails or letters then they should be written to (by the lead in the organisation or the Senior Manager for Public Involvement and Engagement) advising that it is presumed they are no longer able to be involved.

Second stage: Formal meeting to discuss the concern with the member of the public, where they have a right to be accompanied by a member of family or friend. A written report/letter should be produced to include objectives and actions to address/resolve concerns. Arrangements should be made to review the objectives over an appropriate time period. If, on review, there are still concerns then consider asking the member of public to withdraw their involvement or officially move to a formal enquiry.

Termination of involvement

This should only be considered as a last resort, if there is serious behaviour or gross misconduct that has not been resolved.

If possible, hold a meeting to formally communicate the decision to terminate. Ensure all meetings are confidential and respectful and decisions are clear. Written confirmation of decisions should be provided. This can either be the responsibility of the host organisation or Health and Care Research Wales where the Head of Communications, Engagement and Involvement will chair the meeting and their decision will be final.

Consider who else needs to be informed and what they need to know.

If the Health and Care Research Wales Support and Delivery Centre Public Involvement and Engagement Team are not already aware then they should be informed.

Consider if the person needs to be removed from the Health and Care Research Wales public involvement community.

Ensure the involvement opportunity continues with a new member of the public.

Appendix

Public Involvement Agreement

Thank you for your interest in public involvement in health and social care research. The public involvement and engagement team are here to support you, to make your experience positive and rewarding. Our public involvement agreement tells you what you can expect from us to make your involvement experience a beneficial and worthwhile one, as well as what is expected of you while you are involved. By ticking the involvement agreement box on the expression of interest form for current opportunities, you are confirming your commitment to this agreement. This is entirely voluntary and not a contract of employment. It can be cancelled at any time by us or you.

In applying for this opportunity:

What you can expect from us:

- An introduction to the opportunity
- Provision of appropriate training
- Support and provision of guidance
- Reimbursement of out of pocket expenses and offer of payment if provided by the team
- Respectful and confidential treatment
- Promotion of an inclusive and diverse community
- Response to your concerns or complaints as quickly as possible

What we expect from you:

- To make the most of opportunities for training, support and guidance
- To undertake tasks within agreed guidelines to the best of your abilities
- To give as much notice as possible if you are unable to continue with your involvement
- To treat those you come in to contact with while you are involved with respect and ensure confidentiality
- The support of an inclusive and diverse community
- To let us know anything that causes concern for your safety/wellbeing or that of others

References:

<https://www.invo.org.uk/contact-us/complaints/>

<http://www.wcva-ids.org.uk/wcva/2534>