

# Briefing note eight: Getting started

## Getting started

You have considered **why** you want to involve people and **who** you want to involve. You now need to consider **how** these people are going to be involved in the different stages of the research cycle. For many this will involve organising a meeting, for example for project advisory groups, public events, reference groups, or workshops.

How you plan these meetings can make a huge difference to how people feel about the research and how much they are able and want to get involved in your work. Holding a meeting is only one of the ways to involve people and you may decide that this is not the best approach for your research.

‘ I research long term health conditions, particularly respiratory problems. I don’t hold a meeting if I want to involve people in my research – instead I go to their meetings and work with people at the local Breathe Easy club. I regularly attend meetings of the club, often not discussing my research and have built a strong relationship with the people who attend’

A researcher

## Things to think about if you are organising meetings

### Planning for meetings

- Explore opportunities for meeting people in their own

environment, such as by attending a regular meeting of an organisation or group.

- Consider venues that are on neutral ground. Venues such as hospitals or Local Authority departments might be associated with difficult experiences.
- Organise meetings at times and in places that are easy for people to get to. Those who are working, have young children or who are carers might need to meet outside office hours. Make sure that there is parking and public transport nearby.
- It is often better to plan for a mid-morning or early afternoon start to the meeting. This makes it easier for people if they have to travel some distance to the meeting or if they need additional time in the mornings because of their disability or health condition. In some situations, you might need to offer overnight accommodation, in which case check if they have any special requirements for an overnight stay.
- Make sure meeting places, hotels and facilities are accessible to all those attending, for example if you are inviting a wheelchair user to join your committee, meet in an accessible meeting room with parking nearby and fully accessible facilities.
- Where possible, visit the venue in person in advance of the meeting, and ask to be shown around to check its suitability and access to all rooms, dining area, disabled toilets and the stage speaker area (if required). Don't rely on the venue telling you that it is accessible as you might find that this is not the case or that the complex routes of access are not acceptable to you or the people needing access.
- Ask people if they have any special dietary requirements and let them know what refreshments you will be providing.
- Be mindful of practical matters such as microphones and hearing loops or large print for people with visual impairments. Think about whether you will need

interpreters for people from different ethnic groups or for sign language.

- Provide clear information about the meeting, timings and directions for getting to the venue well in advance and in a relevant format. Ask people if they require information posted to them or if they would like to receive it by email.
- Plan and prepare a budget for your meeting ([see briefing note five](#)).
- Develop [terms of reference](#) for the meeting so that those attending know why the meeting is being held and the responsibilities of those attending.

## **Conducting the meetings**

- Brief the Chair and other committee members to ensure that the members of the public are welcomed and included during the meeting.
- Offer a pre-meeting or telephone discussion for members of the public to discuss the agenda and papers.
- Provide name badges in a large clear text font, and ask people to introduce themselves at the beginning of the meeting.
- Agree ground rules for how you will conduct a meeting so everybody has an equal opportunity to contribute. It is important that all group members including members of the public agree to these rules of mutual respect.
- Make sure that everybody has an equal voice on the group. Encourage the use of clear language, explain jargon and acronyms. Ask the Chair to regularly check that people understand the language used and the content of the meeting.
- Plan for frequent breaks and refreshments as people might need to take medication or find sitting for long periods difficult. If it is possible to have a spare room then allocate this as a quiet room for those who might need to take some time out of the meeting.

- Consider different ways of conducting meetings, such as time in small group sessions as well as meetings in a larger group to allow people the opportunity to contribute in different ways.
- Create a mentor or buddy system to support the members of the public you are involving on an ongoing basis.

### **After the meeting**

- Provide feedback on any recommendations or outcomes.
- Allow sufficient time between meetings for people to consult with their peers or their organisations if they wish to do so.
- Ask for feedback from members of the public involved in the meeting and if they have any suggestions for improvement for future meetings.

**Find out more** about organising meetings and events:

[Patient and public involvement in research groups – guidance for Chairs](#) (TwoCan Associates 2010)

INVOLVE online resource for researchers has [templates and examples](#) of ground rules and terms of reference for groups

[Strategies for diversity and inclusion in public involvement: Supplement to the briefing notes for researchers](#) (INVOLVE, 2012)