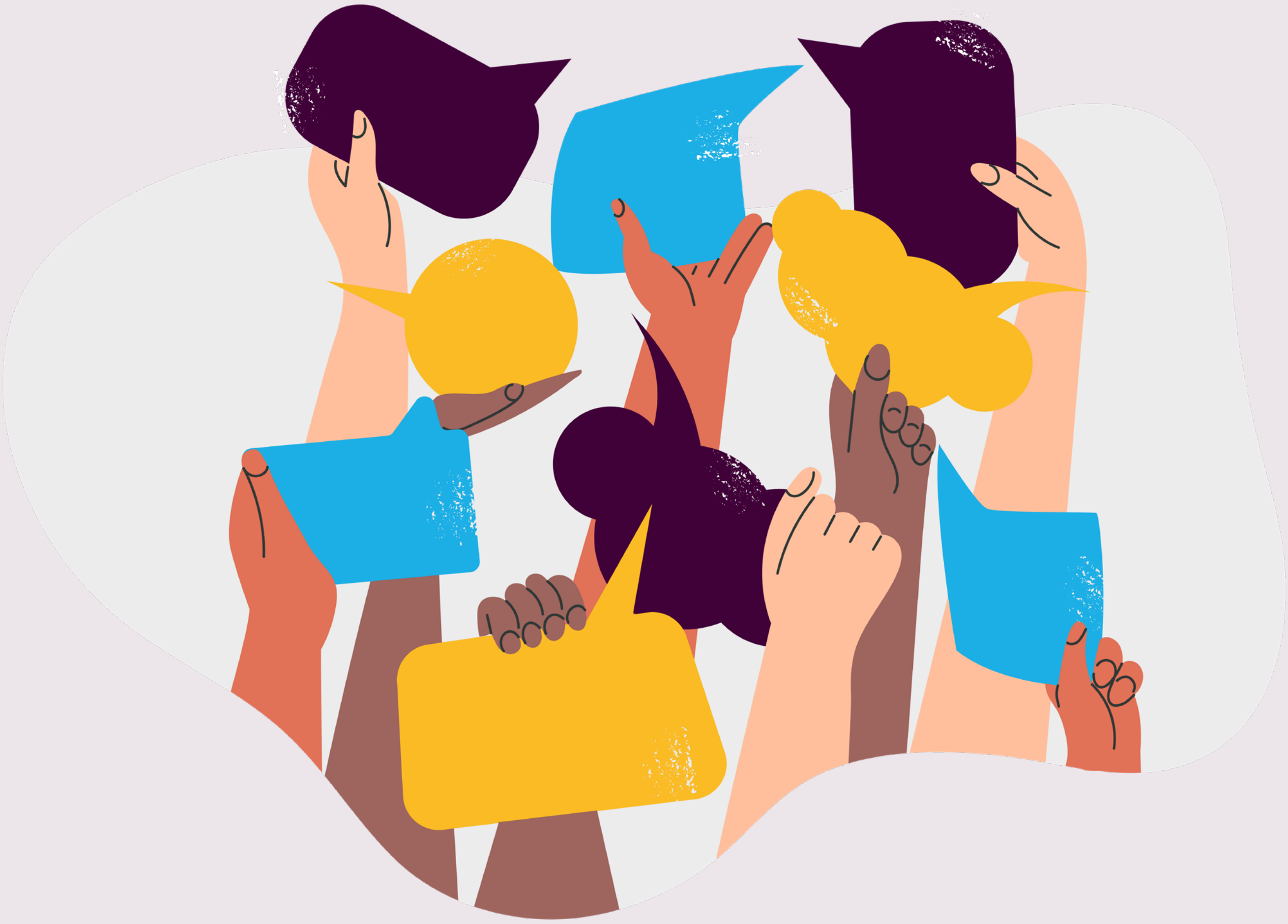

Guidance for conducting inclusive and equitable research

Ensuring research is inclusive, with a sample that is representative of the population of focus, is imperative to conducting ethical and robust research. For example, ensuring participants represent the different sex, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, economic background, ethnicities, religious beliefs, and marital status, you would expect to find in the population of focus.

Connecting with and engaging different types of people to take part in research can be challenging. However, there are things we can do to make our research more attractive to potential participants, easier to participate in, and overall, more accessible and equitable, which will facilitate recruitment of diverse and representative groups of people.

This resource provides guidance on how to enhance accessibility, inclusivity, and equity in research which should, in turn, enhance the diversity and representativeness of our samples. This guide is structured in the order of the research process to help you think about each step of your research and how to make it more inclusive and equitable.

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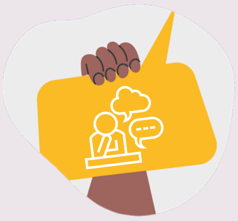
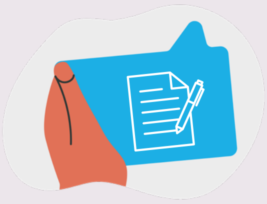
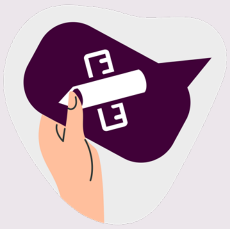


Cross cutting considerations across all stages of research

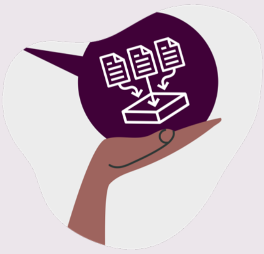


Research design and grant writing

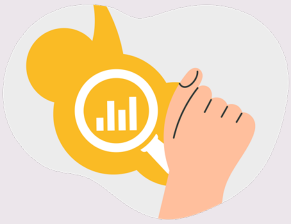


Design of materials

Participant recruitment

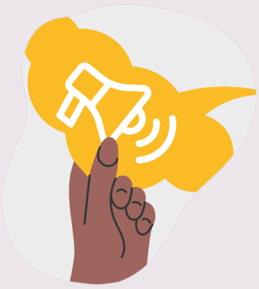


Data collection

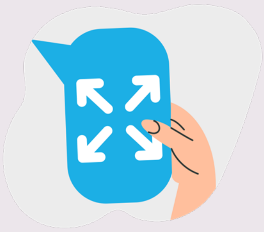


Data analysis

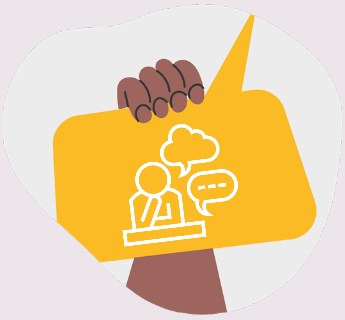
Reporting



Dissemination



Application of inclusive practices in other research areas



1. Cross cutting considerations across all stages of research

- Public and Patient Involvement and Engagement (PPIE)
    - Including representatives from the population of focus from the start of the research process can aid accessibility and equity in your research. This can take many forms – at its most engaged this would be in the form of a co-designed study or maybe using an equitable research framework such as the Community Participatory Research Model, or other participatory research approaches.[1] Alternatively, researchers might work with an advisory group, or advisors, who are consulted throughout the research process. This may include representatives from the intended population of focus and/or stakeholders relevant to the topic and population, and those who are anticipated to be responsible for implementing any recommendations that result from the research. Whether through true co-design, or other forms of involvement, insights into best approaches to undertake the research, including sensitivity around data collection methods, language use within the research, and best ways to reach a broad representation of the intended population, can be shared and discussed. PPIE should ideally take place throughout the research process, into data analysis and through to reporting to ensure the outputs of the research are accepted and accessible to the population of focus and any other intended users of the research outputs.
        - Consulting the **NIHR Involve guidance** is a good starting point to plan any PPIE work and ensure that the PPIE itself is accessible and conducted sensitively and equitability.
- The research team:
    - Reflect on who is in the team – is the team composition diverse? Does the team include members with at least some similar characteristics to the population under study or with experience of the topic/condition under study? Will potential participants see the team as approachable? If you are recruiting new staff to the team, you can consider this in your recruitment.
    - Seeing those like you represented and reflected in the research team may increase propensity to take part.
- Language:
    - Regularly update language used to take account of recent terminology considered acceptable by the community that the research project will be working with.

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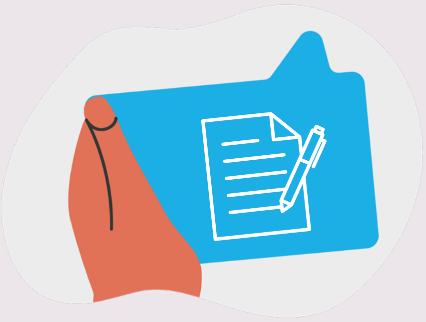
[1] https://jprm.scholasticahq.com/article/13244-participatory-research-methods-choice-points-in-the-research-process

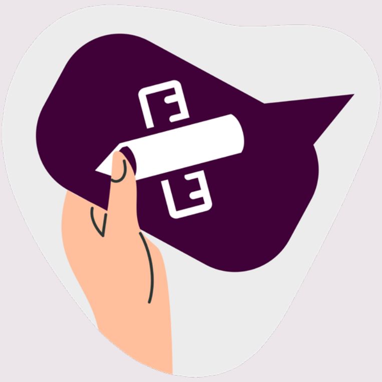
  - Commit to consulting not only scientific literature, but PPIE groups and stakeholders to choose the most appropriate language to implement
  - Consider implementing content warnings (CW) where materials/social media communications may contain sensitive or difficult information/topics (e.g., Trauma, Medical Trauma, Sexual Trauma, PTSD, and more).
  - Presentation of demographic data that is inclusive and equal.
    - Ethnicity is presented alphabetically, not just majority group first e.g., White should not be first, this 'centres' 'whiteness as dominant.
    - Do not use 'other' in gender – instead provide the option to describe their gender, for example 'prefer to self-describe'



2. Research design and grant writing

- Considering burden on participants when designing research projects – what will be entailed through participation? Is this a group that is often researched? Is there scope for collaboration with other research to minimise participant burden? What is the cost/benefit of the research in terms of burden versus potential impact? Could this be communicated to the potential participants highlighting the intended benefits of the research?
- Budget appropriately for PPIE or co-design work – experts by experience should be reimbursed for their time and knowledge sharing as well as any expenses incurred by their involvement. Additionally, make sure time for PPIE work from start to finish, including dissemination, is factored into the project timeline.
- Budget and time plan appropriately for dissemination, considering where/what you should attend for dissemination (wider than academic conferences), and the production of other modes of dissemination (e.g., infographics) that may incur costs for professional design services.
- Considering stakeholders & their priorities
  - Visiting/collaborating with community leaders/community venues
  - Consider the importance of community leaders and other organisations as potential gatekeepers to participant recruitment, data collection, dissemination and implementation of recommendations – making sincere and genuine connections can increase access and raise the sense of the researchers as trustworthy and legitimate among the population/community of focus.
  - Consider timeline and budget: ensure you plan enough time for the process (e.g., making connections with relevant groups) and a budget (or other ways) to compensate/say thank you to any community leaders, organisations, or otherwise who support your research – this could also be mutual promotion or other ways of offering support that are not only financial.

- Employ relevant community representatives as collaborators and part of the research team.
  - Including co-applicants from the communities you are researching, and ensuring their time is budgeted for like any other co-applicant relevant to contribution could be a more formal way of including the community/population you wish to research – this may naturally happen if taking a co-production approach or where PPIE is undertaken from the point of conception of the project.
- Where budgets allow, plan for a sample size that will allow for the analyses needed of sub-groups and intersections of characteristics e.g., black women, neurodiverse men, and consider methods that are designed for analysing and comparing with small sub-sample sizes.
- Consider inclusion/exclusion criteria and reflect on reasons why some groups may be excluded. Are some groups being excluded due to logistic reasons that could be addressed with more budget and time? For example, often research is restricted to English speakers, does this exclude certain groups of the population of focus? E.g., family members who are not from the UK.



3. Design of materials

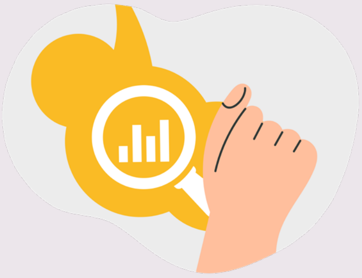
- Inclusive design of materials for neurodiversity, sensory difficulties, and other disabilities (e.g., coloured backgrounds, coloured texts, combinations of certain colours (consider those who are colour blind), minimise blocks of text, use accessible font styles, sizes and spacing, ensure the text can be read by a screen reader)
  - Consider undertaking training in creating inclusive documents and research materials (e.g., neurodiversity training, accessible documents training, writing for screen readers, using alt text) and utilise knowledge about this from organisational communications teams or others in the team with expertise.
- Use images that represent the population your work is about and where aiming to be representative of broad groups include people of different races, genders, abilities, ages, etc.
- In the participant information sheet, highlight how researchers can accommodate different needs where needed, e.g. video, telephone, or in person interviews, remembering ethics approval will be needed for all forms of data collection.
- Consider access to equipment (e.g. laptops, the internet) when asking participants to access research materials - e.g. flexibility around offline/online formats.

4. Participant recruitment

- Sensitivity in approach to minority groups:
  - Clearly communicate rationale for approaching group e.g., under representation in research.
  - Minority groups can sometimes feel "data mined" so be clear about the purpose and anticipated output and impact of the research – show it is not research for research's sake.
- Ask for support from any relevant community organisations and stakeholders you have connected with including but also in addition to PPIE groups/advisors.
- Going beyond traditional recruitment avenues (e.g., Service charities)
  - Where else can we look for participants who are truly representative of the population of focus?
  - Recruiting via different formats (social media, flyers, relevant comms e.g., local newspaper, community spaces, etc.).
  - Unless you are seeking a specific help seeking population, avoid recruiting only via organisations that provide support and other services as this will lead to a sample that is mostly made up of those that seek help and thus not representative of the wider population.
- Snowball sampling – ask existing participants/connections for anyone they might know who would like to participate.
- "High penetration" sampling - sampling from places where the target group represents a large proportion of the population.
- Consider the impact of digital exclusion such as access to computers and the internet, and comfortableness of using online surveys etc, if recruiting online. Consider having multiple ways, not just online.

5. Data collection

- Who is doing the data collection? Consider their identity e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, ability etc., which is the benefit of having a diverse team.
    - Value the expertise of researchers with lived experience throughout the entire research process, but especially in the data collection phase, particularly if qualitative research.
        - Where needed, create appropriate infrastructure to support researchers with lived experience to manage the emotional labour[2] throughout the research process. For example: researchers should make time for mental-health focused supervision with an external mentor/supervisor (ideally clinically trained and with a shared identity with the researcher or someone the researcher feels comfortable with). Additionally, be reflective of having 'insider' researchers (e.g. researchers with shared characteristics/experiences with the participant group) and ensure this is noted in the reporting of the research.
- Consider the key role of advocacy workers or link workers who work within the community and have insight on the communities' needs and values. This could form part of a participatory approach or PPIE or be in addition to.
- Consider relevant and important cultural dates and events. Be mindful of practice around this and avoiding planning data collection during particular dates – consult a diversity and inclusive calendar to assist.
- Consider the culture and first language of the research team member(s) interacting with participants to avoid possible misunderstandings, miscommunication, and potential biases.



6. Data analysis

- Plan for data analyses that will allow the inclusion of minority groups. Explore ways of conducting analysis with very small samples and/or sub-groups within your sample (e.g., gender, sexualities), for example Configurational Comparative Methods.[3]

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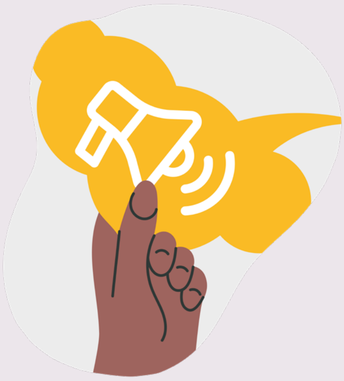
[2] Emotional labour refers to a work specific role that requires managing emotions and expressions as part of a specific role at work to portray suitable work-related emotions. In this example, this might be the need to manage one's emotions experienced in the process of conducting interviews or other data collection approaches.

[3] https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137314154_5

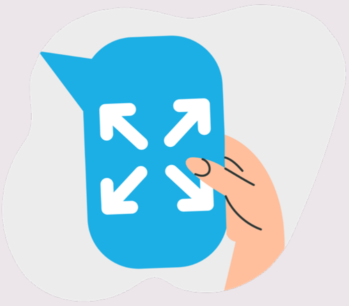
7. Reporting

- Consider presentation of demographic data as above (section 1) (e.g., ethnicity is listed alphabetical, not just majority group first).
- Consider ways in which findings are discussed.
  - For example, in many cases race is not a risk factor for psychological distress, racism is.
- Consider and report on the identity of the researcher:
  - This is especially pertinent in qualitative research where it is important to include a statement of researcher positionality including gender, ethnicity, insider vs outsider status (e.g., military connections, a veteran, service child)
- Ensuring all publications acknowledge limitations in sampling (if relevant).
- Consult PPIE group(s) for acceptability and accessibility of reports, results, and outcomes, especially in the development of recommendations.



8. Dissemination

- Considering different formats of dissemination outside of academic publication (infographics, podcast, social media, talks, public engagement).
- Ensure non-academic summaries are written to an appropriate reading age for the general population.
- Translations and adaptations of outputs (format and content):
  - Adapting to different stakeholder groups e.g., young people, non-English speaking groups.
- Apply guidelines on language outlined in section 1.
- Incorporate PPIE feedback and involve PPIE members in dissemination.



9. Application of inclusive practices in other research areas

These principles and practices can be extended to other aspects of research and academic activities: promoting inclusivity, diversity, and equity throughout all research endeavours enhances the production of high-quality, robust, and ethically sound research. For example:

- Publishing research papers
- Reviewing research papers for journals
- Editorial boards
- Advisory groups
- Grant writing and reviewing
- Public engagement/panel discussions/external events

Centre for Appearance Research | UWE Bristol University of the West of England

This resource was adapted and modified from guidelines produced by the Centre for Appearance Research Diversity, Inclusivity, and Equity (CARDIE) group. CARDIE gave permission to Dr Mary Keeling of the FiMT Research Centre to adapt these for the purpose of creating a resource for the Armed Forces Research community.

Additional suggested reading:

https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-022-01406-7

https://jprm.scholasticahq.com/article/13244-participatory-research-methods-choice-points-in-the-research-process

https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137314154_5

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-guide-to-inclusive-social-research-practices/a-guide-to-inclusive-social-research-practices