Guidelines for Good Practice: University Research and Civil Society Organisations

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GUIDELINES FOR GOOD PRACTICE

UNIVERSITY RESEARCHERS WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH COMMUNITY SECTOR ORGANISATIONS

This guide aims to improve researchers' ability to do the following (as stated by Research Councils UK 'Pathways to Impact' requirements):

- Identify and actively engage relevant users of research and stakeholders
- Articulate a clear understanding of the context and needs of users in the field
- Consider ways for the proposed research to meet these needs or impact upon understandings of these needs
- Evidence engagement with these users/stakeholders

Positive impact needs to be central to any research project engaging with organisations in the community sector, from its conception to its conclusion.

1 Preparation
Consultation
Definition
Anticipation
Realism

2 Conduct
Transparency
Flexibility
Partnership
Respect

3 Follow Up
Conclusion
Consideration
Inclusion
Communication

Common Deadly Sins of researcher conduct with community groups

Smash and grab
- Out of the blue contact
- Underprepared, off-the-sheet questions
- No follow-up

One way
- Little effort to meet needs or to build on existing knowledge
- Clash between interests of researcher and the participant

Opaque
- Unsure of the aims or outcomes of the project
- Academic jargon makes outputs unusable for practitioners

Wasted opportunity
- For researcher
- For community organisation

Words of wisdom from a funder:

"Research is also about relationships: how will you build and secure trust? Be aware of your different expectations and perspectives from the outset and agree your plans in light of these. Partnerships breakdown over the small things. The more you can work through how this will work before you embark on the actual work, the better."

1

PREPARATION

CONSULTATION
• **Consult** with all key partners (inc. funder) prior to finalising the aims of your research
• **Conduct** groundwork research on the organisation
• **Familiarise** yourself with the sensitivities, needs, context

DEFINITION
• Are the aims of your research usefully defined for all participants?
• Define your **obligations** to supervisor, funder, participant, stakeholders – how will these be balanced?

ANTICIPATION
• Factor in time for engagement and logistical challenges
• **Anticipate** risks and plan on how to address them
• Consider drafting a **partnership agreement** in advance, thus thinking through and agreeing working practice from the start

REALISM
• **Don't over-promise** What are you able to offer? Realistically?
• **Don't over-ask** Avoid unnecessary request of their time/resources
• **Don't mislead** in an effort to reassure
• **Don't assume** shared interpretation of issues/texts (a common pitfall!)

2

CONDUCT

TRANSPARENCY
• Be open and honest about what your **objectives** are, including planned outputs and impact
• Maintain **contact** throughout – don't just come back when you need something
• Don't rely on email – face-to-face or phone contact can be vital
• Avoid jargon! Be aware of the power of language to alienate as well as inform

FLEXIBILITY
• Build in a **review** of collaboration during the project and adjust as needs be to avoid missed opportunities
• **Expect** your project to be 'honed' as a result of your engagement with participants
• Recognise that impact is a **process** not a result
• Be prepared to go to the participants as and when suits them (make expectations on this clear and realistic from the start)

PARTNERSHIP
• Don't lose sight of your duty to ensure that *all* participants benefit from the research
• Think about it as a **mutually beneficial** relationship

RESPECT
• Ensure compliance with professional and university requirements for Ethical Conduct in research (and share these with partners)

3

FOLLOW UP

CONCLUSION
• **Liaise** as to how the research findings can be most usefully fed back into the group/community
• Offer to produce a version of findings that partners can use for their needs.
• Have a mechanism for **feedback** on the findings (i.e. a right of reply, albeit with no obligation to alter analysis)

CONSIDERATION
• **Honour** any assurances and commitments, as documented at the outset (e.g. in partnership agreement)
• If these prove impossible, consult as to potential alternatives
• If circumstances/outcomes change, **communicate** that in a timely way

INCLUSION
• **Involve partners** in deciding the target audiences, forms and venues for dissemination
• Invite partners to participate in **dissemination** events

COMMUNICATION
• Share academic publications arising from research
• Keep **open door** for future contact
• Send thanks and updates!