



Consumer and Community Participation Fact Sheet M03: Steering Groups

What is a steering group?

A group of stakeholders who steer and influence the research project, these members have more involvement with the direction of the research. This is high level participation. A steering group may be referred to as a steering panel.

Who would be in a steering group?

Groups can consist of any or all of these stakeholders;

- Researchers.
- Clinicians, policy makers, health administrators.
- Consumers and community members.
- Members of consumer advocacy organisations and/or non-government organisations.

Deciding if consumers and community members of steering groups can also be participants in the research can be a dilemma. It is important for each research project to consider issues about ethics, confidentiality and bias.

Planning considerations:

- If mixing a range of stakeholders, always ensure that there are at least two consumers and community members in the steering group.
- Consumers and community members must be involved at an early stage of the project for their participation to be meaningful.
- Avoid the use of acronyms and technical language throughout the planning and the project, consider creating a glossary if using technical language.
- Time for a member of the research team will have to be set aside to organise and support meetings.
- Consider what support and/or training consumers and community members will need or be offered.
- Payment of expenses and/or an honorarium should be budgeted for especially if all other members of the meeting are being recompensed for their time. This should be discussed with members.



Practical issues:

- Develop draft Terms of Reference and a plain language summary (Fact Sheet M11) of the research for the group – be prepared to accept changes from the steering group.
- Be upfront about items that are not open to negotiation.
- See other Consumer and Community Participation Fact Sheets for help in:
 - Identifying appropriate consumers and community members (Fact Sheet P4).
 - Organising the first meeting (Fact Sheet P5).

Consumer and community participation has been an integral part of two large research projects undertaken at The University of Western Australia. The research looked at medication safety and chronic disease in seniors (age 65+).

There was a planned budgeted strategy for the participation activities which included establishing a Seniors Consumer Panel. The Seniors Consumer Panel provided input into many aspects of the research and took part in several workshops with researchers and health professionals.

Unexpected by-products of the participation were issues relating to packaging and labelling of prescription medicines which were highlighted by panel members. These issues have major safety implications for the quality use of medicines in seniors. Extensive lobbying with relevant government agencies has since been undertaken for changes to be made to national policy and practice.