



Consumer and Community Participation Fact Sheet P02: Principles of Participation

There are certain key principles which underpin all consumer and community participation activities. Regardless of the level of participation that is being used, these principles can help to guide and support all participation activities.

Over-arching principles

- **Start participation as early as you can**

The earlier you start the consumer and community participation process the better the consumers and community members will understand and feel part of the project. Don't be put off if you didn't start participation at the beginning – it's never too late.

- **One size doesn't fit all**

It is important to work with consumers and community members to find the best level of participation for your project. Work together to decide what will be most appropriate and will suit the consumers or community members involved in your research team.

- **Consumer and community participation should add value to the research**

Work with consumers and community members to decide the best way to achieve this. Be clear about what you are hoping to achieve.

- **Treat everyone with respect**

Consumers, community members, researchers and other stakeholders should all treat each other with courtesy and respect. It is important to respect all stakeholders' ideas and perspectives. Consumer and community participation is about giving a 'voice' to these differences.

- **Share information willingly**

Keep everyone informed and involved by sharing information willingly and in language that everyone understands.

Good practice standards should apply to all consumer and community participation activities; these will include discussions about expectations and role; outline of time commitment; discussion about expenses and honorarium.

Consider training needs for researchers as well as consumers and community members. Training can help develop the necessary skills and abilities required to implement and support consumer and community participation.

The Rural and Regional Health and Aged Care Services Division, Victorian Government Department of Human Services lists the following as principles for consumer, carer and community engagement:

- Trust
- Respect
- Openness
- Equal opportunity
- Advocacy and support
- Responsiveness
- Shared ownership
- Dissemination of information

Tips for researchers

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

Useful reading:

Telford, R., Boote, J., Cooper. C. 2004. 'What does it mean to involve consumers successfully in NHS research? A consensus study'. Health Expectations, 7, pp209-220