Reflective questions to support co-produced research

A resource for researchers, members of the public and health and social care staff

About this document

Co-producing research is when researchers, practitioners[1] and members of the public collaborate to develop research. Everyone works together in more equal partnerships and shares responsibility and power throughout the research project (INVOLVE, 2018)[2,3].

This resource was produced as part of a project thinking about the challenges of doing co-production in health and social care research. As the work developed it became clear that what was needed was a broader reflective tool to look at the process and practicalities of co-production. Whilst developed within health, it could prove a valuable reflection for multiple disciplines.

It is acknowledged that co-production is a catch all term for a broad range of activities and would encourage wider reading in this area: See our accompanying document: *A map of resources for co-producing research in health and social care* **at http://bit.ly/CoProResources**

Who is this resource for?

It is intended to be a useful starting point for those new to co-produced research to be used at any point in the process but would be equally beneficial to those with more experience of co-production. It can stimulate personal reflection or in a discussion within a project team.

When might this be useful?

- As a project team is forming – some individual and team thinking about how group members communicate and different needs may be helpful.
- As part of an ongoing reflective process.
- As experience is gained across different projects.

These questions have been updated with a new section on online and remote co-production, to help people think through the issues they need to consider when working with people remotely, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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[1] Practitioners are the people planning and providing services. This could include paid health and social care staff, paid staff of community organisations, health and social care commissioners and policy-makers.

[2] INVOLVE is an organisation that supports active public involvement in NHS, public health and social care research, and is part of, and funded by, the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR).

[3] NIHR INVOLVE. 2018. Guidance on co-producing a research project. Southampton: NIHR INVOLVE. https://www.invo.org.uk/posttypepublication/guidance-on-co-producing-a-research-project/

Starting out / during the project

- Am I (is everyone) clear about what co-production means (in the context of our specific project) and why we think it is useful for our project?
- When is it most important to use co-production in our project, as a whole or segments of the research process?
- Have we got the right people in the group – is anyone missing / who is not represented?
- Are we assuming that people are speaking for wider groups and is this justified?
- What is realistic and achievable within the (practical) constraints that we have e.g. resources and timespan?
- Is everyone able to contribute to discussions? Who is quiet and who dominates? Can strategies be put in place to enable all members of the group to contribute?
- Are researchers and professionals asking questions and sharing their knowledge?
- Does anything need to happen to support the group to work for everyone?
- Are the best methods of communication being used to allow everyone to participate?
- Does any jargon need explaining?

Decision making processes and roles

- Am I (are we) making assumptions about who leads our meetings and our work?
- Do I know when decisions are being made?
- Is there discussion about who does what and scope for people to take on different roles?
- Do I (we) have enough information about the work and what happens between meetings?
- How is work being allocated in the team?
- How are decisions made and by whom?
- Are we all clear about what is decided and do we communicate this with anyone missing?

Co-producing work remotely during COVID-19 pandemic

- Have I asked all public contributors about their preferred ways of communicating without meeting face to face?

- If people have different online/telephone meeting needs can we accommodate them?

- If working together online, does everybody have access to the internet?

  - Are people joining meetings on free phone numbers, or through home broadband? Or do we need to recompense people for their minutes and data that they will be using when they join meetings? Does the organiser know how much it is costing people, if they chose to dial in to a platform?

  - Do people know how to use the features of the online platform? Do you need to organise one-to-one conversations to walk people through how to use the platform?

  - Does everyone know who to contact and how, if they are having technical problems?

  - Unless people have agreed to explicitly share phone numbers, are these hidden, to protect people's confidentiality?

  - If people have agreed to explicitly share numbers, do we need a group agreement for how these are used?

  - Do we have safeguarding policies in place if someone is in crises, or is affected by the subject matter of our work together?

  - Are people in a safe place, and able to say what they would like, without being overhead by others who may be in their surroundings?

- How does the format used to communicate, affect our relationships and decision-making processes?

- How does the facilitation of meetings need to change, to make sure that people can contribute and have space to talk on an equal basis?

- How does our group communication need to change to keep everyone informed as we adapt to online/ telephone/ remote working?

Reflections when experience of co-production has developed and deepened

My status and role:

- How can I use my role, and what is my scope to influence what happens?

- To what extent do I expect others to lead and set standards and give up my influence to them?

- Do I make assumptions about 'how things are done here' that limit my contributions?

- Have I changed my expectations to fit in with what actually happens when I think things should be done differently?

Our power to act within existing organisational cultures:

- What is my sense of my own capacity and resilience – and to what extent do I see difficulties as related to my level of skills or as being about the wider situation?

- Where is it best to put my energy and effort?
  - Do I stick to places where I'm wanted and feel like I can do something useful?
  - How do I deal with situations that need to be tackled but are more difficult?

- How might I support and develop my skills and resilience?

- How much of the more difficult work can I manage realistically?

- How good is the fit between my usual way of being and communicating in a working environment and what might be needed to increase my influence?

Capacity to influence policy and working processes within organisations:

- Do I have any opportunities to influence higher level thinking about public involvement and co-production?

- Are there ways of working that might be adapted slightly to increase the visibility and likelihood of increasing public involvement and co-production?

- Am I too tolerant of 'the way things are here'?

- If I've tried to make changes what happened?

- If I've tried and it didn't work did this discourage me from continuing? Why?

- Do I understand whether lack of influence is a particular issue related to co-production (or involvement) or is it more general to my working environment?

- To what extent is the situation and/or organisation and the culture supportive or challenging for co-production?

- Is there stress and pressure in the environment?

  – Does this affect particular people that are linked to my work?

- Are colleagues focused on delivery of things that are significantly different from the aims of co-production?

Support and allies – Generating collective power with other people:

- Are there people in my environment that might be supportive and helpful?

- Are there any obvious allies who I could talk to about these issues to help to support me?

- If I am trying to tackle difficult situations where I might feel excluded or powerless how do I find support to increase my resilience?

Further details about this document

This document has been developed with the support of the University of Bristol Public Engagement and Research Staff Development Funds, People in Health West of England and NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) West. It is intended to be additional materials to support a training course that is run by People in Health West of England and NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) West.

This document comes from a project where we developed a training course and additional materials to support more equal relationships between everyone within co-produced research. We did this by facilitating five workshops with multi-disciplinary researchers, practitioners and public contributors with public involvement and co-produced research experiences. In these workshops we discussed how different co-produced research had attempted to share power and enable more equal relationships between everyone. This document is one of the results of this process.

To access other resources developed by this project, please see our project page at http://bit.ly/CoProResources

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Better involvement · Better research · Better health