SO YOU WANT TO DO COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH...

A University of Bristol guide to the ethical considerations

University of BRISTOL | CONNECTED COMMUNITIES | KNOW YOUR BRISTOL

What is this guide for?

This guide has been developed to help researchers and professional service staff involved in collaborative research at the University of Bristol. It draws upon the experiences of the AHRC Connected Communities Programme, particularly the Leadership Fellowship and the Know Your Bristol project, both based at the University of Bristol.

We recommend using this guide early in the process of designing your research collaboration to help establish shared values, aims, modes of communication, research methods and agreements on dissemination and rights.

This guide is not a comprehensive set of rules but, rather, a series of questions and provocations designed to help you and your community partner form the robust relationship that will be the foundation of your project. It is primarily focussed on the ethical challenges raised by collaborative research. Practical advice about project management and advice for community partners can be found in the following guides in this series: 'So you want to do collaborative research…: A University of Bristol guide to the practicalities' and 'Getting Paid: A guide to claiming payments from the University of Bristol'. See the resources section for information on where to get the other guides.

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Contents

Where do I start?

When universities and communities collaborate on research, projects will need to go through a university-based ethical review process. Every country and every institution will have a slightly different set of processes and policies. See the University's Ethics Policy and Procedure for specific University of Bristol policies. Your faculty should also have a contact who can provide advice on research ethics - you can find their details and policy documents through the RED website (http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/). Remember that your community partner may have ethical guidelines of their own. It is worth explicitly asking about this so that you can review policies and procedures in collaboration with them before implementing any decisions.

How to begin? – Values Based Ethics

When collaborating with a group it can be really useful to define early on what key aspects of the collaboration will look like practically. Doing so can help to create realistic expectations, better defined roles, and can help to signal and clarify misunderstandings before they become problematic. One way to do this is to begin by collectively defining shared values and then thinking about, and writing down, what it would look like to put these values into practice.

The table overleaf draws on Mary Brydon Miller and her collaborators' 'structured ethical reflection' process (2010). In the left-hand column are some examples of shared values that the participating organisations may aspire to. Along the top row, are headings for the kinds of activities that the partners may be engaged in. The values and the activities listed are just examples – it is down to the partners in a specific collaboration to define these for themselves. In addition to foregrounding collaboration on shared values, this can be great workshop exercise that allows, organisations, volunteers and workers to get to know one another better – this in turn can enhance cooperation.

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Structured ethical reflection process

	Seeking Funding	Designing Questions	Activity Planning	Communication	Remuneration	Evaluation	Sharing Results
Autonomy							
Mutual Benefits							
Transparency							
Democratic Practice							
Shared Roles							
Facilitate Sponataniety							

The following questions may help to flesh out the content of the grid – and the ethos of the collaboration:

Decision-making
How do we want to make decisions? Where will decision-making reside? If it resides with a small group or an individual, will this power been democratically conferred? Is there recourse or accountability if other members of the group are not happy with a decision or the decision-making process?

Organisational Structure
It is not the case the 'ultimate co-production' is attained by completely horizontal decision-making procedure. Procedures must be fit for purpose – all may not need nor want to participate in all decisions and doing so may be too time and energy intensive for little gain. What makes a procedure co-productive or democratic is not how 'flat' it is, but the fact that it is collectively agreed upon and that there are avenues for recourse. Making lines of decision-making and accountability clear early on can be extremely helpful.

Assets to be created
What are we going to make together? Who will benefit and how – increased skills/capacities, experience, employability, pay? Who will be the owners of what we make? What form of copyright will be appropriate? How will the public gain access and where and for how long will outputs be available?

Remuneration and Recognition
What kinds of labour will be remunerated and what kinds will be voluntary? How will remuneration take place in practice? How will labour be distributed, shared and recognised as valuable? Does any invisible/less visible labour support this project and how? Is there a pattern to who or which kinds of labour are more visible and/or valued?

In thinking through these considerations it is also useful to bear in mind:

> **!** Who might be staying silent/being silenced and why?

> **!** Who is not in the room who has a stake in this?

> **!** Which decisions are we not discussing at all (e.g. budgetary, strategic, legacy)?

Brydon-Miller, M., Coghlan, D., Holian, R., Maguire, P. & Stoecker, R. (2010). Covenantal Ethics for Action Research: Creating a New Strategy for Ethical Review. In Dr Jacques Boulet (ed.) Proceedings of 8th World Congress 2010: Participatory Action Research and Action Learning, Australia, 6–9 September 2010, pp. 1-16.

Some handy exercises and techniques

The **Know Your Bristol** project has worked with diverse communities and academics with a range of experiences working with non-academic participants. They found the following to be key to the success of this kind of work:

- Work experimentally and remain open to spontaneity – since outputs may turn out differently than expected, finding ways to value the unintended can be important to recognising success.

- Spend un-programmed time at the space/with the group ('hanging out') to establish trust, learn group dynamics.

- Share and challenge expert knowledge while noticing when and where expert knowledge is useful and using it accountably – good co-production doesn't co-produce everything, it works fairly with people's strengths.

- Arrange weekly drop-in sessions for volunteers/ participants that combine project 'work' and social life.

- Mentoring and cascading knowledge can be more effective than systems and documents.

- Develop short-courses and longer-term workshops, if used with flexibility, they can foster sustainable participation.

- Use a mix of lowfi tools (post-its, paper, etc) and appropriate technologies to include different abilities and learning/working preferences.

- Pay participant expenses for travel and childcare.

- Never underestimate the power of conviviality and communication!

- Design potluck meals together so that all participants bring food. You may wish to consider building a budget into your project to ensure that the institution can cover the costs.

- Consider collaborating on organizing a party to involve everyone from the community in an activity. The form and content of your event should be appropriate for the kind of research you're doing. Be creative rather than falling back on tried and tested.

- Communication can be very difficult. Even when you think that you've both clarified your needs and desires, there's plenty of room for misunderstanding. Make sure you build in regular periods for 'checking in' to address issues quickly.

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- Work together to design exhibitions that celebrate (and question) ideas of community heritage, this gives people a deadline-specific goal and can help to galvanize energies.

- Go for a walk together to share stories and sites. Consider using 'manuals', like those provided by artist collaboratives like Wrights and Sites.

How do I get everyone talking?

Sometimes it can be tempting to default to the workshop or focus group. If that's by mutual consensus, that's great. Try to think about what questions you want to explore and then consider what the best settings, activities, times of day, equipment and so on are best suited to exploring them. Perhaps your group would be interested in a day school, skills training or in designing walks, co-producing interpretation or in running a festival.

Communities and academics involved in participatory mapping and/or heritage might wish to consider using games and challenges as a way to involve people. What about prizes? Or surprises?

Always have a back-up plan so that you can manage arising obstacles and challenges. What will an academic do if a community organization finds it no longer has the capacity to participate? What can a community organization do if an academic moves away from her institution and city?

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Developing Shared Values: Rivers Exercise

Time Required (30– 75mins)

This is a common popular education tool that is used to elicit reflection by an individual or a group on where they have come from and the challenges, privileges and successes they have experienced along the way. If used by individuals, it can be a great tool for getting to know other participants if it is subsequently shared with the group. If used collectively by a group, it can be a great way of gaining a shared understanding of the trajectory of the organisation and what different members see as the key moments, challenges and successes.

For Individuals:

1. Take a piece of flip-chart paper and some coloured pens. (2 mins)

2. Think about your journey with [insert theme here e.g. social change activism, community engagement, interest in maps, your discipline/field of research or practice] up to the present day. You can choose the starting point – it may be a childhood encounter, it may be a more recent career move. On your paper, with as many colours as you desire, draw that journey as a river – how was it that you got to where were are now, what were the challenges, the rapids and white waters, what tributaries fed in to this river, what did the river nourish – are their trees or marshland nearby – bridges over, did dams block the flow at any point, were there any waterfalls, and when did waters feel calm, plain sailing, how did it meander and curve in ways you didn't expect? Play with these metaphors and draw them into your river. Don't worry if you 'can't draw' – it's not an art competition. If you are the only person that can recognise that squiggle and splodge, that's absolutely fine – it's your river. (15 – 45mins)

3. In small groups (2 – 6) share your river with your group. Your group members may ask questions for clarification (like what's that squiggle?) but this is you time to speak and be heard. (Minimum of 5mins per person).

For Groups:

1. Facilitator places a series of flip chart sheets end to end on the wall or floor. Set of pens

2. Facilitator asks the group to collective tell the story of the organisation. Individuals come up to the wall/ paper on the floor and draw on and explain key events, challenges and successes that the group has had.

3. Whole group feeds back on what it was like to do.

How do I evaluate this work?

'Co-production' is an increasingly popular term and approach within academic research and public service delivery. Most simply, co-production is what happens when we make things together, be those things research, museum exhibitions, archives or public services.

So how do we know good co-production when we see it? The New Economics Foundation (NEF) have done some excellent work developing tools for evaluating the co-production of services. The schema below builds on the NEF's work but with an orientation towards co-production of research. Rather than offering a scoring system, the schema is focused on what was created, what was omitted and what if anything might be done to remedy an omission – this is applied to project 'outputs', relationships and organisational arrangements. This framing avoids the assumption that a perfect co-production can be defined in advance, and instead asks you and your group(s) to reflect critically on why a particular ordering of the project was chosen. Thus, in a particular context, it may be the case that specialists (rather than a perfect sharing of roles) were used or that leadership (rather than a perfectly horizontal decision-making structure) was deployed. The implicit claim here is that what makes good co-production is not the presence or absence of ideal forms but rather that the particular form deployed is chosen consciously and collectively by the partners.

Co-production Evaluation Schema
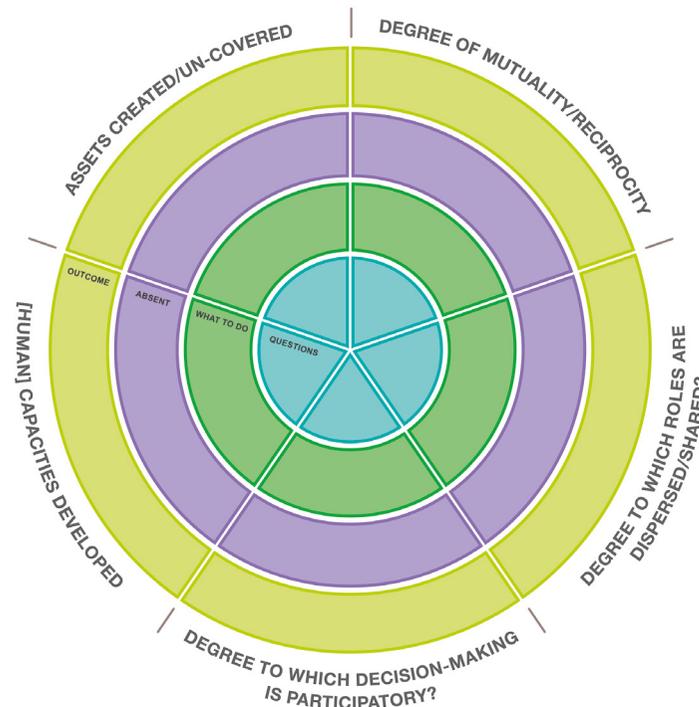
KEY

- Outcome with examples
- What or who remains absent/un-valued/unseen?
- What do we need to do? What would help us do it?
- Key questions/issues

The schema is best used in a group context and can be printed up to size of A0 to for workshop use. Have one person facilitate while the rest of the group move through the sections in turn and write down their reflections/ analysis. 'Assets created/uncovered' is usually the best place to start.

This schema is available from the Know Your Bristol website: http://knowyourbristol.org/2015/07/24/evaluating-co-production/

Schema developed by Nathan Eisenstadt - University of Bristol

Notes on the sections

Assets created/uncovered
What was it that is project created or made visible? What were the 'outputs'? For example, journal articles, book chapters, a digital or physical archive, an exhibition etc.

Human Capacities Developed
What are participants able to do now that could not or did not realise they could do previously? What skills, experience, training and knowledge do they have that enable this?

Degree of mutuality/reciprocity
Think here who benefitted and how? Did partners benefit evenly? For example, individuals may have secured buy-out for their posts or career recognition, organisations may have benefitted from increased visibility, the research may have impacted on the lives of a particular group so as to be of benefit to them.

Degree to which roles are Dispersed/Shared
Think here about who did what and why? Who did the research design, carried out the interviews, analysed the data, presented at a conference, did the writing, design work or publicity. All roles do not have to be shared, but barriers to role sharing should be minimised so that roles can be shared should participants so desire.

Degree to which decision-making is participatory
Who is involved in making which decisions? Are some areas more open to participation than others? Why? Are decision-makers accountable to other members of the group or partnership?

Moving from periphery to centre
When moving from the outer to the inner rings of the circle, try to reflect on what aspects were missed out or and why. What was it that escaped consideration? Is action needed to rectify this lack, if so, what? Or was the focus on a particular group or area an intentional part of the project? What are the key issues or questions that emerge from this kind of reflection?

Key Questions

Here are some questions that you might wish to consider across the various stages of your projects. They may help to inform your road map and/or ethical guidelines. Although they relate to different stages of the project it is best to begin discussing them as early as possible.

Starting points:

- Do you work regularly with community partners or are you thinking about starting a relationship with a new partner? The answer will help guide your approach. Consider what you can offer and what your expectations of partnership might be. Be realistic about what you bring to the table. Ask lots of questions. Listen! You might wish to consider questions around ethics and finance as starting points.

- How do you build trust with new partners?

- What do you need to do to nurture existing relationships?

- How important are the terms and conditions of working together? Do your partners understand that in large organisations, decision-making and action are not always quick and that budgets are often fixed? All partners need to be honest about managing their own and others' expectations and capacities.

- Why is everybody involved? What are the benefits and potential challenges for everybody?

The research:

- What is a good research question? Great research comes from clear and specific research questions. Questions that focus on 'whats' won't be as significant or relevant as questions that encourage you to think about why something might be so and how it came to be. Does your research question cover all the bases: who, what, where, when, why and how?

- Does everybody know the research question and intended outcomes?

- What is co-production and how can this change the way that you work?

It is best to begin discussing key questions as early as possible.

Working together:

- What kinds of methods are best-suited to your communities? Walking, events, workshops, festivals, small-group discussions, visual methods?

- What are the barriers to participation and how will you minimise them?

- How will you communicate so that everybody can understand and participate? How will you ensure they are comfortable participating?

Finishing up:

- How do you evaluate your project?

- What do you do at the end of a relationship and/ or when the project funding runs out? This might be something you wish to address at the very start of your conversations together. What sources of funding are there available from a wide range of sources, some of which only community partners may be able to access? What are the capacity issues for both the community partner and the university should the project carry on? If you decide, collectively, to move on to other projects, think about the kind of event you'd like to collaborate on to mark the closure of the existing project.

- How do you know if your project has changed anything?

Top Tips

Patience is a virtue – co-production takes time whether building trust or co-writing

Communication is key – try to speak and write clearly and encourage questioning

Keep talking – communicate regularly, even when things are difficult

Get advice – the university has lots of ethical guidance and people who can help

Allow plenty of time – everything takes longer when you share the responsibility with others

Be clear about motivations – establish what everybody wants from the relationship from the beginning

Share – your partner is a collaborator not a subject they should have access to your research too

Useful Contacts and Resources

Online resources

Several Connected Communities Projects have published on issues of collaborative research, their reports can be found in the resources section of the website (**http://connected-communities.org/index.php/project_resources/**) along with information about the projects. Here are a selection relevant to the advice in this book:

Making Media with Communities Guidance for Researchers: **http://connected-communities.org/index.php/project_resources/making-media-with-communities-guidance-for-researchers/**

Community-based Participatory Research: Ethical Challenges: **http://connected-communities.org/index.php/project_resources/community-based-participatory-research-ethical-challenges/**

Creating Living Knowledge Report: **https://connected-communities.org/index.php/project_resources/creating-living-knowledge-report/**

Beyond the Creative Campus: Reflections on the evolving relationship between higher education and the creative economy: **https://connected-communities.org/index.php/project_resources/beyond-the-creative-campus-reflections-on-the-evolving-relationship-between-higher-education-and-the-creative-economy/**

Other useful online resources

GW4 Alliance guide to collaboration: **http://gw4.ac.uk/guidetoresearchcollaboration/**

National Institute for Health Research: **http://www.invo.org.uk/resource-centre/payment/** – useful for those involved in NHS, public health and social care research

Centre for Social Justice and Community Action: **https://www.dur.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice/toolkits/** – provides toolkits and case studies for both academics and community partners

Know yourBristol toolkit: **http://www.knowyourbristol.org** – a variety of practical advice based on the projects' experiences of working with community partners.

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RED – Research and Enterprise Development – can offer advice on a range of research issues such as contracts, impact and funding opportunities. (**http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/**)

CPE – Centre for Public Engagement - can offer advice on engagement beyond the university and help with engagement events. (**http://www.bristol.ac.uk/public-engagement/**)

NCCPE – National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement – is joint hosted by the University of Bristol and the University of the West of England. They run events and provide training for academics and community partners and have a good range of resources and information on their website. (**http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/**)

Research Data Service – provide advice on data planning, management and sharing. (**https://data.bris.ac.uk/**)

The other guides in this series are available from the Connected Communities website.

So you want to do collaborative research…
A University of Bristol guide to the practicalities
https://connected-communities.org/index.php/project_resources/so-you-want-to-do-collaborative-research-a-university-of-bristol-guide-to-the-practicalities

Getting Paid
https://connected-communities.org/index.php/project_resources/getting-paid-a-guide-to-claiming-payments-from-the-university-of-bristol