NIHR | Applied Research Collaboration North East and North Cumbria

Evaluating the impact of Public Involvement in Health and Social Care Research

Summary of supporting frameworks

The Public Involvement in Research Impact Toolkit (PIRIT)

Background

- Structured spreadsheet to help plan and/or track Public Involvement (PI) and the difference this makes.
- Initially developed for used at the Marie Curie Research Centre and the Wales Cancer Research Centre by staff and public contributors (Newman et al., 2023)
- Now available to download and use for free, via a short request form.

Strengths

- Simple, flexible spreadsheet specifically designed to be co-owned by researchers and public partners (i.e. more accessible than some other evaluation approaches).
- Encourages reflection on what specific activity has taken place, public contributor intention, impact of public contribution and detail on **why** this contribution matters.
- Includes ability to report impact against the UK Standards for Public Involvement
- Helps research teams convey how involvement influenced decision-making and priorities.

Limitations

- Can be time-consuming to complete well/fully
- Requires a commitment to updating and keeping a diligent record.
- May not capture longer-term outcomes
- Typically completed by research team and public contributors so interpretation of activity and impact may vary in terms of objectivity.

The Cube Framework

Background

- Developed by Gibson et al., (2017) Evaluating patient and public involvement in health research: from theoretical model to practical workshop - Gibson - 2017 - Health Expectations
- Collaborators map (e.g. via post-its) against four dimensions of successful knowledge exchange
    - Weak voice or strong voice (of public partners)

  - One way to be involved or many ways
  - Addressing organisations' concerns or public concerns
  - Organisation changes or organisation resists change

Strengths

- Visual, structured method for considering involvement
- Good for mapping PI activity at a glance and (following mapping activity) can quickly identify areas that need to be addressed, in real time.
- Encourages balanced evaluation across multiple dimensions.
- Useful for workshops, planning sessions, and high-level reporting

Limitations

- If time is short, it may be a challenge to arrange and carry out mapping activity with collaborators.
- Can oversimplify complex involvement activity, lack qualitative detail.
- Evaluation approach can be complex and abstract for those with no prior experience, public contributors may need more support.
- Requires supplementary tools or methods if you want depth (e.g. impact logs).

The Public Involvement Impact Assessment Framework (PiiAF)

Background

- Developed by Popay& Collins (2014) with guidance available online.
- Supports researchers in identifying types of impact they might observe in PPIE and guidance on how to assess this.
- Intended to be used early on in the research process – ideally when funding proposals are being developed.
- There are two parts to the framework
  - **Part 1** – Planning PI
  - **Part 2** – Designing an impact assessment plan

Strengths

- Supports and encourages comprehensive, early planning of impact, aligning with NIHR expectations.
- Structured guidance to identify context-specific, meaningful forms of impact, which can be otherwise difficult to articulate.
- Includes a detailed guidance document with a list of key questions at each stage to guide teams through the framework.

- The tool promotes thoughtful selection of evaluation methods, ensuring approaches are tailored to teams' individual aims.

Limitations

- Aspects of the framework (e.g. 'developing an intervention theory') can feel complex or overly academic.
- Can be time-consuming due to the depth of reflection and planning required.
- May be challenging for those unfamiliar with research and need an experienced facilitator.
- As this is a framework to support the *design* of impact assessments, additional tools are needed to collect relevant data (e.g. impact logs).

RIPPLES (Reflective Framework for Patient and Public Involvement in Rapid Evidence Syntheses)

Background

- A framework developed by the NIHR Innovation Observatory to plan, document and evaluate patient and public involvement in **rapid evidence syntheses** (See Johnson et al;.2026).
- Uses structured reflection to capture the influences and impacts of involvement throughout a project.
- Focuses on understanding what changed, why it changed, and how involvement contributed to those changes.

Strengths

- Flexible and can be applied across different types of involvement activities.
- Encourages ongoing reflection rather than retrospective impact assessment only.
- Captures both process and outcomes of involvement.
- Useful for understanding contributions to research decision-making.
- Relatively straightforward to incorporate into existing project processes.

Limitations

- Developed specifically for rapid evidence synthesis, so may require adaptation for wider PPIE settings.
- Relies heavily on participant reflection and subjective reporting.
- Less explicit about assessing power sharing and partnership working in co-production.
- May not capture broader community or system-level impacts as effectively as some participatory evaluation approaches.

Other useful frameworks

Guidance for Reporting Involvement of Patients and the Public (version 2; GRIPP2)

Background

- Widely used guidance for reporting of PI in health and social care research.
- Developed by Staniszewska et al. (2017): GRIPP2 reporting checklists: tools to improve reporting of patient and public involvement in research | The BMJ
- Both long form and short forms available, depending on the extent of PI in a study.
    - **Long Form** – used when PI is the main focus of a study or where PI has been evaluated.
    - **Short Form** – used when PI is not the main (or secondary) focus.
- Some journals now encourage submission of a completed GRIPP2 checklist alongside the main manuscript.

Strengths

- Can be applied to strengthen description of PI process and impact
- Improves transparency and accountability within research teams
- Standardises the way PI in research is described, helping to build the evidence base.
- May also be useful in the early stages of the research cycle to support planning of PI activity.

Limitations

- Not an evaluation tool – would need to apply other frameworks or approaches to specifically assess the quality or impact of PI
- Retrospective completion may introduce challenges
- May be viewed as additional 'paperwork' to complete, resulting in limited engagement within some teams.

UK Standards for Public Involvement

Background

- Developed collaboratively by NIHR and other partners (including the public) as a national benchmark defining what 'good' public involvement in research looks like (NIHR, 2019).

- Widely used in research, NHS and other settings to support planning and reflection on PI activity.
- Consists of six standards with additional questions to support reflection:
    - Inclusive opportunities
    - Working together
    - Support and learning
    - Governance
    - Communications
    - Impact

Strengths

- Provides a shared language and expectations for high-quality PI.
- Supports reflective evaluation by helping research teams to assess strengths or gaps in their approach and encourages continuous learning.
- Includes an emphasis on inclusive partnerships in line with NIHR priorities and supports development in this area.
- Flexible to apply to a wide range of research designs and can be used at any stage of the research cycle (although use during the initial proposal and/or planning stages is recommended).

Limitations

- Not a structured evaluation tool providing e.g. performance metrics, data collection methods
- May feel abstract without accompanying tools or facilitation
- Variable application and adoption across individual researchers and research teams, often depending on a willingness to engage with the standards.
- Additional evaluation frameworks are often needed to assess how well the standards have been met, especially the 'Impact' standard.

This resource provides a brief summary of widely used frameworks to support teams planning, embedding and evaluating PI within their research. They can be used independently or as part of broader evaluation approaches and methods, such as **Realist Evaluation**, which can draw on the data collected by PI tools to explore what works, for whom and in what contexts (see Staley et al., 2014) or **Ripple Effect Mapping**, which is a participatory evaluation method that visually captures intended and unintended impacts through facilitated stakeholder discussions and mapping (Chazdon et al., 2017).

If you have any general questions or comments about the content of this document, please contact: Dr Angela Wearn, Research Fellow in Public Involvement and Community Engagement, NIHR ARC NENC (angela.wearn@newcastle.ac.uk).

References

Chazdon, S., Emery, M., Hansen, D., Higgins, L., & Sero, R. (2017). A field guide to ripple effects mapping. Available from: https://publishing.lib.umn.edu/publication/a-field-guide-to-ripple-effects-mapping/

Gibson, A., Welsman, J., & Britten, N. (2017). Evaluating patient and public involvement in health research: from theoretical model to practical workshop. *Health Expectations*, 20(5), 826–835. https://doi.org/10.1111/HEX.12486

Johnson, E. E., Gill, S., Still, M., Trenchard, D., Smith, D., Harmston, R., ... & Pearson, F. (2026). Development of the RIPPLES framework for patient and public involvement in rapid evidence syntheses. *Research Involvement and Engagement*, *12*(1), 68. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-026-00878-5

Newman, A., McAlister, B., Seddon, K., Peddle, S., & Nelson, A. (2023). Public Involvement In Research Impact Toolkit (PIRIT). https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/marie-curie-research-centre/patient-and-public-involvement/public-involvement-in-research-impact-toolkit-pirit

NIHR. (2019). UK Standards for Public Involvement. Available from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1U-IJNJCfFepaAOruEhzz1TdLvAcHTt2Q/view

Popay, J. and C. (editors) with the PiiAF Support Group (2014). The Public Involvement Impact Assessment Framework Guidance. Universities of Lancaster, Liverpool and Exeter. https://piiaf.org.uk/documents/piiaf-guidance-jan14.pdf

Staley, K., Buckland, S. A., Hayes, H., & Tarpey, M. (2014). 'The missing links': understanding how context and mechanism influence the impact of public involvement in research. Health Expectations, 17(6), 755–764. https://doi.org/10.1111/HEX.12017

Staniszewska, S., Brett, J., Simera, I., Seers, K., Mockford, C., Goodlad, S., Altman, D. G., Moher, D., Barber, R., Denegri, S., Entwistle, A., Littlejohns, P., Morris, C., Suleman, R., Thomas, V., & Tysall, C. (2017). GRIPP2 reporting checklists: tools to improve reporting of patient and public involvement in research. BMJ, 358, 3453. https://doi.org/10.1136/BMJ.J3453