Researchers' Guide to Inclusive and Meaningful Research with Newcomers

Why this guide?

The best research is both meaningful and inclusive. **Inclusive research** ensures that all members of the target population are considered and given equal opportunities to participate. Mechanisms to support the full participation of individuals who might otherwise experience barriers are planned and implemented. **Meaningful research** focuses on issues or questions that are responsive to the priorities of the community, and research products have a high potential to positively impact newcomers.

When done well, research with newcomer communities can empower research participants and lead to new insights, policy changes, new programs, and other opportunities to improve settlement and integration outcomes.

This guide is intended to assist researchers in executing projects that are inclusive and meaningful. Its contents are based on local research that included researchers, service provider organization staff, and immigrants.

Researchers should be able to answer these questions:

What is the purpose of your research?

Who is the target demographic group in your research?

Are there any language or eligibility requirements?

What are the methods and steps involved in your study?

What are the timelines of your proposed activities?

Can participation stop at any time?

How will this information be used?

How will the information be kept private?

How long will the information be stored?

Is there compensation or payment for participating?

How will the findings or results be communicated?

STEP 1: Getting Started

☐ Have you taken steps to develop a novel, meaningful research question? Steps could include:
- Reviewing published research and research repositories
- Scanning content of relevant websites to gain understanding of organizations and issues. Before approaching staff and newcomers, show that you have read and reflected on the topics at hand.
- Soliciting input from service provider organizations that work with newcomer community members
- Developing a good understanding of how research findings can translate to organizational, institutional, or even policy changes.

☐ Have you developed relationships with service provider organizations and non-profits before reaching out to request their support with recruitment?

☐ Have you taken the appropriate steps to investigate, acknowledge, and respect the linguistic, social, and cultural considerations of the newcomer community of interest?

☐ Have you investigated the needs, insights, and interests of newcomer community members to ensure reciprocity in the research relationship? If not, a good place to start is collaborating with newcomer service provider organizations to identify high-impact research topics involving newcomer community members.

STEP 2: Inclusive Study Design

☐ Does your research address a sensitive topic? If yes, have you taken steps to develop awareness of potential cultural differences when designing a study, particularly when approaching topics such as mental wellness or intimate partner violence that may be considered controversial or taboo? World Health Organization guidelines or guidelines set out by research ethics board in your academic institution on doing research with human subjects should be helpful.

☐ Do you understand participants' backgrounds and cultural sensitivities? Consider differences within social, economic, cultural, family, and employment contexts, and design the study accordingly.

☐ Have you reviewed inclusion criteria and data collection tools with a critical eye? Are there any voices that will be excluded?

☐ Have you sought feedback from service provider organizations on data collection tools?

☐ Is there any flexibility in the time, location, and form of data collection?

☐ Is your written and oral communication in clear, jargon-free language?

☐ Have you translated all participant-facing materials into multiple languages and dialects?

☐ Have you considered budgeting for (and offering) translators and interpreters to enhance data collection?

STEP 3: Recruitment and Data Collection

☐ Could you leverage existing social networks to advertise the study and recruit participants? Rather than contacting prospective newcomer participants directly, newcomers may be more comfortable discussing a research opportunity with someone they already know, such as a friend, case worker, religious leader, or other community member. When attempting to recruit through other individuals or organizations, researchers are most effective when providing clear and detailed information about their projects.

☐ In recruiting research participants, have you considered looking beyond settlement sector organizations if appropriate? This could increase the diversity of perspectives and voices heard, prevent bias, and increase generalizability of the research findings.

☐ Will you clearly outline all aspects of the research process with each participant, including the purpose, applications of the data collection, and how they can learn about the results?

☐ Do you plan to provide organizations with reasonable and realistic deadlines? Ideally, share the research proposal, including all crucial information, two to three months prior to research start. If recruiting through service provider organizations and agencies, start communicating your intentions two to three months prior to data collection timelines.

☐ Will you provide clear and concise messaging to prospective partners and participants about the project and participation requirements? Messaging should include the following:
- Importance of the research
- Purpose of project and how the information will be used
- Data collection method(s) and logistics
- Estimated project timeline with reasonable deadlines
- Resources for additional information and accommodations available to prospective participants

☐ Have you ensured that informed consent is sought from participants throughout the process? Informed consent requires researchers to break down and deconstruct information to ensure potential participants understand the risks, their rights, and that participation is always voluntary. Moving too quickly through this step can leave participants fearful or confused about their rights and responsibilities, including whether their participation could affect their settlement experiences.

☐ Will you provide participants with meaningful compensation in addition to travel compensation (bus fare, parking passes)? Depending on the participant, preferences may vary; some may appreciate a prepaid cash card or a grocery or pharmacy gift card. However, others may prefer a letter of participation, reference (if appropriate), or connection to a service provider organization.

☐ Finally, will you provide further resources for participants? Depending on the research topic, researchers could provide newcomers with additional information and resources at the end of the study, such as lists of available services that are suited to their needs.

STEP 4: Communicating Findings

☐ Do you plan to share the study findings with research participants in a plain language document?

☐ Will findings be translated into languages known by research participants?

☐ Will you share the findings and their impact with service provider organizations and other groups who are in close contact with newcomer community members?

☐ Have you considered how you will share your findings with the broader newcomer community? Suggestions include a community-based seminar, session or workshop.

☐ Will you acknowledge the input received from community partners in your presentations and written outputs?

"If you try to think about what's needed without talking to the [newcomer] community, you will lose your way." – research participant

This guide was developed by the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC). HIPC is a community planning table that brings together local organizations and individuals to help create positive settlement experiences and a sense of belonging for newcomers.

This guide is based on a longer report conducted in partnership with McMaster University Research Shop. The report and various shorter outputs are available for download from the HIPC website: https://hamiltonimmigration.ca/hipc-reports

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