

Working with Communities to Mobilise Evidence and Knowledge - Report on Effective Public and Community Engagement (PACE)

Knowledge for Public Health (KNOW-PH) is the NIHR National Institute for Health and Care Research-funded public health knowledge mobilisation team.

Introduction

Public and community engagement (PACE) is essential for mobilising evidence and knowledge within communities. It involves critiquing, reviewing, and commenting on available research evidence to ensure it is presented realistically to decision-makers. This report summarises the main ideas discussed in a webinar on working with communities to mobilise evidence and knowledge, focusing on effective PACE strategies.

The Role of PACE

- Brings together individuals from diverse backgrounds to critique and review research evidence.
- Ensures evidence reflects lived experiences and local realities.
- Helps local authorities make informed decisions aligned with community needs.
- Prioritizes intersectionality and inclusivity by engaging voices from minority backgrounds.
- Ensures representation across the nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act.

Structure of PACE

Main PACE group:

- Consists of eight individuals from diverse backgrounds (e.g., young people, leaders of small charities, individuals with disabilities).
- Meets regularly to comment on rapid response and co-production projects.

Pocket PACE groups:

- Smaller groups focused on specific local authority issues or thematic areas.
- Example: Collaboration with Kent on mental health issues, recruiting individuals with relevant lived experiences.
- Localised approach ensures evidence relevance and specificity to community needs.

Effective Strategies for PACE

- Prioritises lived experiences

- Makes evidence realistic and relevant to community needs.
- Identifies gaps in research for a comprehensive understanding of issues.
- Intentional recruitment: Involves individuals from diverse backgrounds to represent a wide range of perspectives.
- Creates an inclusive platform for research and evidence gathering.
- Collaboration with local authorities:
- Ensures evidence relevance for decision-making processes.
- Builds trust and adequately addresses community needs.
- Fair compensation and recognition:
- Acknowledges the value of PACE members' contributions.
- Ensures perspectives are represented adequately.

Challenges:

- Lack of resources and funding for sustained engagement efforts.
- Difficulty in recruiting individuals from underrepresented groups.
- Ensuring ongoing collaboration and trust between PACE members and local authorities.

Opportunities:

- Expanding PACE models to address more thematic areas and local authority issues.
- Innovative use of technology for engagement and evidence gathering.
- Enhancing visibility and recognition of PACE outcomes to attract broader support.

Examples of Successful PACE Projects

One of the successful PACE projects involved working on homelessness. The PACE group critiqued and reviewed available research evidence on homelessness to ensure it was presented in a realistic manner based on lived experiences. This approach helped local authorities make informed decisions that better met the needs of the homeless community.

Another successful project was with Kent City Council, focusing on mental health issues. The PACE group brought together individuals from Kent to provide insights based on their lived experiences. This localised approach ensured that the evidence gathered was relevant and specific to the community's needs.

PACE worked on workforce mental health and workplace-related stress with Lincolnshire County Council. This rapid response project enabled decision-making informed by evidence and provided valuable insights into the mental health challenges faced by the workforce.

PACE is currently working with Hertfordshire County Council on community champions and networks in promoting public health, particularly improving air quality. This project involves workshops and collaboration with local authorities to gather evidence and insights from the community.

In deep co-production terms, PACE spent a long time working with Nosley and Leicester on housing, spatial planning, and health impact assessments. This project produced various knowledge outputs that were not traditional, such as peer-reviewed journals, but were valuable for local authorities.

Conclusion

Effective public and community engagement (PACE) is essential for mobilizing evidence and knowledge within communities. By prioritising lived experiences, intentional recruitment, collaboration with local authorities, and fair compensation, PACE can create a truly inclusive platform for shaping research and evidence gathering. While there are challenges, there are also opportunities for continuous improvement and building trust within the community. By adopting these strategies, PACE can ensure that the evidence gathered is realistic, relevant, and useful for decision-making processes.