

How to write your CV as a Public Contributor



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Introduction

Public Contributors bring their lived experience to the task of coproducing research with academic researchers. Sometimes the research funder or the sponsor wishes to create a record of the experience and skills that each Public Contributor brings, and so they ask for a Curriculum Vitae (CV), written by the Public Contributor that captures some basic information.

The following checklist lists possible items to include in the CV and discusses each one in turn. The total list is too long for everything to be included in a CV, so it offers a 'pick list' for consideration both by the organisation that is asking for the information, and by the Public Contributor, who considers what information they wish to disclose.

The principles of the General Data Protection Regulation demand that organisations who are collecting, storing and disposing of information about persons must be able to justify their reasons for needing that information, as well as ensuring that it is open to inspection and correction by the person themselves. Since information that is collected must be relevant, Public Contributors will want to show how it relates to the specific role, skills and experience required to fulfil the role.

Identity

This section discusses the information that confirms the identity of the Public Contributor. It may include:

- **Name.** Some research topics are politically fraught or sensitive due to their potential to generate distress, conflict or even vigilante action from others. Anonymisation or adoption of a pseudonym¹ may help to keep people safe, especially if there are expectations regarding co-authorship of materials that will enter public domain.
- **Address,** both online and offline, will facilitate day to day communication with the person. Particular arrangements may be needed to engage homeless, vulnerably housed or digitally

excluded persons. Some studies will wish to create Affiliate status for their Public Contributors as this will grant access to an academic library and online training. Public Contributors may receive support to obtain a Twitter account or ORCID².

- **Next of kin.** Public Contributors with major health challenges may wish to provide contact details of their next of kin should a health emergency arise while they are meeting with staff in person.

Protected characteristics

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 identifies nine ‘protected characteristics’ that have traditionally been sites of unfairness and outlaws both direct and indirect discrimination based on them. Research organisations will want to satisfy themselves that their recruitment strategies for participants, employees and Public Contributors have not been adversely affected by such discrimination. The protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage or civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Whilst the Equality Act provides protection for all these characteristics, it appears that some are more salient than others. For example, the murder of George Floyd in 2020 triggered substantial efforts to reduce discrimination based on race, while inequalities relating to age or religion are tracked with less vigour. Mechanisms may be set in place to obscure some of these characteristics at the point of decision, so that individuals are selected for reasons directly related to their skills or experience rather than for matters which are unrelated to the role they will perform, while recruitment patterns can be tracked for a group to ensure that specific populations are fully represented.

The principle at stake in these matters is one of self-definition, so, for example, an individual may choose to identify as Disabled or Black but others have no power to assign that person to a specific category. Taking these factors together means that a Public Contributor may wish to declare their position in relation to these characteristics, to ensure that the section of the population which they represent is present, or they may prefer to keep the matter confidential, especially if they fear that this would lead to a negative outcome.

Experience

Public Contributors have a wide variety of experiences that they may wish to describe on a CV. These may include:

- **Lived experience** of the health condition or life situation that is under research scrutiny. This may be personal experience or as a carer. It may or may not include experience of using health, social care or educational services designed to address the needs of this group.

- **Networking.** Some Public Contributors simply bring themselves and the immediate value of their own experience, while others are members of local or national support or campaigning groups, other research teams or have networks and connections with others who may be able to help with the research study.
- **Experience of other research** projects, perhaps as a participant, researcher or Public Contributor.
- **Educational background**, sometimes expressed by reference to the highest qualification. This may indicate how comfortable the person will be in an academic environment and in working with the written word.
- **Employment history.** Keep in mind that Public Contributors are recruited principally for their lived experience, so employment history is less important than it might be deemed to be in a job interview.

Reasonable adjustments

This section answers the question, ‘What will help you succeed in this particular role?’ The following areas might be covered, amongst others:

- **Physical access.** Do you need a taxi rather than public transport, step-free access to a meeting room, natural light rather than fluorescent lighting, an accessible toilet in close proximity?
- **Communication support.** Do you need to be provided with a computer, printer, tablet? Should messages be sent by post or explained by a conversation rather than online? Do you need materials translating or access to a language interpreter? All staff should be able to explain things in plain English, but do you need large print, Easy Read, coloured overlays or other tools that will make things more accessible for you? Will you need to sit in a certain part of the room so you can hear or see the proceedings? Do you need more time to speak?
- **Personal and emotional support.** All Public Contributors should be hosted by a staff member. In addition to this, do you need to bring a Personal Assistant with you? Would it help to meet up occasionally to chat or to review your role? Do you need an external mentor? Should a link be established with your doctor or a named health or social care professional?

What is the status of this paper?

Most of the documents we read are finished pieces of work, carefully crafted and edited in private before being shared with anyone else. This is a different kind of paper – it was shared online [here](#) from the first day, when the initial handful of ideas were incomplete, poorly phrased and tactless. The work has been edited many times, and on each occasion a revised version has replaced the earlier material online. This process is still under way, and so this paper may still be lacking crucial concepts, evidence, structure and grammar³. As readers continue to provide feedback⁴, further insights will be used to update it, so please contact peter.bates@ndti.org.uk with your contributions⁵.

It is one of a suite of documents available [here](#) that try to open up debate about how in practical terms to empower disabled people and share decision-making in health and social care services – in research, implementation and evaluation.

This way of writing is risky, as it opens opportunities to those who may misunderstand, mistake the stopping points on the journey for the destination, and misuse or distort the material. This way of writing requires courage, as an early version can damage the reputation of the author or any of its contributors. At least, it can harm those who insist on showing only their ‘best side’ to the camera, who want others to believe that their insights appear fully formed, complete and beautiful in their simplicity. It can harm those who are gagged by their employer or the workplace culture, silenced lest they say something in a discussion that is not the agreed party line. It can harm those who want to profit from their writing, either financially or by having their material accepted by academic journals.

In contrast, this way of writing can engage people who are not invited to a meeting or asked for their view until the power holders have agreed on the ‘right message’. Since it is unfunded⁶, it is free from vested interests. It can draw in unexpected perspectives, stimulate debate and crowdsource wisdom. It can provide free, leading edge resources.

¹ For a discussion on author’s use of anonymisation, see [May authors use a pseudonym? – Peter Bates](#).

² [ORCID](#) provides a persistent digital identifier (an ORCID iD) owned by the person themselves that distinguishes them from every other researcher, especially when two or more people share the same name.

³ As a result, the author assumes no responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions in the content of this paper. The information contained is provided on an “as is” basis with no guarantees of completeness, accuracy, usefulness or timeliness.

⁴ Contributions and challenges to this discussion have been offered by nobody yet.

⁵ Undated or early versions should be replaced with the most recent, available [here](#).

⁶ See Professor Rosalind Edwards at <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2020/08/13/unfunded-research-why-academics-do-it-and-its-unvalued-contribution-to-the-impact-agenda/> for a discussion of the prevalence and benefits of unfunded research.