Guidance notes for researchers interested in applying for support in developing a research proposal

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1. Introduction and aims

Thank you for your interest in accessing support for developing a research application to Alzheimer's Society. The Proposal Development resource was created in 2014 with the objective of improving:

- the quality of your research application
- the relevance of your proposed research to people's experiences of dementia
- the clarity of your lay proposal so that it can be better understood by our (lay) Research Network reviewers.
- your plans to disseminate your research so that it will be understood by different types of audience and make an impact to people's lives.

We hope that you will find the experience of working with our Research Network volunteers useful for the development of your research. Proposal Development support is not mandatory for applying to Alzheimer's Society for funding and may not increase your chances of getting funded.

2. Alzheimer's Society Research Network

- Alzheimer's Society is a **pioneer** in the involvement of carers, former carers and people with dementia in research.
- Since 1999 our Research Network of approximately **250 people affected by dementia** have been active and integral partners in all aspects of Alzheimer's Society funded research.
- Research Network activities include advising on **priority areas for research**; **reviewing** research applications; playing an active role on our **Grant Advisory Boards; monitoring** our funded research; and **campaigning** for greater awareness, funding and implementation of research.
- Research Network volunteers are based in **England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland** and span across different age groups and demographics.
- Research Network volunteers have experienced a **wide range of types of dementia**.

- Research Network volunteers **receive ongoing training** to support their role.
- In 2018 we launched a report and video on the **impact of PPI** in research here

3. Eligibility

If your proposed research area falls within the remit of either our Biomedical or our Care, Services & Public Health funding streams then you are eligible for this support. For more guidance on whether your research would qualify please visit: http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/forresearchers.

We would especially welcome applications from researchers applying for their first research grant, as part of our Dementia Research Leaders programme.

We would also welcome applications that reflect the challenges listed in our priority-setting process carried out with the Research Network volunteers, which can be found here: http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/download_info.php?fileID=1416

4. Application process

All researchers who are interested in gaining support in developing their research proposal must submit the application form, which is available via the Alzheimer's Society website or on request at researchnetwork@alzheimers.org.uk

Consultations can take up to a month to organise and carry out so we recommend that you submit the application form with as much notice as possible. We are unlikely to support applications that we receive less than a month before the deadline of the grant round you are hoping to apply to.

Alzheimer's Society research staff will review your application, in line with the goals of our research strategy as well as the capacity and suitability of the Research Network to support your requests.

We will aim to respond to you within 2 weeks. Due to uncertainties regarding demand, time restraints or other ongoing commitments it might not be possible to accept your application for proposal development support.

If you would like to send materials for review by Research Network, then we will discuss with you on how to provide them in a suitable format.

Research Network volunteers who support your proposal will be exempted from reviewing your application as part of our grant funding processes due to the conflict of interest they will hold. These volunteers, however, will be eligible to become a Research Network 'monitor' to support your project if it is successfully funded and we greatly encourage continuing the relationships that you will build as part of this development process, should you wish to.

5. Working with people affected by dementia
a. Ideas for involvement activities

The application form lists some ideas for involving the Research Network, which we hope covers much of the support that you would need at this stage. We would, however, welcome discussing any new or innovative ideas that you have and you should use the box at the bottom of the list to detail your idea(s). If you would like to informally discuss an idea with our Research Engagement Team then please email researchnetwork@alzheimers.org.uk or ring 0207 423 3603.

There is a wealth of existing material available on involvement methods and practical issues when working with people affected by dementia. One useful resource can be found here: http://www.dementiapartnerships.org.uk/archive/communities/involvement/

b. Principles of working

We have developed some principles of working with the Research Network which we would expect all researchers to adhere to:

- **Genuine involvement**- involving people affected by dementia should never be a tokenistic 'tick box' exercise. Involvement should be sought where and when it is needed.
- **Allow enough time**- if you are planning a focus group or a consultation then allow 3-4 weeks to plan and allow people to respond. Equally, if you are convening a focus group then allow enough time for everyone to properly introduce themselves and have their say.
- **Feed back**- it is courteous to follow up any consultation with the Research Network volunteers and explaining how their involvement affected your application.
- **Be clear about what is (and what is not) expected**- you should be clear about what input you need from the Research Network and what is expected of them. It is also helpful to explain where volunteers will not be able to influence your work so they can focus on what is needed.
- **Accessibility**- please use terminology and language that can be understood by a lay audience without formal scientific education. Sometimes a glossary of terms can be very useful for this.
- **Inclusion**- when carrying out a focus group please encourage the inclusion of all participants so that they can make a contribution
- **Empathy**- it can sometimes be emotionally difficult for volunteers to express their feelings or to describe their experiences. Sometimes during discussions it can become unexpectedly difficult and a volunteer may wish to withdraw from the discussions. Please be aware that this might happen and prepare a suitable plan for supporting the volunteer (e.g. a quiet space they can be offered).

6. Reporting

Alzheimer's Society will ask you for a very brief report detailing the ways in which you engaged with the Research Network and the impact that it made on your research application. We will use this information to monitor the success of the proposal development pilot, as well as to assess the impact that the Research Network makes.

7. Budgets

Alzheimer's Society has allocated some budget to support the proposal development work so you are not expected to find this from your own departments. If you do, however, have budget to support any face-to-face consultation work (e.g. focus groups) then we would be grateful if you could use this, as it will allow us to direct more funding into our research programme.

8. Proposal development for applications to other funders

If you are looking to develop a proposal for submission to another funder (e.g. NIHR, MRC, ESRC) then there is a separate process which you will need to take. We would welcome applications of this type as part of our 'partnerships' offer, especially from researchers who are submitting their first research application. Your local Research Design Service may have grants available to cover PPI costs for developing your application.

For more information about these partnerships please visit our website here:
http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/researchpartnerships

9. Where to get further information

If you would like any more information or an informal discussion then please contact Matt Murray, Research Engagement Manager at researchnetwork@alzheimers.org.uk or 0207 423 3603.