Carrying out research

Community Research Resources Bank

Norfolk Community Foundation

Together, Norfolk shines brighter

CARRYING OUT RESEARCH

Recruiting research participants

Your research participants will need to be representative of your research population, with the number of participants you have access to being dependent on your chosen research methods and your research population.

When recruiting research participants, you should consider the best channels to access individuals who fit your research population. If you are conducting research within your community organisation, then this will most likely be your service users.

Sampling

It is important that there is no bias in selecting research participants, which would mean that your research participants do not represent your research population as a whole. To prevent bias, community organisations should consider sampling when selecting research participants.

Sampling is a process used to select a sample of your target population for your research. Your research should aim to represent all of the different people that are related to your research topic and fall within your identified population. For example, if your research is not age specific, you should try to get participants who are representative of a range of ages.

To make sampling effective, you need to have established a clearly defined population group which your research will be focussing on. This population group will be made from individuals who meet the characteristics defined in your research topic and questions.

For example, if your research was focussed on young people's mental health in Great Yarmouth, your population group could be defined as people aged 16-25 living in the Borough of Great Yarmouth.

Tip:

To help to remove bias from selection, you should try to select participants randomly when possible. For example, if you have 50 service users, you could select a random 25 to take part. If this is not possible or effective for your research, you can select participants who you are interested in being involved (purposive sampling). However, this could limit how much of your research population the study is reflective of. No matter how participants are selected, you should always be transparent about the selection process, so any limitations of your research are clear.

Number of participants

You will also need to consider the number of participants who will be involved. This will be dependent on the methodology you are using. Typically, quantitative research methods tend to be broader and less time consuming for participants, lending themselves to research with a larger number of participants.

Qualitative research methods on the other hand are more detailed and time consuming, meaning there are normally fewer research participants involved. The number of participants will also be dependent on where you are selecting your participants from. For example, if you are choosing individuals from within your organisations, you will be limited to the number of individuals you can work with.

CARRYING OUT INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Interviews and focus groups are popular methods of qualitative research and are useful when trying to gather in-depth information about your research topic. This section will provide a step-by-step guide for preparing and conducting interviews and focus groups.

Interviews

Preparation with participants

Before you conduct interviews, you need to obtain consent from your participants. Please see the section ‘A quick guide to designing a research project- consent’ for more information.

When you gain consent from your participants, you should discuss:

- The purpose of the interview.
- The steps you have taken to ensure confidentiality.
- How the interview will be recorded and how the data will be stored.

Preparing interview questions

You need to develop interview questions which will help you to gather responses that will enable you to answer your research questions. The level of detail in your questions will depend on the type of interview you are conducting (please see report 2 ‘Designing your research project’ for more information on types of interviews).

Interviews are typically formed of open-ended questions to give participants the opportunity to give a detailed response. When forming your research questions, you should try to avoid any leading questions, or questions rooted in bias. For example, instead of asking:

‘Young people struggle with mental health, don’t they?’

You could ask…

’Do you think that young people struggle with their mental health?’

When conducting interviews, you might find that participants do not always answer the questions in as much detail as you hoped for. If this is the case, a researcher can probe the participants, using neutral questions and sounds to encourage them to expand on their answers. Researchers can also use follow up questions to try and gain a complete answer, for example, ‘Can you tell me more about that?’.

Location

Your interview should take place in a location that is comfortable for the research participant. To keep confidentiality and aid in recording the interview, they should be conducted in a private location.

Recording the interviews

Interviews can be recorded in multiple ways:

Notetaking

When you are interviewing you should always try to take notes. This will ensure you have a backup if other methods of recording the interview fail. The notes you record while the interview takes place will most likely be quite brief, but they can be expanded upon once the interview is finished. For tips on notetaking, please see Report 4 ‘Further Resources - Templates and Guides’.

Tape recording

These can be in the format of either audio or video recordings. Make sure to test your equipment before the recording to see if it is working.

Once you have finished your interviews, you will use any recordings and notes to transcribe the interview in full, so you are able to analyse the data you have collected. There are multiple ways you can transcribe your interview depending on the time and equipment you have available:

- Transcribe the interview yourself.
- Microsoft Teams- if your interview is conducted online through Microsoft Teams, it can record the interview for you and produce a transcription.
- AI services can record and transcribe your interviews for you, such as Otter.ai.

Although the most accurate way to transcribe your interview is to transcribe yourself, this can be very time consuming. If you do use Microsoft Teams or AI services, be aware that the transcription might not be completely accurate, and will require you to go through and check/edit where necessary.

For an example interview checklist, please see Report 4 'Further Resources - Templates and Guides'.

Focus Groups

Preparation with participants

Before you begin the focus group you need to explain its purpose to your participants and gain consent. It is also important to discuss confidentiality with the focus group. You cannot promise that other focus groups members will maintain confidentiality, but you can set this as an expectation within the group. One way to help ensure confidentiality in a focus group is to allow participants to adopt pseudonyms during the session.

Location

The focus group should be conducted in a private space that is comfortable for all the participants. To find a suitable location, consult with someone who is embedded in the community you are conducting research in, who will be aware of a location that would work for the participants.

The moderator

The role of the moderator is to help manage and guide the focus group conversations. In a focus group, you will be required to manage multiple individuals to ensure all voices are being heard, and that the conversation stays on your research topic. To help manage the focus group, you can provide some 'rules' at the beginning of the session, helping set the expectation of how participants should conduct themselves during the session.

Recording the focus group

As well as a moderator, you should have an observer present during the focus group who will take notes during the session and operate the recording equipment. They also help the moderator to set up the focus group and assist with any relevant paperwork.

ANALYSING YOUR DATA

Once you have conducted your research, you will need to analyse your data. Analysis is used to interpret your data, to see what your data tells you about your research questions.

Before you begin interpreting your data, you need to ensure it is organised. This should be done as you are carrying out your research. In qualitative research you should ensure that any interview and focus groups sessions are transcribed, and your transcripts are grouped together to make data comparison easier.

Coding

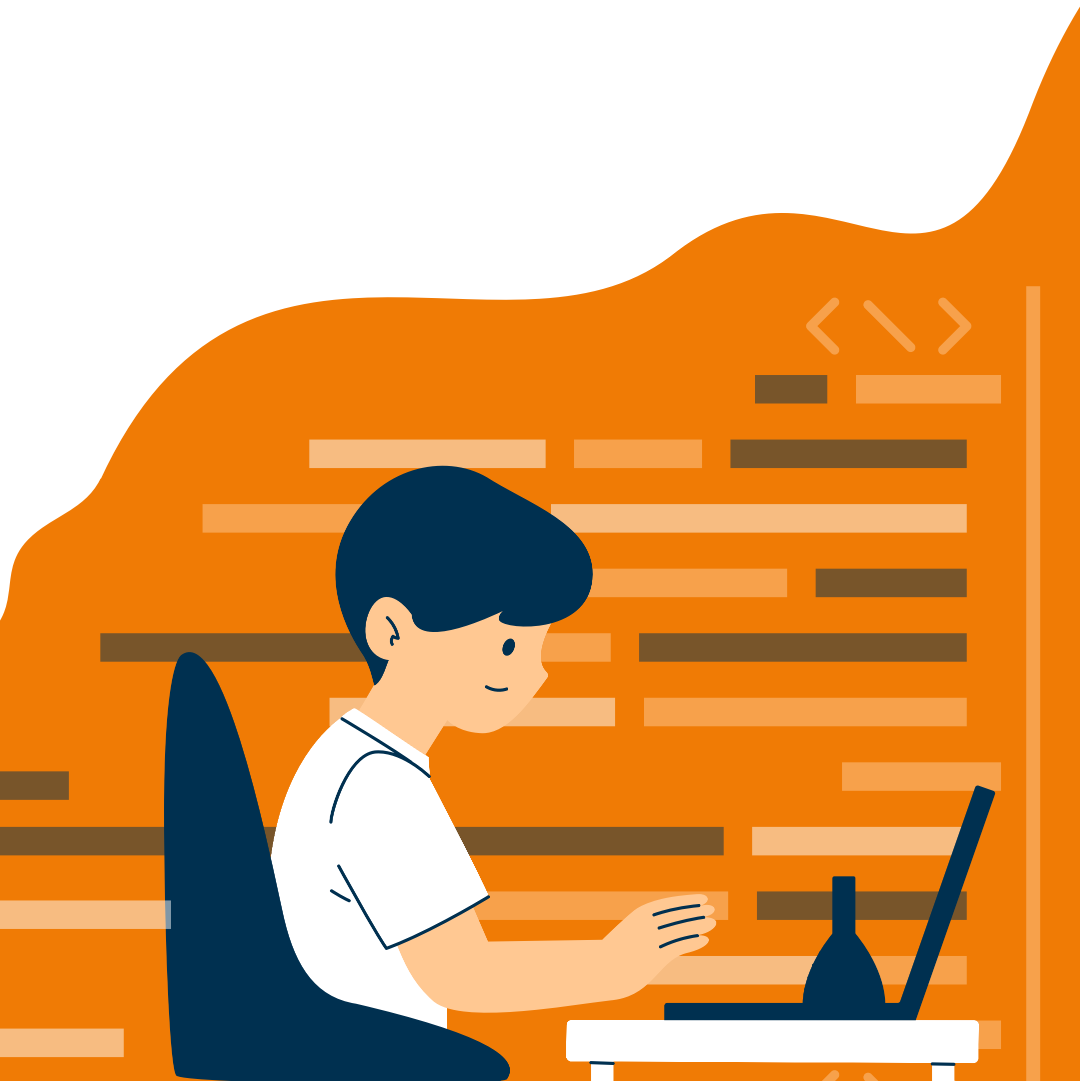
Codes are labels which you put onto the data you have collected. They are used to link and group the data you have collected into different sections to help you draw out the recurring themes.

There are two approaches you can take to your coding:

Coding framework: before you begin analysis you can create a coding framework, a list of themes which fit into your research topic. This framework is then used for analysis as you go through the data you have collected, with codes being assigned to the data. This method is best suited to research where you have a very clear topic and objective.

Thematic network: this approach allows you to develop your thematic codes during the analysis process. This means your codes will be based on your data evidence, rather than on any preconceived ideas.

You can use either of these approaches to coding, or a combination of both, starting with a general idea of codes, and adapting and developing them as you conduct your initial analysis.



Grouping codes

The process of coding your data is an iterative process. You will read through your data sets multiple times to develop your understanding of the data, and the links within your data set. Upon the first few times you read through your data, you will have a large number of codes. These will need to be reduced in order to make analysis meaningful. You can do this as you go along by grouping codes together that fit within the same category.

Within this process you will also want to start exploring the levels of codes:

Higher level: codes which are broader which are more inclusive, e.g., ‘motivation’.

Lower level: more specific, descriptive codes, e.g., ‘making little effort to see friends’, ‘staying in bed’.

When you are grouping your codes together, your lower level codes will often fit into one of the broader categories of your higher level codes. These higher level codes then develop into your themes.

This process of coding helps to take raw data from description into analysis. The identification of themes through the coding process allows you to go below the surface of your data, discovering the different elements that come together to give you your data set. The themes that emerge during this analytical process are then used in relation to your research topic, helping you to answer the questions you developed at the start of your research.

For an example of how coding is used in practice, please take a look at Healthwatch’s guide for analysing qualitative data, which can be found in Report 4 ‘Further Resources - Data Analysis’.

WRITING UP YOUR INSIGHTS

Typically, findings of community research are presented in a research report. A research report aims to tell others about the research you have conducted and your findings.

When you present your insights, they should always:

- Be clear.
- Be presented in a logical structure.
- Justify your research methods and approaches.
- Acknowledge the limitations of your research.

Considering your audience

How you present the findings of your report will depend on your intended audience. Who the research is aimed at will change the language you use, the level of detail you include, and the style you present it in.

Research reports

Research is typically presented in a report format. A report normally contains the following sections:

Summary: an overview of your research and the key findings.

Acknowledgements: this is the opportunity to acknowledge the key stakeholders in your community research.

Introduction: the background of the research project including:

- Why did you choose this research topic?
- What gaps in knowledge is it filling?
- Did you work in partnership with anyone?

Methodology: an overview of your research methods including:

- Who was your research population?
- How did you recruit participants?
- The research methods you used
- When the research took place
- Any limitations to your research methods

You should use this section to justify how and why you conducted your research, to show the readers that your research findings are valid, reliable and ethical.

Discussion and analysis: present the findings from your research and discuss the implications of these in relation to your research topic and questions. Within this section, you can use tools such as case studies and quotes to illustrate to the reader the story of your research and reinforce your analysis.

Conclusions: summary of the key points along with any recommendations you have following your findings.

These sections cover the key information needed to clearly convey to your reader the research that has been conducted, your findings, and the implications of this. However, this structure and the proposed headings do not have to be rigidly followed, they can be adapted to suit your report style and your audience, formalising and informalising the research where necessary.

For examples of different research reports which display some of the different styles you can present your findings in, please see Report 4 ‘ Further Resources - Research Report Examples’.

Want to find out more?

Read our other guides on community research

1 What is community research and why should you do it?

Discover the ins and outs of community research, the approaches you can take, and why it matters.

2 Designing your research project

Find out what you need to think about when developing a research project, including deciding your research questions, involving people, ethics, data management and more.

3 Carrying out research

Learn how to recruit research participants, gather and analyse your insights, and write up your findings.

4 Further resources

Explore helpful links and resources to learn more about community research.

NIHR | Clinical Research Network East of England

Acknowledgements: Funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research. Thank you to Sophie Fuller for producing these resources.

SCAN ME

Find out more or get in touch

www.norfolkfoundation.com
01603 623958
Shinebrighter@norfolkfoundation.com
1st Floor, Carmelite House, 2 St James Court, Norwich, NR3 1SL

Follow us on social media

@NorfolkCF
@NorfolkCF
@NorfolkCF
@NorfolkCommunityFoundation

Norfolk Community Foundation

Together, Norfolk shines brighter

Registered Charity Number 1110817
Company Registration Number 05234236