

# Public involvement workforce career competencies framework

Analysis by Alison Faulkner, with edits/revisions by Polly Kerr

## FEEDBACK FROM THE WEBINAR BREAK-OUT SESSIONS, NOVEMBER 2024

Note: In November 2024, NIHR Centre for Engagement and Dissemination hosted a webinar to get feedback on the [public involvement workforce career competencies framework](#), developed by Polly Kerr, with support from Stan Papoulias and colleagues. This document is an analysis and summary of the break-out sessions of that webinar.

Our thanks to the volunteers who took notes in the break-out sessions (which were not recorded) on which this analysis is based.

This document is divided into four parts:

1. Verbal feedback on the day (the introduction and wrap-up were recorded)
2. Positive comments on the framework (from anonymised notes)
3. Limitations (from anonymised notes)
4. Detailed comments on individual framework competencies (from anonymised notes)

### Summary of reflections

Reading and listening about the competencies framework suggests that it is clearly filling a need: raising the profile of the roles and articulating the many skills involved. There may be some tweaks needed, but overall people seemed to receive it very well. The strongest themes seemed to be:

- a need to introduce or frame the framework to enable implementation
- a need for training and other resources to support the framework
- a greater emphasis on the soft skills
- some concern about its adaptability across different organisational settings

### 1. Verbal feedback on the day

- Positive:
  - Very positive, with an appreciation for the work that has gone into this, and something that is very much needed
  - Useful for developing job roles and supporting staff to identify training needs
  - Shines a light on unrecognised labour
  - Is practical, grounded, not too academic
  - Useful for identifying the skills needed for a whole team – one individual should not be expected to hold all
- Unintended consequences:
  - Could be used to make PPI more transactional
  - Could be used to reduce the level of a job
  - Risks grounding soft skills at a low or junior level
- Training and resources:
  - Centrally accredited training is needed
  - Resources needed to support the framework
  - Real world examples/case studies would be useful to attach to the different levels
- More emphasis needed on soft skills:
  - Support for emotional disclosures

- Relationship management and establishing boundaries with PPI contributors, and ethics of expectations
- Supervision is needed
- Research knowledge is missing: grant writing, publishing, ethics, the research cycle
- Not sure how it will translate across different organisations
  - Hard to adopt in clinical Trusts (patient safety concerns could radically revise/shape competencies)
  - Needs linking with university job roles for parity of esteem
  - Some people work in charities – different organisations and sectors might rate levels differently
- EDI: item about anti-racist training needs broadening out across the piece; EDI needs embedding across the framework, not separating out
- Community engagement skills need including
- Lived experience: can bring valuable insight to the role
- Value of PPI: could the framework be used to raise the profile of the field, and raise awareness and status of PPI, which tends to be female gendered, in a context that is generally white and patriarchal

## **2. Positive comments on the framework**

There were many appreciative comments about the value of the framework, particularly in clarifying the many different aspects of the PPI role, and its potential to raise the profile and awareness of its complexity with researchers and others. People could see that the framework would be useful in identifying training needs and in helping researchers write research bids. It could also be used as a basis for recruitment documents and job descriptions.

Several people said that it could be valuable in identifying the strengths and limitations of a whole team – that no one individual could hold all of these skills, particularly where PPI forms only a part of someone's job.

### *Clarification of the role*

- Articulates so much of what the job is; good to see understanding of it as a professional role
- Good to see bands of competency and that it suggests higher level skills; a progression pathway would help make it more attractive to work in PPI
- Reflects the hidden workload of PPI
- Recognition of range of skills
- Useful to see how it maps on to academic grades
- Useful for supporting people to ensure that others understand the complexities of the role

### *Implementation*

- Could use it to show researchers what is involved in PPI and to support them in submitting bids
- Could use it as a guide to identify training needs for workforce and what training we need to offer
- Could help us to understand the limitations and strengths of our workforce to embed community involvement
- Important for everyone to take responsibility and helpful to facilitate researchers to take on PPI roles
- Good to help recognise team strengths and limitations
- Helpful for developing role descriptions and helpful to have the different levels

- Could be incorporated in job descriptions
- To demonstrate how you have improved
- Could be used as self-reflexive tools

#### *Profile*

- Could be used to raise profile, consolidation and communicating the role
- Love that it's not too academic
- Really useful, much needed – to raise profile of an under-recognised role
- To showcase and highlight what we do and share this with others
- Giving more credibility and visibility to the role

### **3. Limitations or missing items**

#### *Organisational context*

Quite a few concerns were raised about the organisational context and also about its relationship with university banding, and that it might have the unintended consequence of driving the role and band down to the lowest level.

- The framework would need adapting for different contexts/organisations – couldn't just copy it over
- It would not easily transfer to social science where the language is different
- It wouldn't map on to university banding
- It might have unintended consequences for banding – lowest common denominator

#### *Implementation*

Concerns about implementation included the contextual issues and attitudes to PPI, how to use it where PPI is only a part of someone's role, and uncertainty about how or where to disseminate/raise awareness about it for implementation. Once again, the question about using it for a team rather than an individual was raised – to avoid 'dumping' the responsibility for all of this on one person alone.

- Lack of visibility of PPI makes implementation hard
- Hard to implement – not taken account of context and attitudes to PPI
- How would we disseminate this and where do we go with it? Is there expectation from NIHR?
- Difficult to use in job descriptions but could use for recruitment
- Might it put off people who don't have the basic level technical skills?
- How would it work for fractional PPI roles? How would you decide which elements to focus on?
- How would you decide if someone has all this knowledge, skills?
- Would be better applied to a team than an individual? So using it to look at skills needed across the team including researchers – responsibility should not be dumped on one person

#### *Career pathway*

- How would you move up through the progression pathway?
- It is not a career development framework
- It is not possible to create a career progression pathway
- Maybe use for appraisals 'but not sure beyond that'

### *Training and other resources*

Many comments were made on training needed for PPI and the desire for training to be explicitly linked to the framework. The list below is a small sample, but they were all very similar. A few people were interested in accredited training in PPI.

- Need to link the framework with training and resources to enable progression
- List resources under each heading
- It would be good to have PPI training and accreditation to recognise the skills
- Ongoing training would be helpful e.g. in safeguarding

### *Value of PPI*

This theme reflects the positive comments about raising the profile of PPI. Comments here were concerned about the low value ascribed to PPI and the predominance of women in the roles, and wanted the framework to be able to address these things. Does the existence of a baseline level lead to the tendency for all to fall to that lower level?

- How could the framework be used to increase the value of PPI and challenge the patriarchal hierarchy of the institution?
- Danger of the framework being used to continue to undervalue PPI – employing people at the bottom of the scale

### *Clarity of framework*

Several comments were made about the need for clarity of purpose. The framework needs explanation or a framing at the beginning to set it in context: what is it? how can it be used? Practical examples would help. Some confusion seemed to exist about whether it is a career development framework – or could deliver something on career progression for people.

- It needs explanation or framing at the beginning
- It needs practical examples
- It is not a career development framework, more of a job description of what we do – name needs to reflect that

## **4. Specific items suggested for inclusion/change**

### *Communications/Influencing*

- The two should be separated
- Important to include building networks of support and connections with wider PPI networks

### *Organisational*

- Desirable skill: budgeting across multiple projects and dividing your time

### *Facilitation*

This relates to the many 'soft' skills, with one person saying there should be more.

- The engagement and training of new groups and new public contributors
- Concern that facilitation is at the lowest level; building relationships at the Developing level
- Confidence to support others should be in Capable/Proficient
- Engagement with communities needs inclusion – is it here?
- The invisible work of maintaining a group
- Boundary setting and expectation management
- Ability to cope with emotional disclosure
- Problem-solving and navigating difficult conversations

### *Diversity literacy/EDI awareness*

- How to bring people from different communities on board in the first place
- What is meant by 'anti-racist attitude'?
- Needs re-wording around anti-racist/anti-misogynist to encompass the whole of diversity
- EDI needs continuous development
- This whole thread needs to be inherent in every level, not separated out
- Need training to upskill

### *Technical*

- Research skills or basic knowledge about the research cycle: maybe research skills as desirable; knowledge of research ethics; often expected to have some level of qualitative skills
- Not sure if 'technical' is the right title
- Are technical skills needed? Most of the work is values-based. If the organisation does not have the resources, the technical skills will win over the values
- Project management and planning needs including
- Knowledge of creating accessible information
- Knowledge of GDPR
- Knowledge of the line between PPI and volunteering – legal implications etc