PEDRI

Effective public involvement and engagement for project-level data access in trusted and secure data environments

Co-authors: Doreen Tembo[1,2], Samaira Khan[1,2], Jan Speechley[1,2], Katie Oldfield[3], Robin Flaig[4], Kirsteen Campbell[4] on behalf of the PEDRI Roundtable

Affiliations:
[1] Health Data Research UK, 215 Euston Road, London, England, NW1 2BE.
[2] Public Engagement in Data Research Initiative, 215 Euston Road, London, England, NW1 2BE.
[3] Research Data Scotland, Edinburgh Futures Institute, 1 Lauriston Place, Edinburgh, Scotland, EH3 9EF.
[4] UK Longitudinal Linkage Collaboration, Usher Building, The University of Edinburgh, 5-7 Little France Road, Edinburgh, Scotland, EH16 4UX.

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Doreen Tembo,
email: **Doreen.tembo@hdruk.ac.uk**

Background
When researchers apply to use sensitive population data such as health, education or census records, they are often required to demonstrate how they will involve and engage the public. This is known as Public Involvement and Engagement (PIE).

PIE is commonly a condition for gaining project-level access to data within Trusted and Secure Data Environments (TREs, SDEs) and Data Safe Havens (DSHs). Project-level access refers to granting researchers permission to use specific datasets for a defined study within these secure environments. However, there are no standardised processes for gaining access, and researchers often struggle to find the time and funding to apply and to support meaningful public involvement.

Objective
To identify challenges, share organisational experiences, and build consensus on practical solutions to strengthen project-level PIE across TRE, SDE, and DSH pathways.

Methods
Participants: 25 representatives from 15 organisations, including data custodians, regulators, academics, charities, public representatives, and groups.

Approach: Structured discussions focused on approval processes, public involvement, and associated challenges.

Analysis: Thematic synthesis of the roundtable findings, grouping similar points into key themes.

Next Steps: Your Voice Matters!

- Take part in key data-focused events to help shape and refine strategies.
- Engage stakeholders, including public contributors, with regular progress updates.
- Reach wider audiences through surveys and social media. **Have your say by scanning this QR code:**
- Develop a consensus paper with clear, actionable recommendations.
- Establish Task and Finish Groups, including public representatives, to deliver priority work.

Results

Researcher challenges:
- Lack of training, time, and funding (especially for early-career researchers).
- Unclear requirements across different data types (e.g. AI, sensitive health data).
- Difficulty recruiting public contributors with relevant experience in the topic and/or data access.

Public contributor challenges:
- Complex terminology and jargon can be difficult for the public to understand and may limit meaningful engagement.
- No standard processes for inducting, training, or supporting public contributors.
- Contributors may feel their perspectives are undervalued in decision-making.

Proposed Solutions:
1. Citizen juries and other engagement methods to assess the acceptability of data use.
2. Rotate panel membership every 2–3 years to ensure fresh perspectives.
3. Create a central repository or platform for PIE resources.
4. Use standardised tools and templates to support consistent practice.
5. Provide induction and training for public contributors.
6. Build partnerships with charities for diverse recruitment.
7. Promote sector-wide messaging on the value of PIE.
8. Integrate PIE training into the ONS Five Safes framework.

We thank all participants of the PEDRI Roundtable for their valuable contributions.

Conclusion

- PIE must be systematically embedded in TRE, SDE, and DSH approvals.
- PEDRI is committed to making PIE a reproducible, equitable, and non-negotiable standard in UK data research and statistics.

Organisational challenges:
- Unclear boundaries around public contributors' influence on approval decisions.
- Limited resources, such as time and funding, for PIE activities.
- The public needs feedback to build trust in both the processes and the researchers.
- Challenges in balancing accessibility, diversity, public perspectives, and data literacy.

Discussion:
- Need for consistent, reproducible PIE processes.
- Value of collaboration across different sectors to reduce duplication.
- PIE should create learning opportunities for both researchers and public contributors.
- Regulators must be engaged in setting expectations through policy.
- Inclusion of under-represented groups is essential.