

Canadian Research Ethics Boards and Community Members: Finding and Recruiting Community Members



In Canada, Research Ethics Boards (REBs) play a crucial role in ensuring that research involving human participants adheres to ethical standards.

Roles and Requirements for Community Members in Canadian REBs

They bring a lived-experience perspective to the review process, which is essential for balanced decision-making. Their role is to ensure the interests of potential research participants are considered and to represent the perspectives of the general public. Community members are not affiliated with the institution.

Recruiting community members for Research Ethics Boards requires a strategic approach to ensure diversity, inclusivity, and sustained engagement.

Strategies for identifying potential members include:

Outreach Through Community Organizations

Partner with patient advocacy groups, non-profits, cultural organizations, and faith-based groups. Connect with local public health units, hospital advisory committees, and Indigenous governance organizations.

Engagement with Past Research Participants

Reach out to previous participants that may have insights into ethical concerns from a participant's perspective. Connect with researchers to identify past participants who may be interested in the role.

A key component of REBs is the inclusion of community members, who provide valuable perspectives that enhance the ethical review process.

Community members are expected to:

- ✓ Discuss issues and perspectives from the standpoint of research participants
- ✓ Provide input regarding their knowledge of the local community
- ✓ Advocate for the rights and welfare of research participants

How to Find Interested Community Members

Finding individuals interested in serving on an REB can be challenging, as the role requires commitment and an understanding of ethical considerations in research.

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Strategies for identifying potential members include: Promotion Through Public Platforms

Advertise in local newspapers, community bulletin boards, social media platforms, and institutional websites. Use platforms such as LinkedIn, volunteer boards, and community job portals to reach those interested in research ethics.

Referrals from Current REB Members and Researchers

Encourage current REB members and faculty to recommend individuals from their networks who may be interested. Establish a pipeline where outgoing community members help recruit their replacements. (However, this is not a requirement of the current community member but a responsibility of the REB.)

Best practices for successful recruitment

include:

Diverse Outreach: Solicit members from various segments of the local community to ensure a broad representation of perspectives.

Clear Role Definition: Provide a clear understanding of the role and responsibilities.

Training and Support: Training sessions to familiarize community members with ethical guidelines, and provide ongoing support.

Transparent Selection Process: A transparent process for the appointment, renewal, and removal of members, ensuring selection is based on established criteria.

By adhering to established requirements, implementing best practices in recruitment, and providing appropriate compensation and recognition, institutions can ensure that their REBs benefit from the valuable perspectives that community members offer.

Community members are integral to the ethical oversight of research involving human participants in Canada.

Compensating and Recognizing Community Members

Recognizing the contributions of community members is essential for their continued engagement. Compensation practices vary but may include:

Monetary Compensation: Stipends or honoraria for the time and effort contributed by community members.

Reimbursement of Expenses: Transportation or parking to facilitate participation in REB meetings.

Formal Recognition: Acknowledging contributions through certificates, public recognition and inclusion in institutional reports.