

Getting started: consumer recruitment

The key to successful consumer recruitment is to establish a clear, simple process at the beginning. The process for recruiting consumers should be quite similar to recruiting staff. It's all about finding the right person for the job. Following best practice, always involve your current consumer representatives as much as possible in recruitment and orientation of new consumers.

Position description (PD)

If you are recruiting a consumer for an existing committee you probably already have the terms of reference, and can use this to develop a position description for the consumer role.

If you have a consumer who is leaving a role, ask them to assist with the writing of the PD for the new consumer.

The PD should include:

- The purpose and composition of the committee
- Time and place of meeting
- Length of commitment
- What kind of characteristics, skills, attributes you require of the consumer
- Reimbursement details and/or sitting fee
- Application process
- Contact person for applications

If you are recruiting for a different type of role, think carefully about the skills, attributes and time commitment required for the role. Make sure this information is included in the PD.

Health professionals sometimes use terms and phrases that consumers may be unfamiliar with, so take the time to read your information and ensure it is easily understood. Ask a few consumers to read it over and provide some feedback before you finalise the document.

Considerations

Think about recruiting two consumers for a committee or working group rather than one. This may help prevent feelings of isolation and powerlessness, allow them to offer each other support, ensure at least one is present if the other is sick, and allow for some succession planning.

Remember to encourage people from diverse backgrounds and abilities to apply. Make sure you are able to provide support to make this happen.

Advertising

Distribute the position description and information by using your existing networks to recruit consumers.

Internally you can use existing databases (e.g. a volunteer register). You can also advertise in waiting and outpatient areas. Directly approaching consumers who use your service is also a good strategy. You can ask staff working within different units for suggestions about who to approach.

Externally there are many strategies to try:

- Ask community or consumer organisations (with which your service has an ongoing relationship) to nominate or to advertise in their e-bulletin/newsletter
- Place notices in the local paper or on radio
- Talk with community groups in your local area that are likely to have an interest in the area in which you are seeking participation
- Talk with other community services and local government
- Use social media

We can assist with recruitment via our Consumers Step Up program and *Full Circle* newsletter.

Application process

Generally, recruiting for a committee will require a process which is similar to a job application. Ask consumers to fill in a short application form, an expression of interest and/or send in a resume. Be careful not to make this a complex process as it may discourage some people from applying.

- Review the applications with a couple of consumers and other staff who are involved with the committee or project.
- Arrange to meet and talk with suitable applicants at a place that is convenient to everyone.
- Make sure that you communicate with all applicants about the progress of their application, including those you have chosen to not interview.

Effective consumer participation requires ongoing commitment, organisational leadership and resources. Make sure that you have supports in place that will produce a good outcome for yourself and the consumers. This includes having a sound orientation process for your consumer recruits and a nominated key contact within the organisation to provide ongoing support.