

Reflections on the day and Lessons Learned

We think that overall the day was very successful, and our evaluation suggests participants felt the same: 85% of participants said they thought the Hack Day format was effective, and 94% would attend again. The passion of the pitchers for their ideas was infectious, and demonstrated how patients and members of the public can bring much needed energy and insight to the research process. Participants particularly appreciated the opportunity to share ideas and to work with other enthusiastic people, and felt that researchers and PPI partners worked well together and supported each other. Comments included:

"[I enjoyed] People's enthusiasm & interest in all the subjects & willingness of presenters in revealing some very personal problems."

"The morning group was positive and supportive with a lot of great ideas and links for the pitcher to follow up."

"The buzz that came from all the groups working together around the pitches was great."

"In the morning session I was surprised how quickly the group discussion led to developing the idea and the enthusiasm of a lot of the group members to continue working on the project after the event."

"It was novel, energising and not the usual stuff."

"The pitches enable the Public to 'reach out' and enable the Researchers to 'think outside the box'."

We're very proud to have been involved with an event that shows that PPI partners and researchers really can work together in a positive and interesting way! The Hack Day format and evaluation was presented at two national research conferences in 2014 and featured in a blog by the BMJ, so there seems to be a lot of outside interest and we hope this means more Hack Days will be run in future.

There were also some things that could have gone better. In particular, people wanted to know how the ideas would be taken further after the day, and the reflections from the pitchers show there were different consequences and experiences for individual pitchers. We think these are valuable lessons to help us improve how we would run future Hack Days:

1) Increasing the chances of ideas being taken forward after the day.

The Hack Day format is intended to be a jumping off point to kickstart new project ideas, and is not a substitute for long-term investment in PPI. However, participants understandably wanted to know what would happen with the ideas after the day, and some felt that the format was valuable only if it produced concrete projects. We did try to support this on the day, by signposting pitchers to potential research teams who could help realise their idea, but as this was a test-run we did not have the resources available to fully support the translation of ideas into projects. In future Hack Days, we will try to improve the chance that ideas will be taken forward through:

- a) Targeting the pitches around specific topics: For the first Hack Day, we didn't want to restrict people to pitching around a topic – we wanted to see what people chose to bring forward themselves. This did mean however that we weren't able to provide direct links to interested research teams if the pitch was about something we didn't research ourselves. Next time, we'd ask for pitches on specific topics that we know the local research teams have interest in. This will make it more likely that the pitchers can work directly with researchers who are able to take their ideas forward. (For example, Carole, who pitched last year, has been able to take forward her input within a broader research theme of 'multimorbidity').
- b) We recognise that other organisations may also be interested in getting involved in new ideas at an early stage, or may themselves be able to help with developing the idea further. We will approach local groups such as charities and social enterprises with interests relevant to the specific topics for pitches and ask them to attend. We think this will make for an even better 'melting pot' of researchers, PPI partners and other interested stakeholders.

- c) We will cost in funds for each pitcher to attend at least one follow-up meeting with researchers they meet on the day. We hope this would help keep momentum going after the day and ensure pitchers aren't out of pocket if they want to meet with researchers again.

2) Providing PPI buddies who have experience of working in research.

At the previous Hack Day we provided pitchers with “Hack Buddies”, researchers who helped the person prepare their pitch. We think on reflection that having buddies who are experienced PPI partners would be more helpful. They can give moral support and share their experience and insight of working with researchers and starting a journey of involvement in research. The fact that the research topics on the day will be more focused will hopefully mean there is less need for advance preparation in terms of the pitch itself. Also, although we are taking steps to make it more likely that pitch ideas will be taken forward, it is still the case that research funding is hard to secure and progress can be slow. We hope that the PPI partner buddies will be better able to prepare pitchers for this process and help manage expectations.

3) Making sure groups have an independent PPI facilitator.

We will recommend independent facilitators are available for each group. At the last Hack Day, the pitcher and their Hack Buddy had to manage the discussions, take notes and follow the ‘Research Toolkit’ process, and we think it would be better to have someone else manage this so the pitcher and their buddy can focus on their own contributions. Ideally, the facilitators should be PPI partners themselves (rather than research staff) so that the groups are ‘PPI led’ and so that all the PPI attendees feel comfortable contributing.