

Guidance and Resources for Honoraria, Payments, Stipends, and Gifts in Community Research

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Fair, timely, adequate, ethical, and considerate recognition for contributions to community research is fundamental to community-based, community-engaged, participatory, service-user led, patient oriented, and community-action research.

In the past, issues with institutional barriers to adequate recognition have negatively impacted contributors to community research in inequitable ways. Those who receive income support, disability income support, have disproportionately experienced inequities with respect to access to government documents, and financial systems (SIN numbers, bank accounts, etc.) that shape how they can be respectfully recognized for their contributions to community research.

Newcomers, Indigenous and racialized people, people with mental health concerns, people with low income, 2SLGBTQ populations, those without housing, and those who use substances are often scrutinized, subjected to surveillance, and criminalized in disproportionate ways via the historical trajectories of stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and systemic exclusion. Academic researchers have also been connected to community research initiatives that have advanced some of these issues resulting in inadequate recognition, exploitation, or by enforcing procedural requirements that negatively impact community contributors. It is also commonplace for institutions, organizations, and agencies to rely on the knowledge of specific populations for their lived/living knowledge with respect to inequities to inform their work without adequate recognition or compensation.

Institutional mechanisms that enforce policies that reproduce inequities in community work require interventions that directly and respectfully address them. These social, historical, contemporary, and political contexts impact community research and relationships and must be acknowledged while developing projects and relationships led by, for, or with community members, partners, leaders, and participants. These are not new conversations.

For these reasons, many organizations, institutions, and community groups have offered guidance on how to think through the complex matters of recognition, compensation, the provision of honoraria, as well as how to think about gifts, and stipends to ensure that these decisions are fair, equitable, considerate, and ethical in community research.

Below are a few examples of resources that have engaged with some of these complexities for those new to this work or require this background to support this work.

[Re:searching for LGBTQ2S+ Health has published a document](#) entitled, “Key Practices for Community Engagement in Research on Mental Health or Substance Use”¹. In it, they provide guidance on compensation for community work. Specifically, they articulate that “Some community members may be on disability or other forms of social assistance, and so receipt of additional employment income may create serious issues for them in maintaining their social assistance income and/or housing.” The guidelines suggest pre-planning when developing grants, and offering multiple options for compensation, including cash payments can serve to reduce harms. As they also suggest, “Where payment is by honorarium, cash payment is preferable to reduce logistical barriers, assure confidentiality, and avoid stigmatizing and paternalistic assumptions that people who use drugs should not be compensated in cash.”

Funding organizations such as the [Canadian Institute for Health Research have offered guidance](#)² on considerations when working with patient partners in research. In the guidance, they offer considerations on flexibility, fair and equitable payment, informed consent as well as some definitions to make considerate and careful distinctions about the types of payments to offer, covering expenses, and how institutions/organizations can and should have policies to ensure the respectful facilitation of payments to patient partners.

[The Wellesley Institute has also published a report](#)³ on compensating research participants. In it they identify that it is common practice to reduce or reimburse participant costs, offer payments in cash and offer gift cards where appropriate. The report also acknowledges that the use of gift cards can be marginalizing and insulting if they are used control or imply where and how contributors to research can and should spend their money. On average research participants were paid 25\$/hour.

[The BC Centre for Disease Control has published a resource on peer payment standards for short-term engagements](#)⁴. In it, they recommend, upfront, “employing peers full-time or for longer-term contract engagements when possible and appropriate”. They outline some specific recommendations. Specifically, they suggest being upfront about payments and to discuss payment amounts, expenses that are covered, the best time to pay, and the implications of payments. They also recommend the provision of options (when to be paid, upon work completion etc., mixed payment methods, cash, and cheque). Consider paying cash, where possible (“paying with gift cards may be seen as patronizing because it assumes that the payer is delegating where a peer should spend their money”). Cover other costs (transportation round trip, accommodation, meal per diems, travel time, childcare etc.). Also, discuss income and/or disability assistance (as “income may have implications for people enrolled in government assistance programs, such as Income and/or disability assistance”).

¹ <https://lgbtqhealth.ca/projects/docs/practicesforresearchonmhandsu.pdf>

² <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/51466.html>

³ <https://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Fair-compensation-Report-.pdf>

⁴ http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Educational%20Materials/Epid/Other/peer_payment-guide_2018.pdf

[The Tamarack Institute has published a document entitled](#)⁵, “Engaging people with lived/living experience: A Guide for Including People in Poverty Reduction”. In it, they begin by sharing some considerations for assessing if you or your groups are even ready to begin engaging people with lived/living experience. They also include some considerations on eliminating financial barriers to participation and on paying people for their time.

[The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Addiction has published “Guidelines for Partnering with People with Lived and Living Experience of Substance Use and Their Families and Friends”](#)⁶. The guidelines include a brief list of best practices for honoraria and compensation. Specifically, they include a table for suggested honorarium amounts as well as some considerations regarding the impacts of honoraria on income taxes as well as on rent for those whose rent is fixed to their income.

[Simon Fraser University has published an article by Kari Grain \(Ph.D.\) on “Why Money Matters in CER” \(Community Engaged Research\)](#)⁷. In the article, the author notes, as others do that “research with communities experiencing poverty—has often been a historically exploitative endeavour”. Grain also highlights that “plenty of Indigenous researchers, Participatory Action (PAR) Researchers, and community engaged researchers (among others) have demonstrated ways that research can be a collaborative force for enhanced health and wellbeing, social justice, and decolonization”. In the article, Grain links several resources on how to think carefully about research in, and in relation to Indigenous communities. Specifically, considering matters of reciprocity, relationship, privilege, power and resource distribution are all necessary areas for reflection.

[Patricia Johnston, Mark Stoller, and Frank Tester have published an article in *Critical Social Work* with respect to a participatory action research project in Nunavut with Inuit youth.](#)⁸ In the article they outline some of the ways universities and research funding bodies have failed to address institutional, structural barriers to equitable participatory action research. These barriers impede efforts to conduct research based on decolonizing research frameworks.

[Theresa J. Hoeft, Wylie Burke, Scarlett E. Hopkins, Walkie Charles, Susan B. Trinidad, Rosalina D. James and Bert B. Boyer have published an article in *Health Promotion Practice*](#)⁹ entitled, “Building Partnerships in Community-Based Participatory Research: Budgetary and Other Cost Considerations”. In the article they discuss the importance of carefully considering payments and cost reimbursements for participants in community-based research projects related to addressing

⁵ <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Publications/10-Engaging%20People%20With%20LivedLiving%20Experience%20of%20Poverty.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2021-04/CCSA-Partnering-with-People-Lived-Living-Experience-Substance-Use-Guide-en.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.sfu.ca/cei/blog/2020/why-money-matters-in-cer.html>

⁸ <https://ojs.uwindsor.ca/index.php/csw/article/download/6031/5032/16601>

⁹ [Building Partnerships in Community-Based Participatory Research: Budgetary and Other Cost Considerations on JSTOR](#)

health disparities. They also specifically identify (through examples) that contributions need to be compensated for their time both “at and between meetings”.

[The Ontario Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee have published a document providing guidelines for enhancing the engagement of people with lived experience.](#) In the document, the authors provide a sample honoraria policy within a broader contextualized guidance framework developed in consideration of the contributions of Psychiatric Consumer/Survivor Movements and Prisoner Rights Movements.

[The BC Centre for Disease Control, in collaboration with other organizations has published a guidance document on Peer Engagement Principles and Best Practices. In the guidance document the authors outline the importance of considerations that, “include options for payment in cash or cheque, financial institution barriers, income assistance/disability, employment earnings exemptions, and compensating expenses \(i.e. telephone, travel\)”.](#) They also reference [their Peer Payment Standards Guide](#) to assist others in with recommendations and considerations when working with community member, organizations and peer groups.

The University of British Columbia has published [Indigenous Finance Guidelines](#), “to better support gift giving and compensation in reciprocal, respectful, relationship-based collaborations between Indigenous partners and UBC”. The guidelines review payment practices, highlight disparities, and offer alternative processes as well as a table of payment guidelines for respectful engagement with Indigenous people. The University of Alberta has published an [Indigenous honoraria form](#) that includes a decision tree for considering when issuing payments for Indigenous people.

Considering the implications for honoraria, payments, stipends, and gifts in community research for participants, collaborators, peers, community leaders, and partners is an important part of community research that requires a respectful, ethical, and reciprocal approach. As the costs of living shift, the minimum standards referenced here must be reconsidered to adequately recognize the value of those contributing.