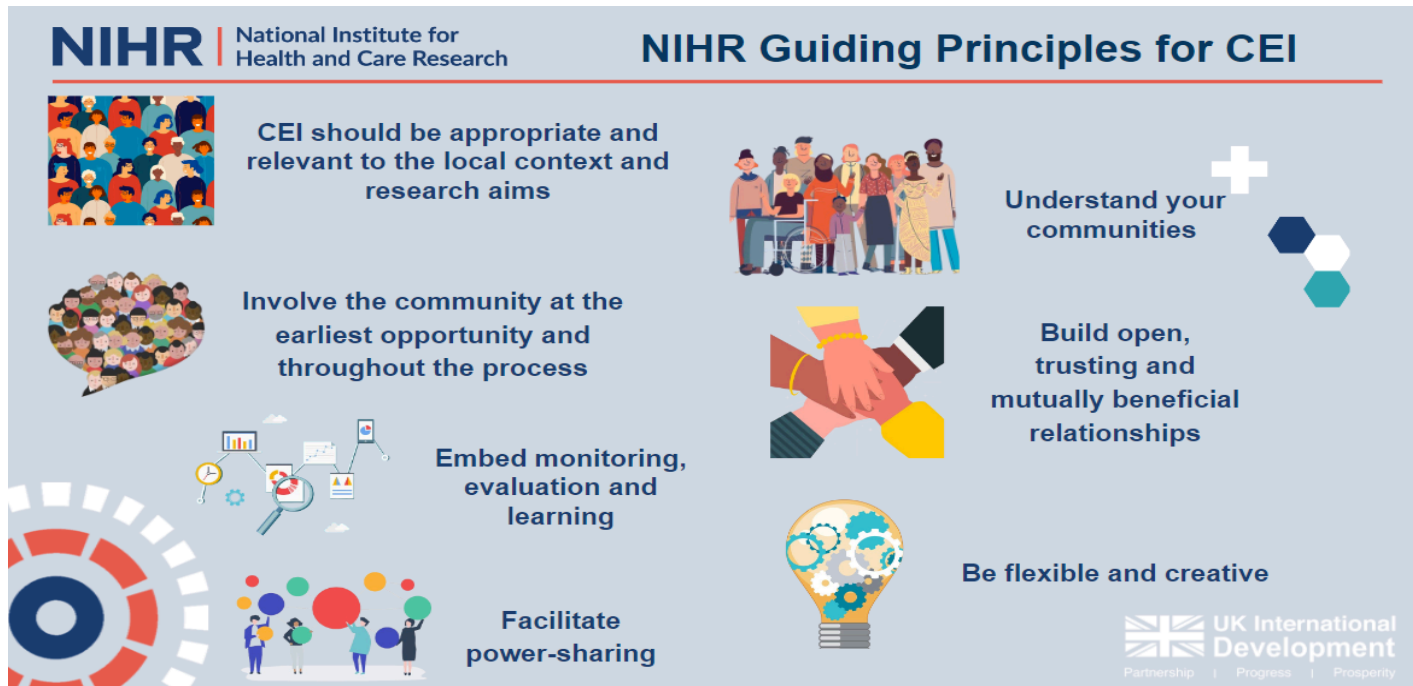


## An Introduction to the NIHR Guiding Principles for Community Engagement and Involvement (CEI)

### CEI is understood to mean:

- An active involvement of the community throughout the research process, using participatory approaches and working in partnership with all key stakeholders.
- A range of activities which involve interactions between researchers, community members, and stakeholders, aimed at improving the relevance, value, and conduct of health research.

There are 7 non-hierarchical and non-linear guiding principles for CEI:



# The Principles

## ❖ CEI should be appropriate and relevant to the local context and research aims

Planning for CEI requires input from communities at early stages of research to ensure it aligns with local values and needs. CEI should take into consideration the type and aims of the research, local knowledge, and the context. This can be achieved through collaboration and partnerships with community members and organisations to ensure wider representation, including the most vulnerable and marginalised.

## ❖ Involve the community at the earliest opportunity and throughout the process

Working with communities to identify priorities and to develop mechanisms for continued collaborations throughout research planning, delivery, and dissemination. This enables a sense of joint ownership, adds value, increases the relevance, reach and impact of the research. It is important to note that the level of involvement may vary at different stages of the research lifecycle and according to the type or nature of research.

## ❖ Understand your communities

Communities are not homogenous. They can consist of people with different interests, histories, social structures, values, and cultural customs. Learning about the community and the variations within it is an important element of knowing which CEI approaches will be appropriate within a research context. Researchers should respect the different forms of knowledge and experience that influence the way people learn and engage.

## ❖ **Build open, trusting, and mutually beneficial relationships**

Taking time to actively listen, respect, and understand the perspectives of communities and research collaborations helps to build strong relationships, and enable community partnerships to thrive. It is necessary to develop mechanisms for two-way communication and feedback that are ethical, sustainable, and mutually beneficial.

## ❖ **Facilitate power-sharing**

Regularly assessing and addressing evolving power dynamics ensures that power-sharing practices remain relevant and effective in promoting equitable CEI. Identifying opportunities to facilitate working together will enable community members to speak freely, without fear of being intimidated.

## ❖ **Be flexible and creative**

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to CEI because every community and context is unique, and responds to changing circumstances differently. Embedding critically reflective practices and trying different approaches in response to community feedback will ensure that research remains focused on local needs.

## ❖ **Embed monitoring, evaluation, and learning**

Plans should be developed for recording and evaluating CEI processes and outcomes against the research objectives to understand their impact; these can be both positive and negative. This process helps to determine what works and enables changes to be made. Involving community members in monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities from the beginning will help to produce indicators and measures that are mutually valuable.