Principles of Good Upstream Engagement

1. Taking the time you need

- Planning carefully – what do you want to achieve?
- Recruit participants – go through intermediaries who already have relationships
- Doing the engagement – what form does this take? How long in-between sessions?
- Communicate effectively – sending info at least 1 week in advance
- Incorporate the outputs into research – how long will this take? When di funding apps open/close?
- Have contingency time for the unexpected

2. Clear Communication Throughout

- When first approaching people – have a clear purpose to manage expectations
- Consider multiple communication formats – written, audio, video, images
- Clarity about roles – what are you expecting from participants? What should they expect from you?
- Two-way communication - How can your partners ask you for information?
- Transparency – unexpected delays, timelines for payment, other systems
- Consistency – builds trust

3. Affirming and Inclusive Process

- Minimise barriers for those you are working with to get involved – proactively ask for and address access needs
- Co-create a 'ways of being' in session 1 Ensure everyone feels comfortable and confident engaging in the space
- In person vs. online vs. hybrid – consider what is best for your groups needs
- Facilitation – have an independent facilitator so you can be an active participant in the process

4. Working together

- Power dynamics – venue, format, facilitator, who is present and how many researchers vs. public contributors
- Compensating participants – NIHR rates, £27.50/hour, but not everyone wants payment
- Grievance process – what to do if something goes wrong
- Holding and wrapping up relationships

5. Reflective Practice

- Part of your evaluation – build this into how you work to save time
- Helps you (and partners) capture learning
- Book in post session debrief
- Have regular check ins with partners
- Checking in after something difficult
- Use reflective techniques – free writing, weather model, journaling