

## **Clarifying/reviewing the terms of reference of the Folk.us Management Steering Group – a discussion paper by Roger Steel (INVOLVE)**

### **1. Reasons why Folk.us Management Steering Group terms of reference and working practices need reviewing:**

- Folk.us is about to take on an extension to the existing contract which expands its work across the South West peninsula but also concentrates its work into some very specific activity areas. This has important implications for Folk.us capacity. It is important that 'management group' arrangements fully support capacity for the new contract.
- The current expectations concerning communication, reporting and responsibilities between the management group and the co-ordinator and grant holder are not sufficiently clear, as has been highlighted by members of the Folk.us Management Steering Group, Coordinator and Grant holder.
- Circumstances have changed since the original terms of reference for the management steering group were written. Accountability within the Peninsula Medical School and to and from the Management Steering Group has not yet been reviewed and clarified.
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities will make Folk.us easier to run.

### **2. The current terms of reference are as follows:**

1. That the group will meet quarterly to support and enable the work of the Folk.us Co-ordinator
2. That the chair of the group will change every meeting, with the next meetings chair being agreed at the previous meeting
3. That the purpose of the group will be to provide the Folk.us staff team with support, guidance and priority setting
4. That the Folk.us programme co-ordinator can call upon individual members of the group for support as appropriate between meetings
5. That the group can expect an update from the Programme Co-ordinator at each meeting

6. The monitoring and checking of the outcomes of the Management Steering Group. Create a research diary
7. Build in evaluation of activities and develop reflective assessment

### 3. The need for clearer model/terms of reference

The current arrangements are relatively informal, and provide direction checking, and support for the co-ordinator. What the arrangements do not do is:

- make clear the relationship between the grant holding organisation and the steering group
- make clear the accountability of the steering group within Folk.us as a whole
- make clear what sort of guidance the steering group gives
- make clear who the group members should be and what their roles are
- make clear how group membership arrangements work

At present the day to day management of Folk.us is undertaken by the co-ordinator and the grant holder. To describe the current group as a Management Steering group is misleading as it does not **manage** Folk.us, but instead provides monitoring, guidance and support to the co-ordinator. Perhaps it would more accurately be called simply the Folk.us Steering group. As a steering group it has a function of keeping Folk.us on track from the point of view of wider strategic aims as well as ideology or 'mission'. It also monitors progress against agreed strategic objectives, and ensures that work was carried out in the 'spirit' of the organisation and help identify opportunities to move forward. It would also support and provide a reference for the co-ordinator in the operational work. Questions remain however, as to **how** this should be done in view of the new contract and current arrangements with the Peninsula Medical School as grant holders.

- a) What powers if any does the group have if they have reason to be seriously concerned about the conduct of, or direction taken by the co-ordinator and/or grant holder?
- b) What responsibilities does the Steering group have when agreed aims and objectives lead to operational and political challenges which require difficult and far reaching decisions?
- c) In view of (b), at what level should the co-ordinator and/or grant holder refer to the management group?

- d) Who should the management group be made up of in order to perform these functions? E.g. How many service users/carers should there be in relation to 'professionals'?
- e) How long should members serve on the group?
- f) Should the chair be rotated for each meeting or should there be a named chair and deputy for an agreed period of service, say, one year? (In view of a, b, and c, this is probably very important.)
- g) Should some members of the steering group have responsibilities as Folk.us grant co-applicants?

#### **4. Some suggested models of working for the purpose of discussion.**

Here are a few ideas. There are advantages and disadvantages to each. Combinations could be worked out. They need to be seen in relation to the questions already posed.

##### **Model (I)**

Co-ordinator, Lead Grant Holder, and independent Steering Group Chair/deputy meet or communicate more regularly than the full group to discuss up and coming issues and concerns and the group continues to meet quarterly. The chair decides which decisions need to go to full group. An agreement is drawn up between the grant holding organisation and the steering group as to working relationship between all three parties. This would include a simple thumbnail guide to levels of decision making and where these should lie. An updated 'terms of reference' document would be developed. Steering group chair and deputy would be Folk.us grant co-applicants.

##### **Model (II)**

A Fok.us constitution is drawn up and the Steering Group position and responsibilities are formalised within this. The Steering Group would have significant and formal responsibilities as grant holders.

##### **Model (III)**

The Steering Group acts as an independent and informal reference group and informal support for co-ordinator and grant holder. It has no formal responsibilities at all. A new 'terms of reference' document is drawn up. The co-ordinator and grant holder take all key operational decisions and refer to management group when additional views are needed. The Steering Group would in fact be an **advisory group** and carry little weight in terms of the actual direction of Folk.us.

##### **Model (IV)**

The Steering Group is part of the Grant Holder's jurisdiction. Grant holder chairs the group. Terms of reference reflect this arrangement. Steering group may be grant co-applicants.

## **5. Conclusion**

Overall, I would suggest that the discussion context should be the Steering Group role in promoting the effective operation of Folk.us in the new contract period. This includes its role in maintaining the organisation's values as its operations focus and expand across the region. Clarity about the role and responsibilities of the Steering Group will make it easier to run Folk.us.

Given that Folk.us is a research organisation it seems appropriate that the lead grant applicant should be from the academic community.

Whichever arrangements for the Steering Group are settled upon, there needs to be documentation to describe it for the purpose of transparency. Public, researchers, and members need to know how decisions are made, and information about how Folk.us is managed should be included on the website. The implications of the Freedom of Information Act for Folk.us need to be considered.

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