Fellowship in Advanced Rural General Practice

Guidelines for a rural general practice community-focused project
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Recommended citation


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Published December 2017, updated April 2020

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Introduction

The Fellowship in Advanced Rural General Practice (FARGP) is a qualification awarded by The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) in addition to the vocational Fellowship (FRACGP). Please refer to the Fellowship in Advanced Rural General Practice – Guidelines for general practice registrars and practising GPs for further details. The FARGP requirements are completion of:

- the FARGP learning plan and reflection activity
- 12 months in a rural general practice setting
- 12 months of Advanced Rural Skills Training (ARST) in an accredited training post
- the FARGP emergency medicine activities, including satisfactory completion of two advanced emergency skills courses.

These requirements recognise the additional skills required by rural generalists in providing safe, accessible and comprehensive care for Australia’s rural and remote communities. In addition to this, the FARGP community-focused project is an optional activity which provides a valuable opportunity to get to know the community and improve health outcomes.

This document is designed to provide guidance on how to complete the rural general practice community-focused project. Completion of the project will need to be documented via the FARGP online learning platform, gplearning.
**Project overview**

The community-focused project is designed to provide you with an opportunity to develop skills that will equip you to meet the needs of your community, both in the short-term and onwards throughout your career. Through the completion of the community-focused project, you will consider the needs of your community, engage in community consultation, and develop, implement, and evaluate a program that seeks to improve community health outcomes.

The project is not a full-time commitment, but should be conducted over a six-month timeframe – this includes the planning, implementation and evaluation stages. This timeline has been developed with consideration for candidates having a full-time workload and the project being completed in additional time. The ideal time to complete the project is during the 12-month rural general practice placement; however, it can be completed at any point during FARGP studies.

Through the completion of this project, you will gain the opportunity to engage with your community and seek to improve health outcomes. While the specifics of each project will differ, the community-focused project generally involves completing the following steps:

1. Researching community needs
2. Deciding on a topic idea or issue to address
3. Conducting a literature review to explore what the research indicates in relation to the topic or issue
4. Developing a broad project plan
5. Engaging in community consultation
6. Developing a detailed project plan and obtaining ethics approval if needed
7. Conducting the project
8. Evaluating the project
9. Documenting the project

The following section of this guide provides additional information about each step.
The process

Step 1 – Researching community needs

The first step in the community-focused project must involve gaining a detailed understanding of the needs of your community. You will be required to complete and document a community profile in gplearning. This involves gathering information on the demographics of your community, its infrastructure, available services, current health issues, and any health promotion activities or preventive health measures currently active in your community. It will be useful for you to consider both the material and human resources available in your practice, the local hospital (where relevant), other health services, and community support groups.

Data can be gathered from sources such as:

• the Australian Bureau of Statistics
• local government websites
• your local Primary Health Network
• your community engagement
• your medical practice.

This data should then be used to identify a community need. Questions you may wish to consider include:

• What is your patient population profile?
• What are the socioeconomic and cultural determinants of health?
• What health services are currently available/unavailable?
• What is the infrastructure capability?
• Are there particular health trends affecting your patient population?

Use the community profile and the information gathered from these considerations to determine a current community health need that your project can address.

Step 2 – Deciding on a topic, idea or issue to address

Each community-focused project will be different. Through building a community profile and undertaking an audit of the resources available, you should have identified some gaps or needs within your community. Use this information as well as a consideration of your own interests to choose a focus for your project.

It is important to note that you will not be assessed on the topic chosen. Instead, the assessment will focus on how well you follow project processes. However, your project must address one or more of the Five Domains of General Practice:

• Domain 1: Communication skills and the patient–doctor relationship
• Domain 2: Applied professional knowledge and skills
• Domain 3: Population health in the context of rural general practice
• Domain 4: Professional and ethical role
• Domain 5: Organisational and legal dimensions
Examples of topics and activities that a community-focused project might address and undertake include:

- creating and running a health promotion activity
- monitoring a chronic disease self-management group
- investigating how to make early identification of mental health issues in a patient population
- raising awareness of a prevalent disease
- increasing participation of a patient population in regular health checks
- addressing specific health issues of a patient population.

When selecting your topic and beginning to shape your project, it is important to consider project feasibility. It is generally recommended that you keep your project relatively small and focused, ensuring that it is something you will be able to complete within the six-month time frame. We also recommend that you discuss your idea with your supervisor/medical educator at this stage.

Once you have a broad idea of what you would like to do, the next step is to conduct a literature review to gain evidence-based insight into the best methods to address your project area.

**Step 3 – Conducting a literature review**

Conducting a literature review is a vital step in the project planning process. A literature review:

- will give you an understanding of your topic and current knowledge of how to best address it
- will highlight any significant new research
- may inspire further project ideas by identifying gaps or inconsistencies in current knowledge.

Ultimately, conducting a literature review will help you understand the issue and provide a framework to develop your project.

Conducting a literature review involves reviewing research that has previously been conducted in your chosen topic area and evaluating it critically. You will need to conduct your own research and summarise your findings. You must use at least five high-quality (ie peer reviewed), current (ie maximum five years old) articles and use appropriate referencing (any recognised style such as Vancouver, Harvard or APA is acceptable). You must submit your completed literature review of approximately 1000 words in gplearning.

The RACGP John Murtagh Library can offer access to databases, medical journals and textbooks. Additional resources to support your literature review can be found in the ‘Recommended resources’ at the end of this guide.

**Step 4 – Developing a broad project plan**

The literature review should help you shape your project and begin developing a project plan. At this stage, consider what your project will entail and how it will address your chosen community health need. Make sure that your plan is relevant to your practice and your community (ie the project should aim to meet the need you are trying to address and be feasible for completion in your community). Consider:

- What do you want to do, and why?
- How do you plan on doing it?
- What resources will you need?
- Which stakeholders will need to be involved?
- Have you a broad timeline and project milestones?
- How do you plan to evaluate the project and its outcomes?
- What are the potential risks, and how will you manage them?
Step 5 – Engaging in community consultation

Once you have a broad project plan, you will need to engage in community consultation to help ensure that your project will work in your community. This should involve consultation with at least three key stakeholders to ensure the project is viable (ie accepted, understood and supported by the community). This consultation might involve:

- patients
- carers
- practice staff – GPs, nurses, administrators, practice manager
- allied health providers
- other health providers
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders
- local organisations and businesses.

Community consultation can be completed in a range of different ways, including:

- face-to-face interviews
- phone or written surveys
- focus groups.

After community consultation, you will need to reflect critically on the information gathered. Review your project in light of this information, and make any adjustments as required. For example, your consultation might reveal an alternative method of information distribution you can use for your project. Alternatively, it might reveal additional risks that you will need to manage. Revise and modify your initial project plan as needed.

You will need to document your community consultation in gplearning, including how you completed the consultation process, the questions you used, your analysis of the outcomes of your consultation, and the changes you made to the project plan as a result of this consultation.

The more thorough the community consultation, the easier it will be to develop a detailed plan for your project that is fully tailored to your community’s needs.

Step 6 – Developing a detailed project plan and obtaining ethics approval if needed

You will need to develop a detailed project plan. Flesh out your broad plan and document:

- your project title
- the background for the project (ie your reason for selecting this project)
- the demographics of the people who will be participating in the project
- a description of the project (ie exactly what the project will involve)
- the domain/s of general practice that will be addressed
- at least two measurable outcomes for the project
- key stakeholders who will need to be engaged throughout the project and how you will engage with them
- a timeline for your project
- project milestones (ie the stages in the project that will define its progress)
- identified risks and risk management strategies
- an evaluation plan (ie how you will evaluate the outcome of your project and the tools you will use). Plan to conduct an evaluation at the mid-point of your project so that you can make adjustments if necessary.
The requirement of obtaining ethics approval differs based on the details of each project.

RACGP Rural recommends you consult first with your medical educator or supervisor to discuss whether ethics approval is required for your project. If ethics approval is required, you must obtain approval prior to commencing the project. Please be aware that the ethics approval process can take considerable time – you will need to consider this time frame when developing your project plan.

Ethics approval is not required for the community project if it is considered a quality improvement, quality assurance or evaluation activity; that is, an activity undertaken within a general practice where the primary purpose is to monitor, evaluate or improve the quality of healthcare delivered by the practice.

If you are considering publishing your results, ethics approval will be required. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) document ‘Ethical considerations in quality assurance and evaluation activities’ provides guidance on ethical issues and helps identify triggers for the consideration of ethical review.

Research projects involving humans will require approval from a human research ethics committee (HREC). If the research involves Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and communities, approval from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HREC may also be required.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with expertise and experience in the subject matter of the research should be actively involved in the design and conduct of any activities affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Lowitja Institute and the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW provide useful information and resources.

If your project does require ethics approval, it is best to find a registered HREC in your rural area or state, such as a local university or hospital, as they will have a better understanding of not just your project but also your local community and its health standards. Please view the NHMRC list of registered ethics committees.

Where necessary, candidates can apply for ethics approval from the RACGP National Research and Evaluation Ethics Committee (NREEC). Please be mindful the NREEC only meets every second month and applications should be submitted at least three weeks prior to the next scheduled meeting, so that materials can be prepared and sent to the committee members for review.

Please visit the NREEC website for further information, including ethics approval submission deadlines and committee meeting dates.

If you require advice regarding ethical approval, you can contact the NREEC secretariat at ethics@racgp.org.au or on 03 8699 0385.

**Step 7 – Conducting the project**

After you have completed project planning and obtained ethics approval (if required), you must use your project plan to conduct your project. Throughout this stage you should keep records of key activities, events, consultations, risk management strategies implemented, and your mid-point evaluation activities.

You will also be required to document three case studies of patients who participated in the project in gplearning. Ensure that you keep accurate records so that you will be able to document these case studies. Please note that these cases do not necessarily need to have a successful outcome.

**Step 8 – Evaluating the project**

You must complete both a mid-point and end-point evaluation of the project. At the mid-point, your evaluation will help ensure that your project is on track, or enable you to make adjustments to your project plan as needed. Your end-point evaluation will enable you to evaluate the success of your project.
It is important to note that the project does not necessarily have to succeed in reaching its outcomes. In cases in which the project is not successful, you will still have benefited from the process and have developed insight into the obstacles that you faced and how they could be better addressed in future.

You must document your evaluation activities in gplearning. You will need to document:

- examples of the evaluation tools you used
- the results of your mid-point evaluation and adjustments made to your project based on the results of this evaluation
- the results of your final evaluation
- recommendations that you would have for future work in your project area.

**Step 9 – Documenting the project**

Once you have completed your project, you will need to document it by writing either a short abstract or preparing a poster presentation (similar to those you would prepare when presenting to other GPs at a conference).

If you choose to write an abstract, this needs to be concise summary of your project. Use plain English and include the project background, aims, methods, results and conclusion. If you choose to prepare a poster presentation, you should include the same type of information, but you should also consider that it is a visual medium, and so you should also use colours, graphs and images. Additional resources to support you in preparing abstracts and poster presentations can be found in the ‘Recommended resources’ section at the end of this document.

Finally, as part of documenting your project, you will also need to complete all of the FARGP community-focused assessment questions on gplearning. This includes a short reflection statement (approximately 250 words) that describes the impact that undertaking the project has had on you, your practice and your community. You can include discussion of the challenges you faced and what you did to overcome them, what you learnt, what worked well, and what you would do differently if you repeated the process.
Contact

We wish you well in your community project. Should you have any additional questions, please contact the FARGP team on 1800 636 764 or email fargp@racgp.org.au

Recommended resources

- Abstracts
  - Guidelines for papers, www.academic-conferences.org/policies/abstract-guidelines-for-papers
- Literature review
- Local government directory, www.gov.au
- Planning for effective health promotion evaluation, www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/policiesandguidelines/Planning-for-Effective-Health-Promotion