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Stakeholder engagement:
Guidance for anaesthesia research
departments

August 2025

Purpose of document:

This document provides guidance for clinical trial teams on how to effectively engage stakeholders, particularly clinicians, to support the planning, execution, and sustainability of anaesthesia and perioperative research. Drawing from a 2025 ANZCA Annual Scientific Meeting CTN workshop presentation by Tracy Hess, it outlines strategies for building trust, communicating early, highlighting benefits, and navigating common engagement challenges to foster a collaborative and research culture within departments.

Acknowledgements:

The development of the Anaesthesia Research Co-ordinator Network (ARCN) and ANZCA CTN toolkit is being led by the CTN office team, in collaboration with the ARCN sub-committee and the CTN executive. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the ANZCA CTN members, CTN office, ARCN sub-committee, and CTN executive in the creation, preparation, development, and review of this document.

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DOI:

10.60115/11055/1343

Suggested citation for this document:

ANZCA Clinical Trials Network. *Stakeholder engagement: Guidance for anaesthesia research departments*. Melbourne: Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists; 2025.doi 10.60115/11055/1343

Document history:

Version	Contributors	Reviewed/Approved	Date Approved by ARCN Sub-Committee & CTN Executive	Changes
1.0	Tracy Hess Paige Druce Gillian Ormond Karen Goulding	Allison Kearney Dr Ben Moran	1/8/25	Creation

Table of contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Who are the stakeholders?	4
3. Building relationships and trust	4
4. Early involvement and communication	4
5. Highlighting benefits	5
6. Challenges and solutions	5
7. Celebrating success	5
8. Conclusion	5

Stakeholder engagement: Guidance for anaesthesia research departments

1. Introduction

Effective stakeholder engagement is essential for the success of clinical trials. This document provides guidance on building relationships, establishing trust, and ensuring transparent communication to engage clinicians and other key stakeholders for clinical trials. It draws from insights shared by Tracy Hess during the 2025 ANZCA Annual Scientific Meeting workshop.

2. Who are the stakeholders?

In the context of clinical trials, especially within anaesthesia and perioperative research, a stakeholder refers to any individual, group, or organisation with a role, interest, or influence in the planning, conduct, or outcomes of the trial.

This includes:

- Clinical staff: anaesthetists, surgeons, nurses, pain specialists, intensivists, etc., involved in patient care or trial delivery.
- Department heads or managers: who oversee staffing, workflow, and resources affected by trial activities.
- Patients and carers: as participants or beneficiaries of the research.
- Research personnel: study co-ordinators, data managers, trial pharmacists.
- Hospital executives and governance units: including Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs) (Australia) or Health and Disability Ethics Committees (HDEC) (New Zealand), Research Governance Offices (RGOs), and legal teams.
- CTN staff and collaborators: including statisticians, health economists, or implementation scientists.
- External sponsors or funding bodies: who support the trial financially or logistically.

Engaging stakeholders effectively ensures buy-in, resource alignment, smooth trial implementation, and ultimately, better patient outcomes.

3. Building relationships and trust

Successful clinician engagement begins with building relationships and trust. Transparent communication between researchers and stakeholders is essential.

Key steps include:

- Identifying key stakeholders involved in trial activities.
- Understanding the needs of each department and how the trial may impact them.
- Involving stakeholders early in the feasibility stage to clarify expectations and resources required.
- Highlighting the benefits to both the department and patients.
- Offering professional growth opportunities linked to research involvement.

4. Early involvement and communication

Engage stakeholders early in the trial planning process to build understanding and support.

Key practices include:

- Conducting introductory trial meetings to outline trial requirements and resource needs.
- Designating a single point of contact to streamline communication.
- Clearly defining trial expectations, including time commitments and patient involvement.

5. Highlighting benefits

It's important to highlight the benefits of participating in research to clinicians and other stakeholders.

Focus on how research participation can:

- Enhance professional growth and career advancement.
- Influence clinical practice and healthcare policy.
- Improve patient outcomes within the community.
- Attract funding opportunities and grants.
- Support education of anaesthesia staff in research methodology and analysis.

6. Challenges and solutions

Common challenges in stakeholder engagement include:

- Varied interest levels: Some clinicians may lack interest or time to commit to research. Tailor your messaging to emphasise department specific benefits and patient care improvements.
- Some clinicians may feel the study intervention isn't relevant to their practice, particularly if they're accustomed to doing things a certain way.
- Some anaesthetists may be resistant to being told how to give 'their' anaesthetic, especially if the study protocol feels prescriptive.
- Communication barriers: Inconsistent updates or unclear expectations can hinder engagement. Maintain a single point of contact and clear communication protocols.
- Competing priorities: Balance trial activities with existing clinical workloads by offering flexible schedules and aligning trial tasks with standard care practices.
- Lack of trust or familiarity: New researchers may face scepticism. Build rapport and leverage existing professional relationships to increase acceptance.
- Recruitment and retention issues: Consider patient burden when designing trials and be transparent about the time and effort involved.
- Technology adoption: Address challenges with digital tools by providing necessary training and ensuring reliable infrastructure.
- Regulatory and administrative challenges: Start ethics and governance processes early and work collaboratively with multi-centre sites to streamline approvals.

7. Celebrating success

Acknowledging progress and successes keeps stakeholders motivated. Celebrate milestones like the first patient recruitment and acknowledge contributions from each department.

8. Conclusion

Stakeholder engagement is a continuous process that requires proactive communication, relationship building, and clear demonstration of benefits. By fostering a collaborative research culture and actively involving junior staff, clinical trials can achieve greater success and sustainability.