

Twelve Tips for Men's Sheds to Deal with Research Proposals

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We all need to know whether what we are doing in men's sheds is working (or not), and how we might use good evidence to improve what we do. For this reason, men's sheds (and peak national and state shed organisations) tend to keep an up to date record of which sheds are active, what sheds are doing and achieving, who comes and what shedders get out of it.

Sometimes governments and other community organisations that help support sheds want to know, 'Is this a good investment?' Some research can therefore be very valuable for your shed and the men's shed sector.

However, some sheds and shedders take a view that all research is unnecessary. Others actively encourage it. Whatever your view, you need to be fully informed about your options. These 'twelve tips' are designed to help you make informed decisions about research and whether you should participate.

What sort of research are we talking about?

Researchers from universities do research on men's sheds for a range of mostly good reasons, of variable quality and impact. Most small studies are about researchers or research students chasing 'a hunch'.

Many bigger studies have some form of external funding and typically seek to investigate some specific aspect of men's sheds, compare sheds and shedders in some way using surveys, interviews, or other methods.

The Twelve Tips

When shed organisations and shedders are approached by anyone to do research, there are some important basics, and some questions we suggest you ask, and have answered to your satisfaction. These 'ten tips' are summarised below.

1. You always have a right to ask questions, and once fully informed, say 'Yes' or 'No'.

2. Ask yourselves, either personally or as a group, whether it is the Men, the Shed, the Movement or just the researcher that will benefit from this work being done. You have every right to decline the opportunity to participate in any research with which you are not comfortable. Good research is more likely to be of benefit to Men or Shed.

3. All formal studies conducted by university-based researchers should have University Research Ethics Approval. In this case you will get a form to read and consider in advance which fully and in plain language informs you about the research, who is doing it, what they are trying to find out, how they are doing the study, what they are seeking from you or your shed, their contact details and an address of the University Research Ethics Committee, in case things go 'pear shaped'. It also gives you a chance to ask questions before you agree to cooperate (or not) and any other the conditions of your participation, e.g confidentiality.

4. Any student undertaking research as part of a degree will have an assigned supervisor. It is good to ask who this person is and feel free to contact them if necessary.

5. If you complete a survey, you usually don't have to complete any other form (filling it out implies consent), but you should not fill it out until and unless you are clear about all the important basics, above.

6. If you complete an interview you also will be given a Statement of Informed Consent that must clearly outline exactly what you are agreeing to do, with the conditions of interview made very clear. If the interview is recorded in any way, ask about privacy and confidentiality of the tapes and transcripts, and whether they plan to use names of people and sheds (or not). You are entitled to be treated anonymously and with no identifying information included in any document. If you are still not clear, ask more questions until you are sure whether you want to participate (or not). You have a right during (or soon after) the interview to withdraw your previous written and signed permission for any reason. You should be given copies of all transcripts of your interviews and at least see the draft final report, thesis or other publications before they are finally submitted or published.

7. If there are other forms of health or medical testing involved, the ethical bar will be raised even higher. Read and check everything.

8. All other research without formal university ethics approval studies (e.g. done by private individuals, consultancy firms, community and shed-based organisations or government agencies) should provide the at least same basic, ethical information as in points 2-5 above.

9. You have a right with all research to ask where, when and in what form the research will be published, and how you will be able to get a copy.

10. If you do participate in a study, you are free to use all published research to your best advantage (e.g. in newsletters, funding submissions, reports, media releases), as long as you accurately quote it and acknowledge those that did it.

11. If the results of research are not eventually published, if the results are interesting and useful, try and find people who can get them rewritten and published. This is in the best interests of everyone, including those shedders who took time to participate. The more respected the publication or publisher is, the more it will get 'cited' by other researchers internationally and the more it will be respected in the wider community as good evidence of what men's sheds do, their benefits for all concerned and how what we all do might be improved.

12. If you think the research that is being done is not meeting your shed's needs, try contacting universities, governments or researchers and encourage them to work together to gather the evidence you do need. Typically, no one asks them – and they will sometimes be delighted!