

McMaster Forum Citizen Partners for Evidence Synthesis summary of facilitated feedback workshop 27 April 2026

Context

On 27 April 2026, the McMaster Forum Citizen Partners for Evidence Synthesis convened a 90-minute facilitated feedback workshop with 12 of the 18 citizen partners. Citizen partners were from eight provinces in Canada.

The objectives of the group discussion were to:

- explore the logistics: what worked and what did not work and gather recommendations to improve
- explore their experiences with providing feedback – enablers and challenges
- identify areas of uncertainty when presented with the evidence synthesis product
- understand what additional training could be helpful.

Key insights

Citizen partners reported generally positive and rewarding experiences related to all stages of their involvement in evidence syntheses. There was strong satisfaction with the process and support. They valued clear communication, feedback from research teams, and training to enable them to contribute meaningfully and grow in the role. Citizen partners identified areas for improvement at each stage.

Participants used the following words to describe their experiences of participating in evidence syntheses.



Citizen partners' insights regarding their engagement at each stage of the evidence-synthesis process are summarized below.

Stage 1: Before citizen engagement in the synthesis begins (first contact and onboarding on a specific project by the evidence-synthesis teams)

- Researcher request form
 - Citizen partners appreciated the detail in the researcher request form as it “had everything I needed” and noted that this information helped them to understand why the evidence synthesis was being done, and to determine if it was a good fit for them.
 - The request form was also noted as being useful once the evidence synthesis had started.

- As one participant said: “The expectations of involvement were very clear. Even when there was a lot of information thrown at me in a short period of time there is always written documentation.”
- Virtual onboarding session
 - Citizen partners reported high levels of satisfaction with the onboarding sessions highlighting how they appreciated meeting with the research team and their fellow second citizen partners.
 - They noted benefiting from the opportunity to review the framework with the team, ask questions and provide recommendations on how to improve the framework discussion.

Citizen partners referred to both the request form and the onboarding session as being smooth, easy to access, and helpful in orienting them to the evidence syntheses. They stressed that it is important that we keep in mind the learning curve involved for engaging in this work. One participant noted: “The first time I was quite confused, I muddled through but now I know what is going on and especially after the evidence-synthesis course, it makes a lot more sense to me and it is innovative and doable. Now I know how to add value, but the first time was rough.”

Citizen partners made two suggestions to improve this stage:

- 1) During the onboarding meeting, provide a “roadmap” of the process for the specific evidence synthesis. Reviewing the process is especially helpful when there is a significant amount of time between projects
- 2) When reviewing the framework, it would be useful to understand how the research team created it. This would also help understand why certain items are “out of scope”.

Stage 2: Experiences reviewing the evidence syntheses

Citizen partners reported generally positive experiences with reviewing evidence syntheses and had several suggestions to improve this stage. They noted that they find the use of a shared document where they can see the second citizen partners’ feedback useful. One participant said: “It would be helpful to not necessarily write new questions but if the researchers could provide one or two key things we should be paying attention to in addition to the questions that would be helpful”.

In addition, they recognize that perspectives vary and that uncertainty in what type of feedback is required is sometimes inevitable. One participant shared struggling with: “What’s too much or too little? Am I going beyond what I should be saying?” Citizen partners also noted that timeline flexibility was acceptable as long as communicated up-front.

Citizen partners made four suggestions to improve this stage:

- 1) The Dropbox can be confusing, and users worry about editing the wrong file. Clear labeling of the documents, “read-only” indicators, and a demo video to accompany the written instructions on navigating the Dropbox would be helpful
- 2) Consistent acknowledgement that the feedback was received by the research team would alleviate worrying about whether feedback could be seen in the document
- 3) Generic guiding prompts are helpful, but citizen partners could also benefit from a few key focus areas for the specific synthesis
- 4) Examples of comments from previous reviews would be helpful, especially for new members, and these comments could be adapted to make them more generic and anonymous, to help people see how varied their comments can be.

Stage 3: Receiving feedback from the research team and closing the loop

Citizen partners strongly appreciated the feedback from the research team. One citizen partner noted: “I have appreciated the feedback I have received when I have made comments, which makes me feel seen.” Explanations for why comments aren’t used are especially helpful. Citizens would like to receive a final project update, including the link to the published synthesis. It was noted that acknowledgement has not always been consistent. One citizen partner noted that “acknowledgement values the work on paper”. Another citizen partner noted: “Acknowledgement sometimes happens, and sometimes it is not as clear. I am not always sure what ended up happening with the project, so I am unsure how to record it, or even whether to include it in my records. I think a final email, maybe after the project finishes, saying what the state of the project ended up being and how to write it on our records, or how we are acknowledged, would be helpful.”

Compensation was reported to be a smooth process, noting that it demonstrates how their time is valued. One issue about social insurance numbers was raised resulting in an immediate clarification to the compensation form.

Citizen partners made two suggestions to improve this stage:

1. Consistent acknowledgement of their contributions in the final report
2. A final project update indicating the report has been published (with link).

Additional training

Citizen partners expressed that they were motivated to learn more and appreciated opportunities for training. Several noted that the Evidence Synthesis Ireland course was very valuable. Optional training could be offered for those who wish to learn more about specific steps or types of evidence syntheses.

Citizen partners had three suggestions for additional training and tools:

- 1) Co-develop a glossary of acronyms and terms that they could refer to when providing feedback
- 2) Training to understand the processes of evidence synthesis such as what goes into developing a search strategy and selecting databases, which might help to also understand how topics get scoped
- 3) A one pager available on the Forum webpage that explains what this citizen panel is and how it works would be really helpful so we can direct people to it.

Conclusion

As the group discussion came to an end, citizen partners were asked: *If you had one message for evidence synthesis research teams engaging with citizens, what would you tell them?*

- It’s absolutely feasible with the right support. You are missing out if you do not include people with lived experience. A curious person who can relate to the topic but is not the “academic expert” in the area can illuminate gaps, provide ideas, and help with better communication of the results to whoever commissioned the report and their audience.
- We can engage citizens, even in short time frames!
- Don’t be afraid to discuss any possibilities with us, rather than assume that we can’t do it – if we have an open conversation, we can find great new ways to help.
- It is important to recognize that citizen partners are committed, fast learners, and ready to try new things! We also should emphasize multidirectional learning as we are bringing expertise to the space.
- We each have our areas of expertise, we need to use them all.



- Researchers should approach receiving citizen feedback with humility, acknowledging the value of different perspectives.
- Thank you for providing feedback on the feedback!
- Avoid acronyms! Try to imagine reviewing something in a domain that isn't familiar to you.
- I would just say to the researchers that in the research process there are some obvious details that the researchers really find valuable and some details that a person with lived experience can give may seem not as relevant but if we apply some empathy and think out of the box those details from the consumer and community member can be very relevant to the ground level experience of the community.

Messages to evidence-synthesis research teams who partner with citizens can be summed up as follows:

- Citizen engagement is feasible, valuable, and impactful, even in short timelines
- Lived experience provides unique insights, identifies gaps, and improves communication
- Collaboration should be open and exploratory—don't assume limitations
- Multidirectional learning is important; citizens bring real expertise
- Use clear language (avoid acronyms) and maintain humility

Next steps

This summary of key insights from the facilitated feedback workshop will inform the following next steps:

- The McMaster Health Forum staff who support citizen engagement in evidence synthesis will debrief to make sure future citizen engagement in evidence synthesis builds on these insights
- Suggestions for improvement will be considered and operationalized
- The McMaster Health Forum will share the report with:
 - all citizen partners
 - evidence syntheses teams with whom they collaborate.

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