STaRR

Supporting Translation of Research in Rural and Regional health settings

Mentoring handbook

This handbook has been developed by the STaRR team to guide mentors and emerging researchers in establishing their mentoring relationship. It was inspired by the NSW Health Education and Training Rural and Remote Research Capacity Building Mentoring Information Package 2020.

1. Background

With support from the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, the inaugural STaRR (**S**upporting **Tra**nslation of **R**esearch in **R**ural and Regional settings) program commenced in 2021. The aim of this program is to provide health practitioners with the foundational research skills needed to develop a research translation-focused project (i.e., a project that will develop evidence that will lead to changes in practice or policy, or use existing evidence to change current practice or policy).

The STaRR Emerging Researcher Training Program (STaRR hereafter) runs annually and comprises three workshops. The first workshop is held in-person, and the subsequent two are held online. In 2025, the STaRR workshops will run from the end of August to the end of October. For more information about STaRR, please visit our [STaRR training website](#).

One of the key elements of STaRR is the pairing of emerging researchers with a mentor who has relevant skills and experience. Previous evaluation of other research training programs and feedback from past participants indicates that mentoring is a highly valued part of the program.

Support provided by mentors will vary but may include:

- Helping to refine the research question
- Providing guidance on the project timeline and key tasks in the research process
- Providing input on the research design and data analysis
- Referring emerging researchers to useful resources and opportunities
- Facilitating networking, where appropriate
- Assisting with ethics applications
- Providing feedback on written materials
- Supporting dissemination and publishing their research
- Providing encouragement

Benefits of mentoring

The mentoring component of STaRR aims to:

- Develop **emerging researchers'** research skills and progress their project by pairing them with a mentor who has relevant research experience
- Provide **emerging researchers** with opportunities to speak with an experienced researcher who is supportive of their research project or idea

- Facilitate professional development for **mentors** by extending and refining their skills in research design, implementation, and translation through supporting **emerging researchers** who are motivated to learn about and engage in research
- Provide opportunities for **emerging researchers** and **mentors** to participate in research translation-focused education and training
- Promote research networks across the Western Victoria region by linking **emerging researchers** and **mentors** with similar interests
- Recognise **mentors** for their research mentoring skills and experience (for example, listed on mentor's academic CV)
- Create opportunities for **emerging researchers** and **mentors** to develop and potentially co-author publications that arise from the emerging researcher's project, as discussed and agreed throughout the mentoring process

2. Expectations and responsibilities

Mentors' responsibilities

- Offer support and advice to the emerging researcher as they participate in the 10-week (approx.) STaRR program
- Acknowledge your limitations and draw on your networks or the STaRR team when appropriate
- Be available for *at least* four meetings while the emerging researcher prepares for and participates in the training, and ideally shortly after the training as they develop their protocol
- Provide feedback on research-related documents developed by the emerging researcher
- Maintain confidentiality of all aspects of the relationship
- It is **not** the responsibility of the mentor to make sure the emerging researcher is on task or on time with their research

Emerging researchers' responsibilities

- Coordinate and be responsible for your research project
- Contact your mentor to arrange regular meeting times
- Drive communication with your mentor, i.e., initiate contact, set topics for discussion, request feedback

- Take initiative in raising problems and difficulties with your mentor or a member of the STaRR team

Regular meetings

We highly recommend emerging researchers and mentors are in regular contact, either by phone, email or face-to-face. The frequency of meetings is driven largely by the needs of the emerging researcher moving through the research process. Sometimes contact may be more frequent, such as when the emerging researcher is undertaking a new skill or approaching a milestone (e.g., ethics submission). At other times, less contact may be required.

We envisage that emerging researchers and mentors will meet on approximately a fortnightly basis, for 30-60 minutes each meeting. However, these parameters are flexible and are left to emerging researchers and mentors to negotiate.

3. Additional support and resources

In addition to the training delivered as part of the STaRR program, we offer a number of additional support mechanisms and resources to assist emerging researchers in conducting and translating their research.

Research Translation Coordinators

Three Research Translation Coordinators (RTCs) are embedded within the health services and are available for on the ground support. Amongst other things, our RTCs provide technical support for conducting and translating research, assist with identifying and facilitating opportunities for collaboration and grant funding, and help to develop research capacity and capability across Western Alliance member organisations.

Our RTCs listed below are available to discuss how they can best support your research and translation efforts.

Barwon Health	Michael Field
	MField@cah.vic.gov.au
Colac Area Health	Michael Field
	MField@cah.vic.gov.au
East Grampians Health Service	Ella Ottrey
	ella.ottrey@eghs.net.au

Grampians Health (all sites)	Alesha Sayner Alesha.sayner@gh.org.au
Maryborough District Health Service	Ella Ottrey ella.ottrey@eghs.net.au
Portland District Health	Jessie Adams Jessie.Adams@wdhs.net
South West Healthcare	Jessie Adams Jessie.Adams@wdhs.net
Western District Health Service	Jessie Adams Jessie.Adams@wdhs.net
Western Victoria Primary Health Network	All RTCs Contact starrsupport@deakin.edu.au and we will connect you with the appropriate RTC

Ethics and governance

There are three health service Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs) registered with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) in the western Victorian region. Emerging researchers are encouraged to seek advice from their local research ethics office *prior* to submitting an ethics application.

The officers listed below are available for advice and assistance with research design, research ethics applications and research governance compliance.

Ballarat and East Grampians region Ballarat Health Services & St John of God Hospital Ballarat Human Research Ethics Committee	**Mr John Hand** Manager, Research Ethics and Governance, Ballarat Health Services – Part of Grampians Health Email: researchethics@bhs.org.au Ph: (03) 5320 8661
South West and Western District region South West Healthcare Multidisciplinary Ethics Committee	**Ms Leah Damman** Manager of Research, South West Healthcare

	Email: ethics@swh.net.au Ph: (03) 5563 1633
Barwon and Colac region Barwon Health Human Research Ethics Committee	**Dr Nicola Cooley** Manager, Research Development Unit (RDU), Barwon Health Email: rdu@barwonhealth.org.au Ph: (03) 4215 3389

Biostatistics and health economics support

With Deakin University having significant expertise in this area, we have now established a process for health sector-based researchers to access biostatistics and health economics support. The first step is to contact your local RTC (see above) and arrange a time to discuss your needs. Your RTC will then facilitate contact with the relevant biostatistician or health economist.

STaRR Resources

To help promote researchers' skill development, Western Alliance has recently established 'STaRR Resources' – an online, open access repository of research and translation-focused resources. The repository provides access to high quality and useful resources covering all aspects of research design, activity and translation. We encourage both emerging researchers and mentors to explore the repository for relevant resources.

STaRR Resources is available here: https://www.westernalliance.org.au/starr/starr-resources/

Please note that STaRR Resources is a work in progress with content continually being added over time. We always welcome feedback on STaRR Resources and ideas for new ones.

Funding

Approximately 6 months after the STaRR program, there will be an opportunity to submit an application for a limited number of Western Alliance STaRR Emerging Researcher grants

worth up to $5,000 and STaRRships (translation grants and support) worth up to $15,000. Key criteria for all Western Alliance funded research includes translation focus, relevance to rural/regional Western Victoria, collaboration, and consumer and community involvement. More information about the STaRR Emerging Researcher grant round is made available toward the end of the training program.

4. Overcoming challenges in the mentoring relationship

Here we describe some challenges that you may encounter during the mentoring relationship and suggested strategies for overcoming them.

Emerging researcher feels like they don't know what they are doing
For many clinicians this will be their first time engaging with research. It is completely normal to feel overwhelmed or lost when undertaking a research project for the first time. The mentor is there to provide support, reassurance, and guidance during these times.

Strategies for overcoming this challenge:
- o   Discuss with your mentor what you think your next steps are and write a plan for moving forward
- o   If you feel you have bitten off more than you can chew right now, there is always a way to simplify and scale back. You can chat to your mentor about this

Lack of special skills or expertise
The STaRR program is designed to provide emerging researchers with the foundational research skills needed to develop a translation-focused research project. The mentor will have general research experience and expertise and, in some cases, particular expertise relevant to the emerging researcher's project. However, in some instances, a research project may require special skills or expertise that the emerging researcher/mentor don't have.

Strategies for overcoming this challenge:
- o   Draw on your networks to identify and potentially bring someone with this expertise onto the research team
- o   Chat with your Research Translation Coordinator or STaRR team – we may be able to link you with a senior academic with expertise in that area, as well as biostatistical and health economics related support, as mentioned above

The project is behind schedule

Unfortunately, research often takes longer than we anticipate. We can encounter all sorts of roadblocks and unanticipated circumstances throughout the research process.

Strategies for overcoming this challenge:

- o Plan ahead – spend some time mapping out a project timeline and ask your mentor for feedback
- o For common roadblocks (such as ethics approval) get in touch with key contacts early to pre-empt any issues
- o Divide up the work – identify someone that can join your team and share the load
- o If your project is quite large, you may consider scaling it back or completing it in two separate parts

Emerging researcher struggling to find time for the project

We ask that managers agree to support the emerging researcher's participation in the program. However, a lack of time remains a common struggle for busy clinicians engaging in research.

Strategies for overcoming this challenge:

- o Discuss time management tips with your mentor
- o Divide up the work – identify someone that can join your team and share the load
- o Speak to your manager before you begin and frequently during your project to keep them updated on how things are going and how much time this is taking up

Meeting as scheduled

Both mentors and emerging researchers have commitments and responsibilities which can at times make it difficult to meet as scheduled.

Strategies for overcoming this challenge:

- o Make sure you set clear expectations around meeting times at the beginning of your mentoring relationship. Find a regular day/time that works for both of you and block out the time in your calendar (see Appendix 1 – STaRR mentorship plan)
- o Remember to be courteous and let your emerging researcher/mentor know if you are unable to attend a meeting
- o If things change and you can no longer commit this time, get in touch with the STaRR team

Not the right fit

Sometimes things don't go as you had planned. Either the emerging researcher or the mentor has the right to end the mentoring partnership at any time and do not need to state a reason.

Strategies for overcoming this challenge:

- o You should discuss this with your mentor or emerging researcher in the first instance and decide on mutually agreed changes to your mentoring agreement
- o Notify the STaRR team (contact details below)

5. What happens from here?

It is the emerging researcher's responsibility to establish contact with the mentor and to guide the conversation about how the relationship might be developed in a way that is mutually agreeable to both parties.

6. Contact details

If your situation or needs change during the STaRR program, please notify Olivia or Peter via email.

Dr Olivia King	**Mr Peter Kelly**
Manager, Western Alliance Research Capability Building Program	Program Officer, Western Alliance Research Capability Building Program
Email: starrsupport@deakin.edu.au or o.king@deakin.edu.au	Email: starrsupport@deakin.edu.au or p.kelly@deakin.edu.au

7. More information on mentoring

For more information on mentoring we encourage you to visit STaRR Resources, available at: https://www.westernalliance.org.au/starr/starr-resources/mentoring/

Appendix 1 – STaRR mentorship plan

This mentorship planning template may be a useful tool to establish the parameters of the mentorship with your mentor/emerging researcher. You may decide to make formal agreements about some of the points below and not others.

Discussion point	Agreement
Goal for the mentorship *(e.g., to complete a research protocol, submit ethics application, commence data collection, complete the study)*	
Meeting frequency *(weekly, fortnightly, monthly, ad hoc)*	
Meeting length *(minutes/hours)*	
Preferred meeting medium *(in person, telephone, videoconference, email)*	
Physical location or videoconference platform *(and who will arrange meeting room or videoconference link)*	
Preferred means of contact *(email, telephone)*	
Management of ad hoc requests for support or input	
Other comments *(e.g., areas on which the emerging researcher would particularly like support)*	

Date:

Emerging researcher/s name:

Mentor name: