

HESTIA Plus Application webinar | FAQs

¿Should this ethics approval come from the University of the lead applicant or is there a specific HESTIA ethics review panel?

The ethics approvals will come from the university of the lead applicant. This is outlined in the guidance - "Ethical approval for feasibility studies funded by the HESTIA network and any data sharing agreements between partner organisations that are required will be the responsibility of the relevant named principal investigator and local academic institution(s)."

Since ethical approval should be in place before the start of the project (1st January 2027), we also recommend that should aim for something that is less complicated / minimal risk from an ethics perspective, otherwise the process may take too long.

¿If we want to investigate people's experiences of a potentially beneficial technology, and they are users of this technology, their housing might now be quite good – does that rule them out as public participants?

If someone has had relevant prior experience (such as of poor quality housing), even if they don't have current experience, that could be fine. In practice, this is something that you will need to argue in your application as to why that person is particularly relevant to include as your public member.

We encourage you to also consider questions of affordability, that is for example, how this potentially beneficial technology could be used more widely by lower-income communities.

¿If the co applicant is an organisation, a local authority for example, do we need to provide named co applicant and their CV?

Yes, you will need to provide a CV for each co-applicant. This is outlined in the guidance, "Section 3 requires inclusion of a CV for the principal applicant and each co-applicant. Each CV should be no longer than 1 page."

¿Should the budget include writing up and dissemination (which may happen after 6months)?

As per all UKRI grant terms and conditions, all costs will need to be incurred within the funded project period. Therefore, planned funded writing up and dissemination would need to take place in the project timeline. We therefore encourage you to think of what writing up and dissemination is feasible within the 6-month period of the project (e.g. blog, report, social media posts, presentation at HESTIA event, conference presentation, public event/webinar, policy briefing, etc.).

¿Can the industrial partner be a beneficiary, or should it contribute in kind?

Yes industrial partners can be a beneficiary, but we encourage you to also look at the EPSRC funding guidance that outlines eligible costs: [Costs you can apply for – EPSRC – UKRI](#). It is also beneficial to consider whether an industrial partner needs to be paid in this short project. For example, a private company may be able to provide some expertise without being paid, which is equivalent to £X amount of in-kind contribution, given that they may already be well resourced. Decisions on this front will be outlined in the justification of resources section of the application.

¿Can a public member also be a participant in the project?

Yes, a public member can be a co-applicant in the project – indeed, this is encouraged as per the public involvement assessment criteria. In terms of a public member being a co-applicant and a participant in research, you wouldn't normally have the same person doing both roles in the same project. For example, if a public member is a co-applicant they would normally be involved in helping to manage the project or perhaps to facilitate or help you design some parts of the research project, but they would not normally then complete a survey / be a participant in an interview or a workshop etc.

We therefore, encourage you to keep separate the roles of having a public member as a co-applicant in the project, and being a participant in the research project.

¿What do we do if the PI is going to have a contract until Sep 2027 but currently cannot confirm it - do we have a deadline beyond 17 July to confirm this? And could a Col take over as PI if needed?

Ideally it would be better if the person has a contract confirmed to at least the 30th of September 2027 to be the principal applicant. However, we appreciate that there is a little bit of uncertainty here, and we do not wish to exclude certain applicants if this is unavoidable. Nonetheless, you should be clear in the application (perhaps in the justification of resources section) that there is a co-applicant who could step up to lead the project if the contract of the principal applicant is not confirmed to at least the 30th of September 2027 by the time the panel reaches its decision in late September 2026. We would encourage you to try and avoid this situation if you can.

¿We must pay public members of the project £27.50 minimum BUT what if that affects their benefit claim and is actually detrimental to them? Can we pay them in vouchers? Can we make a case for remuneration that takes into account someone's circumstances? In our proposed project, we will likely have a public member who could lose out from being paid that amount.

We have included a link to the NIHR guidance on public involvement in the full funding guidance ([Payment guidance for researchers and professionals | NIHR](#)) which we encourage you to read in full, but we appreciate that funding public members can be a delicate and complex situation. Public member co-applicant(s) should be paid the minimum NIHR rate of £27.50 per hour unless they are on benefits and this is likely to adversely impact these. In such instances this should be discussed with the person concerned and an agreement reached as to what works best for them – this could include being paid less or them volunteering – and an explanation should be provided in the Justification of Resources section of the application form.

We include some of the most relevant parts of the NIHR guidance below:

- *When people who are in receipt of state benefits are amongst members of the public who are being recruited for involvement you will need to ensure that staff provide appropriate information and support as follows:*
 - *as appropriate, ensure the person has identified the benefits they receive - they are likely to be in receipt of more than one benefit type*
 - *ensure the person is given [relevant guidance](#) which is up-to-date on the relevant benefit conditions that apply to them and on their earning limits and disregards, and on guidance on liaising with Jobcentre Plus – this can be via the Benefits Advice Service*
 - *signpost the person to the [Benefits Advice Service](#)*

- *provide an offer of involvement, describe involvement activity, pay rates, duration of events, frequency of involvement events*
- *explain that the person can ask to be paid less where their benefit limits are below the amount offered, or choose to volunteer instead*
- *allow time for the person to consider their decision*
- *provide the [letter](#) from your organisation that explains why involvement is different to employment and about support for mobility or care needs*
- *allow time for a person to obtain permission for paid involvement or notify paid involvement and take or post the official letter from your organisation to the relevant Department for Work and Pensions or Jobcentre Plus office*

In practice, they can choose to **volunteer or be paid less** because of the way payments may affect benefits. Vouchers can be problematic as they can be treated as earnings unless there is a ruling that the voucher is a gift.

- *High street or gift vouchers may be treated as earnings, and viewed by the benefits authorities in the same way as other forms of payment. These payments need to be declared in the same way as cash, cheques or bank transfers.*
- *In some circumstances HMRC will treat vouchers as a gift and are not subject to National Insurance or tax deductions. In this case the Department for Work and Pensions follows suit and treats the vouchers as a gift that does not affect benefits. An organisation that wishes to be able to provide vouchers for service user involvement that will be treated as gifts should contact their tax office to request a ruling. Low amounts such as a £30 voucher will be more likely to be agreed.*

If in doubt or there is insufficient time to discuss this with the public member before submitting the application, then we would advise you to cost in for £27.50 per hour to be on the safe side and we can always revisit the budget between the offer of award and contract being set-up if things change.

¿Can you make examples of who a member of the public could be? Should they represent a charity?

Public members should not be a representative of a charity (a charity would be a non-academic partner). Instead, they might be someone with a lived-experience of poor quality housing, or someone with a specific condition (or caring for someone in that space, or someone that lives in a certain type of housing, or has a past experience or going through a type of retrofit or using a certain technology. These are just some examples, but the onus is on you to justify in your application why the public member is relevant to your project.

¿I would like to ask about the process you mentioned for applying for the larger funding scheme of £65K while also being willing to switch to the smaller scheme. How would this work in practice? For example, if I apply for the larger scheme with a £65K budget and the budget has already been approved through my university's internal system, how would the application then be switched to the smaller scheme? Would I need to submit two separate budget plans to the university?

There is an optional box on the application to outline what you would consider doing if we were to offer you the smaller amount. If you do not want to be offered a smaller amount, just say no. If you are willing to consider the smaller amount, then please use this box to explain which component(s) of your project you would retain that would roughly fit within this size of budget. Please just submit one budget for the £65k, but it would be helpful for you internally to roughly calculate that what you are suggesting could fit into the £30k. There will be time between us letting you know and contracts being drawn up for you to redo the budget for £30k and for you to get internal approvals. We will work with you in this case, and we accept that this might result in a slight delay to the beginning of the project on your end.

¿"member of the public from a relevant area of the UK or community affected by poor quality housing" - what is meant by relevant here?

This depends on what you are proposing to do. For example, if you are doing a project with a specific community in a city, someone from that city may be relevant. Likewise, if you are working on people with a specific medical condition, it might be someone with a lived experience with that condition. The onus is on you to explain why the public member applicant is particularly relevant for the project you are proposing.