



HESTIA PLUS FUND GUIDELINES



The EPSRC-funded HESTIA Network invites application for plus fund grants to enable healthier indoor home environments for everyone, with a focus on health, technologies, and equity and justice. **We can fund 4 small-scale projects** (e.g., to test the feasibility of an idea, scope the literature, survey views of residents, hold workshops to develop collaborations, etc.). **Projects must start on 1st January 2027 and be completed within 6 months of the award.** Two of these projects can cost up to £30,000 and two can cost up to £65,000 (at 100% full economic cost; HESTIA will fund 80% of this). The intention is that these projects will lead to larger scale funding applications in the future.

HESTIA will fund research projects which focus on at least one of the following priority areas:

1. Existing technologies used in homes (e.g. smart meters, air cleaners), and how they might help towards meeting low carbon / net zero targets and promote human health, considering affordability and those who might be most vulnerable (e.g. older people, those with existing physical/mental health difficulties, and low-income households).
2. The impacts of climate change on housing, and how homes can be ‘future-proofed’ to be resilient to extreme conditions (e.g. extreme heat/cold, air pollution), in a way that is low carbon and promotes human health, and is affordable/cost-effective.
3. Co-producing healthy homes with communities affected by poor quality housing.

Applications must be led by a researcher who attended the HESTIA sandpit, involve at least one non-academic organisation, and meaningfully involve individuals from communities affected by poor quality housing (including recruiting a local public member to the project team).

Applicants must email their completed application form and budget spreadsheet to the HESTIA Network Coordinator, Denise Groves, at: D.S.Groves@leeds.ac.uk with the email header ‘NAME OF PI – HESTIA application’ by 23:59 on 17th July 2026.

Further details of this funding scheme are provided below and all awards will be subject to [UKRI’s FEC grant terms and conditions](#).

Timeline

- 17th July 2026 23:59: Application deadline
- Mid-September 2026: Peer review complete
- End of September 2026: Panel meeting
- Early October 2026: Ratification of awards by Advisory Board
- By end of October 2026: Applicants notified of outcomes
- 1st January 2027: Projects start
- Mid-March 2027: Check-in meeting between each project team and HESTIA lead
- 30th June 2027: Projects end
- 31st July 2027: Final reports and funding expenditure sent to HESTIA
- Autumn 2027: Project presentations at HESTIA network event

Eligibility of applicants

- **There can only be one principal investigator and this must be a researcher who attended the HESTIA sandpit**, is resident within the UK, and whose contract at a [UK-based higher education institution](#) is until at least 30th September 2027. This is to ensure they can provide the final report and funding expenditure spreadsheet within a month of the award ending (allowing for any unforeseen delays in starting or completing the project).
- We strongly encourage applications to be led by early career researchers (ECRs), but this is not mandatory. We define an ECR as those that are immediately post doctorate, and/or transitioning to become an independent researcher. For example, this includes postdoctoral researchers and/or Lecturers/Assistant Professors.
- Co-applicants and other members of the project team do not need to have attended the sandpit.
- All applications must include at least one co-applicant from a non-academic organisation, and at least one co-applicant who is a member of the public from a relevant area of the UK or community affected by poor quality housing.
- You can include as many additional co-applicants as you wish but it is worth bearing in mind that these are small-scale projects with fairly limited budgets and each applicant should have a clearly defined role in the project and be appropriately costed.
- Individuals can be co-applicants on multiple applications. However, researchers can only be principal investigator on ONE application (they can co-applicants on other applications).
- HESTIA investigators are not permitted to be applicants or advisors on proposals. Similarly, HESTIA advisory board members are not permitted to be applicants or advisors on proposals (unless they wish to stand down from the advisory board prior to submitting the application). HESTIA project partners are eligible to be applicants on proposals but no one from these organisations will be permitted to be involved in reviewing the applications.

Remit of the projects

Projects must start on 1st January 2027 and be completed within 6 months of the award.

Therefore, they will need to be small in scale and feasible to complete within this timeframe. They should lay the foundations for a larger funding application, for example by providing pilot data, proof of concept, scoping the literature, or through holding workshops or conducting surveys, focus groups or interviews to develop ideas and/or collaborations. The research question(s) addressed in the projects must fall within one or more of the HESTIA sandpit priority areas:

1. Existing technologies used in homes (e.g. smart meters, air cleaners), and how they might help towards meeting low carbon / net zero targets and promote human health, considering affordability and those who might be most vulnerable (e.g. older people, those with existing physical/mental health difficulties, and low-income households).
2. The impacts of climate change on housing, and how homes can be ‘future-proofed’ to be resilient to extreme conditions (e.g. extreme heat/cold, air pollution), in a way that is low carbon and promotes human health, and is affordable/cost-effective.
3. Co-producing healthy homes with communities affected by poor quality housing.

How to apply

Please complete the application form and budget spreadsheet available to download from the HESTIA website (<https://hestia-network.org/>). Applicants must email their completed application form and budget spreadsheet to the HESTIA Network Coordinator at: D.S.Groves@leeds.ac.uk with the email header '*NAME OF PI – HESTIA application*' **by 23:59 on 17th July 2026**.

Section 1 requests the names and contact details of the applicants along with a brief description of the role each co-applicant will play in the project, as well as the title of the project and its intended duration (maximum is 6 months).

Section 2 is the main research proposal. This comprises the following sections:

- *Lay summary* (max. 200 words) – summarise the project in plain English language that members of the public can understand.
- *Sandpit themes* – please indicate which of the three sandpit themes the project fits with (you must indicate that the project fits with at least one of the themes).
- *Introduction* (max. 300 words) – explain why the project is important and timely, how it is novel (i.e., does not duplicate existing research), and how it fits within one or more of the HESTIA sandpit themes.
- *Aim(s) of the research and research question(s)* (max. 150 words) – outline the main aim(s) the project intends to achieve and the research question(s) it will address.
- *Methodology and/or activities to be undertaken* (max. 400 words) – provide a description of the methods that be utilised / activities that will be undertaken, and details of any analyses that will be conducted.
- *Expected outcomes/outputs* (max. 150 words) – outline the main outcomes or outputs of the project (e.g., pilot data / ideas generated for inclusion in a subsequent grant application, feasibility of approach/product tested, blog, conference presentation, etc.), including how this project would support a larger grant application and which scheme you aim to apply to.
- *How the public / affected communities will be meaningfully involved throughout the project* (max. 200 words) – explain how you will involve members of the public / those from communities affected by poor housing in the different stages of your project. Best practice is to include them from inception to completion of a project. We recommend reading the [UK Standards for Public Involvement](#). We will also provide a webinar / online drop-in session to provide additional guidance on this important aspect of the HESTIA plus fund projects.
- *Responsible Research and Innovation and ethical considerations* (max. 250 words) – outline how you will undertake responsible approaches to data gathering, sharing, storage, and access, embed [environmental sustainability](#) and [equality, diversity and inclusion](#) in your project, along with any ethical considerations relevant to your proposal and how you will address them. Note, if ethical committee approval is required it must be in place before 1st January 2027 when the project is due to start.
- *Timeline of activity* (max. 150 words) – explain what you will do in each month of the award.
- *Justification of costs* (max. 200 words) - provide a brief summary and justification of all the costs requested in the budget spreadsheet including the amount of time each applicant will spend on the project.

- *Optional section* (max. 150 words) - if your proposal is for the larger award (up to £65,000) and you would consider accepting the smaller award (up to £30,000) then please explain which components of your project you would retain within this smaller budget. If we offer you the lower amount, then we will liaise with you at that point to create a revised budget. If you would not like to be considered for this smaller award, then please write *Not applicable* in this section. If your proposal is for the smaller award (up to £30,000) then leave this section blank.

Section 3 requires inclusion of a CV for the principal applicant and each co-applicant. Each CV should be no longer than 1 page. The CVs should be pasted at the end of the application document. CVs must NOT be sent as separate files.

Budget spreadsheet – please complete the template and submit it alongside your completed application form. You should enter the costs at 100% full economic cost (FEC) and the spreadsheet will calculate the 80% cost that HESTIA will fund. Note, the start date must be 1st January 2027 and the maximum duration of the project is 6 months. The maximum funding available is £65,000 at 100% FEC (HESTIA will fund 80%). Note though that we aim to fund 2 awards up to £65,000 and 2 awards up to £30,000 (at 100% FEC). We anticipate that the smaller awards may be less popular so the success rate for these might be higher than for the larger awards.

All proposals should be costed on the basis of FEC. If a grant is awarded, HESTIA will provide funding at 80% of the FEC. The lead organisation must agree to find the balance of FEC for the project from other resources. Universities and other higher education organisations use the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) methodology to calculate full economic costs.

What costs can be included

Full details of the costs that can be included in proposals are provided on the EPSRC website: <https://www.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-applicants/costs-you-can-apply-for/> and are summarised briefly below:

Directly incurred costs

Costs that are explicitly identifiable as arising from the conduct of a project, are charged as the cash value actually spent, and are supported by an auditable record. These include:

- staff salaries (e.g., research assistants, research associates, technicians, administrators)
- travel and subsistence (for meetings, workshops, conferences etc)
- other costs, for example (but not limited to):
 - consumables
 - equipment under £10,000 (including VAT)
 - consultancy fees – note public member applicants / advisors must be paid as a minimum the NIHR INVOLVE rate of £27.50 per hour (see [here](#) for further details)
 - participant payments
 - venue hire
 - data preservation and data sharing
 - dissemination costs
 - recruitment costs
 - software licenses

Directly allocated costs

The costs of resources used by a project that are shared by other activities. They are charged to projects on the basis of estimates rather than actual costs and do not represent actual costs on a project-by-project basis. These include:

- investigator salaries (where you are buying out a percentage of an individual's time who is on an open-ended or permanent contract)
- estates (may include building and premises costs, basic services and utilities, and any clerical staff and equipment maintenance or operational costs that have not been included under other cost headings; they will be calculated by a research organisation and a single figure will be required at time of application)
- other directly allocated costs (e.g., charge out costs for major facilities or for use of existing equipment)

Indirect costs

These should include the costs of administration, such as personnel, finance, library and some departmental services. Like estates costs, Indirect costs will be calculated by research organisations and a single figure will be required at the time of application.

Exceptions

Directly incurred costs that are funded at 100% of full economic costing (FEC), subject to actual expenditure incurred, or items that are outside FEC. There are unlikely to be any for these projects.

Note, any proposals requesting items that would ordinarily be found in a department, for example non-specialist computers, should include justification both for why they are required for the project and why they cannot be provided from the research organisation's own resources (including funding from indirect costs from grants). Given the short length of these projects, it is very unlikely that computer hardware costs will be met.

How we will assess your application

Following eligibility checks, each proposal will be independently reviewed by five individuals: two HESTIA investigators, two non-academics (e.g., project partners not involved in a proposal), and at least one public member.

Reviewers will not be permitted to review applications where they may be potentially conflicted (e.g., where an applicant is from the same institution or organisation as them, where they have a personal connection to an applicant, or any potential financial or other vested interest in the application being funded).

The confidentiality of all applications and deliberations will be rigorously maintained to protect intellectual property and the applicants' privacy.

Reviewers will rate each application by providing (i) an overall scientific score of 1-6 and (ii) a score for the level of meaningful involvement of the public / affected communities within the project (1-6).

Note, that applications will need to have an average score of 4 or above on public involvement to be taken through to the panel to be considered for HESTIA funding. Those with an average score of less than 4 for public involvement will not be considered at the panel regardless of the average overall scientific score. The criteria used for each type of score are outlined below.

Overall scientific score	Definition
6 (Exceptional)	The proposal is exceptional in terms of its potential scientific merit. The project is extremely timely, novel, and answers an urgent and important research question within at least one of the sandpit themes. It is very likely to lead to a larger funding application. It employs high quality methodology, is clearly feasible to conduct within the proposed timeframe, and provides exceptional value for money. There is an extremely strong cross-disciplinary and cross-sector project team.
5 (Excellent)	The proposal is excellent in terms of its potential scientific merit. The project is very timely, novel, and answers an important research question within at least one of the sandpit themes. It is likely to lead to a larger funding application. It employs high quality methodology, seems feasible to conduct within the proposed timeframe, and provides excellent value for money. There is a strong cross-disciplinary and cross-sector project team.
4 (Very good)	The proposal is very good and has considerable potential scientific merit. The project is timely and answers an important research question within one of the sandpit themes. It has the potential to lead to a larger funding application. It employs good quality methodology, seems feasible to conduct within the proposed timeframe, and provides reasonable value for money. There is an appropriate cross-disciplinary and/or cross-sector project team.
3 (Good)	The proposal has good potential scientific merit but is not of consistently high quality. The research question is important but may not be urgent or novel and may not fully align with the sandpit themes. There may be some concerns about the appropriateness of the methods employed. It may have limited potential to lead to a larger funding application. There may also be uncertainty about the feasibility of conducting the project within the proposed timeframe and/or its value for money. There may be limited cross-disciplinary and/or cross-sector expertise in the project team.
2 (Weak)	The proposal will add to understanding but is of lesser quality or urgency than more highly rated proposals. The research question has little alignment with the sandpit themes. There are likely to be concerns about the methods employed, feasibility and value for money. The proposal is unlikely to lead to a larger funding application. The project team may also lack relevant cross-disciplinary/cross-sector expertise.
1 (Poor)	The proposal is flawed in its scientific approach, or is repetitious of other work, or otherwise judged not worth pursuing; or even though it possibly has sound objectives, it appears seriously defective in its methodology. The research question does not fall within the sandpit themes. The project is not feasible within the timeframe and does not provide value for money. Or insufficient information was provided so it is not possible to make a higher rating.

Score for public involvement	Definition
6* (Exceptional)	At least one member of the public will help lead the project and be involved in every stage of the research – from designing the proposal, through to delivering the activities, analysing/interpreting the findings, and disseminating the results. There is exceptional support planned for the public member(s) and extensive adjustments made to ensure they can be fully involved. The public member(s) have extremely relevant lived experience. Payment to public member(s) is above minimum expected rates, fully covers their involvement, and will be made via the easiest possible method. The public member(s) will play a key role in the larger funding application planned for after this project.
5* (Excellent)	The project will involve at least one member of the public in every stage of the research. There is excellent support planned for the public member(s) and adjustments have been made to ensure they can be fully involved. The public member(s) have extremely relevant lived

	experience. Payment to public member(s) may be above minimum expected rates, fully covers their involvement, and will be made via the easiest possible method. The public member(s) will play a role in the larger funding application planned for after this project.
4* (Very good)	The public member(s) is involved in at least two stages of the research. There is very good support planned for the public member(s) and adjustments have been made to ensure they can be involved. The public member(s) have very relevant lived experience. Sufficient costs are included for public member involvement and made via the easiest possible method. The public member(s) may be involved in the larger funding application planned for after this project.
3 (Good)	The public member is only involved in one stage of the research (e.g., dissemination). There is good support planned for the public member(s) and some adjustments have been made to ensure they can be involved. The public member(s) have some relevant lived experience. Sufficient costs are included for public member involvement but the method of paying these has not been considered or is unnecessarily complicated.
2 (Weak)	The public member only has a consultation role and is not direct involved in the research. There is minimal support planned for the public member(s) and no adjustments have been made for them. There are insufficient costs included for public consultation/involvement.
1 (Poor)	No involvement or consultation of the public at all. Or the public involvement proposed could be potentially harmful.

* Note that a proposal would need to score an average of 4 or above to be taken through to the HESTIA funding panel.

Reviewers' scientific scores and their public involvement scores will be separately averaged. Any proposal with an average public involvement score of less than 4 will be deemed not to have met the appropriate standard and will be disregarded. The average scientific and public involvement scores for the remaining proposals will be summed and this combined score used to create a ranked list of proposals. The top-ranking proposals (~5 for larger awards and ~5 for smaller awards) will be taken through to the panel (comprising all reviewers, chaired by Prof Helen Fisher and Prof Suzanne Bartington) in late September to discuss and re-score. Potentially conflicted reviewers will be asked to leave the (virtual) room during panel discussions involving the application they are conflicted with and will not be permitted to score them.

Final scores will be a weighted average of the peer review (60%) and panel (40%) stages. The top two ranked projects for the larger awards and the top two ranked projects for the smaller awards will be recommended for award and ratified by the HESTIA Advisory Board in October 2026. In the result of a tie, the panel will decide based on closeness of fit to the themes of the sandpit or give smaller amounts to multiple projects.

Outcomes of applications and set-up of awarded projects

All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application by end of October 2026. The University of Leeds pre-award team will oversee set-up of contracts and distribution of funds for those who are successful. Feedback will be provided to unsuccessful applicants in a constructive and transparent manner, ensuring continuous improvement and engagement with the community.

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). Note, **if ethical committee approval is required it must be in place before 1st January 2027 when the project is due to start** and we will require the principal investigators of awarded projects to provide us with confirmation of their

ethical approval (where this is applicable) before any funds are released. Given the short turnaround for starting these projects and the length of time it can take to secure ethical approval, applicants wishing to use data from human participants are strongly advised to capitalise upon already collected data or add an amendment to an existing study's ethical approval to ensure their proposal is feasible.

All public facing documents, including material for potential and recruited participants, should be prepared in collaboration with public members. All funded studies involving human participants must consider all possible negative consequences and/or potential harms and include appropriate withdrawal procedures and robust support plans for all participants.

After award

We will check in with each funded project team about half-way through the project to help catch any problems early, discuss progress with activities and budget expenditure, and monitor involvement of the public member(s). Progress will also be tracked and shared through presentations at network events and via HESTIA website/social media (blogs, infographics, newsletters).

Funded projects will be contractually required to provide a written report within 1 month of finishing, covering what was achieved, who was involved, progress towards the target future grant call, other impacts, and financial expenditure. Projects will also need to provide updates for ResearchFish, or other EPSRC reporting requirements during and after the award.

We will be holding webinars/online drop-in sessions to support you with completing your application during June and in early July. If you have any questions, then please email the HESTIA Network Coordinator, Denise Groves, at: D.S.Groves@leeds.ac.uk