

Guidance for writing public involvement sections of grant applications

Background:

When you are applying for a research grant, the funding and ethics committee will look at how you have involved members of the public in developing your proposal and how you intend to involve them in your research study.

In this guidance we offer a suggested outline on how to structure your public involvement sections of grant applications and provide suggestions and examples of what you might include in this section.

This guidance primarily focuses on applications for National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) funding. Therefore, please ensure you read the associated guidance document for your specific funding call to ensure you are meeting all the requirements relating to your funder's public involvement (which may also be called "public engagement" (e.g. Wellcome Trust)).

For NIHR applications it is expected that at Stage 1 you will evidence your plans for involving the public¹ at as many stages of the research project life cycle as possible for your project. For an NIHR Stage 2 application, you will be asked to expand upon these plans, including how the public involvement will be managed, reported, and evaluated; whilst it is not necessary to provide this detail at Stage 1, early consideration should be given to these aspects.

1. Describe what you have done already

In this section you should include details of how you have consulted or worked with public contributors about your project so far². This should include who you have involved (names are not required but their general description and number e.g., 4 patients, 2 carers), how you found them (e.g., your own patients, patient support groups, VOICE, People in Research etc.) and what you did (e.g., had one-to-one conversations, held a workshop, discussion group etc.). Activities might include members of the public:

- Identifying the research area as a priority and/or sense checking ideas
- Helping you to design the research project and reviewing the protocol including outcome measures, exclusion and inclusion criteria, selecting appropriate PROMs, reviewing the study schedule and proposed tests to be undertaken
- Reviewing and contributing to the Plain English Summary and PPIE section of your funding application including the PPIE costs
- Ensuring that the recruitment process is practical and feasible

You should also include one or two sentences on how public involvement has impacted your research so far, particularly where public involvement feedback has led to changes in the

¹ When we refer to 'the public' this includes patients, potential patients, carers and people who use health and social care services as well as people from organisations that represent people who use these services.

² The RDS London offers funding up to £350 to undertake public involvement pre-funding. You must apply for this well in advance of the funding deadline and further details can be found [here](#).

application. Be explicit here and explain what changed e.g., removal of some test measures because of patients expressing these were too onerous and would affect participation and retention

If you haven't consulted with public contributors before the grant submission, it is important to outline why this is the case.

For ideas on how to involve members of the public at this stage you can visit the [Patient Experience Research Centre \(PERC\) Rough Guide to Public Involvement](#) and also see what others have done through the [PERC Blog](#).

2. Planned public collaboration during the study:

At the start of this section, you should explain what you want to achieve through involving the public in your study. You should think about what outcomes you might want to achieve from their involvement within your project, this may include, but is not limited to:

- Optimising how you approach our study population by revising the information you provide about the study, the processes of consent, data collection tools and interview guides
- Ensuring you measure outcomes of relevance to patients (and have included these in the protocol)
- Including one or two public contributors in the governance of the study e.g., on the study steering committee
- Providing interpretations of findings beyond a researcher perspective, based on their lived experience
- Supporting effective dissemination of results to appropriate groups in appropriate formats to them

You should also outline how you plan to involve public contributors throughout the project and how these planned activities will meet your aims above. You should be as specific as you can including who you are planning to involve (numbers and the nature of their lived experience), where you will find them, and what you plan to do and why. Activities may include:

- Providing critical feedback on research questions, protocol, and lay summary; AND/OR
- Attending ethics committee meetings; AND/OR
- Assisting the team in identifying and developing themes from data; AND/OR
- Advising on and helping to develop and implement dissemination plans/materials, including identifying wider dissemination groups; AND/OR
- Contributing to reports, papers, and the interpretation of research findings; including the development of conclusions of direct relevance and impact to patients and the public and on recommendations for going forward

You may also want to consider a public co-applicant for your research project. This individual should have the same level of responsibility as other co-applicants and should be considered an equal member of the team. Public co-applicants should be identified early, be involved in the development of the research idea and grant application, and should have appropriate skills and experience to take on such a role and be paid appropriately for their time.

Please note, that a public co-applicant may not be suitable for every research project and is not a mandatory requirement. To learn more, go to the [NIHR public co-applicant guidance](#)

For ideas on how to involve members of the public throughout your research project you can visit the [PERC Rough Guide to Public Involvement](#) and also see what others have done through the [PERC Blog](#).

Public involvement management and support:

In this section you should clearly outline how you will support those involved throughout your study, and any infrastructure you have in place to achieve this. This may include:

- Public contributors being provided with a key contact throughout the project who will lead the public involvement activity ([See Appendix 1](#) for further details on the role of the PPI Lead). This individual will have the appropriate skills and experience in public involvement and engagement including strong interpersonal and communication skills.
- Public involvement support and advice being provided by the PERC a core facility of the NIHR Imperial Biomedical Research Centre.
- Public contributors being offered appropriate induction and training PERC had created an online public involvement in research training course which can be undertaken by public contributors as well as researchers (<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/patient-experience-research-centre/ppi/ppi-training/>). Those involved will also need continued support throughout the project by being provided with a point of contact, additional opportunities for training and development, as well as opportunities to attend events and activities relevant to the project. Include in this section any other training/development opportunities for them relevant to your research area and/or public involvement activity.
- Reimbursing public contributors for any relevant expenses and will be paid an hourly fee in recognition of their time and contribution throughout the project (approx. £25 per hour + £5 Wi-Fi/remote working fee), in accordance with [NIHR Centre for Dissemination and Engagement guidance](#). NIHR funding panels will expect to see a realistic budget for public involvement in your study and for further information and support you can refer to their [budgeting guide](#).

Evaluation of public involvement

UK funders, including NIHR are increasingly requiring researchers to provide details of their proposed plans for capturing the impact of, and evaluating public involvement. Evaluation of public involvement is critical to understanding the impact your public involvement has on your research and the people (public and researchers) involved (positive and negative) and reflecting on whether the initial aims of your public involvement have been met. A number of tools have been developed to support the capturing of public involvement impacts and reflecting on these.

Resources available include:

- Assessing public involvement against the [UK Standards for Public Involvement](#) which are a quality benchmark by using the PERC National PPI Standards Self-Assessment Tool [can be provided on request from PERC]
- Using the PERC two-part planning and impact tool to help plan, and monitor, meaningful public involvement throughout the project. [can be provided on request from PERC]

Note: While both tools may seem similar, however the self-assessment tool is to ensure high quality and positive public involvement. The PERC planning and impact tool is designed to plan the project, the public involvement aims and activities and evaluate these at the end of the project having captured impacts along the way using a public involvement log - they work together to ensure all aspects are covered.

- A [public involvement impact log](#) captures impacts from feedback during public involvement activities throughout your project
- We also recommend inviting public contributors to reflect on their experiences of involvement and be supported to contribute to papers, news items and blogs to share these.

Appendix 1 – The Role of the ‘PPI Lead’

NIHR funding applications will now require you to have a named person to lead, manage and evaluate your public involvement activity across your project (a PPI Lead). This should be a member of the research team and be fully costed and resourced to undertake this role with skills and expertise in this area. Having a key person to coordinate public involvement is best practice and ensures public contributors will be supported throughout the project. PERC is not able to act as PPI Lead on individual projects however we can provide advice and support to PPI Leads.

- **Named** – this can be a member of the research team already listed on the application or a standalone role. They do not need to have already been appointed but they do need to be aware that they will be the PPI Lead.
- **Skills and Experience** – The member of staff does not need to be a PPI practitioner such as a PPI Lead or PPI Officer from an NIHR organisation. Most of the skills and experiences required to undertake this role are transferrable from related fields that researchers are also involved in. This can include working with patients in a clinical setting, building relationships with charities and community groups or working on engagement strategies. The most important skills are the ability to identify, build and support relationships between the public and researchers.
- **Costed and Resourced** – The PPI Lead needs to be (FTE) resourced appropriately. Undertaking meaningful public involvement can take time; both to organise/administrate events and activities and to build and maintain relationships with the public including actively involving underrepresented groups and communities. The cost to fund the PPI Lead is in addition to the budget assigned to pay for public involvement costs.
- **Management** – The PPI Lead needs to have a good understanding of the project and be embedded within the research team to be able to lead and rollout the public involvement plan.

More information and examples of the activities a public involvement lead might undertake can be found in our guidance on the [NIHR website](#).