

How to estimate the cost of public involvement

December 2021

A longer version of this document is available [here](#)



Purpose of this paper

This Guide helps people to estimate the full costs for Patient and Public Involvement activities. The exact sums will change over time, local costs may vary, funders may offer smaller sums than suggested here and some of the items will be unnecessary in a particular bid or project. While general advice is available elsewhere, figures are sometimes missing or buried in detailed advice about each item, so this price list focuses upon the actual sums involved. Such considerations, whether that is compliance with tax rules or the need to achieve value for money, are, of course, important, but this guide simply lists prices to help those who wish to consider the potential costs of involvement in their work.

Introduction

Funding agencies such as the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) expect researchers they support to assign a portion of their budget for the purpose of engaging with Public Contributors. In addition, some research organisations allocate centrally managed resources and employ a specialist facilitator for public involvement to provide free advice and support to individual research studies. This Guide attempts to put a price on all the items that might be necessary to achieve effective public involvement.

The figures that appear in the price list below are drawn from research into health and social care, as this is the field where the contributions of Public Contributors have most often been assigned a monetary value. There is no reason why they should not be used to acknowledge contribution in other areas where historically patients and the public have contributed as unpaid volunteers.

The sums listed here have been drawn from NIHR published guidance and successful funding applications. They have been collected over several years, but there is no evidence that rates have increased over time, so it would not be wise to assume that the largest figure in a range is the most recent or most often used. The long version of this Guide contains a full list of sources for each figure. NIHR recommends full cost inclusion in funding bids, so it is unwise to reduce the forecast in the hope that some members of the public will choose not to submit a claim or that other resources, such as room hire, will be available for free.

Payments and other benefits offered to Public Contributors must be legal and non-coercive. They should not leave the person worse off, harm their relationship with the benefits agency, discourage them from obtaining paid work, or inadvertently establish a contract of employment by defining productivity expectations in exchange for rights to remuneration. This paper is confined to setting the budget figure itself and advice should be sought regarding these wider issues.

Where possible, the research team make payments directly and supply train tickets or book hotel rooms on behalf of the Public Contributor, helping with cash-flow challenges that might otherwise arise if the Public Contributor had to pay out of their own pocket and then wait for reimbursement. This is part of the administrative support needed to support Public Contributors.

This Guide has built on figures offered by the NIHR Centre for Engagement and Dissemination as well as the Cost Calculator previously published by NIHR INVOLVE, and



notes that NIHR stops short of recommending that others adopt the rates they set for their own activities, advising instead that local circumstances should influence local decisions.

Readers will have their own response to these figures, perhaps deciding that some are low, and others are high, but such reactions were set aside in the creation of this Guide, so that the figures recorded here are simply those that have been cited in guidance or funded in other studies.

Furthermore, the complexity of the task to be carried out by Public Contributors has generally not been defined, so readers need to treat these figures as no more than a general reference point for their own decision-making process.

Description	Unit cost
Payments for research participants¹	
Payments or vouchers for research participation	£10 - £25 per hour plus expenses
Participant diary, journal, or workbook	£20
Prize for lottery	£50 - £100
Payments for acquiring skills, access, and permission to be involved	
Funding for time spent in attending training	£50 - £150
Conference or training registration fee	£200 - £400
Books and equipment (tablet, laptop, internet access, audio recorder or other equipment)	Varies
Check with the Disclosure and Barring Service	£23 - £44
Expenses incurred by Public Contributors	
International travel costs	Varies
Domestic travel costs	45p per mile plus parking or ticket prices
Subsistence	£5 - £10 per meal
Childcare	£5 - £6 per hour
Carer or personal assistant costs	£8.72 to £40 per hour
Overnight accommodation	£85 - £115 per night
Home and mobile office costs	£5 per meeting
Engaging and hosting Public Contributors	
Advertising in the local newspaper to find people	£200
Accessible meeting room hire	£60 - £100 for half a day
Lunch	£7.50
Tea or coffee	£2.50
Fee or donation to an organised 'experts by experience' group or patients organisation	£300 - £2000
Making meetings inclusive	
Language translation and interpretation	£600 per day

Description	Unit cost
PA system and microphones to support participants with hearing loss	£160
Speech to text reporter	£500 per day
Mobility scooter	£80 per day
Specific roles for Public Contributors	
Conducting an interview to collect research data	£25 per hour
Reading, evaluating, and commenting on a document (papers relating to the task of preparing for meetings are counted within the meeting rates)	50p - £1 per page
Writing or co-authoring a document	£100
Named member of a formal group	£100 - £150 per day
Chair or co-chair	£225 per day
Public Co-Applicant for research bid	£400 per day
Staff recruitment and selection panel	£150 per day
Delivering a presentation	£45 - £150
Involvement staffing and other items	
Public Involvement Coordinator	£18.80 per hour
Independent facilitator	£400 - £1000 per day
Transcription, printing, and postal costs	Varies
Administrative support	Varies
Contingency (such as taxi costs, additional staff recruitment due to high turnover, or other unanticipated expenses)	Varies
On-costs (employer's national insurance, employer's pension contributions and perhaps a margin to cover corporate overheads)	25 - 40%

References

¹We use the term 'public contributor' where others may say patient, carer, service user or member of the public.

² A broader version of this price list might be envisaged that drew figures from other activities, such as research participation, consultancy and open employment – see Bates P (2021) [How to set payment levels for research participants](#) and Bates P (2018, revised 2021) [Experience Pays: How to make money from your lived experience](#).

³ See https://peterbates.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/how_to_estimate_the_costs_of_public_involvement.pdf

⁴ See [Payment guidance for researchers and professionals \(nihr.ac.uk\)](#)

⁵ See [Payment guidance for members of the public considering involvement in research \(nihr.ac.uk\)](#).

⁶ <http://www.invo.org.uk/resource-centre/involvement-cost-calculator/>

⁷ 'The rate of payment that you make is at your discretion... There are no nationally recommended rates... and the amounts that public contributors are paid for involvement varies widely...' Centre for Engagement and Dissemination, NIHR – see [Payment guidance for researchers and professionals \(nihr.ac.uk\)](#).

⁸ Payments for research participation are not part of public involvement but are listed here to emphasise the distinction.

