



# *National Institute for Health Research*



## **The National Institute for Health Research Central Commissioning Facility**

### **getting going as a lay reviewer**

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## Getting going as a lay reviewer

Lay reviewers play an influential role in the funding of health and social care research projects for the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). Patient and public involvement is fundamental to all stages of NIHR research.

*We value your input to the work of the NIHR Central Commissioning Facility (NIHR CCF). This leaflet explains how our lay review process works.*

## Registration

When you initially contact us by email or phone we ask you to register your details on our website at [www.nihr-ccf.org.uk](http://www.nihr-ccf.org.uk). Your record contains your name, address and postcode; email and preferred telephone contact; preferred route to receive documentation from NIHR CCF (online, email or as hard copy); area(s) of interest for review. A secure registration is then created for you to use the NIHR CCF extranet. The information is held in confidence under Data Protection regulations. You can ask for it to be updated, amended or deleted as a record at any time.

## Competition alerts

When a competition comes into the review stage for either *Research for Patient Benefit* or *Programme Grants for Applied Research*, we alert patient involvement organisations. We issue adverts on the INVOLVE website ([www.invo.org.uk](http://www.invo.org.uk)) and the People in Research website ([www.peopleinresearch.org](http://www.peopleinresearch.org)). We also use our own PPI registration system to alert our registered lay contacts and to send invitations to join in a competition's lay review.

## Invitation to review

When you are registered, we can send an invitation to review by email when the next suitable match arises. This is based on our record of your area(s) of interest. The email will list the titles of up to two or three relevant research applications, together with the lay summary to help you decide which you prefer. There is never any obligation to review; and the request and reply are in confidence. On receipt of an invitation email, simply let us know if you are willing to take part this time round and, if so, for which application.



## Receiving your review materials

When you accept an invitation to review, we will contact you directly with the application, review form, expenses form and guidance on how to complete the review online.

## Remuneration

We are able to provide remuneration for time and effort, claimed through the expenses form, in line with the recommendations of INVOLVE. The Citizens Advice service has liaised with INVOLVE to provide information for people who volunteer for work in healthcare and are receiving benefits. An INVOLVE document on benefits and volunteering can be found at:

**[www.invo.org.uk](http://www.invo.org.uk)**.

## Receiving the research application and review form

You can choose how to receive the research application and review form (we use the same form for both lay and peer review) by one of these routes: via the NIHR CCF extranet and viewing online (using your secure registration); by email; or as hard copy in the post.

## Submitting your review

You will receive information about how to send back the review form to NIHR CCF when the review is completed. Most people use the online system; however we can accommodate all requirements. No one except you and the programme concerned can access it.

## Lay guidance

You can request the latest guidance for lay reviewers in use by our programmes by post, by email or you can download it from the NIHR CCF website on our PPI Resources page. The guidance is revised regularly and we welcome feedback from you to ensure we are meeting your needs.

## Confidentiality

The applications and reviews are confidential. If you do decide to review for us, and you receive, download or print any hard copy to work from, please either shred the documents when the task is completed or send them back to us and we will reimburse postal expenses through the expenses form.

*Your assigned task of reading through an application for one of our programmes and submitting your review form is very important to us.*

***We look forward to working with you***



# What do we need from a lay review?

In becoming a lay reviewer, you are commenting on the acceptability of the proposed research to patients and the public as well as on its overall importance and relevance. Your comments from the review form are submitted anonymously to the relevant funding panel or committee to assist members (including lay members) in the NIHR commissioning process.

## What to focus on?

### **Patient and public involvement**

One of the important criteria for assessing research proposals is the way the research team has involved – and plans to involve – patients and/or the public. It is helpful when lay reviewers comment on whether the form of involvement is appropriate given the research question. Those lay reviewers who are active service users in the field of the study can point to weaknesses – an unrealistic element in the design, for example, that could have been avoided by consultation with a named national service user organisation or with a local group in the area. Lay reviewers often comment if there is a lack of provision for payment of service users who are advising or helping to conduct elements of the study.

### **Backing up your views**

Please do not be tempted into one word answers – yes, no or possibly. Scientific as well as lay reviewers sometimes do this. Funding panels and committees will usually have to discount them altogether. The same can be true of a single sentence to sum up. The sentence, 'This is excellent, it is a model of how it should be done' would need to continue with 'because'. Without it, an unsupported assertion might still be discounted, despite the time you have invested, so please include a concise explanation to support your view.

### **Relevance to the programme**

Lay reviewers can certainly have an impact here. The most persuasive lay comments are those that explain why the project is important – often adding more context about the patient group being studied and the potential it has to improve the lives of a specific group with which they were already familiar. Knowledge from lay experience could thus endorse and strengthen an applicant's case.

## Feasibility and quality of the research design

Although the first reaction of many lay reviewers is that they couldn't possibly comment, observations about the appropriateness of the design and whether it would work could in fact be made. Consider the following questions. Would recruitment to a study work? Has the plan for the intervention taken account of patients' lives? Would treatment of the control group be alienating? If poor outcomes worsened the lives of those taking part, what steps would be taken to address this? If you feel that the methodology is not going to work because the researchers do not understand enough about the respondents, this is an important design fault - so do comment in the appropriate section.

## Adequacy of the project plan

Lay reviewers are often hesitant on grounds of technical issues. It is helpful, however, to have comments perhaps deliberately to draw the attention of the subject experts as to what might be unrealistic scheduling, or a lack of clarity on who is doing what in a team.

## Impact

There is a role here for lay people in spotting, for example, that there are no plans to inform a service user group or to provide feedback to the patients who have actually been involved in the study. This can be a useful counterbalance for the scientific reviewers who tend to focus on the design of the study and its methods and give much less attention to the way the findings will be conveyed to whom and with what result – key questions if research is to have any effect on daily practice and patient experience.

## Value for money

It is useful to have lay views to set alongside those of people working in the service or researchers working in a single field of practice. Although lay reviewers may not necessarily be in a position to comment on the detail, they could take a view on implications for the NHS, such as whether the suggested intervention has the potential to improve outcomes for the patient as well as to make a real cost-saving.

## Style and tone

Good points can be missed because an apologetic-sounding comment can detract from its seriousness and importance. So, be clear and confident. Say the design could be improved by xxx or, without xxx, the danger is yyy. Point out if xxx is well-argued, clearly thought through / particularly appropriate and why. It is also not necessary to apologise for a lack of knowledge. So, instead of saying I don't know about / have no expertise in xxx, say from a lay point of view or as someone with experience of a related disease, I would question xxx or I would strongly support xxx.

# How does the review process work?

Registration with NIHR CCF as a lay reviewer

Identified for review (search is by region and interests)

Invited to review (by email)

Reviewer accepts

Reviewer is sent application and review form

Reviewer completes review (submits by email or uploads form to website)

Expenses form (hard copy) returned (by post) and reviewer reimbursed

Review (anonymised) included in committee papers / panel papers

Committee / panel discuss and recommend applications to accept or reject

Recommendations ratified by the programme director and the Department of Health

Applicants notified and feedback sent

Commissioned projects posted on the NIHR CCF website when contracts are signed



## Patient and public awareness

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) is delivering the government's health research and development strategy *Best Research for Best Health* by building a vibrant and world-class research environment in England. The NIHR has put structures in place that will help people take part in all stages of NHS research. One example is through its funding of INVOLVE, which promotes active public participation in NHS, public health and social care research to improve the way that research is prioritised, commissioned, undertaken, communicated and used.

## Further information

NIHR Patient & Public Awareness • [www.nihr.ac.uk/awareness/](http://www.nihr.ac.uk/awareness/)  
INVOLVE • [www.invo.org.uk](http://www.invo.org.uk) • Tel: 02380 651088 • Email [admin@invo.org.uk](mailto:admin@invo.org.uk)

Visit the NIHR website at [www.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.nihr.ac.uk)



## Patient and public involvement at the NIHR Central Commissioning Facility

We manage the following NIHR programmes: *Programme Grants for Applied Research*; *Research for Patient Benefit*; *Invention for Innovation (i4i)*; and *Research for Innovation, Speculation and Creativity (RISC)*. We always welcome new lay reviewers. We work closely with INVOLVE and other partners including the UK Clinical Research Collaboration, who developed the People in Research website ([www.peopleinresearch.org](http://www.peopleinresearch.org)).

Contact the Patient and Public Involvement team at:  
The NIHR Central Commissioning Facility • PO Box 407 • Teddington • TW11 0XX  
Tel: 020 8943 7476 • Email: [info1@nihr-ccf.org.uk](mailto:info1@nihr-ccf.org.uk)  
Web: [www.nihr-ccf.org.uk/site/consumerinvolvement](http://www.nihr-ccf.org.uk/site/consumerinvolvement)

*The NIHR Central Commissioning Facility (NIHR CCF) is based in the Life & Food Sciences Division at science-based company LGC in Teddington, Middlesex.*

Visit the NIHR CCF website at [www.nihr-ccf.org.uk](http://www.nihr-ccf.org.uk)