

Learnings from research funding organisations' experiences with participatory pilots

The research funding organisations (RFOs) of PRO-Ethics are implementing ten pilots to explore participatory approaches in RFO activities. While adding value by obtaining relevant inputs from citizens and stakeholders not normally included in such processes, these pilots also enhance the RFOs' competence with participation processes and inform future activities. In this policy brief, we share important learnings from our pilot experiences that can benefit all research and innovation funding agencies with a wish to apply participatory methods.

PRO-Ethics is working with research and innovation funding organisations across Europe to test new, ethical ways to involve citizens and other non-traditional stakeholders in innovation processes. Public participation can give researchers and innovators a better understanding of diverse social and societal needs in the development of new solutions. However, we also need to consider „the ethics of participation“: who to engage how and when within a process, to achieve good, unbiased results while protecting participants. The core output of PRO-Ethics will be a comprehensive Ethics Framework and Guidelines for more relevant, fair, and effective research and innovation activities across the European Research Area.

In total, ten participatory pilots are implemented in two phases by PRO-Ethics' RFO partners. The current *pilot phase 2* includes six pilot cases that build on the learnings of the project so far and act as sites to implement, test and reflect on the first version of the Ethics Framework¹. Our aim is to learn how to tackle ethical issues that arise when non-traditional stakeholders participate in RFO activities? As such, the pilots will be instrumental in developing the final version of the Ethics Framework (by 2023), but these experiences are also useful to other agencies that aim to implement novel participation processes.

¹ Available at: https://pro-ethics.eu/sites/site0229/media/downloads/d1.4_ethics_framework_update.pdf



Main learnings so far

Participatory activities are highly complex compared to traditional RFO endeavours.

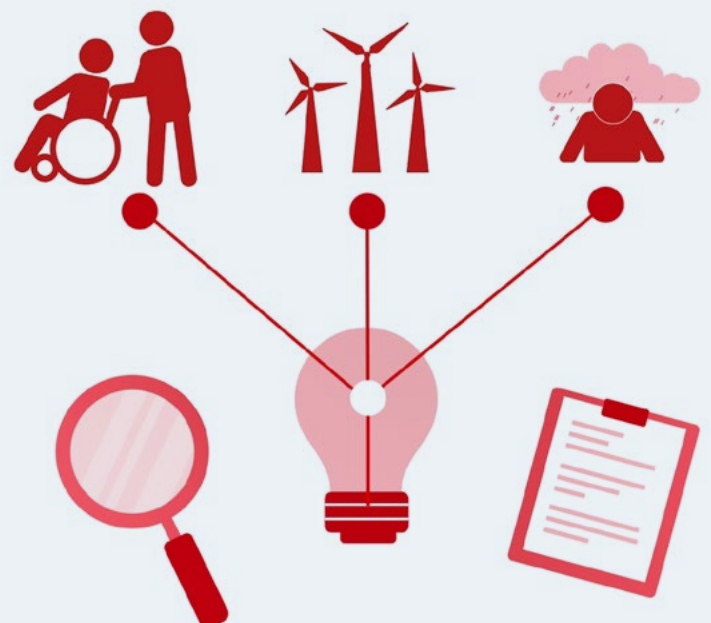
This means that the RFOs must be flexible in their planning to account for specificities of participatory processes, especially:

- » recruitment and selection of participants, including informed consent. In this phase, it is important to be clear on the aims and intended benefits of participation, as well as available resources and the scope of participation;
- » different goals and needs of non-academic participants. The goals of participants do not necessarily operate within a traditional science logic;
- » awareness that deliberative processes must make space for non-consensus.

This also means that there is a need for continuous reflection and adjustments where necessary along the way, regarding:

- » the process as a whole;
- » planned activities and methodologies;
- » expectations and roles of participants: academic and non-academic participants, experts and laypersons, outside facilitators, etc.;
- » power relationships.

It is important to keep in mind that outcomes and impacts might differ from what was initially intended. As such, agencies must be ready to adapt.



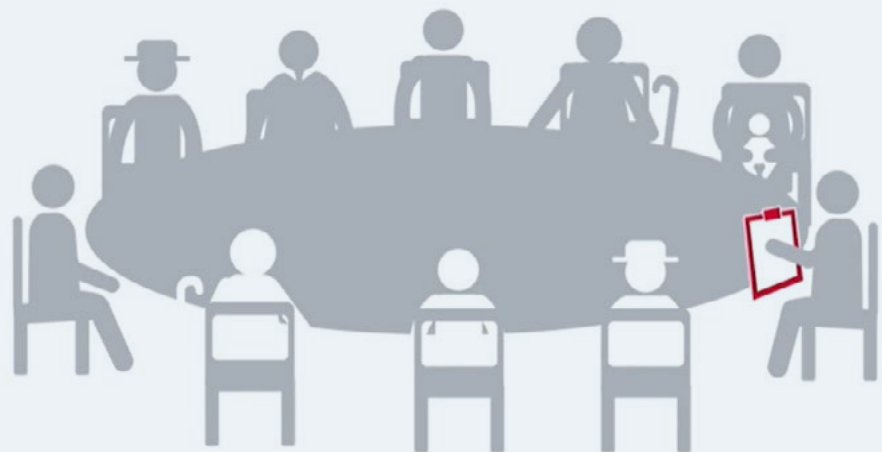
Institutional support is key to success. Resources and framework conditions are of utmost importance. All RFOs are owned or supervised by ministries, which give them direction and fund their activities, mostly in the form of funding programmes. This means that relevant ministries not only have to approve pilots, but also finance them in the longer term if they are to be integrated into the RFOs' task portfolio in the medium term. The RFOs' autonomy of action varies greatly: some can define their programmes, focal points, and fields of action themselves within the framework of a longer-term agreement, while others must be explicitly commissioned for each of their activities. Our analysis suggests that RFOs that support basic research are more autonomous than innovation agencies, because most science councils have a tradition of scientific self-governance that innovation agencies do not have². In any case, the governance of RFOs results in classic principal agent phenomena in various forms. All well-working pilots have a backing from both their own organisation as well as from the responsible ministries and/or supervising institutions.

All participants benefit from coaching and training for participatory activities. Existing wisdom on for example citizen science, participatory action research and RRI should inform participation in RFO contexts. The RFOs have different degrees of knowledge and experience with participatory processes and, depending on their needs, outside support can be highly valuable, e.g., for facilitation, specific methodologies, as well as legal and ethical expertise. It is important to keep in mind that ethical implementation goes beyond legal compliance.

² The idea of scientific self-government goes back to Merton 1942.



Learning by doing. A common takeaway is that RFOs are "learning by doing". Because it is a pilot undertaking and most RFOs have not carried out participatory activities before, the general feeling is that they are learning through each step, and they need to be flexible during the process. They also point out the need for continued interaction and exchange of experiences and ideas. Through PRO-Ethics, the partners meet for cross-learning activities and workshops which have proven very fruitful. Although the challenges are unique to each pilot's current implementation stage, the main issues are common, for example when it comes to questions revolving around recruitment and engagement: "how to recruit a heterogenous group in terms of number, experiences, and perspectives for the relevant topics?", "how to ensure that everyone participates on equal terms?", or "how to deal with vulnerable groups?". To further advance the co-learning, the RFOs write down short pilot stories along the way. The pilot stories are informal reflections, to improve the learning and illustrate dilemmas the agencies encounter. Despite the early stage of the pilot implementation, the RFOs have already collected valuable insights and experiences throughout the course of their operations.



Examples from pilot stories

The German funding organisation VDI/VDE-IT is piloting a Citizen Advisory Board of informal caregivers, supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The board first contributed to the evaluation process of a new funding call, assessing proposals for research projects developing interactive technologies aimed at supporting caregivers. Next, each board member will act as a mentor for one of the funded projects. At a first network meeting between the Citizen Advisory Board and the funding projects, short videos and lively slides were presented by the researchers, to ensure that everyone in the board was able to follow the information easily. The board members were also asked to introduce themselves and their background. **Lots of similarities and similar interests between the project members and their board members became obvious, which encouraged the participants for their future common endeavours.** Afterwards, they were split into small groups where the board members could discuss questions, hints and remarks with the project members. This way, each board member had the opportunity to voice statements to all projects in a small setting. Overall, the event was quite well received by both the project members and board members. The next scheduled events for the members of the Citizen Advisory Board are meetings with their respective projects. **In 2022, they will take part in the project kick-off meetings and two practical "hands-on" meetings where they will work directly with the projects on their ideas, concepts and proceedings.** VDI/VDE-IT will be supervising the processes.

#1



Brussels-based funding organisation Innoviris will involve citizens in determining the themes of an applied research programme on urban challenges. In the past, they have experimented with ateliers in which public administrations and other regional stakeholders reflect together upon key topics such as mobility and water management. Citizens, however, have never been involved. Interacting with the other RFOs of PRO-Ethics, the question of how to define a citizen and manage expectations remained important for Innoviris. Citizens are a wide category that can refer to either individuals or civil society actors. **What do you ask of someone when you want him or her to participate in a consultation process as a citizen and not play another social role?** The risk of lobbying and politicising is always around the corner. Innoviris also spent time on deciding **which method to apply to reach the citizens who have appropriate knowledge and experience on urban challenges in a particular field.** The PRO-Ethics draft ethics framework lists a broad spectrum of citizen consultation methods that can be explored, such as consensus conferences, deliberative conferences, the Delphi and Charette methods, focus groups, etc. At the end, Innoviris chose a mixed-method approach, combining a traditional citizens' polling to first probe for priority challenges and citizen panels in which 20 citizens co-construct the call framework in collaboration with scientific and internal experts.

#2

The Research Council of Norway's pilot, Involve Hub, is meant to be a network for sharing and developing knowledge on ethical participation processes in research and innovation. The learnings will, e.g., inform RCN's work to improve its funding tools and processes. RCN has put a lot of effort into the mapping of, and getting in contact with, stakeholders and potential hub participants. They have also participated in and organised relevant events, but **so far, the contact has mostly been with relatively homogenous groups of people. In these cases, it has been quite easy to get good discussions and learning exchange on ethical issues of participation.** In the fall, RCN will host the first, official gatherings of Involve Hub, inviting people involved in research and innovation projects from different thematic fields, as well as national stakeholder institutions and others with an expressed interest in the Involve Hub. This means, they will have researchers and practitioners, decision-makers, and administrative staff, among others. **A challenge of bringing a variety of stakeholders together, is related to the range of experiences, motivations, interests, and power they bring to the table. How to make a programme that is interesting to all? How to ensure that everybody feels free to share their opinions, and that all opinions are appreciated?** These are important considerations in the planning process.

#3



Overview of pilots

Pilot title	Field of Action	Partner	Country
New modes of engaging citizens in topic identification and programme design	Agencies' processes	VDI/VDE	Germany
Citizen participation learning hub	Agencies' processes	RCN & RCL	Norway
Citizen participation in topic definition	Agencies' processes	FFG	Austria
Citizen participation in thematic definition of programme calls	Agencies' processes	Innoviris	Belgium
Citizen participation in the new National R&D Strategy 2021 - 2027	Agencies' processes	UEFISCDI	Romania
Evaluation of the social impact of the NEOTEC programme from a participative approach	Evaluation process	CDTI	Spain

Collaboration with TAFTIE

PRO-Ethics will work closely with TAFTIE in order to further share our results beyond the RFOs represented in the consortium and to test, validate and widely disseminate the Ethics Framework. After an initial presentation of PRO-Ethics with interested TAFTIE members in May 2022, we now plan:

- » A half-day interactive workshop.
- » An open call to support innovative processes within RFOs, geared towards improving their skills and know-how to foster participatory processes. RFOs can apply to receive funding to develop their competencies, so that they can carry out participatory activities as part of their portfolio in the future. The funding might cover leadership workshops, stakeholder discussions, trainings and similar activities.



Collaboration with ethics and integrity bodies

PRO-Ethics will encourage and intensify the dialogue between policy makers, funding agencies and the ethics and research integrity bodies.

Therefore, PRO-Ethics plans a workshop together with the *European Network of Research Integrity Offices* (ENRIO) in September 2022 where we invite research integrity experts and bodies. The bodies and experts will be addressed mainly with the help of ENRIO, as well as ALLEA and ENERI. The workshop will address the question of the new challenges facing the integrity of research and innovation activities in the context of participatory processes. Relevant questions are, for example:

- 1. Role of participation:** Which role does participation play for good scientific practice?
- 2. Citizens as equal partners:** To what extent can citizens be equal partners in the research and innovation process?
- 3. ALLEA Code of Conduct and participation:** Who owns the outputs? How can citizens be given fair co-ownership? How (publicly) accessible are the results of the research and innovation processes? What if the outcome is a patent or a marketable product?

Furthermore, a workshop with Research Ethics Councils (RECs) was scheduled 9 June 2022 in Berlin, the participants being REC members or representatives from other ethics bodies. The main objective was to gather the views and needs of RECs with regard to ethics and participation. In this workshop, PRO-Ethics partner EUREC worked with working groups on two important topics:

- 1. Working group 1:** Social impact of research: what is the role of RECs?
- 2. Working group 2:** Lay and citizen representation in ethics committees.



About PRO-Ethics

proEthics is a 4 year project funded by the EU H2020 scheme, running from 2020 to 2024. Our aim is to facilitate more relevant, fair and effective research and innovation activities.

PRO-Ethics brings together a consortium of research and innovation funding organisations (RFOs) from across Europe to test ethical ways of involving citizens in research and innovation activities: Participation in innovation projects, strategy development and evaluation processes.

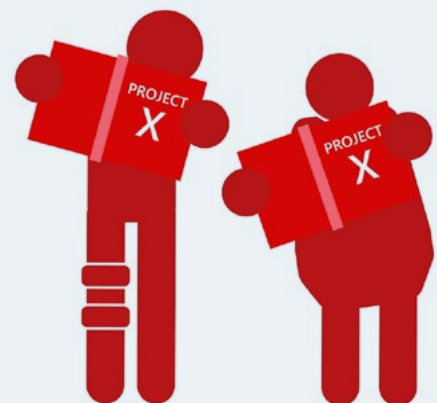
Through real-life experiments in the context of 11 pilots, dialogue with relevant stakeholders, and theoretical assessments, the project will develop an Ethics Framework and guidelines for participation.

Our consortium consists of 15 partners from 12 European countries, including RFOs, universities, research and technology organisations, and academic research organisations.

Do you want to learn more?

Do you want to learn more? Please visit PRO-Ethics' website pro-ethics.eu for detailed information about the project, our pilots, our reports and results of the work so far.

Sign up for our [newsletter](#), follow us on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and find us on [Zenodo](#) to keep in touch.



Project details and contact info

Project name	PRO-Ethics – Participatory real life experiments in research and innovation funding organisations on ethics
Coordinator	Centre for Social Innovation, Austria
Consortium	<p>Danish Board of Technology, Denmark Technical University Delft, Netherlands Sciences Po, France Nesta, United Kingdom EUREKA, Belgium EUREC Office, Germany Innoviris, Belgium Research Council Norway, Norway Centre for the Development of Industrial Technology, Spain Austrian Research Promotion Agency, Austria VDI/VDE Innovation + Technology, Germany Executive Agency for Financing of Higher Education, Research, Technology Development and Innovation, Romania Research Council Lithuania, Lithuania</p> <p><i>Unfortunately, PRO-Ethics partner Technology Agency of the Czech Republic had to leave the consortium in spring 2022.</i></p>
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Further publications	https://pro-ethics.eu/pro-ethics-outputs
For more information	<p>Website: https://pro-ethics.eu</p> <p>Twitter: @pro_ethics</p> <p>LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/pro-ethics</p> <p>Newsletter: https://pro-ethics.eu/news-events/newsletter</p>

