



PAYMENT FOR INVOLVEMENT

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# Job Centre Toolkit

the  
social  
change  
agency

LocalMotion

### **The Social Change Nest**

We tear down the barriers that prevent communities from creating change. We take care of the finance and administration, freeing groups to focus on their core mission, and work closely with funders to enable them to support social impact with confidence and transparency.

### **The Social Change Agency**

As a consultancy, we help groups and organisations build the structures, knowledge and networks they need to make change happen. We offer expertise in governance, strategy development, systems change, communications, training and programme design too.

# Introduction

## Social Change

The Social Change Agency has been working on Lived Experience and in Social Movements since its inception in 2013. Over the past decade we have seen a shift by Funders and Institutions to accept responsibility and investigate how power shapes their organisations, and the flow of financial resources to movements, communities and individuals. This also includes how funders expect people in movements to show up and what they expect them to do.

For organisations, charities and funders working across social movements, or looking to make transformative change, people with lived experience of the injustices and broken systems are the bedrock of this shift. But the drive for systemic advancement should not come at the expense of people who are more vulnerable than others and living through trauma. When Funders and institutions are repeatedly asking people to use their lived experience to help achieve their organisational strategic aims, their expertise in their subject matter should be remunerated for, and discussions about how this can work should be embedded in principles of equity and fairness in a joint endeavour.

Payment for Involvement for people in receipt of benefits does not come without its risks. There are risks for the payer and the person receiving the support, but it is useful to ask what these risks are and for whom. Risking overpayment or having to repay a large amount of money which pushes someone into hardship because of an ill thought through payment for involvement process seems a high price to pay for an individual versus an organisation who is sitting on years of an endowment. The risk needs to be shared equally - not just pushed over to an individual who is more than likely still living within a system that causes more trauma and stress.

At the Social Change Nest we have a mechanism that enables people to be remunerated easily, however, unless the policy and advice is right and rooted in the desire to share risk properly, we are still creating systems of inequality and upholding a power imbalance that contradicts the work we are all trying to do.

This toolkit was written at the behest of the people who are in receipt of benefits and the organisations that pay them. We know that not all systems are created equal and that while intentions are there, it takes influencing and support at a very hyper local level to make a distinct difference in individual lives. It is based on our experience of working with and talking to people who give financial remuneration to people on benefits, the approaches they have found success with and our understanding of current DWP policy. We hope that this toolkit will provide some confidence and support

to people who are liaising with their job centre to get the best outcomes for themselves and their families.

We wish you luck!

In solidarity

**The Social Change Agency**

This toolkit is intended to provide guidance and support in communicating with the DWP. It is based on good practice we've seen across the sector and the DWP's own, publicly available, policies. However, it was not produced with input from the DWP and we cannot guarantee how every work coach and decision maker in every job centre will respond to payment for involvement. We are confident that it is always better to have these conversations and that claimants are absolutely allowed to receive payment for involvement and honorariums payments and we believe that the tools and strategies laid out here are a good way to approach this

**Please note the information in this playbook is not welfare advice.**

If you or the people you work with require welfare advice, we recommend seeking out a local welfare advice service. Bedford CAB have a paid, ticketed service for people who do not live in the Bedford area. The commissioning organisation will need to purchase tickets for their participants to be able to receive advice. They can do this by contacting the details below. Once a ticket has been purchased, the participant can then contact Citizens Advice Bedford for an appointment:

By email: [benefitsadvice@bedfordcab.org.uk](mailto:benefitsadvice@bedfordcab.org.uk)

By phone: 01234 346 543

The advice in this playbook assumes that your participants are **aged 18 or over, British citizens and resident in the UK.**

It also assumes that your organisation is registered in the UK and that you will be making any payments into UK bank accounts.

## Glossary

<b>Lived experience</b>	everyone has ‘lived experience’ of some kind. We recommend that when using this term, you specify the experiences which are being centred. For instance, stating: ‘people with lived experience of <b>severe mental health issues</b> ’, ‘people who use our services’ or ‘autistic and neurodivergent people’. Use the language that people use to describe themselves and be careful not to imply that someone’s status as a member of staff or a freelancer means they do not share some of these experiences.
<b>Risk</b>	in the context of this work, we talk about risk as potential harm or hazard to an individual, namely the person claiming benefits.
<b>Service user involvement</b>	active, collaborative research and influencing work carried out between a statutory service and members of the public. <a href="#">Within the DWP, service use involvement specifically relates to working within services delivered by a body that has a statutory duty to provide services in:</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● health or social care, or</li><li>● social housing, or</li><li>● social security, or</li><li>● child support.</li></ul>
<b>Participation</b>	a broader term for work conducted with members of the public that may be appropriate for organisations that do not provide a statutory service. Often used interchangeably with ‘involvement’ and ‘co-production’. Involve has a <a href="#">comprehensive guide to participation</a> .
<b>Honorarium</b>	payments made to individuals who are not employed by an organisation, but who hold a position within the organisation, such as an officer. <a href="#">These are classified as earnings</a> . They are typically irregular and short-term payments, <a href="#">to recognise work that would not otherwise be paid</a> .
<b>Expenses</b>	<a href="#">the covering of any costs incurred ‘wholly and exclusively in the performance of the duties of the employment’</a> . These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Travel</li><li>● Subsistence</li></ul>

- Accommodation
- Equipment

Expenses are not classified as income when calculating benefits. The claimant is responsible for informing the DWP or HMRC of any expenses and should be covered in addition to payment for involvement.

This Job Centre Toolkit is part of our Payment for Involvement Series. Please see our [Payment for Involvement Policy Playbook](#).

# Introduction to our Jobcentre Toolkit

The purpose of all of these resources is to support open, positive communication with the jobcentre whether you are a claimant, organisation or foundation. These resources can be adapted for different organisations and activities. Whilst we have included some sample letters for organisations to send and encourage any organisation engaging in service user involvement or social participation to proactively communicate with the relevant jobcentre on behalf of each participant, it's likely that most of the communication will still fall to individual claimants. We've included some sample text below that can be used in journal entries or letters as well as quoted in meetings.

## 1. Tips for discussing this in meetings or calls with the jobcentre

Regardless of how you communicate with the job centre about your involvement or participation activities, here are some key things to remember:

- Be honest about the organisation, the work and why you want to do it. You don't need to go into great detail but you're allowed to be involved with charities, research and community projects and your work coach should be supportive of these.
- Be clear about the payment or honorarium you're going to receive. Be clear about the amount you'll be paid, the number of payments you'll receive and when you expect to receive them. You are allowed to receive payments and, even if you need to explain it to your work coach further, it's always going to be better to be upfront. Remember that, in the event of a bank account check, you will have to account for every payment you receive and it will make things much simpler if you've done this in advance.
- Give them as much notice as possible. Ideally, you want the job centre to have signed off on your involvement before it begins so make sure you have time to answer any questions and provide any evidence.
- Share the benefits of participation. If you have commitments around looking for work or improving your health, it's possible that participation may help you to meet some of these. It's worth proactively asking if this is possible, especially if you're engaged with an organisation like an NHS trust who are likely to keep working with you over a longer period of time.

## 2. Letter for service user involvement

Service user involvement is defined in detail in [Advice for Decision Makers Chapter H3: paragraph 3161](#). In general it covers any work where members of the public are engaged to improve a statutory service, either through co-creation or consultation with the service provider or through research. It is best practice to remunerate anyone who participates in this work financially, regardless of their employment status. If your work involves engaging people who claim state benefits, it's important to let their work coach know about it before any work commences. The following letter can be used and adapted for your organisation's needs. It's been adapted from [this sample letter provided by NIHR](#).

*Headed paper*

To Jobcentre Plus

Mr/Ms/Mrs xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx has been requested to assist [Organisation] with service user involvement. We wish to ensure that the purpose of service user involvement is understood and is not mistaken for work.

### ***What is the [organisation]***

*Include a brief explanation of your organisation and the services you provide. Be brief but specific about exactly what services the individual is engaged with or being asked to help improve.*

### ***What is service user involvement***

People who can offer a service user perspective because of their personal experiences of using health and/or social care services are requested to assist in our work.

The term 'public' here includes patients, potential patients, carers and people who use health and social care services.

The DWP have a full description of service users that applies to all benefits and can be found in Advice for Decision Makers Chapter H3: paragraph 3161.

### ***The difference between service user involvement and work***

Involvement in research/co-production activities should not be mistaken as capacity for work, and recruitment for service user involvement should not be confused with recruitment for employment. People are recruited because of their personal experiences of using health and social care services.

Service user involvement activities:

- are intermittent and people can withdraw at any time
- vary in length and in frequency, and usually last for a few hours (or less) in any one week
- are individual activities and do not imply future involvement
- may include attendance of quarterly or annual meetings
- may include contributing to intermittent meetings or telephone conferences
- may include helping to prepare for meetings, telephone conferences or events
- may include some follow-up activities after meetings or events

Any payment that is offered for service user involvement is intended to cover preparation, attendance and appropriate follow-up activities.

### ***Support provided***

*Detail any support that is provided for you or others to attend or participate in the activities here. An example of what this might look like is:*

Organisations provide support measures that are appropriate for each individual so that members of the public can attend and contribute to our meetings and events. Some people who are involved may be in receipt of benefits for mobility or care needs. Involvement in activities should not be interpreted as a reduction in the care or mobility needs of service users involved.

Support for care or mobility needs is offered as required by the service user and may cover preparation, travel to and from a venue, and contributions both during and after the activity. For example, support may include provision of childcare, or provision of a personal assistant or a support worker.

### ***Payment for service user involvement***

Good practice guidance for service user involvement in research recommends that members of the public should be offered payment for activities such as attending meetings and events, and that reasonable out-of-pocket expenses should be covered. Please note that:

- as involvement activities are often arranged on an ad hoc basis, organisations often pay service users monthly in arrears
- to assist service users who receive welfare benefits which have earnings limits or disregards, organisations offer involvement on a voluntary basis, or at a lesser amount, if requested

- as the payment period may be over a month or more, we anticipate that Jobcentre Plus will treat these payments as averaged over the payment period. See DMG Chapter 48 paras 4080-81 and for a cycle of work para 48094.
- the Department for Work and Pensions legislation exempts ‘service users and carers’ from the application of notional earnings and treats reimbursed expenses for service user involvement as ignored (see ADM Chapter H3, paras 3160 and 3241)
- service users can withdraw from involvement activities at any time to attend ‘employment-related’ activities
- the Department for Work and Pensions legislation for persons who receive Employment and Support Allowance on exempt work now allows earnings at the higher level of Permitted work without time limit (see Memo DMG 7/17)

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information.

*Signed by member of staff*

The person who signs the letter should be someone with direct knowledge of the piece of work the person is being engaged for and, ideally, senior enough to answer any questions the jobcentre may have. Include both a job title and contact details. It may be worth including details of a second contact point in case the main person is on leave or off sick.

### **3. For Charities, Foundations, or Community Groups who are paying people for involvement and want to inform the local job centre as best practise (or a move of solidarity).**

#### ***Letter for other participation (not covered under service user involvement)***

If you are a **charity, foundation or community group** who do not provide statutory services you may still, on occasion, engage members of the community for occasional, intermittent participation that would not be considered employment. This might include participating in a co-creation workshop or a participatory grantmaking process. As with service user involvement, it is best practice to remunerate participants for their time when possible and as with service user involvement, it’s important to inform the jobcentre before the project begins.

You can use the following template for this. Again it has been adapted from NIHR’s sample letter and covers much of the same information but has been adapted to describe other forms of participation rather than “service user involvement”

To Jobcentre Plus

Mr/Ms/Mrs xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx has been requested to assist [Organisation] with our activities. We wish to ensure that the purpose of this work is understood and is not mistaken for work.

***What is the [organisation]***

*Include a brief explanation of your organisation and the services you provide or your organisation's purpose. Be brief but specific about exactly what services the individual is engaged with or being asked to help improve or the area of work they've been engaged with.*

***The difference between participation and work***

We have engaged this person to support us with *[describe activity]* but have not offered them an employment contract. This activity should not be mistaken as capacity for work, and recruitment for occasional participation activities should not be confused with recruitment for employment. People are recruited because of their personal experience of *[briefly identify the exact experience you are recruiting for here]* rather than their capacity for traditional employment. This activity is designed to help us *[describe what you are aiming to get out of this, it may be to understand the community you serve better, design a specific programme or material or ensure that your activities are carried out in line with the experiences of the community you work with]*

Participation activities differ from employment as they:

- are intermittent and people can withdraw at any time
- vary in length and in frequency, and usually last for a few hours (or less) in any one week
- are individual activities and do not imply future involvement
- may include attendance of quarterly or annual meetings
- may include contributing to intermittent meetings or telephone conferences
- may include helping to prepare for meetings, telephone conferences or events
- may include some follow-up activities after meetings or events

- Any payment that is offered for this activity is an honorarium that is intended to cover preparation, attendance and appropriate follow-up activities. These payments will be small, intermittent and likely irregular payments. We do not expect this activity to ever reach the level of a regular reliable income that could constitute either employment or gainful self employment.

### ***Support provided***

*Detail any support that you provide for participants to attend or participate in your activities here. An example of what this might look like is -*

Organisations provide support measures that are appropriate for each individual so that members of the public can attend and contribute to our meetings and events. Some people who we involve may be in receipt of benefits for mobility or care needs. Involvement in activities should not be interpreted as a reduction in the care or mobility needs of service users involved.

Support for care or mobility needs is offered as required by the service user and may cover preparation, travel to and from a venue, and contributions both during and after the activity. For example, support may include provision of childcare, or provision of a personal assistant or a support worker.

### ***Payment for participation***

Good practice guidance for involving members of the community in co-creation or participation recommends that members of the public should be offered an honorarium payment in recognition of their time given in attending meetings and events, and that reasonable out-of-pocket expenses should be covered. Please note that:

- as involvement activities are often arranged on an ad hoc basis, organisations often pay service users monthly in arrears
- to assist service users who receive welfare benefits which have earnings limits or disregards, organisations offer involvement on a voluntary basis.
- as the payment period may be over a month or more, we anticipate that Jobcentre Plus will treat these payments as averaged over the payment period. See DMG Chapter 48 paras 4080-81 and for a cycle of work para 48094.
- service users can withdraw from involvement activities at any time to attend 'employment-related' activities

*Post participation activities will be time limited and you may well already know the exact amount of remuneration you're planning to give to the*

*person, if this is so you should include the amount of money and the dates of payment here.*

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information.

*Signed by member of staff*

The person who signs the letter should be someone with direct knowledge of the piece of work the person is being engaged for and, ideally, senior enough to answer any questions the jobcentre may have. Include both a job title and contact details. It may be worth including details of a second contact point in case the main person is on leave or off sick.

#### 4. Journal notes for UC claimants

The following are potential notes for universal credit claimants to share in their journal to alert their work coaches they are engaged in service user involvement activities, or are receiving occasional, intermittent honorarium payments from a charity or community organisation. It's important to initiate this dialogue as soon as possible to ensure your work coach understands what the payments are and how they differ from employment before the work starts. **This is intended to supplement communication from the organisation making the payment and not to replace it.**

##### ***Service User Involvement***

I have been asked to participate in service user involvement for [*organisation name*]. [*Name of person who sent the letter*] from [*organisation*] has written to you with details of the service user involvement. I will be receiving financial remuneration for these activities. This is not the same as employment, there will be no contract and I can withdraw from these activities at any time. I expect to be paid [include amount or approximate amount] on [*expected date*]. This will not affect my availability for work related activity. Please let me know if you need any further information.

##### ***Honorarium for other activities***

I'm participating in [*activity or project*] with [*organisation*]. [*Name of person who sent the letter*] from [*organisation*] will be writing to you with more details of the project. I will be receiving an honorarium of [amount] to thank me for my time. This is not employment, I will not have an employment contract or be registering as self employed and can withdraw from these activities at any time. However, participating in community or charity projects is generally considered to be inherently valuable and may lead to the development of employment skills. From this project I am hoping to gain

*[include any skills or experience you may get from this project. Depending on what your commitments are, you might also want to include any potential benefits to your mental health or wellbeing]. This will not affect my availability for work related activity. Please let me know if you need any further information.*

## 5. Benefits of Social Participation

*It may be helpful to have this information ready to share with your work coach to explain the benefits of participating in charity and community projects. In many academic sources this is referred to as “social participation” It links some academic articles and policy reports providing evidence about participation.*

[Social participation](#) is generally defined as participation in activities that involve participating in and contributing to others in your community. It's generally considered to be [beneficial for your overall health and wellbeing, especially in those with pre-existing mental health problems.](#) It can also [combat isolation and increase community cohesion.](#) There's some evidence to suggest that there's less opportunity to take part in these kinds of activities for those who are [unemployed](#) or [suffer from long term health problems.](#) Depending on the activity, some participation can also offer valuable experience which may increase employability. I'm participating in *[name the activity and give a brief description of what you'll be doing]* with *[organisation]*. I will be receiving expenses and a small honorarium to thank me for my time. I'm also hoping to *[outline why you want to participate in this activity, any skills you might learn or develop or any benefits you might experience for your health or wellbeing]*.

## 6. Questions you might want to ask your work coach

*Here are some questions you may want to ask your work coach either through a meeting or in your journal before you begin any activity for which you expect to be paid.*

- What information do I need to share with you and how?
- Have you received the letter from *[organisation]*?
- What's the best way for *[organisation]* to contact you about my involvement with them?
- Is there any further evidence or information that might be helpful for you?
- Could this activity count as part of my commitments? (Especially if you're expecting to gain employability skills)

The Social Change Agency and Social Change Nest CIC can support you and your organisation with your payment for involvement policy, mechanism for financial distribution and advice and support.

You can also join our growing learning community of organisations and networks who are working towards a fair payment for involvement policy and experience.

Please get in touch:

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