



PPI IGNITE
NETWORK

IMPACT CASE STUDY

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Stronger charity – researcher partnerships

Who was involved?

Led by Health Research Charities Ireland (HRCI) and the PPI Ignite Network national office, with the following involved in core activities:

- 3 PPI Ignite lead sites
- 15 charities (including local partners): HRCI members, The Wheel and the Charities Research Involvement Group (UK)
- 2 PPI Ignite Network national partners
- 3 research funders
- 3 university research offices
- Researchers and staff in research support roles

Summary

HRCI and the PPI Ignite Network national office co-developed a practical guide to support effective partnerships between researchers and health charities. The guide was shaped through a joint workshop and an iterative development process that brought together charity, researcher, PPI Ignite Network and other important perspectives.

This collaborative approach ensured the guidance reflected real-world challenges across both sectors, including roles, expectations and governance. The guide has been widely used by charities and

researchers. It has been recognised nationally and internationally, contributing to improved and more effective partnerships between researchers and charities and informing subsequent work on fair market value for charities in partnership models.

Our work

HRCI and the PPI Ignite Network national office identified a shared challenge within the Irish health research ecosystem – while charities and researchers increasingly work together, partnerships are often formed without a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities, or good practice. Both sectors reported uncertainty, but from different perspectives and little to no guidance existed.

To address this, the PPI Ignite Network national office and HRCI worked in close partnership to bring together charities, PPI Ignite Network lead sites, research funders, university research offices, researchers and staff in research support roles. An in-person workshop was hosted in March 2022, on the theme of *Charities as partners on research grant applications*.

The workshop created a structured space to explore the experience of partnership working, identify points of friction and highlight examples of good practice. The diversity of



The guide is available from [the PPI Ignite Network online hub](#) and the [HRCI web site](#), reaching all stakeholders

participants led to rich discussion, strong peer learning and very positive feedback.

Responding directly to participant feedback, and expanding beyond grant applications, HRCI and the PPI Ignite Network national office then co-developed the [Charities & Researchers Partnering for Societal Benefit guide](#). The guide was produced through an iterative process and also shaped by structured feedback from 13 people with different perspectives. This ensured the final guidance was practical, balanced and grounded in real-world use. Since its publication in 2023, the PPI Ignite Network and HRCI have been sharing and building on its messages.

Our impact

Actively sharing the guiding messages

The guide has been shared widely at national and international fora, including

at the 2023 National PPI Festival launch, a Research Ireland brokerage event on innovation in health and wellbeing, and the University of Limerick PPI Summer School. It has been selected as a core resource within the PPI resource hub of the European Rare Disease Research Alliance (ERDERA), which includes over 170 international partners, and was presented at a webinar with 500 attendees.

Charities & Researchers Partnering for Societal Benefit was also highlighted in a RISE Podcast episode focused on [Lessons from Public and Patient Involvement for Engaged Research](#). RISE is an EU funded project focused on building the skills of social economy organisations to partner in projects with research institutes, reaching hundreds of organisations worldwide, including many charities.

The guide has been used by Universities, when delivering PPI training to staff in research offices. PPI Ignite Network programme managers regularly share the guiding messages when providing PPI support to individual researchers who are new to partnering with charities.

This sustained dissemination has helped embed principles of equitable partnership across the research ecosystem. Its impact is strengthened by the credibility of the guidance, which was co-developed through a genuine partnership between the PPI Ignite national office and HRCI, bringing researcher and charity perspectives together.

Charities and researchers doing better in partnership

In feedback on the initial workshop, all 20 respondents reported feeling more knowledgeable about charities partnering on grant applications, with 14 stating “very much” and 6 “somewhat”. Participants highlighted the value of “hearing the different sides” and ensuring “all voices were heard”, and strongly called for practical guidance, directly leading to development of the guide.



Dr Avril Kennan, HRCI and Edel Murphy, PPI Ignite Network, jointly launch the guide

Following the launch of the guide in 2023, a 2024 HRCI member survey showed that 92% of respondents now act as partners in research, up from 74% in 2022. The guide is widely used by HRCI member charities to clarify expectations, governance and decision-making, and to engage more confidently with researchers, while researchers have used it to better understand charity roles and perspectives.

On-going annual events putting the guide into practice

Following the involvement of the Maynooth University Research Development Office in the workshop and guide development, the University now hosts an annual Research Together event bringing charities, researchers and research support professionals together. These events have strengthened collaboration, with 81% of attendees at the 2024 event reporting new connections.

One attendee noted that hearing from the speakers helped them “*see the potential of such partnerships*”.

The guide remains central to these events and was used to ground a facilitated design-thinking session in 2025. See [a reflection on the 2023 event here](#), which included a presentation on the partnering guide.

Leading to wider developments

The guide has informed subsequent system-level work, including HRCI being invited to partner on the [Fair Market Value for Charities in Partnership Work](#) guidance, developed in 2024 in partnership with four UK organisations, to support fair and transparent partnership arrangements.

Research funders attended the first workshop, which created an awareness of some of the challenges to both researchers and charities in working together. Through repeated exposure to the guiding messages at subsequent events, & meetings, research funders are considering how to respond. For example, (the then) Science Foundation Ireland introduced changes to the SFI Discover Programme that align with our recommendations. On a trial basis, the programme now allowed up to 15% of grant costs for administrative expenses, improving the ability of charities and other civil society organisations to participate as applicants.



Attendees at the partnering workshop deep in discussion

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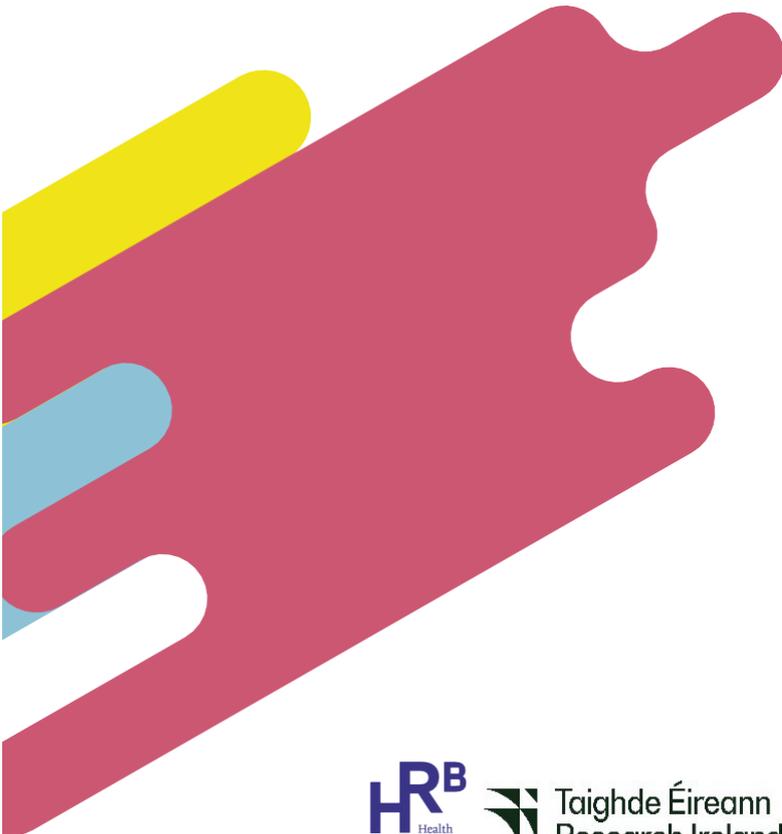
“Attending the workshop and supporting the development of the guide made me want to do more to facilitate meaningful partnerships between researchers and charities. I have been running the ‘Research Together’ event ever since.”

Dr Noreen Lacey, Research Development Office,
Maynooth University

“In the last two years, we collaborated with PPI Ignite Network @ UCC to deliver a postgraduate PPI module. We gave the guide as pre-reading for one of eight workshops, and the guide then informs the workshop discussions. I also require students who begin a placement with the PPI Ignite Network @ RCSI to read the guide as part of their induction training.

Personally, I find it very useful and recommend it to researchers sometimes when having 1-to-1 meetings to discuss their PPI plans.

Niamh Dillon, PPI Ignite Network @ RCSI programme manager



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