

Policy brief PRO-Ethics

New guidelines for ethical participation processes

The PRO-Ethics project introduces concrete, actionable ethics guidelines and a comprehensive framework to facilitate more relevant, fair and effective research and innovation activities across the European Research Area.

Public participation can give researchers and innovators a better understanding of diverse social and societal needs in the development of new solutions. It can broaden perspectives, ensure transparency and accountability, and make science more effective.

However, we also need to consider "the ethics of participation": Who to engage in a process, and how and when to do so? How to achieve accurate and meaningful results? How to care for and protect participants from potential negative effects related to the participation? After a 4-year journey experimenting with participatory activities in research funding organisations (RFOs), and many iterations, the final version of the Ethics Framework and Guidelines was finalised in a user-friendly design: <https://zenodo.org/records/8089672>

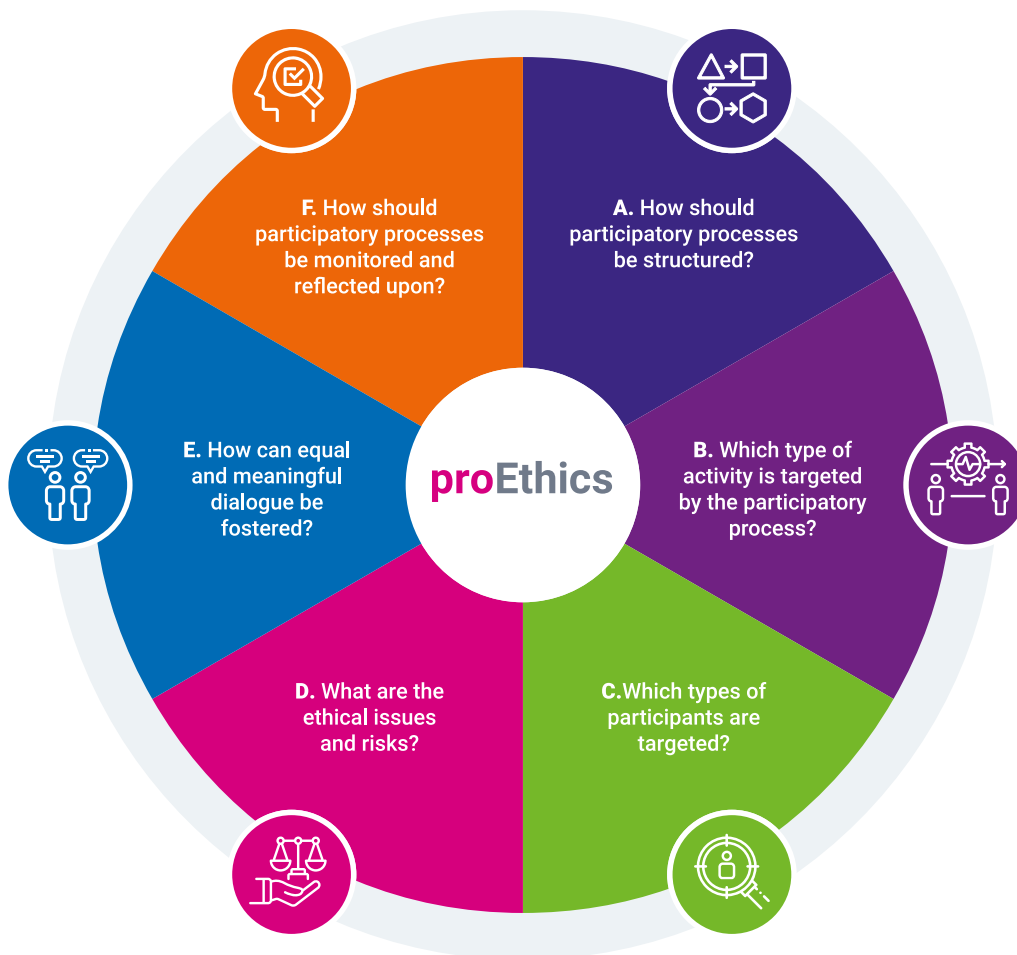
A roadmap - not a fixed checklist

The ethics framework consists of tools and guidelines that focus on how stakeholder participation can be ethically organised. Rather than providing a list of criteria only, it offers a broad set of questions that should be considered. The document aims to operate as a standard for organising stakeholder participation, helping you address ethical issues and risks before and while they arise in participatory processes. It makes it easier to deal with the complexities of different approaches to ethics and participation by exploring some important contextual questions:

How is participation justified? What are the targeted outcomes? And what are the underlying ethical issues?

Because different contexts offer different opportunities and constraints, these ethics guidelines do not provide rigid rules, but a context-sensitive roadmap for the design, implementation and evaluation of stakeholder participation. It is structured according to six main questions with associated considerations that take you through a participatory process step-by-step:





For example, the guidelines help you consider:

- How to identify the processes stakeholders should be involved in
- How to select appropriate formats for stakeholder engagement
- How to choose participants and accommodate disadvantaged stakeholder groups
- How to address barriers for participation
- How to ensure meaningful participation and address power and information asymmetries between stakeholders
- How to manage and mitigate biases
- How to care for participants during their participatory involvement
- How to assess personal risk factors (physical, psychological, social, etc.)
- How to ensure the privacy rights of participants
- How to conduct participatory activities in line with basic principles and values of research ethics and research integrity, often in complex transdisciplinary settings

Methods

The guidelines have been developed with a focus on the activities of research funding organisations, including participation in strategy development and agenda setting, call topic definition and formulation, project and proposal evaluation processes, and research and innovation projects. It is built on insights from existing literature as well as empirical data collected primarily across 10 pilots implemented in two phases. Four of these pilots were implemented at the beginning of the project and provided experiential inputs to the development of the first draft of the document. In the six pilots of phase two, the draft was extensively tested and improved.

The pilots focused on engaging “non-traditional” stakeholders in the processes of research funding organisations, which entails any stakeholder not usually included in such activities. In PRO-Ethics this meant citizens in the broadest sense, residents of an area, end-users of a technology, people affected by an issue, beneficiaries of funding calls, and others. Further feedback was collected from civil society, researchers and especially the

citizen science community of practice, other RFOs, research ethics committees, research integrity organisations, and other stakeholders interested in preparing, implementing, and evaluating participatory processes.

Who is it for?

Even though the guidelines were developed with research funding organisations as their primary target group, they should also be highly relevant for researchers, research ethics and integrity bodies and anyone else interested in public participation.

The Ethics Framework is compatible with, and complementary to, other frameworks, standards, and codes of conduct used in the context of research and innovation. It can be a useful starting point for operationalising aspirations in the ALLEA Code of Conduct in research practice. Research ethics committees can also use it as a basis for the improvement of ethics reviews when assessing the ethical dimensions of community involvement, public participation and other methods of engagement, as well as the societal, economic and environmental consequences of research.

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

PRO-Ethics brought 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 has developed an Ethics Framework and Guidelines for participation.

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

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. You can also watch our video or find us on [Zenodo](#).



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

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Technical University Delft, Netherlands

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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

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01/2020-12/2023

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Further publications

<https://pro-ethics.eu/pro-ethics-outputs>

For more information

Website:

<https://pro-ethics.eu/>

LinkedIn:

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/pro-ethics>

Zenodo:

<https://zenodo.org/communities/pro-ethics>

Unfortunately, PRO-Ethics partner Technology Agency of the Czech Republic had to leave the consortium in spring 2022.

LBG Open Innovation in Science Center joined PRO-Ethics via an open call in fall 2022.

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