

Frequently asked questions

What are test beds?

Test bed sites are likely to be local groups of commissioners and providers, including NHS providers from all sectors: primary, community, acute and mental health. They will also have strong links to social care and to the local voluntary sector. Our Academic Health Science Network (AHSN) partners will identify and put forward these sites, making a case for why they offer the right conditions to test innovations. We will also explore larger potential test bed sites that may not be contiguous with AHSNs but may nevertheless offer advantages—for example, town or city conurbations, or rural areas with specific needs.

Why are you doing this?

The NHS Five-Year Forward View highlighted how innovative ideas or technologies with the potential to improve patient care had failed in the past because they had been tried in isolation from other technologies, without changes to ways of working, or on top – not instead – of existing programmes. It therefore identified the need for ‘test bed’ areas with the willingness to adopt whole-system change, and the ability to measure benefit and pass on learning to other areas.

Who can express interest in testing their innovations?

Expressions of interest are being invited from innovators from the UK and globally, working either alone or in a consortium. It is our intention to use the test bed programme to entrench England's advantages as a destination of choice for health sector innovators seeking to demonstrate the value of new ways of delivering health and care services.

Innovators may come from any sector. NHS employees working alone or in partnership, medical technology, biotechnology and life sciences businesses voluntary and community sector organisations, academia and NHS bodies themselves are important sources of innovations.

How do I express interest?

Innovators: Innovators will be required to fill out an expression of interest online. Information on how to do so will be available on the NHS England Innovation website from Thursday 26 March - www.england.nhs.uk/testbeds. Innovators have until 12 noon on Friday, 29 May 2015 to express an interest.

Event(s) for interested innovators to ask questions and find out more about the programme will be held in May. We strongly encourage innovators to wait until after this event before submitting their proposals. If you are interested in attending this event please, please email england.innovation@nhs.uk by April 10 2015.

Test bed sites: Our AHSN partners will identify and put forward prospective test bed sites. Interested NHS organisations should therefore contact their AHSN to express interest.

Who are the test beds likely to be?

A small number of test bed partnerships (around 5) will be selected based on the potential value of the innovations and the commitments made by both innovators and NHS partners to test their package of innovations in real world settings.

Test bed sites will be characterised by strong clinical leadership, with an appetite for testing innovations, and have the infrastructure to support data sharing and a sufficiently large patient population to enable projects to be run at scale.

Innovations will need to demonstrate the prospect of improving health and healthcare outcomes at lower overall cost; in other words, high value innovations. The test bed programme is about deploying existing technologies in NHS settings—not about inventing new ones. Innovations should not be subject to further safety or regulatory tests and should be available for immediate use.

What problem are you trying to solve and what do you expect to achieve?

Test beds seek to address three important problems that have constrained the impact of innovation in the NHS:

- First, innovations are often implemented in isolation from each other—and from the infrastructure on which they depend.
- Second, there is a comparative lack of robust evidence about the effects of innovations in the real world, as opposed to experimental or research settings.
- Third, innovations are often introduced on top of existing working practices and infrastructure, some of which these new innovations may even be designed to replace. As a result innovations often simply add cost, with little or no gain in value.

There therefore remains a large, unexploited opportunity to combine different technologies, testing these together with innovations in how clinical services are delivered in real world settings. By evaluating combinatorial innovations carefully, we can identify those which produce significant health improvement at the same or less cost than existing practice. It is these high value innovations that the test bed programme seeks to promote.

How will it work?

This programme comprises four steps:

- 1) **A global call to innovators.** At this stage, we are inviting interested organisations or consortia to provide an initial description of what they propose, how they propose to partner with test bed sites once they are selected, and what value they expect to achieve. In parallel, our AHSN partners will be working to identify appropriate sites.
- 2) **Shortlist and catalyse partnerships.** The AHSNs will review the expressions of interest we receive from international innovators, and run a number of 'matchmaking' events over the summer which will provide the opportunity for the NHS to provide more detail on the problems or priorities they want help addressing.
- 3) **Proposals finalised.** Following these events, potential test bed areas and innovators will have a period to solidify their joint proposals and finalise their partnerships. Where it is helpful, AHSNs may have a role in brokering these partnerships.
- 4) **Designation of test beds.** Once agreements between innovators and NHS partners have been finalised, the programme will commence, with national support to solve problems and potentially financial assistance for local NHS organisations to cover the costs of implementation.

Does it matter where innovators are based?

Innovators looking to participate in an 'Internet of Things' focused test bed must have a UK base. The 'Internet of Things' describes when everyday objects are connected to a network

in order to share data and work together. There is no such condition for the other test bed projects.

How long will successful bidders be given to demonstrate their solutions?

The evaluation criteria against which the test beds will be measured will be agreed with both the test bed site and the innovator prior to the project commencing, as this will depend on the combinations of innovations being tested. The length of the evaluation will vary depending on the individual projects; however, this is expected to last around 2-3 years.

Will there be any financial support accessible to the test beds?

NHS England will consider making available a limited amount of investment for each test bed to cover the start-up costs of NHS bodies supporting the implementation of test bed innovations. However, we expect innovators to invest as well; for example, to cover the costs of the new technologies themselves. It is important that the value proposition of innovations put forward for testing is strong enough to stand on its own merits rather than be continuously supported by government subsidy. Funding will be agreed at a later stage in the process, on a case-by-case basis.

Where can I get more information?

You can find out more about the programme by contacting the Test beds team via england.innovation@nhs.net