Call for a forward deployed engineer in residence

Nesta residency programme

Are you a software engineer or developer with experience building practical AI tools and working directly with the people who use them?

Join us at Nesta for a paid residency to explore how AI can transform the way we work, developing and testing solutions alongside teams across our missions.

About Nesta

We are the UK's innovation agency for social good. We design, test and scale new solutions to society's biggest problems, changing millions of lives for the better. For over 20 years, we have worked to support, encourage and inspire innovation.

Our three missions are to give every child a fair start, help people live healthy lives, and create a sustainable future. We use innovation methods, including data science, behavioural science, design thinking, evidence and experimentation, arts and more to achieve our goals.

About AI at Nesta

We have long been curious about AI's potential to advance Nesta's missions and work. Drawing on our deep experience in data science and machine learning, we've consistently applied these methods to further our mission goals while investing in upskilling our staff with the latest generative AI tools. Over the last year, every mission team at Nesta has delivered at least one project that would not have been possible without AI. We are now exploring how to move beyond individual experiments and embed AI more systematically across our work.

About the residency

Nesta is offering a unique opportunity for an experienced software engineer or developer to join our team as an 'expert-in-residence'.

The resident will help Nesta explore how AI can transform the way we work by collaborating directly with colleagues to identify opportunities, develop prototypes and test practical solutions. The resident will spend time embedded with one or two teams across Nesta's missions or research functions. They will work alongside colleagues to understand their challenges and explore how AI could improve existing processes or enable entirely new ways of working.

The resident will be based at Nesta for a two-to-three-month period, for two to three days per week, although duration and time commitment can be discussed. This would consist of time with the team in person on a regular basis (eg, weekly or fortnightly) in our London office (but we are open to other arrangements to cater for individual circumstances). Reimbursement will be offered to those based outside of London to cover reasonable expenses of travel to meetings or workshops held in London.

As a charitable foundation, Nesta has more freedom to take risks, think long-term and to choose what we work on than many other organisations. This residency will offer an opportunity to shape the future of applied AI in the public and social sectors, test bold ideas in a mission-driven environment and work closely with a multidisciplinary team committed to using innovation for public good.

Benefits of being a Nesta resident include:

- a fee to cover the duration of your engagement with Nesta
- access to our networks and insights about the cutting edge of innovation
- opportunity to work closely with Nesta staff
- use of a workspace and resources, through the ability to use the offices (London, Wales and Scotland) for the entire duration of the residency
- public recognition as a Nesta resident

Who we would like to hear from

While an ideal candidate would have all of the following skills and experience, we will consider the right candidate with a combination of some of them:

- Strong, versatile software engineering: the ability to move quickly across APIs, data, light front ends and the workflow tools organisations run on (Google Workspace, Slack, Salesforce, Asana or similar), choosing the simplest tool for the job, including no-code or low-code tools where that makes sense.
- Experience building and releasing working software, alone or in small teams, with full-stack frameworks such as Ruby on Rails or Django and core web technologies (HTML, CSS, JavaScript). Our default stack is mostly Python, Ruby on Rails and AWS, so familiarity with any of these is helpful. You're comfortable with Git, GitHub and AI coding tools and can review, test, deploy and monitor what you build.
- Hands-on experience building with large language models (we work across Anthropic, OpenAI and Gemini models) and agentic workflows - prompting, retrieval, structured outputs, tool use - and a clear-eyed view of what they are and are not good for.
- A track record of getting prototypes into real use with non-technical teams, and the judgement to know when something is good enough to ship and when it is not.
- Excellent collaboration and communication - the ability to work from inside a team, build trust with non-technical colleagues, understand their working context, and explain trade-offs in plain language.
- Comfort with ambiguity: starting from a vague need, scoping something small and useful, and improving it from real use.
- Care for security, data protection and responsible use, and the discipline to handle sensitive data properly in the middle of fast-moving work.

The individual will need to be available for 26-30 days over a two-to-three-month period commencing in early 2027. To cater for existing commitments there is some flexibility around the start date and weekly time commitment.

We believe that diverse perspectives lead to better ideas and outcomes. We encourage applications from people with a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and fields of expertise. We will consider reasonable adjustments and flexible working arrangements in the recruitment process and beyond.

Key outcomes from the residency

The resident will contribute to Nesta's work in the following ways:

- Develop and test practical AI solutions. Work closely with one or two teams to identify opportunities where AI could make a significant difference, build working prototypes and test them with colleagues.
- Explore how AI can be embedded into everyday work by helping teams identify what is needed to make solutions reliable, responsible and sustainable.
- Build internal capability by upskilling Nesta staff in agentic AI concepts and applications, participating in knowledge exchange sessions and suggesting frameworks for evaluating solutions across the organisation.
- Strengthen Nesta's connections with the wider AI ecosystem, by engaging with the AI research and development community about the residency work.

How it works - budget, IP and time commitment

The proposed day rate for the programme is £500 per day. We expect the successful candidate to work with the team for 26-30 days over a two-to-three-month period.

We're also open to secondments from other organisations and are happy to discuss day rates and other arrangements on a case-by-case basis.

We anticipate that the residency will commence in early 2027.

How to apply and selection process

If you are interested in applying, please send your CV or LinkedIn profile and an example of your work (such as a GitHub repository where you have made critical contributions) to discoveryhub@nesta.org.uk along with your answers to the following questions:

1. What skills and experience would you bring to the residency? [max 250 words - shorter is fine]

2. Pick a workflow you think a team at Nesta, or an organisation like ours, probably runs, where AI could take out administrative work or make something new possible. How would you find out whether it's the right problem, what's the smallest useful thing you'd build first, and how would you decide whether it's ready for the team to rely on? What would you expect to go wrong? [max 500 words - shorter is fine]

The applications will be evaluated against the criteria set out in the 'Who we would like to hear from' section. Those with the closest match to the resident profile will be invited to take part in a follow-up conversation. More information will be shared with shortlisted candidates in due course.

Indicative timetable

- **6 December 2026 (23:59)** - Deadline for applications
- 7-11 December* - Shortlisting
- 14-18 December* - Follow-up conversation with shortlisted candidates to take place
- 18 December* - Appointment
- January 2026 - Expected start of residency

* *Please note that dates are indicative and may be subject to change.*