Introduction to public engagement

Public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement involves interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit.

National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement [https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk](https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk)

Why?
1. Gives new insight into your work, particularly relevant if the groups you engage with have lived experience of the subject you are working on
2. Opportunities to challenge preconceptions and misinformation
3. Chance to share the excitement of your work with others
4. Provides people with the skills, knowledge and understanding to make more informed decisions about their own and their families lives
5. By engaging with underserved groups, public engagement can help increase science and social capital
6. PE raises your profile and develops your transferable skills
7. And it is being looked at more in promotion criteria so can have direct impact on your academic career

We know it is going to take time. Think about your own motivations for engagement. Prioritise activity that will enhance your research, both its quality and its impact. These are your aims for engagement

Who?
No such thing as the ‘general public’!
Public engagement is engagement with anyone who is not your peer.

1. Conduct a stakeholder analysis - list audiences and the different reasons why you might want to engage with them - the WHY! Importantly, also consider why they would want to engage with you.
2. Seek advice from the PE team, E&D, existing networks, voluntary groups, charities, city council, teachers and ideally involve members of your target audience in your planning.
3. Break down into age, gender, location, ethnicity, interests. Even if you have chosen a targeted audience, consider how you will ensure that you are not only engaging with one subsection.
4. Consider barriers to engagement and try to minimise these.
5. This is particularly important if you are trying to reach unengaged groups. Ask for advice before you start, it is important that you build trusted relationships with key members of the communities you want to engage with first and this takes time.
Your key message(s)
What do you want to discuss with your audience? What is the one (two or three!) thing you want them to take to take away with them and share with someone else? Catching your audience’s attention and keeping it is vital. Having a good story to tell and then telling it in a compelling way enables you to connect with your audience. Sign up for our story telling training to find out how.

What are you going to do?
Likewise, with audiences, there is no one size fits all public engagement; different types of activity will allow you to meet your aims.

- **Informing and inspiring** - providing information so people can make more informed decisions about their own and their family’s lives.
- **Consultative** - to better inform you on the public’s views and concerns about your research, and also an opportunity to hear fresh perspectives and insights.
- **Involvement/Collaborative** - encourage public participation by involving people as researchers or developing collaborative research projects with them.

Finding a good fit for you and your audience takes time but will make the engagement effective and enjoyable.

Make a plan
One way to plan your engagement is through a logic model.

This helps you set your aims and objectives, what you are going to do, how you are going to do it, what the outcomes you plan, over what time scales and how you might evaluate your engagement to see whether you meet your aims.

- **Inputs** – practical resources needed to meet your aims, time, equipment, people, money
- **Outputs** - online resources, exhibitions, events, publications, partnerships, training courses, people (numbers and demographics) etc.
- **Outcomes** - include increased understanding, enjoyment, skills development, attitude change, inspiration and creativity, new experiences
- **Impact** - often self-reported for many types of activity as difficult to track people over time (unless you have planned this into your engagement from the start and have asked for permission to do so.)
Keeping it safe, keeping it legal
Those who create risks must manage them

HSE - five steps to risk assessment
• look for the hazards
• decide who might be harmed and how
• evaluate the risks arising from the hazards and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done
• record your findings
• review assessments every year as a minimum and when work and people change or there has been an accident or incident

1. There is no standard form for risk assessments. Worked examples are available from the Festival team.
2. Talk to the Safety Officer in your department or the University Safety Office before you start.
3. Risk assessments must be signed off by your Departmental Safety Officer and shared with everyone involved running your activity. And of course, they must be followed! Writing them is not enough!
4. Check with your Department about insurance too. You need to ensure you have PLI cover and find out whether your departmental insurance covers any equipment damaged or stolen outside of your Department.
5. You must have permission to use images, audio recordings and music online and in publications. You can buy the rights or use those published with a ‘creative commons licence’.
6. If you want to take photographs or use recordings and images from your events, you must have authorisation to do so. Perimeter forms and consent forms for photography, video and audio are available on the legal services website and our Festival coordinators webpage.

Dealing with disruptive people is something you should consider as part of your engagement. It is particularly important if you are planning to discuss controversial topics that you are prepared for all eventualities and have the support you need to do so well. We feel it is important that issues are discussed and debated in public and we are very happy to help you work through a plan with you.

Engaging online
We are all new to this but there is help out there already. Crowd-sourced advice on online engagement is available – see the NCCPE Guide to online engagement.

● Consider if you need to moderate communication and what you would do if you get unsolicited communications from members of the public.
● Contact UIS, your line manager and departmental safety officer if you receive inappropriate communications.
● Most online platforms are 13+ years.
● Use appropriate language.
● Once posted, always posted.
● Keep personal info personal - decide in advance what information you want to share – it is often easy to slip into more personal information or anecdotes. If you are using video, ensure you are not filming items/views that identify your location particularly if you are at home.
● That live streaming is live.
● Use organisational accounts, never personal ones - if you don’t want to use your cam account, consider setting up a specific email address/social media strand for the project you develop.
● Your online reputation can be a good thing, look after it!
Evaluation
The process of collecting evidence and reflection to help understand the effect of your work and inform future projects or approaches. Evaluation can stimulate learning more widely, particularly if you are happy to share what didn’t work as well as what did! Having well defined engagement aims makes evaluation much more straightforward. Consider who you need to report to, different audiences and stakeholders need different information.

1. Evaluation provides evidence that you have conducted the work and a record of achievement.
2. It can help demonstrate value for money and help with future funding applications and importantly, if shared, can inform the practice of others.
3. Ask for feedback from colleagues, test groups and your audiences.
4. Evaluation conducted throughout the process – during development, piloting and delivery
5. Only collect data you will use.
6. Make sure you give people the opportunity to share their own views.
7. Importantly also - undertake some self-reflection, but be kind!

Ethics of evaluation
Respect – treat people respectfully
Honesty - tell people what you are doing and why and if they don’t want to be part of it, no problem! Thank them and approach someone else.
Ownership - ask permission to record and collect information
Integrity – be honest about the constraints influencing decisions and do not leap to conclusions without evidence
Confidentiality – consider data protection and ensure GDPR compliance around collection and storage

And online
For web and social media, track engagement and interaction using analytics and and @/# - remember to tag in people and organisations you want to see your posts. Include a ‘call to action’ on a post – links to click etc. Likes and retweets are not enough. Encourage comments (do you need moderation?), get into conversations, use quizzes, polls, action cards in videos.

How we support your public engagement plans
We are always keen to chat! Get in touch to talk about any aspect of public engagement including grant and fellowship applications – publicengagement@admin.cam.ac.uk

Find out more about the training we offer: Engaged Researcher training programme
More information about our online activities including our video projects and Do try this at home, our online resource listing.

Grants of up to £1500 are available through our Starter Fund which supports innovative new public engagement projects

The Vice Chancellor’s Awards for Research Impact and Engagement recognise and celebrate excellence in research impact and public engagement with research.

For public engagement news, resources and ideas, sign up to our bulletin.

To take part in Open Cambridge, contact Sue Long and Hannah Jackson OpenCambridge@admin.cam.ac.uk

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