

**PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**  
WITH RESEARCH

# TEN TOP TIPS



UNIVERSITY OF  
**BATH**



# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WITH RESEARCH

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 is a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit.

Thinking of undertaking some public engagement with research? Since 2013, the Public Engagement Unit has awarded over £80,000 of funding to 50+ researchers across the University to help develop their engaged research practice. The tips that follow have emerged from their experiences.

To find out more about some of the engaged research projects we have funded see our website [www.bath.ac.uk/public-engagement](http://www.bath.ac.uk/public-engagement)



# 1

## START WITH CLEAR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AIMS

You might have multiple objectives and multiple publics. For example, a project could involve collaborating with one group of people, then disseminating to another. Think about the people you are hoping to engage with and the role they might play in the process.

**Engagement:** Are you creating meaningful and significant encounters with the research tuned to the needs and interests of specific people?

**Involvement:** Are people outside academia collaborating in shaping and influencing the research so that their insights or expertise inform the outputs?

**Dissemination:** Are you trying to raise awareness and maximise the reach of your research into potential user communities?



## 2

# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IS ABOUT MUTUAL BENEFIT

Before engaging, consider: “what’s in it for the people I’m working with?” This will help ensure that their involvement is as meaningful as possible.

*Be willing to incorporate participants’ motivations and agendas whilst being open about your own motives and objectives*

**Nicola De Martini Ugolotti, Department for Health**

*Start by developing an understanding of what young people already know/ believe about the issues*

**Dr Emma Rich, Department for Health**

*It is vital to develop an ongoing approach that is supportive and promotes trust*

**Dr Justin Rogers, Department of Social and Policy Sciences**



# 3

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TAKES TIME

Whether you are involving participants in the research itself or creating some kind of event, the process is likely to take much longer than anticipated.

*We cannot stress enough the need to leave ample time for identifying, contacting and recruiting publics*

**Dr Jessica Francombe-Webb, Department for Health**

*Don't underestimate the power of networking and meeting people in advance; this takes time*

**Dr Cathy Randle-Phillips, Department of Psychology**

*You need at least six months from being awarded funding to planning an art exhibition like this! Particularly in relation to the marketing and publicity of the event*

**Dr Sarah Bailey, Department of Pharmacy and Pharmacology**



# 4

## ASK FOR HELP FROM OTHERS

Things you find challenging other people do on a daily basis, so take advantage of the expertise of local people and organisations.

*Our collaborators, Bath Royal Literary & Scientific Institution, provided particularly helpful advice in relation to issues of health and safety and working with children*

**Dr Sarah Bailey, Department of Pharmacy and Pharmacology**

*The success of our project was down to the support of the staff at TACT and their foster carers who encouraged and facilitated the young people's involvement throughout*

**Dr Justin Rogers, Department of Social and Policy Sciences**

*We were able to use external designers, who had worked on similar projects in the past and already had the skillset required for our specific needs*

**Rachel Rose Jackson, Department for Health**



# 5

## GET TO GRIPS WITH LOGISTICS

Expect to meet new challenges and systems in terms of planning and organisation.

*It is hard to coordinate this type of project (an arts exhibit) alongside research and teaching commitments. In hindsight, I would have requested part of the grant to fund some admin support*

**Dr Hannah Family, Department of Pharmacy and Pharmacology**

*Make clear to participants what is offered re expenses and simplify procedures/ paperwork where possible to speed up payment*

**Dr Fiona Gillison, Department for Health**

*Have discussions with your collaborators about health and safety and risk assessment prior to committing*

**Dr Susanna Martin, Department of Psychology**



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## ENSURE YOUR ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY IS RESPECTFUL

Demonstrate respect for all participants through your actions, language and environment.

*In the same way that we strived not to privilege academic ideas and input, we were also aware that our choice of venue could give an implicit sense of the event's 'neutrality' and expectations*

**Dr Sarah Bailey, Department of Pharmacy and Pharmacology**

*Be aware of the potential challenges of language - participants in my project soon pointed out that classing someone as an ADHD "sufferer" has negative connotations*

**Dr Thanos Verousis, School of Management**

*Remember the importance of speaking a language that is accessible to young people*

**Dr Emma Rich, Department for Health**



# 7

## RESPOND TO GROUP DYNAMICS

The perceived power of the university in comparison to those groups being engaged is sometimes an issue. Think in advance about how your engagement positions people.

*Recognise heterogeneity within your community and be inclusive of marginalized voices*

**Nicola De Martini Ugolotti, Department for Health**

*We opted for an invited guest list as opposed to distributing an open call to any interested parties. This created an intimate atmosphere that fostered dialogue amongst participants*

**Dr Jessica Francombe-Webb, Department for Health**

*Encourage participants to support/contact each other outside project meetings*

**Dr Fiona Gillison, Department for Health**



# 8

## BE PREPARED TO CHANGE

Part of inviting others to engage with your research means recognising that different ways of doing things might emerge.

*Adapt to the needs of the audience rather than rigidly sticking to plans, which may decrease collaboration*

**Dr Neal Hinvest, Department of Psychology**

*Explore diverse means to communicate to relevant stakeholders; we've found our website is a more effective and engaging way to discuss our research*

**Dr Fiona Gillison, Department for Health**



# 9

## BUILD EVALUATION INTO THE PROCESS FROM THE START

Evaluating public engagement can take many forms. Outcomes might be instantly tangible or ongoing and more subtle. You will find it easier to assess these if you have thought about them upfront.

*We structured feedback mechanisms in to our event so the importance attributed to feedback was clearly expressed*

Dr Jessica Francombe-Webb, Department for Health

*Young people reported that they enjoyed being able to participate and reflect through a variety of forms including social media, dance activities and discussion of salient issues in small groups*

Dr Emma Rich, Department for Health

For guidance on evaluation visit the Public Engagement Unit's website:  
[www.bath.ac.uk/public-engagement](http://www.bath.ac.uk/public-engagement)



## WHAT NEXT?

Allow time to reflect on the longer-term benefits of engagement both for you personally and for your research.

*Collaborating with community groups proved really valuable. They were keen to be involved in research, leading to collaborations that will hopefully grow for future projects*

**Dr Justin Rogers, Department of Social and Policy Sciences**

*Effective public engagement doesn't stop with the development of a new output. In order to have productive relationships with stakeholders, on-going communication and collaboration is essential*

**Rachel Rose Jackson, Department for Health**

*When budgeting for our project we allocated funds for post-event sandpits/seminars with the goal of evolving these conversations into grant applications*

**Dr Jessica Francombe-Webb, Department for Health**



The Public Engagement Unit has links with many external partners, including:

Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institute  
Bristol Natural History Consortium  
Fringe Arts Bath  
South West Foundation  
Art at the Heart, Royal United Hospital  
44 AD  
At-Bristol  
Science Communication Unit, University of the West of England  
Bath Film Festival  
Bath and North East Somerset  
U3A (University of the Third Age)  
Gallomanor  
Graphic Science  
National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement  
The Holburne Museum  
Bath Volunteer Centre  
Creativity Works  
Wansdyke Play Association  
Black Families Support Education Group  
Transition Larkhall  
Triumph Over Phobia

For further support within the university try:

### **Research and Innovation Services**

For help engaging with industry  
[www.bath.ac.uk/ris](http://www.bath.ac.uk/ris)

### **Institute for Policy Research**

For help engaging with policymakers  
[www.bath.ac.uk/ipr](http://www.bath.ac.uk/ipr)

### **Widening Participation Office**

For help engaging with schools  
[www.bath.ac.uk/widening-participation](http://www.bath.ac.uk/widening-participation)

### **The Edge Arts**

For help engaging with artists  
[www.edgearts.org](http://www.edgearts.org)

**Email us:** [public-engagement@bath.ac.uk](mailto:public-engagement@bath.ac.uk)

**Call us:** 01225 385353

**Visit us:** Public Engagement Unit,  
Department of Marketing and Communications,  
Wessex House Room 4.09

**Find us online:** [www.bath.ac.uk/public-engagement](http://www.bath.ac.uk/public-engagement)



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