

TEN TOP TIPS





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



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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?

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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



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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



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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

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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



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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



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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



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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



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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

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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

Institute for Policy Research

For help engaging with policymakers

www.bath.ac.uk/ipr

Widening Participation Office

For help engaging with schools

www.bath.ac.uk/widening-participation

The Edge Arts

For help engaging with artists

www.edgearts.org

Email us: 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

