

# Public Engagement Guidance

## What is public engagement?

Public engagement involves activities that bring researchers and the public together. It is more than just meeting an audience and telling them about your research - effective public engagement is about two-way communication, with the researchers listening to and learning from participants. Research Councils UK provide a comprehensive definition on their web site [insert link].

Done well, public engagement can build trust and understanding between the research community and a wide range of groups, from policy makers through to young people.

## Why engage with the public?

Involving the public in research can have a wide range of benefits: for the researchers, the organisation employing them, the public involved and society more widely.

The RCUK publication [What's in it for me? The benefits of public engagement for researchers](#) includes a selection of some of the highlights and first hand experiences of a range of researchers across the UK of the positive benefits arising from engaging with the public.

Reasons for engaging with the public extend beyond the benefits to the research and researchers themselves. Some argue that if research is publicly funded, society has a right to shape research agendas and be involved in decisions about how discoveries are used.

In the case of young people, public engagement is an effective way of stimulating interest in a subject and encouraging young people to consider research careers. This benefits the individual students, and society as a whole, as young people are encouraged to become more skilled and engaged citizens.

## Planning a public engagement activity

There are a number of excellent online guides which provide invaluable information on public engagement with research, why it is important and how to plan a public engagement activity. As a starting point the [The Engaging Researcher](#) provides a very useful introduction to engaging the public with your research. The [National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement](#) website contains a wealth of information including a practical [How to do it](#) toolkit.

## EPSRC funding for public engagement

Public engagement activities can be included in any research proposal as part of the Pathways to Impact plan. Public engagement is a valid and important route to impact and EPSRC encourages researchers to include public engagement activities within their Pathways to Impact plans. These

activities should be related to the research within the grant and should not be generic science or engineering outreach.

You may also include public engagement activity within the case for support where it forms part of the research process or as a work package of a larger grant, such as a programme grant.

Detailed information on Pathways to Impact can be found here <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/apprev/preparing/Pages/economicimpact.aspx> and at: <http://impacts.rcuk.ac.uk/default.htm>

Key considerations when planning a public engagement activity as part of an EPSRC research proposal:

- Public engagement activities should have a strong link to current or recent research. We will not provide funds for generic science outreach.
- In addition to communicating your research findings to the public, you should also consider two-way engagement and interaction with the public. For example, working with a particular user group where there might be a tangible relevant output; and for areas with potential societal or ethical impact, ascertaining current public attitudes and aspirations/concerns for the area.
- Public engagement can take place at any point - before your research begins to help shape your research question, during the research grant as part of the research process or at the end of the grant to feedback on the findings and potentially influence the future research portfolio.
- Resources eligible under FEC can be requested, for example, to cover training in public engagement or communications, public engagement specialist staff expertise and support, materials/venue costs or travel expenses etc.

## **Top tips for effective public engagement**

- Be clear about why you are engaging with the public, both in your own mind and in your communication with potential participants. Do not raise unrealistic expectations amongst participants.
- Allow enough time to plan public engagement thoroughly, whether it is a small, one-off, event or a sustained programme.
- When planning your public engagement strategy, consider who you wish to engage and why, their interests and why they might be interested in your research area. This will help you choose a suitable approach.
- Consider your own preferred communication styles and skills in the area of public engagement. Your activities will be far more successful if you are comfortable delivering them.

- Developing an activity timeline or Gantt chart will help you manage the public engagement activity and identify potential pitfalls.
- Think about your public engagement role as one that is ongoing - this will allow you to connect your activities, build your expertise and develop a rapport with the groups you are engaging with.
- Build evaluation in at the start of the public engagement programme. Evaluating the experience or activity is the only way to learn what works.
- Share your experiences of public engagement with your colleagues; if possible, make your evaluation reports publicly available so that others can benefit from your experiences.
- Ensure you allocate enough money for public engagement activities when you apply to the EPSRC for funding - too often plans remain vague at the time of application and insufficient funds are set aside for high quality activities.

## **Further Guidance and Resources**

- [The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement \(NCCPE\)](#)
- The [Beacons](#) for Public Engagement
- [Sciencewise](#) – The expert Resource Centre for Public Dialogue
- [RCUK Public Engagement with Research](#) programme
- EPSRC Pathways to Impact [Guidance](#)