



Planning your Public Engagement



Public engagement is a way of connecting our research with wider communities.

Public Engagement:

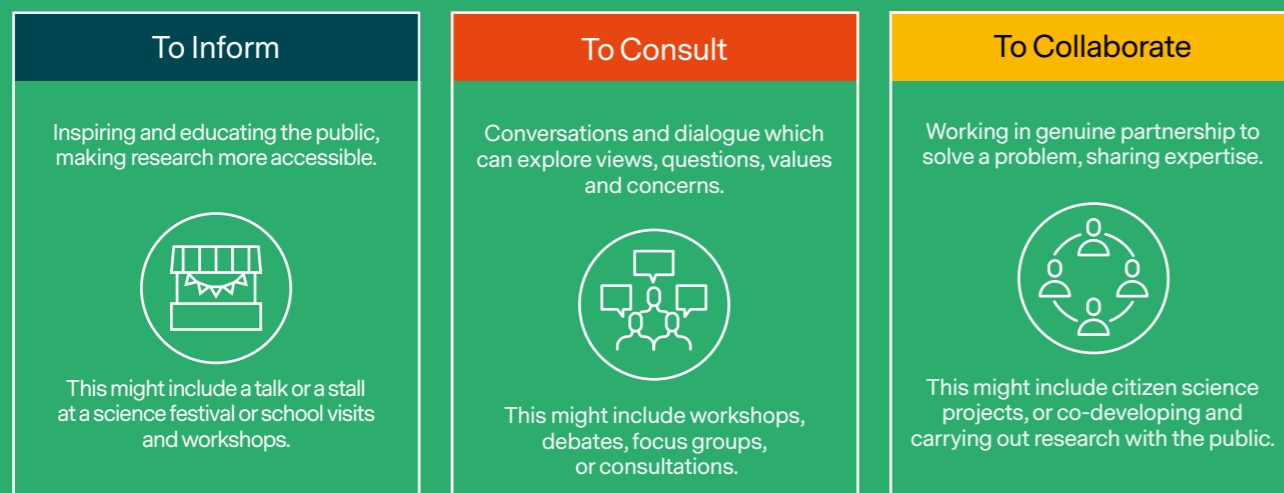
- involves two-way conversations to create genuine dialogue with members of the public – be they patients, school children, community groups or the general public
- seeks to be mutually beneficial
- can happen throughout the research cycle

This guide is designed to help you plan your public engagement by outlining some of the key areas to consider. If you would like to see some examples of past public engagement projects at the School, please visit our case study page on the [intranet](#).

Why do you want to engage with the public?

The first step in planning for successful public engagement is considering why you want to engage, or what you are aiming to achieve with your engagement. The diagram below shows some of the different potential aims through which you can frame your public engagement work. Not all public engagement fits neatly into this spectrum but it can be a helpful tool when you first start to think about your engagement.

Engagement can be considered on a spectrum. This diagram can be a helpful guide to considering your public engagement aims.



Cover image: Elaine Flores conducted an engagement project with communities in Carapongo, Peru affected by El Niño-related flash floods and landslides. Participants used photography and art therapy to share their experiences and discuss post-disaster resilience and mental wellbeing within the community.

Identifying your public engagement aims

Your aims describe the impact you hope to achieve through your project. For example, you may wish to increase awareness of a particular disease, or to gain insight into public attitudes about your research.

Aims can often relate to:

- Awareness
- Attitudes
- Behaviour
- Understanding
- Skills
- Empowerment

Setting clear aims will help you to focus on what you are hoping to achieve. Keep coming back to your aims during the planning process to stay on track.

Some example aims:

- For mothers to understand the sources and transmission of ocular chlamydia infection.
- To stimulate ideas around how to strengthen relations between community members and researchers when engaging with research programmes.
- To collaborate with local schools to develop a research question, design study methodology and analyse and interpret the data that they collect.

Set clear objectives

Your objectives set out the short-term targets and activities that will help you achieve your aims. It is a good idea to use the SMART technique to develop these objectives, as seen in the box on the right.

Some examples:

- Conduct a 3-hour workshop with 10 people to discuss HIV risk factors and prevention.
- Assess participant understanding of HIV prevention using a one-page questionnaire.

TOP TIP: Aims

When framing your aims, consider not just aims for your audience or public(s) but also for yourself, your research, your project team and any collaborators. For example: You could have a personal aim to improve your communication skills.

SMART Objectives are:

- Specific:** Providing details of the tasks involved.
- Measurable:** To determine if they have been achieved.
- Achievable:** Able to be completed instead of grand gestures or statements.
- Relevant:** Such that they contribute to your overall aims.
- Time-Limited:** Framed within realistic and identifiable time limits or deadlines.

Who will you engage with?

Public engagement is most effective when it is targeted towards a specific group or groups, identified based on what you are aiming to achieve. Engagement which tries to connect with everyone can end up interesting no one, or can fail to be meaningful or valuable.

Think about who would benefit most from the engagement, as well as what groups are important for you to connect with or include. Some examples of potential audiences could be:

- Festival visitors
- World travellers
- Children or teenagers
- Patients
- Science sceptics
- Cultural groups
- Science enthusiasts
- Parents
- Schools
- Community organisations

Once you have defined your target audience, think about their context and how this could impact how they engage with you. For example, you could consider:

- What level of understanding do they already have in relation to your topic?
- What types of activities might interest them?
- What is in it for them?
- Why would they want to (or not want to) engage with you?
- What cultural or social environment do they live in?
- What limitations are there on their time?
- How can you ensure that you create an inclusive and accessible environment?

TOP TIP: Audience

In addition to the primary audience that you are targeting, consider secondary audiences who might also engage with your project. For example, your primary audience could be children at a science festival, but their parents will probably also visit your stall. Consider whether there is a simple way you can engage with that audience as well.

As another example, your primary audience could be a small focus group with patients living with a particular condition. The focus group outputs however may be distributed through blogs, media, or reports which could increase awareness more widely in a secondary, more general, audience.

How will you reach your audience?

Think about how you will find your audience, and how they will find out about your project.

Will they be sent private invitations, or will you work with a community group to contact them more broadly? If trying to reach schools, consider your personal contacts who may have a connection to a school. You can also approach and/or collaborate with organisations that you already work with, or who have access to your identified audience, e.g. a charity, work experience organisation, or support group. Other possible means of promoting your project could include flyers, posters or social media.

TOP TIP: Manage expectations

When reaching out to your target audience, be clear about what the project is, what the public should expect and what they will get out of it. Make sure that your audiences' expectations are in line with what they will experience when they participate.



Focus group on food preparation and hygiene in Nepal. Credit: LSHTM

How will you engage with your audience?

There are boundless tools and activities to facilitate effective public engagement. The most important thing is to choose a method, approach or activity that allows you to reach your intended audience, and achieve your aims. The following are just a few of the different ways you could engage with your audience. The School has published a [series of case studies*](#) on previous public engagement projects which are available on the intranet. We encourage you to check these out for more ideas and examples of projects in action.

	Online games or apps		Photo story activity (e.g. Photovoice)		Guided tour or walk
	Community forum		Make-and-take workshop		Citizen science project
	Co-production of research		Focus group		Public talk
	Art creation and installation		Drama or theatre production development and event		Exhibition
	Patient advisory group		Panel discussion		Making and screening a film
	Festival stall		School workshop		Public Q&A session

When planning a creative approach to engagement (e.g. film, drama/theatre, dance, exhibition, online game, etc.) consider how engagement can happen throughout the development process (e.g. writing the script, filming and editing) and not just when the final product is being shown. This will mean that the final product, with public input from the beginning, is more likely to resonate with wider public audiences.

*ishtm.sharepoint.com/Services/comms-eng/Pages/examples-of-engagement.aspx

Other factors to consider

Collaborators and external service providers

You may work closely with other organisations or partners in your research. Consider whether they could be involved in your public engagement project, and how they could contribute.

Your project may also involve tasks which are not within your skill set, or that require very specific expertise. Consider all the skills you may need to complete the project successfully and determine what external assistance you might need to bring on board. This could include:

- Professional facilitators
- Writers, artists or performers
- Film or audio producers
- Interpreters

Some of these roles might be covered by your existing research partners or collaborators, but you might need to bring in external resources or professionals to assist with/collaborate on the project.

Value your volunteers and participants

Show your appreciation for volunteers, and for participant's time if they have come to an event and/or have helped you (e.g. focus group).

For example:

- Provide sufficient food/drink if necessary.
- Make volunteers and the public feel welcome by using easy to understand directions and signage and greeting them when they arrive at your event, meeting or stall.
- Consider whether you should reimburse volunteers or participants for their travel and/or time.

TOP TIP: Consider your budget

When deciding how you will engage with your audience, be realistic about what you can do with the budget you have. For example, a £500 grant can go a long way but will not be enough to produce a film, or to run workshops for 200 people. When planning how you use your budget, don't forget about smaller but important costs such as printing, or transport. There are also likely to be last minute costs that you hadn't anticipated, so try to keep a little money for emergencies.

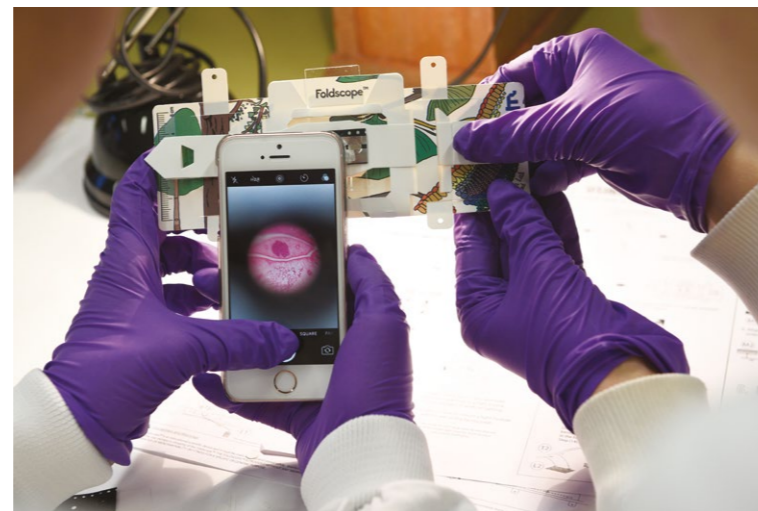
Health & safety

When planning a project and/or event, you should conduct a risk assessment to evaluate potential risks and hazards to participants and/or facilitators. Information on how to conduct a risk assessment can be found on the [Safety intranet pages](#). Contact the School's insurance provider to make them aware of what the project is and who is taking part so they can confirm that insurance cover is in place.

Controversial topics and cultural concerns

Some research topics can be controversial. For example, your work might involve animals, or you might work on a disease that impacts vulnerable groups, or are planning your engagement on an emotive topic for participating individuals. As you are planning your project, think about how you might approach any concerns or questions that may arise and create a safe and inclusive space for participants.

You should also consider if there are any cultural barriers related to your project. This could include cultural objections to your research, or distrust of researchers or people external to the community. Identifying these possibilities early on, and ensuring you follow the appropriate channels to ensure community buy-in, can mean your project is more likely to succeed.



Ailie Robinson held a series of workshops with year 11 school students about the use of microscopy for diagnosing disease. The students got to experiment with microscopes in LSHTM labs and build their own Foldscope, novel paper origami microscopes developed by Stanford University. Using the Foldscopes and their mobile phones, the students could view and take photos of the parasites they were discovering. Credit: LSHTM

TOP TIP: Public engagement within research grants

Different funding agencies have varying requirements and guidelines for public engagement. It is important to understand these when you are developing a proposal to ensure you develop a project that fits the bill.

For example: The Wellcome Trust identify 'must-do', 'smart-to-do' and 'wise-to-do' public engagement. 'Must-do' public engagement is essential for your research and should be included within the core research budget. You can apply for additional public engagement funds for 'smart-to-do' and 'wise-to-do' engagement. Find out more on their website.

UK Research & Innovation (UKRI) take a broader approach, including public engagement as part of their 'Pathways to Impact' framework linked to 'Economic & Societal impacts' as a way to improve research quality and impact, develop skills, empower and inform citizens and inspire future researchers. When public engagement is written into the 'Pathways to Impact' statement, a budget for proposed public engagement activities can be included.

Working with children

If your engagement project involves working with children, you or your volunteers may need to have a DBS check. Speak to HR or the Public Engagement Team for more information.

Ethics

If your public engagement project will involve collecting data and/or you are planning to publish about your project, you may need to get formal ethics approval before you begin through the School's ethics approval process.

Photography & videography permissions

In accordance with GDPR legislation, you need to obtain people's permission to capture their image and use it elsewhere. More information, including subject permission forms, can be found on the intranet.

Venue considerations

An inappropriate venue can negatively impact on your engagement and your audience's experience. Make sure the venue is suitable and has the facilities you require. Ask yourself:

- Does your venue support the technological requirements you have? Will support be available or do you know how to operate the equipment?
- Does the venue have Wi-Fi or electricity if you will require these? (Particularly for outdoor events)
- Will the audience feel comfortable and welcome at this venue?
- Is the venue fully accessible and open for the audience?

Follow-up

Following a project or activity, consider whether it is appropriate and/or helpful to provide a way for people to continue to engage with you, the research, or your group. This could occur by:

- Giving information on how to access your website, newsletter or social media feed.
- Providing opportunities to be updated on future research progress or to continue to be involved in your research.
- Sharing a summary of the feedback from participants with any volunteers and collaborators and thanking them for their time.

Share your experience

Sharing your experiences in public engagement is a great way to celebrate your project and share the learning with others. Some ways to share your experience could be:

- Present your public engagement project at your team or Department meetings.
- Include information about your public engagement in presentations about your research.
- Share your resources and experiences directly with colleagues who are considering their own public engagement.
- Work with the Public Engagement Team to turn your project in to a written case study to be shared with others.

If you think your project would make a good case study, get in touch at: publicengagement@lshtm.ac.uk.

Evaluation

How are you going to measure the success and impact of your engagement project?

Evaluation that is built into your project plan from the beginning will help you to determine if you have achieved your aims, identify areas for improvement, and provide insight for others hoping to do public engagement.

Your evaluation should link back to what you are trying to achieve (as stated in your aims) and who your audience is. It is something that should be considered and integrated throughout the engagement. We have a more in-depth guide on evaluation in public engagement which can be found on the [intranet](#).

TOP TIPS: General

- Start by defining your aims, objectives and audience before coming up with your activity or method.
- Consider how your engagement could benefit you/your research.
- Ensure you can articulate what the audience will get out of engaging with you.
- Don't be afraid to be creative when developing your engagement activities.
- Make use of existing resources, external expertise, and collaborator knowledge.
- Be aware of your budget, and be prepared for last minute expenses.
- Be flexible and always have a Plan B.
- Evaluation is a must! Design an evaluation method that is appropriate for your project.

TOP TIP: Match your evaluation to your project

There are many tools that can be used in evaluating public engagement. Complicated evaluation methods are not needed for a simple engagement activity. For example, a festival stall environment, which is busy with often short interactions with the public, could be evaluated with a simple 'voting box' or similar activity which can still be informative and in line with your aims.

School contacts and other resources

Forms on the Intranet

- Internal risk assessment form
- Photo permissions
- Expense forms

Other resources

These guidelines have been created using information from the following organisations. Visit their websites for more information and to check out their best practice guides.

- Wellcome Trust
- Sheffield University Public Engagement
- UCL
- Mesh Tools and Guidelines
- UKRI: Guides, policies, research and publications
- National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement
- Engage2020: Science, Society and Engagement
- Science for all: Public Engagement Tool
- NCCPE Understanding audiences
- Royal Academy of Engineering
- University of Manchester

Need support or advice planning your public engagement?

Contact the School's Public Engagement Team on: publicengagement@lshtm.ac.uk

Public engagement intranet webpages: lshtm.sharepoint.com/Services/comms-eng/Pages/public-engagement.aspx

 lshtm.ac.uk/facebook

 lshtm.ac.uk/twitter

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