

How To Start A Public Engagement With Research (PER) Project or Event

PLANNING

It is important to think about *why* you want to engage and *who* you want to engage before deciding *how* you're going to do it.

Why? The purposes of Public Engagement with Research fall into three main categories:

- **Inform and inspire:** Informing and inspiring young people, adults and family audiences about your research. Communicating the findings of your results to the public. Increasing the accessibility of your research. E.g. taking part in festivals; museum events; podcasting.
- **Consult and listen:** To better inform you on the public's views and concerns about your research. E.g. Online consultations; panels and user groups.
- **Collaborating with the public:** To encourage public participation in your research by having people participate in conducting the research and/or defining future research directions. E.g. Citizen Science

There is no intended hierarchy on engagement strategies - all are useful and valid in their own way and often an activity will contain a blend of these techniques and purposes.

Want to see some examples of PER projects run by the School of Archaeology? Check these out [here](#)

Who? The public is "*anyone who does not currently have a formal relationship with a HEI through teaching, research or knowledge transfer, but who may have an interest in these activities or upon whom the research or its application could impact.*" – RCUK.

However, people differ in many ways, such as their interests, affiliations, background, age, economic circumstances, location and gender. Who you want to reach will depend on the nature of your research and the reasons for the engagement.

High-quality Public Engagement with Research activities have a clear and specific demographic in mind - rather than the 'general public'. Target audiences can be mixed but it will be important to break down who is included

within that group. For example, the target audience for an 'inform and inspire' activity could be parents and their children (15 years+) from Oxfordshire.

Once you have identified who you want to engage with, the best way of reaching out may be through a partnership with another organisation that already works with, or has access to your identified audience. For example, the Ashmolean or Pitt Rivers Museum.

Need ideas for PER venues? Check out the links to these University spaces [here](#)

How? Once you've identified *why* and *who*, you can then think about the best format for your engagement. This should both achieve your objectives and be suited to the target participants or audiences. Some examples are provided below:

| Informing/ Inspiring | Consulting | Collaborating |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Talks | Opinion polls | Citizen Science |
| Exhibitions | Attitude research | Participative research |
| Podcasts | Public dialogues | Stakeholder dialogue |
| Films | Public debates | Citizen Jury |
| Education activities | Focus groups | Co-production of knowledge |
| Social media | Social research | Committee representation |
| Theatre/ the arts | Advisory Committee | Patient & Public Involvement |

Need some ideas for PER activities? Check out current PER seed funded projects across the University [here](#)

EVALUATION

The final step of planning is to consider evaluation. When thinking about what you want to evaluate – as well as counting (people; downloads; views and other metrics) think about ways in which you can measure the impact of an activity i.e. by selecting a sample of the public participants and exploring whether a change has actually happened as a result of the activity. You should also reflect on the activity from your perspective as a researcher and think about asking other colleagues about their reflections. For example:

Inform & inspire activities: Did the public audiences change in any way – gain knowledge, change their attitudes, perceptions or behaviour?

Consulting: Did the public participants' views and insight lead to a change on the researchers' thinking in any way or help refine the research questions?

Collaborating: In what ways did participation of the public lead to changes in how the research was conducted?

Need help formulating your ideas about evaluation? See our evaluation documents [here](#)

OTHER THINGS...

For any Public Engagement with Research activity you will also need to consider the following:

- Do you have an appropriate risk assessment? This should cover both risks to the public and to you and any volunteers
- GDPR photo permission? If you're taking photos and/or video at the event you will need signed consent forms from members of the public
- Do you have enough volunteers? It is useful to have additional volunteers specifically for collecting signed photo consent forms and undertaking evaluation on the day. If you need help to identify students and staff in the School who may be interested in helping please email per@arch.ox.ac.uk
- Advertising – social media, a website, an organisation's mailing list or events guide (e.g. a Museum's 'What's on' booklet). Consider what type of advertising will be most likely to reach your targeted audience

Supporting documents can be found on our PER Resources page [here](#)