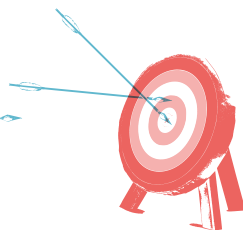
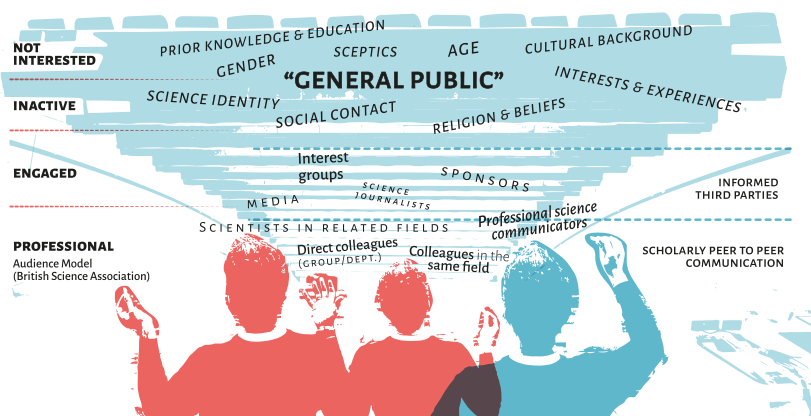


Target groups of science communication



After defining the goal of your communication, the guiding question should be *WHAT* am I communicating to *WHOM*? These two aspects are strongly interconnected. For the *WHAT*, you need to decide whether you want to speak about a specific aspect/finding or whether you want to communicate about aspects of a particular research field, area, topic or project more generally. Specific findings are often aimed at a well-defined and more informed target audience, such as other researchers, sponsors etc. But even if you want to communicate a very specific finding to such a group, the target group will often influence the content... you might decide to emphasise aspects for one group, but may omit them completely for another. For example, two sponsors for the same project may have different interests/philosophies that you need to consider. In practice, this means you will often have to iteratively adapt the *WHAT* to the *WHOM* when planning a communication. Addressing a larger audience, you will often choose to communicate more generally about a topic. The larger the audience, the more heterogeneous it will be. At some point, the group becomes too large to be a suitable target audience. The best example is the “general public”. If you state that your activity is aimed at the general public, you must follow up by defining the primary and maybe also the secondary subgroups that you are targeting. Also think about how to retain the audience once you have gained their interest. For example, if you expect families to attend an event, you can attract and retain them by adding an activity for children or young people. Each audience is made up of people with different knowledge, backgrounds and personal experiences, so *one size will not fit all*. A general, *dumbed-down* approach is therefore not the best way to reach even a lay audience: Try to build on your audience's existing knowledge and experiences wherever possible.

Concepts such as the *science capital* or *science identity* of an audience are useful for reflecting on the heterogeneity of a target group, for helping to design targeting strategies for specific subgroups or for responding to an audience during an interactive activity. *Science capital* is a theoretical concept that aims to explain the science-related patterns of aspirations and educational participation of a group of people ^[20]. It considers the “scientific baggage” that a person or group accumulates over time, including scientific knowledge and education, experiences, beliefs and social environments. High or low *science identity* refers to the degree to which a person identifies with science and the extent to which science influences their thinking and behaviour ^[21]. In addition to aspects such as gender and age, scientific baggage will influence a person’s attraction to and behaviour during a SciCom activity. Some people may be engaged, while others may be inactive or even disinterested ^[22]. The target audience also defines the place, medium, time and often the effort required for the activity. Find out as much as you can about your audience. Be aware that even defined groups can be very heterogeneous and that you cannot reach everyone at the same time. Think about the blend of *information*, *dialogue* and *involvement* that might be most appropriate for a given audience. If you are a researcher, consult professional science communicators within or outside your institution, if possible.



Recommended reads:

- ♦ Schäfer et al. (2018). *The different audiences of science communication: A segmentation analysis of the Swiss population's perceptions of science and their information and media use patterns*, Public Understanding of Science, 27(7): 836–856. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662517752886>
- ♦ Humm, C. & Schrögel, P. (2020). *Science for All? Practical Recommendations on Reaching Underserved Audiences*, Front. Commun. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2020.00042>