

Public engagement

Planning and developing science communication for research should be part of your project from the outset, not just something that is thought about at the end. Being clear from the start about who you want to share outputs with, and why, will help you shape a better project and define how best to engage them. *If people are engaged with the question, they will be engaged with the answer*, so involve the groups you plan to communicate with, and involve them early.



But how do you do this? Which people should be involved and how do you determine that and find them?

Here is a five-step process to help you plan a public engagement activity and involve the public you want to communicate with in co-creating communications of research or scientific insights. A co-creation process ensures that the activity is tailored to the needs and interests of the audience and has the right format to make an impact; presenting potential users with finished material for approval is not co-creation. The five-step guide consists of key questions that you should ask yourself before starting your project. These guiding questions will help you dig deeper. Your main target audience isn't just the general public. Who is particularly interested in your topic? The more of this five-step process you are able to do, the more successful your public engagement activity is likely to be.





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1.Scoping

Look at what people are saying and the underlying assumptions.

How is your research topic being talked about in the public domain? How well is information being used? What are the misconceptions? What context is missing? What are the key underlying assumptions?

2.Involving people

Work out the significance for different groups and how to involve them.

Which individuals and groups are most interested, concerned or involved in the issue? Who isn't but should be? Who is driving the public conversation? Who should be part of the project team? Who should you invite to user testing? Who can help you share your findings?

3.Planning

Propose content and formats that are relevant for the people accessing them.

What is the best format to communicate your research: website, graphics, video, events, publications? What is the key content and context you need to include? What language and style should you use?

4.User testing

Develop your material together.

How can you run user testing? Who should be involved? Which parts of your output should you user test? What questions can you ask?

Use the feedback from user testing to re-plan your science communication activity.

5.Dissemination

Continue to engage people and use feedback.

Who should know about your research findings? Who will talk about and publicise them? How can you share them with the media, with professionals, with the public?

The process should expand the scope for others to shape communication and increase the range of opportunities and conversations where this can happen.

Recommended reads:

- ◆ Sense about Science (2017), *Public engagement: a practical guide*, <https://senseaboutscience.org/activities/public-engagement-guide/>
- ◆ National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Centre for Engagement and Dissemination (2012), *Briefing notes for researchers: How to involve members of the public in research*, <https://www.invo.org.uk/resource-centre/>
- ◆ The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), *Engagement activity planning guides for universities*, <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/planning>