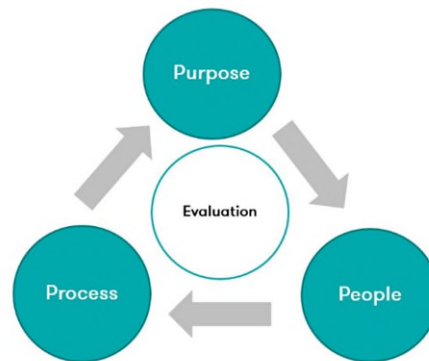


How to engage the public and community partners in research

1. Who do you want to engage and why?

Before you consider how to engage the public and partners with your research, you should consider *who* you want to engage and *for what purpose*.

A useful tool to help you identify the audiences you want to engage is the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement’s [framework for quality public engagement](#):



This framework has four key elements to consider when planning your public engagement activities:

- **Purpose:** Why are you doing the engagement?
- **People:** Who is involved in the project as participants, partners, or deliverers of the project? How have you considered their needs and interests in developing your approach?
- **Process:** Is the process appropriate to the purpose and people you are engaging with?
- **Evaluation:** Have you considered how to use evaluation to both inform your approach, and to assess its value?

The majority of this toolkit will focus on considering the needs and interests of the people you wish to engage and processes for engaging them.

- The [Finding Your Audience](#) toolkit can help you to identify the people you wish to engage.
- The [Evaluation](#) toolkit can help you measure the success of your project and understand the experience of your audiences and partners

2. Types of community engagement

One key consideration when you’re designing your engagement activities is how you want to involve communities and to what extent. The [IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation](#) provides a framework that may help you to consider the most appropriate level of engagement for your project. The NCCPE has also [defined several different purposes](#) for public engagement which can help you consider what purpose public engagement has for you. The table below integrates the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation with the NCCPE purposes of public engagement:

IAP2 Spectrum	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
NCCPE purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share what we do • Inspire people • Give people information to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from others • Dialogue about lived experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to need • Respond to requests for research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create knowledge together • Do research together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable the community to conduct their own research – with or

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	help change behaviours		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask the public what is important to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply research together to make a difference 	without researcher support
Case studies	Heart and Lung Shops	Radiotherapy and Me	Something In the Air Lothian Lugs	Little Voices Shouting Out Community Matters	Connected Communities

When designing your public engagement activities you should:

- Consider which activities will work best: NCCPE has a useful [typology of activities](#).
- Consult with and involve community partners in designing your activities.
- Consult with and involve the public (where possible) on how they would like to engage.
- Consider what skills and resources you will need to successfully deliver your chosen approach – this may include specialist facilitators, creatives and/or other professionals.

A note on setting up partners and specialists as suppliers in public engagement projects:

- University finance systems can be slow moving and complex. It can take a long time to get partners or specialist facilitators set up as suppliers and/or to get permission to pay them as self-employed individuals.
- Build in plenty of time for this (2-3 months) to avoid any problems.
- If you need support, talk to either a finance contact in your department or get in touch with the WIE Team who can advise on the best process to follow.
- You may also have to get Financial Regulations approval depending on what you're hoping to do – you can [find your Fin Regs champion](#) on the Finance pages.

Find out more

- NCCPE has a large [case study database](#) to give you ideas.
- The [Practical Engagement Skills toolkit](#) provides information about how to design approaches to public engagement.

3. Barriers to public engagement

Once you have identified your audience and your purpose, you need to think about how to find and then engage them. In order to successfully engage audiences, beyond the 'usual suspects' who will happily go out of their way to attend public engagement activities in a university setting, it is essential for researchers to go out of university environments and meet people where they are.

However, it can be challenging for researchers to engage certain audiences¹, particularly those without direct personal experience of higher education². There are a number of reasons for this, including:

- Familiarity:** Many people have never engaged with a university before and do not know anything about what happens there, who works there and why they should engage with you.
- Confidence:** some communities and individuals may feel intimidated by academia and doubt that they have anything valuable to add to academic research.

¹ A survey by Wellcome Trust in 2016 found that over a quarter (26%) of researchers cited 'difficulty finding relevant audiences' as a barrier to public engagement.

<https://cms.wellcome.org/sites/default/files/wtp060034.pdf>

² A survey by researchers at the University of Reading found particular challenges with engaging certain audiences in citizen science: <https://research.reading.ac.uk/openupsci/2019/01/16/challenges-and-barriers-to-public-engagement-and-citizen-science/>

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- **Trust:** there can be a lack of trust which may make certain communities and individuals reluctant to engage, especially where they do not know the researcher or the organisation they represent.
- **Time:** people lead busy lives and may not feel they have the time or inclination to participate in research or engagement activities.

4. Why should I work with community partners?

There are a wide range of benefits to working with community partners to engage the public with your research, including:

- Opportunities to engage with audiences and communities you would not otherwise reach
- Expertise in how to engage audiences who are not familiar with higher education/research
- Expertise and knowledge that researchers may lack
- The opportunity for two-way knowledge exchange
- Gain new ideas for research or ways in which your research can have an impact
- Access to local networks that can broaden links with communities
- Potential to contribute to policy drivers such as Engaged Universities³, the placemaking and levelling up⁴ agendas.

Find out more:

- Leeds Beckett University have [produced a video](#) exploring the benefits of their community partnerships initiative “CommUNITY”.
- Northumbria University discusses the benefits of [working with local arts and cultural organisations](#).
- Researchers talk about the [benefits of working with public libraries](#) in a toolkit created by Carnegie UK and Libraries Connected to support public library/HE partnerships
- The NCCPE have produced a [toolkit for working with local communities](#) which emphasises institution-wide and strategic approaches to partnership building

5. Finding community partners

There are many different potential community partners and each local area will have its own ‘community ecosystem’.

Community partners can include (but are not limited to!):

Archives	Further Education colleges	Parks and green space management teams
Arts centres	GP Practices	Public libraries
Charities/organisations supporting older people	Hairdressers	Social housing providers
Community centres	Hospices	Schools
Citizens Advice Bureaus	Hospitals	Skills/employment providers
Cultural centres	Law centres	Sports centres and groups
Disability charities and support groups	Museums	Theatres
Faith centres and groups	Organisations supporting homeless people	Uniform groups (e.g. Scouts)
Festivals	Organisations supporting refugees	Walking groups
Food banks	Parent/carer support groups	Youth charities and services
		Youth Offending Teams

³ <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about-engagement/what-does-engaged-university-look>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>

Local Authorities often work across a range of services and priorities and may be able to signpost local groups or support local partnership engagement. However, as they are large organisations, the public library service and/or Further Education colleges may be useful 'entry points' into wider Local Authority partnerships.

There may also be **local partnership groups** and consortia that you could approach e.g. Local Enterprise Partnerships, Voluntary Action Groups and Cultural Education Partnerships.

You may also be able to consult a community asset map to find potential partners for example [Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Asset Map](#).

The NCCPE hosts a [national community partner network](#). This includes a JISMAIL group for community organisations who are interested in working with academic partners which could be a useful resource to identify possible partners.

6. Creating effective community partnerships

There are certain common issues that you may need to consider in order to successfully establish a partnership with community organisations:

ENGAGEMENT

- **Describe your research and the purpose of engagement simply and accessibly.** A useful way to think about this is to rehearse an '[elevator pitch](#)' avoiding jargon and academic language.
- **Engage your partner as early as possible.** The more involvement they have in scoping the project and co-designing it with you, the more likely they are to be positively engaged.
- **Ensure you feel you can work well with the partner.** If your initial contact is too busy or isn't interested in your project then you may need to look for someone different. Or ask them what they would need to be able to engage with the project – which leads to the next point...
- **Consider resourcing and funding needs of community partners.** While they may be interested in working with you, many community organisations are under-resourced and under-funded. Reflecting their resourcing requirements in your funding bid or helping them to identify complementary funding for the project will ensure you have an engaged and effective partner. Please refer to the note on *setting up partners and specialists as suppliers* in Part 2 of this toolkit for some considerations if you need to pay community partners for their work.
- **The National Community Partner Network** has a useful factsheet with tips for [how to connect with community partners](#).

UNDERSTANDING

- **Agree shared goals and aims.** Understand the aims of your community partner and make sure you are both getting something out of the project. This can be a good opportunity to explore the value of the project to the community ecosystem e.g. in terms of helping them to achieve funding or gain evaluation evidence.
- **Establish a shared language.** Academic language is not widely understood and can place barriers between researchers and communities. Start the project right by agreeing a shared description of the project and language about its aims, methods and outcomes.
- **Manage expectations on timescales.** Universities tend to move more slowly than community organisations so it is important to agree a realistic project timeline with partners at the beginning.

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- **Discuss and agree ownership of intellectual property** arising from the project. This can be an issue particularly when working with creatives, artists and freelancers who are used to owning the IP from their work. Get in touch with wie@warwick.ac.uk or the legal department if you need support.

POWER

- **Respect the knowledge and expertise of your community partner.** Researchers are experts in their field of study, but community partners have expertise you may not e.g. in effective ways of promoting activities and engaging target audiences, detailed local knowledge etc. Ensure you let your partner know that you value their expertise and do not assume you know more than them about a given topic.
- **Credit your community partner in your promotional and publicity materials.** Agree branding guidelines at the outset and ensure you credit your partner appropriately.
- **Think about how you will share the findings/outputs of your project with the community:** “extraction” of knowledge and information from communities through community-based research can exacerbate power imbalances. Try to think about how the community can experience, reflect on and use the outcomes from your public engagement activity.

RESILIENCE

- **Flexibility is key.** You may have an idea about a partnership or project, but this may change as the project develops. Be open to changing your approach, but keep in mind your goals and aims.
- **Maintain communication** through the lifetime of the project to ensure your partner is still positively engaged. Online communication tools make this a lot easier to fit into busy days.
- **Keep and regularly review a risk register** which considers external issues such as partner funding/resourcing/capacity and any issues that may affect the willingness and ability of the public to engage with the project. Think about actions you can take to address issues before they escalate.

EFFECTIVENESS

- **Reflect on your approach** through a collaboratively devised evaluation. Review what did and didn't work and ensure that you discuss the experience of the partner organisation as part of this.
- **The [Evaluation](#) toolkit** can help you measure the success of your project and understand the experience of your audiences and partners.

LONG TERM RELATIONSHIPS

- **A research project for you can be everyday life for communities.** Public engagement activities often take place on a project-by-project basis, but the community is always there.
- **Think about how to build long-term relationships** with communities as part of your research practice.
- **This will foster trust and strong relationships** between the university and the community and will enable you to conduct better quality public engagement with greater depth over time.