

How do I plan a public engagement activity?

Developing aims to plan a successful activity

1 | What kind of impact do you want to have? What do you want to achieve?

There are various things you could achieve through engagement but different goals often require different approaches. Try to narrow down some more specific goals so you can choose the right approach from the

outset. For some inspiration, look at the left column of the table below and consider which aims apply. Then expand further so it's specific to you and the research you are engaging the public with.

'I want to...'	Further details might include
Inform / raise awareness	Inform who about what? Why?
Inspire curiosity / entertain	In which groups of people? About which topics?
Increase STEM uptake	Amongst what kind of young people? In which disciplines?
Change perspectives / attitudes	Changing whose perspective of what? Why?
Change behaviour	Changing what kind of behaviour? Who?
Gain insights to improve my research	From which groups of people? About what topic? To what specific end?
Understand the impact of my research in wider society	Who are the stakeholders / impacted groups?
Share skills	What kind of skills and with who? Why?
Collaborate on a project	With who? On what kind of project?
Build / repair relationships	With which groups? Why?

Here are some examples of specific aims:

- *I want to inform* local residents about new solar panel technology so that people are aware of the different options available.
- *I want to collaborate* with a local charity to increase awareness of a specific disease and facilitate further funding for research.

To focus your planning, you might want to consider the balance of how broad and deep you hope the impact of your activity will be:

Broad – I want to reach as many people as possible.

Deep – I want to have a deeper impact (usually on a smaller number of people).

Achieving a significant impact usually requires high levels of involvement with your audience and therefore a larger investment of time and resources. This means it can be difficult to do this with large groups of people. Other formats can reach large numbers of people but might not have as deep or lasting an impact.

If you are aiming to achieve both, you can use a multi-pronged approach, such as designing one activity that will have wide reach and another that will have significant impact on a smaller group. Or you may design your activity in a way that will result in it having a more long-term and sustained impact.

2 | Can you plan for continued impact?

A 'multiplier effect' is when the impact of a project continues to spread long after you have stopped working on it. This could entail making your activities self-sustainable and able to continue to run beyond your involvement. Or you might wish to focus on how to disseminate and share your learning, ensuring your project has legacy. To achieve this you will usually need to involve others who will pass on the impact.

For example, imagine you set up a plant exchange event in a community, where seeds are exchanged for knowledge about growing plants. While you will need to be involved heavily at the outset, once this becomes an established event and draws other interested parties, it may be able to run entirely without your influence. If you can provide a guide for how this event was set up, you may even inspire other communities to begin their own events, multiplying the impact further.

3 | Who is your audience and how can you involve them?

Thinking through your public engagement aims might help you to identify an audience for your activity. For example, if you would like to encourage people to recycle more, then locals who currently don't recycle might be an ideal target. If you want to understand the needs of patients with a specific disease, then you would want to speak to those patients or their carers. Try to narrow down your audience further than the 'general public' as this will help to create a targeted and relevant activity. Read our resource *How do I choose an audience to engage with?* to help build a profile of your audience that will help you make decisions later down the line.

Engagement is about involving your audience on some level, so you might also wish to consider how involved they will be in the planning. The deeper you want your impact to be felt, the more you might want to involve your audience (who may well become your collaborators).

Here are example levels of involvement:

- **Not involved** – I will design / run the activity without their input and deliver it to them without opportunity for feedback from the group.
- **Participating** – They will participate in an interactive activity I design and run, with opportunity for them to feed back.
- **Consulted** – I will consult them and use their insights to shape my activity / future activities.
- **Collaborating** – We will design / run the activity together.
- **Empowered** – I will give them the information / skills they need and they will design / run the activity.

Involving representatives of your audiences in the design of your activity can make it more relevant for them and therefore more successful when you roll it out. You can also use these partnerships to recruit more participants for your activity when the time comes. Here is an example of how different stages of involvement might play out across an engagement process:

If you are wanting to design and deliver a science demo in schools, you might want to include some school students in the design process as collaborators. They might then be empowered to deliver the activity themselves to their peers.



4 | What format is best and what content do you need?

There are many formats engagement activities can take! Once you have an aim and an audience in mind, you could use this to determine your approach. Why not have a look at the resources under **'Designing your activity'** on our toolkits page. Whilst it's tempting to jump straight to thinking about the activity you would like to deliver, it's important to consider your aims and audiences first to ensure you choose an approach that is best suited to these.

5 | What resources will you need?

The resources you might need usually fall into three categories: funding, materials and time. Funding is a good place to start as this will have implications for the rest. See our resource *How do I fund my public engagement activity?* to develop a budget. This will also help you consider the materials you need and will offer some suggestions of where you might source them.

The final resource, time, will require a different strategy, especially if you have limited funding. It may be that you want to partner with a specific person or group. Not only will you have more collaborators who can put their time into your activity, but you will also have access to any resources they have. On the other hand, you may require a significant amount of buy-in from colleagues or volunteers. For help with this, see our guide on getting people involved in your engagement.

6 | How will you evaluate your success?

Reflecting on your engagement activity is really important, both during your work on it and after you have run it. Evaluation will help you to tweak and improve what you do and demonstrate the impact it has had. This includes being able to include it in grant proposals or funding reports, demonstrating

new skills gained and getting buy-in for future projects. However, to get as much out of your evaluation as possible, it's important to practice it throughout the project. Having an evaluation strategy can be really useful. Why not check out our resource on how to evaluate your engagement activity?

Further reading - Let us know of others!

- [Generic Learning Outcomes](#) – Produced by the Arts Council, these are often used in the visitor attraction/museum sector to help formulate clear aims for activities
- [Planning template from Wellcome](#)