

### *Lesson 3: Pathways to research: planning a strategy for public engagement*

#### Learning outcomes:

LO#5 - The student will become familiar and differentiate several RMA facilitation roles that add value to research (such as science communication, societal engagement, technology and knowledge exchange).

LO#7 - The student is aware of the major elements and characteristic features of a research engagement plan and the key performance indicators.

LO#8 - The student will be able to map the different target stakeholders and its roles at different stages of the research project

LO#13 - The student is able to select the engagement strategies, platforms and communication style suited for each target audience.

For a research activity/ project to have impact beyond academia, developing top research is not enough. Depending on its major goals, the different potential beneficiaries and stakeholders should be engaged throughout the project lifecycle to maximize its impact. As thus, defining the **pathways to impact** means defining a **public engagement strategy for the design, implementation and dissemination of research**.

For a research activity/ project to have impact beyond academia, developing top research is not enough. Depending on its major goals, the different potential beneficiaries and stakeholders should engage throughout the project lifecycle to maximize its impact. As thus, defining the **pathways to impact** means defining a **public engagement strategy for the design, implementation and dissemination of research**.

Public engagement is a fundamental element to maximize the research impact as it focuses on co-creating the future with citizens and civil society organisations, bringing together all possible actors that would not normally interact with each other in research contexts. To do so, the promotion of continuous and inclusive participatory dialogues among a wider number of actors along the research activities is needed, with mutual understanding and co-creation of R&I outcomes and policy. Public engagement is by definition a two-way process and, as thus, it is also a way of empowering the citizens to act on a basis of evidence and also to influence Research Policy and decision-making, while promoting research impact and also raising the visibility of the researcher and develop his/her transferable skills (such as communication, negotiation, cultural awareness, etc.).

Researchers are requested to demonstrate their research (project) impact already at the application stage and define ways to maximize it. As such, defining and designing primarily a public engagement strategy that includes multiple engagement activities feeding into one

another is essential to potentiate the highest possible impact. In order to define them, researchers must answer the following questions:

- **PURPOSE: Why to engage the public?**
- **STAKEHOLDERS: Who might benefit from this research?**
- **PROCESS: How to engage and when?**
- **EVALUATION: How to assess the success of such activities/ public engagement strategy?**

In this lesson we will take a closer look to these four steps necessary to draw a research impact plan.

### 1. PURPOSE: Why to engage the public?

Public engagement is multi-faceted, and it integrates a variety of strategies, such as outreach, patient-involvement, collaborative research, citizen science, participatory arts, lifelong learning, community engagement, and engagement with partners. To define what strategy is fitted to the project, the researcher must define clearly the purpose of such engagement - **What do I want to achieve?**

The UK National co-ordinating centre for Public Engagement identifies [six main categories of purpose for public engagement](#):

1. Sharing what we do (inspiring, informing)
2. Responding (to societal needs / requests)
3. Creating knowledge together / Doing research together (collaborating, innovating)
4. Applying knowledge together (collaborating, innovating)
5. Learning from others (consulting)
6. Changing attitudes / behaviour

Another approach is proposed by [Engage2020](#), a project funded by the European Commission (DG Research) looking at research, innovation and related activities and exploring how members of society are involved today and how they could be in the future. In its [Deliverable 3.2 Public Engagement Methods and Tools](#) this project divides the levels of public involvement as follows (based on the purpose of the action):

1. Dialogue: aims to improve the “two-way” communication between scientists, policy makers and citizens to ensure a regular exchange of views.
2. Consulting: aims to obtain public feedback for decision-makers on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
3. Involving: aims to work directly with the public throughout the engagement process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered in decision making processes.
4. Collaborating: implies partnering with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
5. Empowering: happens when the involved participants acquire certain skills/knowledge in the process of engagement.

6. Direct decision: takes place when final decision-making is in the hands of the public.

Before selecting the adequate audience (step 2- Stakeholders) and activity (step 3- process) the researcher needs to have a broader picture of the research subject beyond academia (= where they want to act). NHS [Public engagement: a practical guide](#) identifies an important task to address. At this stage, the researcher and/ or RMA must **scope about what is being said about the project subject** - in news media, public statements and on websites, social media, blogs and forums; and where relevant in advertising, policy documents or reports. This is of particular relevance to draw a more concrete picture of where people are starting from when they engage with the issue, and also where you might find the people you need to engage.

### 1. **STAKEHOLDERS: Who might benefit from this research? How would they benefit from this research?**

After defining the purpose of the public engagement plan the next step is to define who are the stakeholders needed to engage with and why. Understanding the different audiences' needs is essential to promote the quality and effectiveness of the public engagement plan.

Although it is tempting to target the audience as the “general public”, this generalization does not help to develop quality targeted engagement activities. As such, it is necessary to identify the particular interest groups or specific segments of society for which the research is relevant or likely to appeal. For that, it is useful to take a step back and understand the potential impact of such the research activity/ project

1. What could be the change beyond academia (even if at a small scale)?
2. What new insights will the potential beneficiaries gain and how can they use them?
3. What current or emerging debates does your research contribute to?

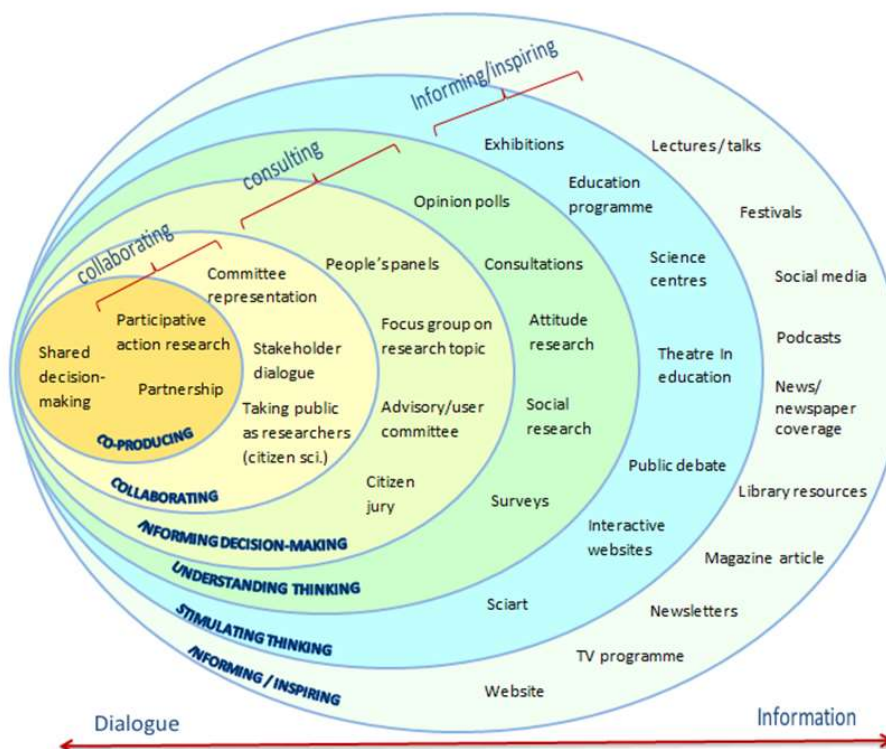
It can also be helpful to break the public down into different types based on categories such as age, gender, ethnicity, location or interests. Examples of types of audience include:

- Adults
- Minority groups
- Community groups
- Family groups
- Older people
- Young people
- Employees
- Students
- Service users/Consumers/Patients
- Affected citizens

If the target audience is wider or difficult to access, it may be useful to work with an intermediary organization (for example, a teacher's association if the target audience are teachers at large).

## 1. PROCESS: How to engage and when?

It is very important to stress that public engagement must be integrated at different stages of the research: design, implementation and dissemination. As such, different levels of engagement activities responding to different purposes (informing, collaborating, consulting, etc.) should be planned to be developed through the activity/ project, not leaving the engagement with the potential beneficiaries to the end of the research process. This interlinkage between the purpose - 1 with process - 3 can be easily understood by looking to the public engagement onion - developed by the Wellcome Trust:



Source: <https://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/public-engagement/what-is-public-engagement>

Several research associations and projects have described and categorized these different engagement activities and strategies, such as:

- The UK National co-ordinating centre for Public Engagement identified following categories of public engagement activities:
  - Lecture / Presentation
  - Broadcast
  - Event
  - Writing
  - Encounter
  - Websites
  - Performance

- Exhibition
  - Exhibit
  - Workshop
  - Network
  - Social media
  - Collaboration
  - Consultation
  - Formal learning
  - Citizen research
  - Collaborative research
  - Enquiry
- service
- The selection of such activities must take in consideration the 1. purpose and 2. stakeholders identified previously, as some activities are more suited than others. As such, students may find examples of how to choose the suited activities in <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/quality-engagement/process>
- If we look again at the Engage2020 project we can find a list of 57 types of public engagement activities, from citizen science to science weeks, from focus groups to participatory budgets. In its [Deliverable 3.2 Public Engagement Methods and Tools](#) students can find a factsheet template for each of these 57 types with very detailed information concerning the application of such methods with examples of past experiences.
- Another tool developed by this project is the [Action Catalogue](#), an online decision support tool that is intended to enable researchers, policy-makers and others wanting to conduct inclusive research, to find the method best suited for their specific project needs.
    - Students may explore this tool to select one or more engagement methods fitted to their research projects. For that, they must select the objective of engagement and the level of involvement (i.e. 1. purpose), the participants (i.e. 2. stakeholders), the geographic scope of the application and also the skills needed for such activity (which can make them think about their skills but also the relevance of developing management skills). When selecting a method, students can explore a detailed description with examples of use of the method worldwide.
- Other examples of public engagement activities can be found at:
- [UK National co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement case-studies](#): featuring a range of different purposes, methods and people. Students can search by discipline, purpose, participants and other criteria.
  - Examples of Public Engagement activities <https://www.completecommunitiesde.org/public-engagement/charrette/>: this

video describes how a charrette process was used to involve and actively engage stakeholders in a corridor planning project in the Town of Smyrna, Delaware.

### EVALUATION: How to assess the success of such strategies?

Evaluating the effectiveness of the public engagement activities means assessing the effect of such activities, looking at “whether” the goals were achieved and also “to what extent” the activity was effective. Evaluation must be used strategically so that it can provide useful information to concretely assess if the engagement goal was achieved but also to gather insights for future pilot approaches/ further exploration. As such, evaluation must also be part of the impact planning, right from the start. Also, at the level of evaluation different aims, approaches and methods, as well as types of data can be found. We can have a ‘summative evaluation’ – assessing the outcomes of the engagement activity - or the “formative evaluation” - looking closely to the process to ensure that your approach is as effective as possible.

### The role of the RMA as facilitator

As mentioned in lesson 1, the role of implementation (and supporting the implementation) of such strategies and activities is often in the hands of an RMA, often named facilitator or knowledge broker. Julie Bayley et.al. development a [framework for knowledge mobilisation and impact competencies](#) were the authors list a series of key competencies required for such roles:



Source: <https://juliebayley.blog/2018/03/19/knowledge-broker-competencies-across-the-institution/>

On the [top rated competencies](#) we have:



1. Internal communication skills
2. Developing and maintaining professional relationships
3. Working in teams, communities and networks
4. Managing multiple conversations
5. External communication skills
6. Active listening
7. Organizational link: acting as a connection point to your organisation
8. Facilitating sharing of knowledge
9. Partnership and relationship management skills and processes
10. Reporting and presenting knowledge

### Public engagement plans: beyond the research project

Besides the project's public engagement plan, plans at more macro levels might exist, such as at the level of **Research Performing Organizations (RPO)** or **Research Funding Organizations (RFO)**. At these levels, the Public Engagement (PE) Plans establish the main aims, objectives and underpinning principles for public engagement with research.

- **R&I institutions engagement plans:** Developing Institutional Public engagement plans (such as University PE Plans) is often a task of specific departments/ units that congregate different actors within and outside an RPO. The development of such strategy, their monitoring and evaluation, as well as the activities of interface between the different stakeholders that are often called to contribute to such plan/ strategy includes the participation of RMAs. The examples below illustrate such strategies and processes within the Universities:

- [UCL Public Engagement strategy](#) 2017: This strategy is developed by the UCL public engagement unit and identifies four strategic aims, and some indicators of success.
  - Aim 1: Enable UCL to become a global leader in listening to communities and engaging with public groups
  - Aim 2: Champion a culture of public engagement across UCL
  - Aim 3: Enable the UCL community to be effective in public engagement activity
  - Aim 4: Put UCL at the centre of London conversations, creating London-wide impact and being a good neighbour

It provides a vision of Public Engagement a journey, with five phases:

1. Find your voice
  2. Learn to listen
  3. Start a conversation
  4. Develop a dialogue
  5. Embed a change
- [Imperial College of London Public Engagement with research strategy](#) 2017-2020: This strategy also identifies four areas for research engagement activities
    - Schools outreach and widening participation
    - Local community engagement
    - Patient engagement

- Engagement with research

It also lists a set of initiatives through which they will realise their strategy divided in: One-way communication, Interactive engagement and Two-way engagement.

– **Public engagement plans of a funding body:** examples

- [Research Councils UK Public engagement strategy](#) focuses on:
  - 1. stimulating a reflexive and responsive research community that engages the public within the research process;
  - 2. enabling public views to inform policies and research strategies across Research Councils and the broader community; and
  - 3. helping to secure and sustain a supply of future researchers and enable the next generation to act as informed and involved citizens.
- [Welcome Trust foundation new Public Engagement strategy](#): that describes a outcomes-led approach with a vision of an [engagement that's led by researchers](#). It includes a [new funding scheme](#), [supported projects](#) and [Fellowships](#).

**Bibliographic references:**

- *Action Catalogue*. (n.d.). Retrieved 15 January 2021, from <http://actioncatalogue.eu/search>
- Bayley, J. E., Phipps, D., Batac, M., & Stevens, E. (2018). Development of a framework for knowledge mobilisation and impact competencies. *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, 14(4), 725–738. <https://doi.org/10.1332/174426417X14945838375124>
- *Engage2020*. (n.d.). Retrieved 15 January 2021, from <http://engage2020.eu/home/>
- KMb Unit, York University. (n.d.). *Competencies for research impact professionals* [Education]. Retrieved 15 January 2021, from <https://www.slideshare.net/KMbYork/competencies-for-research-impact-professionals>
- Knowledge broker competencies across the institution. (2018, March 19). *Julie Bayley*. <https://juliebayley.blog/2018/03/19/knowledge-broker-competencies-across-the-institution/>
- *Nation co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement*. (n.d.). Retrieved 15 January 2021, from <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/quality-engagement/purpose>
- National Institute for Health Research. (n.d.). *Public engagement: a practical guide* (p. 29). National Institute for Health Research.
- *NERC - Public engagement*. (n.d.). Retrieved 15 January 2021, from <https://nerc.ukri.org/about/whatwedo/engage/public/>
- *Research Engagement - Public Engagement - Grant Funding | Wellcome*. (n.d.). Retrieved 15 January 2021, from <https://wellcome.org/grant-funding/schemes/research-enrichment-public-engagement>
- *The Charrette | Planning for Complete Communities in Delaware*. (n.d.). Retrieved 15 January 2021, from <https://www.completecommunitiesde.org/public-engagement/charrette/>



- UCL. (2016, October 20). *Public Engagement Strategy*. UCL CULTURE. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/public-engagement/public-engagement-strategy>
- University of Oxford. (n.d.). *What is public engagement with research?* Retrieved 15 January 2021, from <https://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/public-engagement/what-is-public-engagement>
- Vicky Brightman, & Amy Seakins. (2017). *Public engagement with research - Strategic Plan 2017—2020*. Imperial College London. <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/about/leadership-and-strategy/associate-provost-ap/public/PublicEngagementStrategy.pdf>