foRMAtion

Lesson 3 - Pathways to impact: planning a strategy for public engagement

Keywords

- PE strategy
- Empowering citizens
- Public engagement activities
- Going beyond academia
- Stakeholders' engagement
- Public Engagement Onion
- RMAs as knowledge brokers
- University PE plans

Learning Objectives

⑤ ⑦
⑧ ⑬

Scan for complete LOs

Go to the exercise
https://learningapps.org/watch?v=pzx36maoc22

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

Empowering citizens thorough multiple engagement activities

Public engagement is a fundamental factor to multiply research impact as it focuses on **co-creating the future** with citizens and civil society organisations, bringing together actors who would not normally interact with each other in research contexts. To do so, a promotion of continuous and **inclusive participatory dialogues** among a wider number of actors, throughout the research activities, is needed, along with a mutual understanding and shared co-creation of R&I outcomes and policy. Public engagement is, by definition, a **two-way process**, able of **empowering citizens** to perform evidence-based actions, influence research policy and decision-making, promote research impact and also raise the visibility of the researcher, developing his/her transferable skills (such as communication, negotiation, cultural awareness, etc.).

Researchers are requested to demonstrate their expected research (project) impact early on, during the application stage and define ways to maximize it. As such, shaping and designing a **public engagement strategy,** that includes **multiple engagement activities** feeding into one another, is essential to power the greatest possible impact.

To design a solid path, leading to impact, researchers must answer the following questions:

1. **PURPOSE**: **Why** engage the public?
2. **STAKEHOLDERS**: **Who** might benefit from this research?
3. **PROCESS**: How to engage and **when**?
4. **EVALUATION**: **How** to assess the success of public engagement strategies/activities?

In this lesson, we will take a closer look at these four necessary steps to draw up an effective research impact plan.

1. PURPOSE: Why engage the public?

Public engagement is multi-faceted, involving 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 fits the project, the researcher must clearly define 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:

- **Sharing** what we do (inspiring, informing)
- **Responding** (to societal needs/requests)
- **Creating knowledge** together/Doing research together (collaborating, innovating)
- **Applying knowledge** together (collaborating, innovating)
- **Learning** from others (consulting)
- **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 to explore 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, Engage2020 proposes the following **levels of public involvement** (based on the purpose of the action):

1. **Dialogue**: aims to improve the **'three-way' communication** between scientists, policymakers 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**: this happens when the involved **participants acquire certain skills/knowledge** in the process of engagement.
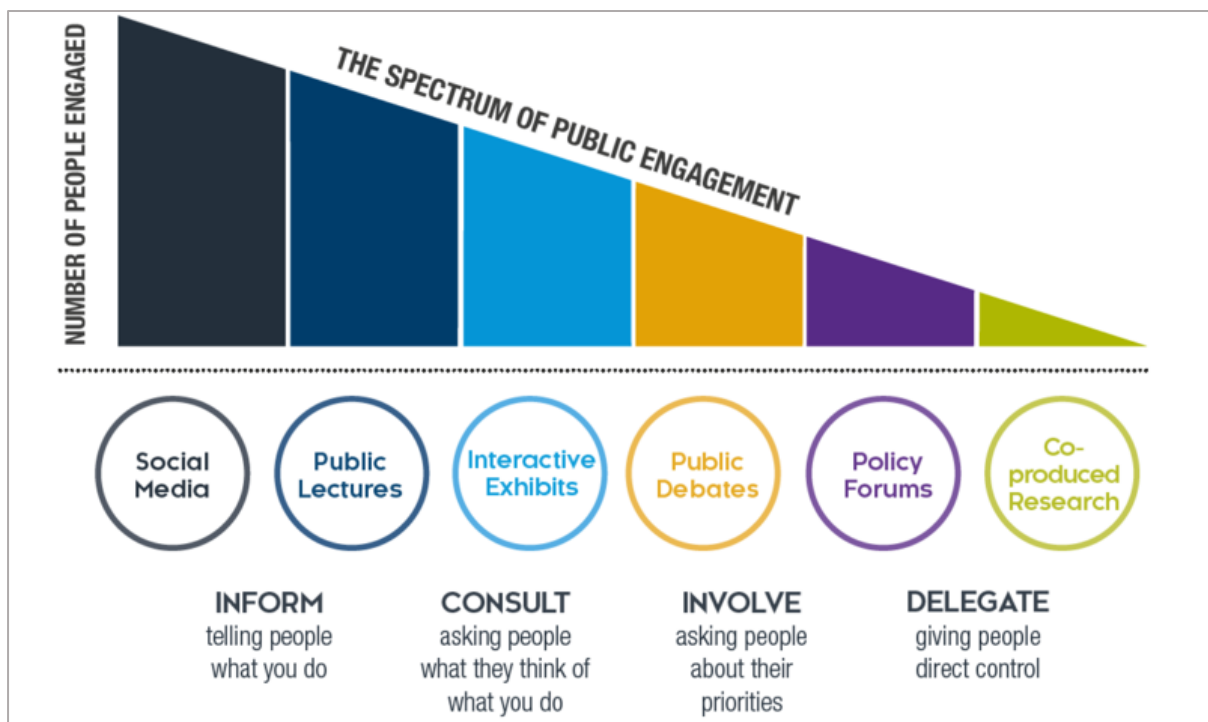

Figure 56 - Different purposes for public engagement
(Source: https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/research/engage/engaged-research.htm)

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 **scan what is being said about the project subject** in news media, public statements, websites, social media, blogs and forums and, if relevant, in advertising, policy documents or reports. This review is instrumental to draw a more concrete picture of where people are starting from when they engage with the issue, and also to locate the actors you need to engage.

2. 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 identify who are the stakeholders to engage 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 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. Taking a step back, to **understand the potential impact of the research activity/project** in question will help focus on the people to reach and involve.

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

Breaking the public down into **different categories** such as age, gender, ethnicity, location or interests may help narrow down the target audiences. Examples of audience types 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 teachers' association if the target audience are teachers at large).
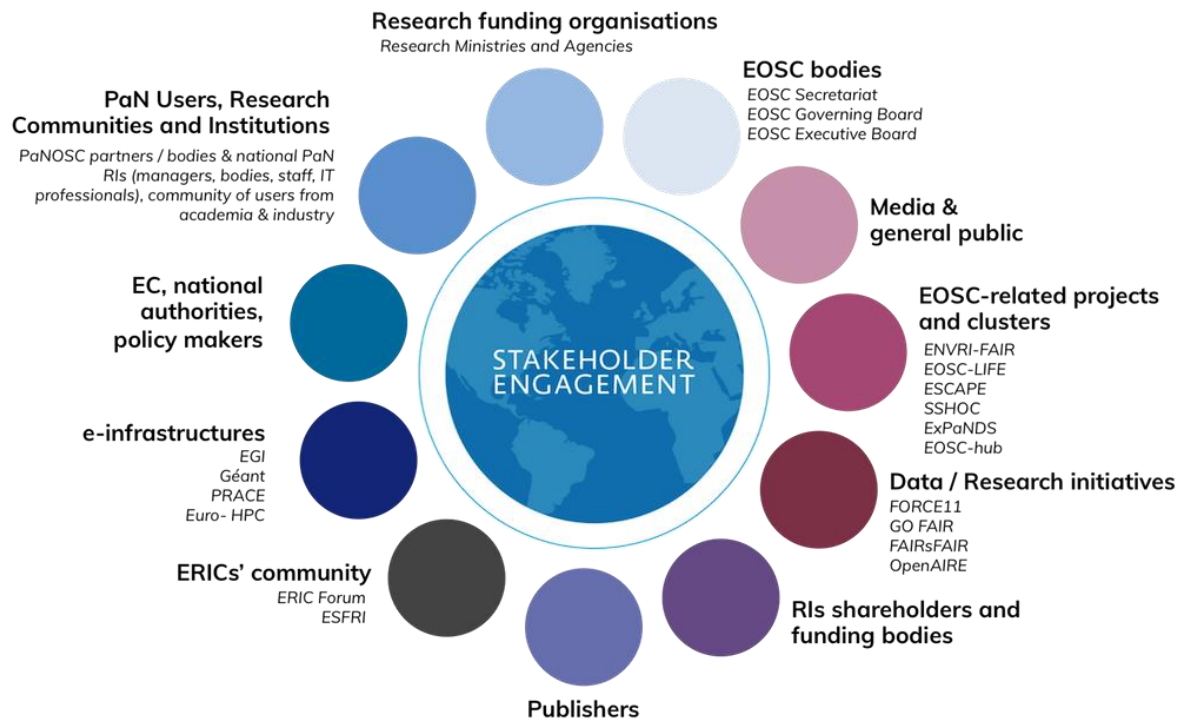
Figure 57 - Example of a stakeholder mapping for the PANOSC initiative
(Source: https://www.panosc.eu/stakeholders/)

3. PROCESS: How to engage and when?

It is very important to stress that public engagement must be integrated at different stages of the research process: during design, implementation and dissemination. As such, different levels of engagement activities, responding to different purposes (informing, collaborating, consulting, etc.), should be planned and developed throughout the activity/project, avoiding leaving engagement with potential beneficiaries to the end of the research process. This interlinkage between purpose (step 1) and process (step 3) can be easily understood by looking at the **Public Engagement Onion** developed by the Wellcome Trust.

Figure 58 - The Public Engagement 'Onion', developed by the Wellcome Trust
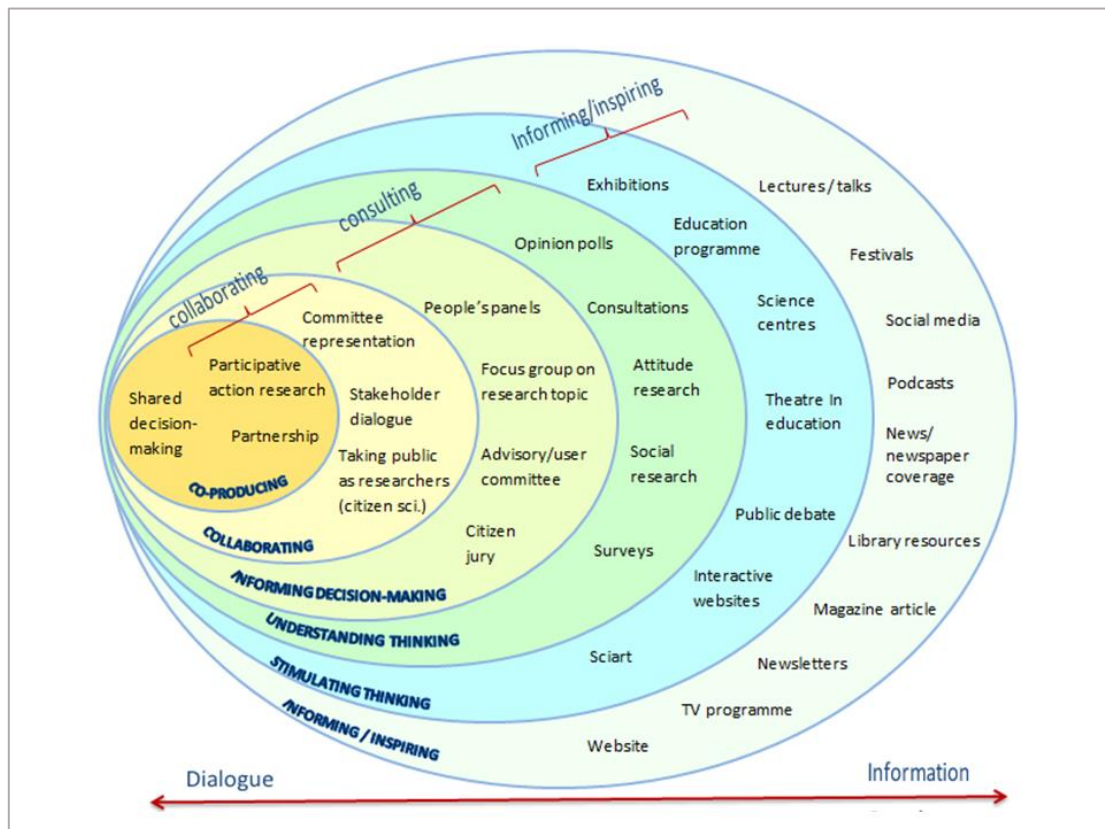*(Source: https://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/public-engagement/what-is-public-engagement)*

Several research associations and projects have described and categorized these different engagement activities and strategies.

The UK National co-ordinating centre for Public Engagement identified the 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 always consider step 1 (purpose) and step 2 (previously identified stakeholders), as some activities are more suited than others. As such, students

may find examples of how to choose appropriate activities at https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/quality-engagement/process

- The **Engage2020** project lists **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 activity types with very detailed information concerning the application of such methods, including examples of past experiences.

- Another tool developed by Engage2020 is the Action Catalogue, an **online decision support tool** intended to enable researchers, policy-makers and other actors wanting to conduct inclusive research to find the most appropriate method for their specific project needs.
  Students may explore this tool to select one or more engagement methods suited for their research projects. To do so, they must select the objective of engagement and the level of involvement (step 1 - purpose), the participants (step 2 -stakeholders), the geographic scope of the application and also the skills needed to carry out such activity (which can activate thinking about their own skills but also about the relevance of developing management skills). When selecting a method, students can explore a detailed description, including examples of the use of the method worldwide.

- Other **examples of public engagement activities** can be found at:

  o UK National co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement case studies: featuring a range of different purposes, methods and audiences. Students can search by discipline, purpose, participants and other criteria.

  o 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.

4. EVALUATION: How do we assess the success of such strategies/activities?

Evaluating the effectiveness of public engagement activities means **assessing the effect** of such activities, looking at whether the goals were achieved and considering **to what extent the activity was effective**. The evaluation must be used strategically for it to 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, the evaluation must also be part of the impact planning, right from the start.

Evaluation procedures may have different aims, approaches and methods and may yield different types of data. **Summative evaluations** assess the outcomes of the engagement activity, while **formative evaluations** look closely at the process to ensure that the approach is as effective as possible.

The role of the RMA as a facilitator

As mentioned in Module 4 - Lesson 1, the implementation (and support to the implementation) of such strategies and activities is often in the hands of an RMA, known as a **facilitator or knowledge broker**. Julie Bayley et.al. developed a framework for knowledge mobilisation and impact competencies which lists a series of key skills required for such roles.

Figure 59 - Knowledge broker competencies across the institution
(Source: https://juliebayley.blog/2018/03/19/knowledge-broker-competencies-across-the-institution/)

RMAs' top-rated competencies are:

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, **higher level plans** might exist, such as those of **Research Performing Organizations (RPOs)** or **Research Funding Organizations (RFOs)**. At these levels, the public engagement plans establish the main aims, objectives and underpinning principles for community 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 strategies, their monitoring and evaluation, as well as the interface activities between the different stakeholders called to contribute to such plan/strategy include the participation of RMAs.

The examples below illustrate such **strategies and processes within the Universities**:

UCL Public Engagement Strategy (2017): this strategy, developed by UCL's public engagement unit, 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 the **vision of a public engagement journey**, in 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.

1. **School's outreach and widening participation**
2. **Local community engagement**
3. **Patient engagement**
4. **Engagement with research**

It also lists a set of strategic initiatives divided into **one-way communication**, **interactive engagement** and **two-way engagement**.

Public engagement plans of a funding body

The [Research Councils UK Public engagement strategy](#) focuses on:

- stimulating a reflexive and **responsive research community** that engages the public within the research process;
- **enabling public views to inform policies** and research strategies across Research Councils and the broader community;
- helping to **secure and sustain a supply of future researchers** and enable the next generation to act as informed and involved citizens.

[The Wellcome Trust's new Public Engagement strategy](#) adopts an outcome-led approach with a vision of **researchers'-led engagement**. It includes a [new funding scheme](#), [supported projects](#) and [Fellowships](#).

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