National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement

The University of Manchester

Engage Framework

Good practice principles for public engagement involving universities

Background

There are lots of reasons researchers might choose to engage the public with their work. It might be because of a desire to make a difference; to respond to funding calls that ask for pathways to impact to be integrated into the research programme; to be accountable to the public; to try to create a REF impact case study; or to learn new skills. As public engagement is increasingly in the spotlight, and funders invest significant effort to incentivise more engagement, it is important to consider what the good practice principles for this work might be.

The NCCPE and Manchester University are working together to develop a framework that draws out some of the key principles behind high quality public engagement. The framework has been informed by a significant amount of work in the HE sector exploring public engagement in practice; a deep dive into the REF 2014 case studies; and consultation with people inside and outside the HE sector.

Introduction

> *"Public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit." (NCCPE 2010)*

Whether you are new to public engagement or more experienced, we all strive to deliver quality engagement. So what makes high quality engagement?

The Engage Framework aims to explain the key things necessary to create quality engagement activities and deliver value to all involved. It captures the features of good practice and recognises that all engagement happens within a context and should offer value for all those involved.

There are five guiding principles, each illustrated with ways the principles might happen in practice:

Good Practice Principles

PRINCIPLE 1: PURPOSE

I will put purpose at the heart of my engagement

PRINCIPLE 2: PEOPLE-FOCUSED

I will strive to ensure my engagement is appropriate to the participants and framed around their needs

PRINCIPLE 3: MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL

I will commit to establishing a way of working that is mutually beneficial for myself and my partners

PRINCIPLE 4: PROFESSIONAL

I will value engagement as a professional endeavour and plan my projects appropriately

PRINCIPLE 5: LEARNING

I will build reflection and improvement into the engagement work I am part of

Who is the framework for?

The Framework has been designed for:

- Public engagement professionals
- University researchers
- University professional support staff
- Higher education funders
- Trainers
- Evaluators.

Using the Framework

Whether you are new to public engagement or are reflecting on your practice, use the Framework by considering each principle in light of what you are planning to do or have done to inform, shape and refine your engagement activities.

Further resources and support can be found on the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement's web site www.publicengagement.ac.uk

Principles of good practice for public engagement

Principle 1: PURPOSE

I will put purpose at the heart of my engagement practice…

Therefore:

- I will be clear about my own motivations for engaging and intentional about my practice
- I will be thoughtful about the difference I am seeking to make
- I will be explicit about the values which are important to me, and open and curious about other people's
- I will consider the outcomes from my engagement activity for all participants, including myself
- I will have thought carefully about the value I hope my engagement activity will realise, for whom, and will take steps to assess how, in practice, this value is actually realised
- I will take account of the context within which I will conduct my engagement work, including who else is working in this space

In practice, this could involve:

- Spending time reflecting on my own motivations and values and exploring how these intersect with those of the people I am collaborating with
- Considering the difference I want my engagement to make, and finding a way to describe this to others
- Considering how I might use evaluation and reflection to check how far my aspirations are actually realise in practice

- Researching what others are already doing in this space e.g. charities, NGOs, other research groups etc.

Principle 2: PEOPLE-FOCUSED

I will strive to ensure my engagement is appropriate to the participants, and framed around their needs

Therefore:

- I will consider carefully the nature of the participants in the engagement process including their interests, values, perspectives and needs
- I will challenge my own assumptions about who I am engaging with and why
- I will listen and respond carefully to the perspectives of participants in my engagement work
- I will be flexible in my approach and adapt my communication and activities to meet audience needs
- I will respect the views, differences in understanding and attitudes and diversity of all participants
- I will open my eyes to new ways of seeing and doing.

In practice, this could involve:

- Being sensitive to the needs of my audiences and showing awareness of background issues and experiences that will inform their values
- Considering my audience's motivation for engagement by identifying social, political and ethical issues that are relevant to them
- Considering how my audience may have different understandings and attitudes to myself
- Being flexible in my approach by adapting my communication, changing my tasks or giving examples, stories, activities and metaphors that the audience can relate to
- Being aware of any relevant controversial or ethical issues within my area of work/research and take these into account when designing my engagement activity.

Principle 3: MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL

I will commit to establishing a way of working that is mutually beneficial with any partners

Therefore:

- I will recognise when I need to work in partnership
- I will respect the contributions of all partners
- I won't assume I am in charge

In practice, this could involve:

- Exploring the value that your partners and participants want to realise, and explore how you can work together to realise that value
- Empathise with opinions which conflict with your own

- Brokering effective relationships and partnerships with key stakeholders when you all have with clearly defined roles
- Ensuring transparency throughout your engagement process
- Recognising the value engagement might have to the various participants and partners, which may differ from the value it has to you. (This might include making new connections, sharing new ideas, building confidence, creating new opportunities, developing new skills or building relationships. For some, engagement might be about contributing to developing collective value, to others it is about the individual value to them, or the people they are engaging with.)

Principle 4: PROFESSIONAL

I will value engagement as a professional endeavour and plan my projects appropriately

Therefore:

- I will be curious about and will strive to understand the context for my engagement activity (e.g. social, political, economic, and institutional contexts), and how this is likely to influence what I can achieve
- I will ensure I have the capacity, resources and skills necessary
- I will seek to build on what has already been tried and the lessons others have learned, relevant to the context I am working in
- I will draw on a body of evidence to underpin my approach
- I won't default to what I know, but will be open to doing things differently

In practice, this could involve:

- Researching the context where I am planning to engage, to understand better what other people have already done
- Conducting an analysis to make explicit the social, political and economic context within which I plan to engage
- Sharing your learning and evaluation of your engagement with others
- Taking time to understand the contextual factors (including social, political, economic and institutional factors) that will influence the engagement I am doing including me, my institution, the partners, and the participants.

Principle 5: LEARNING

I will build reflection and improvement into the engagement work I am part of

Therefore:

- I will learn as I go and be prepared to get things wrong
- I will trial my approach with others, to test out my assumptions
- I will support learning across the project participants
- I will support others to learn from our approach locally and nationally, through relevant networks
- I will be open to feedback, and actively seek it

- I will use evaluation in appropriate ways to support learning, improve practice, and capture value
- I will be open to doing this with project team and partners as appropriate

In practice, this could involve:

- Devising an evaluation plan to conduct formative and summative evaluation and identify when and how to gather feedback
- Dedicating time to reflect on my practice, review the evidence of my learning and try to learn from my experience
- Taking into account my learning and any evaluation when generating new engagement activities.

Summary

To strive for excellence in my engagement work I will …

- Ensure my engagement will be informed by purpose and its participants and will be appropriate to both
- Be sensitive to the cultural factors that will influence the engagement work I am doing
- Be flexible about my approach and be prepared to respond to unexpected developments
- Seek to realise mutual benefit from my work by building in purposeful opportunities for two way engagement
- Conduct my engagement in a professional manner
- Actively seek to learn by exploring others practice; seeking feedback on my work; reflecting on my work; and sharing my learning with others.