ACACIA Practical Guidelines for Public Engagement

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PART 1: Introduction

What is Public Engagement?

These guidelines about Public Engagement are based on information from the NCCPE (National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement)[1]. The NCCPE defines Public Engagement as:

> *"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."*[1]

Public Engagement, as used by the NCCPE and here, has a broad definition. It can include: outreach, patient-involvement, collaborative research, citizen science, participatory arts, lifelong learning, community engagement, engagement with partners, PPI (Public and Patient Involvement), Science Communication, and PPIE (Public and Patient Involvement and Engagement). Public Engagement in this context also encompasses Community Engagement and Involvement (CEI), as described by the NIHR funder.[2]

It is important to note that the public can be actively involved in all stages of the research process. Furthermore, engagement can range from passive activities, such as outreach, to full collaboration between scientists and members of the public. Some use the term involvement for more active forms of engagement. Others distinguish between multiple levels of engagement (see Figure 1).
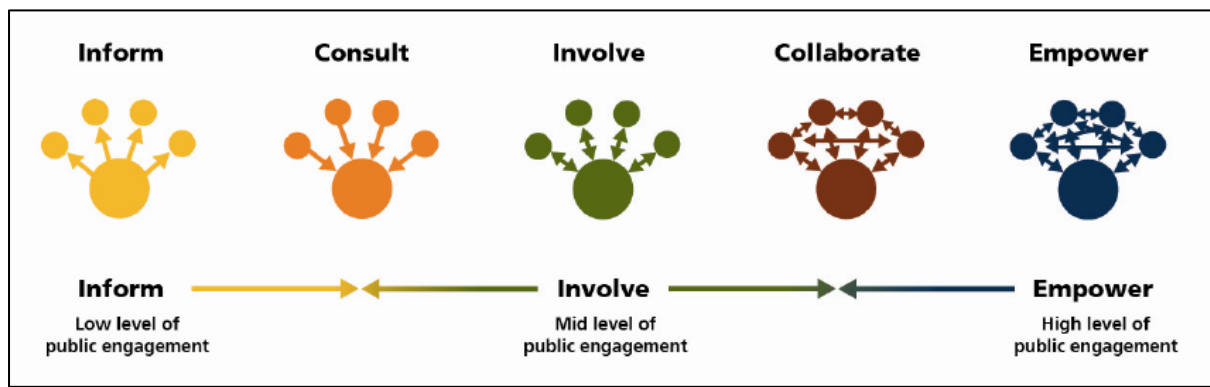

Figure 1: Different levels of Public Engagement

It is crucial to carefully plan and consider which engagement activities might bring the biggest effect to your research project. Some projects might benefit most when focusing on informing the public, other may benefit from a more collaborative approach. This document provides a step-by-step guide to plan tailored engagement activities.

Why should you do Public Engagement?

The public can provide alternative views to the research team. Patients may make different judgements based on their understanding of their condition. They may have different aspirations and thoughts about health outcomes that health care professionals and researchers may not have considered. Public Engagement may also improve enrolment in clinical trials.[3]

Positive impacts of Public Engagement for the community:
- Improved applicability of results for patients and relevance to the public, e.g. for intervention development.
- Improved research transparency.
- Increased public understanding of research processes and results.

Positive impacts of Public Engagement for the researcher:
- Introduces a different perspective to research through communication with non-experts, improving it.[4]
- It is important to many funders, and for securing future funding.
- Scientists that engage in Science Communication have a better scientific track record.[5,6]
- It is rewarding to have positive feedback from non-experts. It's fun.[7,8]

Further reading

NIHR (National Institute for Health Research) Involving the public in research:
https://www.invo.org.uk/resource-centre/
https://www.invo.org.uk/find-out-more/what-is-public-involvement-in-research-2/

NCCPE (National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement):
What is public engagement: https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about-engagement/
Choose a method: https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/

Examples of Public Engagement:
https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/nccpe-projects-and-services/completed-projects/school-university-partnerships-initiative
https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/inspire-me/case-studies
https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2012.00364.x
https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/inspire-me/case-studies/developing-interventions-raise-rabies-awareness-rural-africa

Some examples of Public Engagement activities

Stall at Queen Mary University's science festival

Educational theatre ('In Control'):
https://myhealthinschool.org/in-control-documentary/

Development of an educational short film about asthma self-management ('The third option'):
https://vimeo.com/301864867

Testing and discussion of a board game about asthma ('Asthma Dash')

Interactive workshop – learning about airway inflammation

Public talk or discussion (Parents event, ACACIA Nigeria)

PART 2: How to develop effective Public Engagement?

Public Engagement activities can provide a powerful tool to complement the aims and objectives of a research study. Yet, Public Engagement activities only unfold their potential if they are carefully thought through, recorded, evaluated, and tied to clear aims and goals.

There are four Public Engagement principles to consider for the development and execution of Public Engagement activities: **1) Purpose**: Why are you doing the engagement? **2) People**: Who is involved in the project as participants, partners, or deliverers? **3) Process**: Is the process appropriate to the purpose and people you are engaging, and **4) Evaluation**: Have you considered how to use evaluation to inform your approach and to assess its value?

Below is a step-by-step guide to develop effective Public Engagement activities whilst considering the four Public Engagement principles.

Steps to develop your Public Engagement activities

The following steps will be supported by the ACACIA management through regular conversations. Please contact Gioia at the central team to talk you through the steps before you get started.

STEP 1: 'Theory of Change' for your study

To plan Public Engagement activities as part of a study, such as ACACIA, it is helpful to map out all parts of the science project in a Theory of Change model (see Supplement 1) as a first step. *All six ACACIA sites have filled in a Theory of Change for their part of the study during the inaugural annual meeting (see ACACIA Dropbox folder). Some of these may need updating.*

STEP 2: Formulate Public Engagement aims and objectives

It is important to define a purpose, i.e., why you will do Public Engagement, through defining aims and objectives. Consider your Theory of Change model: In which areas of your research might Public Engagement be helpful - for you, the participants, or the wider public? What would be the aims of Public Engagement? Examples could be: 'to improve participant recruitment', or 'to improve the perception of asthma in the community'.

If you break down each aim into objectives, what would these objectives be? Examples could be: 'to educate parents of asthmatic children about asthma symptoms', or 'to communicate the benefits of the study to school management and teachers'.

STEP 3: Idea finding

Brainstorm any activities that could help to fulfil your aims and objectives.
- Start with a long list: Try to come up with as many ideas as possible.
- Consider what the audience might enjoy and how to motivate them.
- It can be helpful to have several people involved in idea finding or to do it in a group

STEP 4: Cut and refine:

Next, your long list of possible activities needs to be refined. First, remove all ideas that do not address your aims and objectives.

Once you have a set of ideas that fit the aims and objectives, review them one by one and cut them to a short list. Go through the considerations below to help you decide which ideas would work well, which ideas might need changes to work well, and which ones might be difficult to execute. You can do this step in a group, if you like.

People considerations:

- **Who is your audience?** Public Engagement can include patients, carers, parents, health/social care service users, people from organisations that represent service users (such as support groups and charities), or the wider public groups.
  - o What do they like/dislike?
  - o What barriers are there to their participation?
  - o Where will they be?
  - o How will they be involved?
- **Consider why you want people involved** in your research – what do you think their perspective will bring, what can they add?
- **Expectations**
  - o What contributions will the audience make?
  - o Are your time demands reasonable?
  - o Are you explaining everything at the right level?
- **Do you have enough people to run the activity?**
  - o Do people who run the activities need training?

Process considerations:

- **Costs:** ACACIA and the NIHR Global funder encourage Public Engagement activities and generally are happy to help with funding. Large costs or costs not close enough to ACACIA research aims and objectives may not be covered. You will need to check if your activities' costs are covered with your PI and in some cases with the ACACIA central management.
- **Travel** arrangements?
- **Equipment**: What do you need? Do you need to develop any props? To borrow equipment?
- **Duration:** How long will activities take? Should you meet beforehand/afterwards to ensure participants feel comfortable? They may require breaks.
- **Location:** Where should activities take place? Local to them e.g., in community centres, schools, coffee shops?
- **Communication**
  - o Who will be the point of contact?
  - o How do you communicate: Could you discuss some parts via email or telephone? Would it help to send printed/electronic reading materials in advance?
  - o Will you need translations or audio versions?

Evaluation considerations

Evaluation will show if your activity was effective. It is therefore a crucial part of public engagement. If done well, results of Public Engagement evaluations can be used in funding applications, or they can be published.

Generally, it is best to build evaluation into an activity itself and not treat it as a separate entity. The evaluation done through drawings of camels below are an excellent example how a fun activity can be part of evaluation. There is plenty of evaluation advice and toolkits online (see links below). Other considerations are:

- For whom are you evaluating?
- What will you do with the evaluation: e.g., to inform future Public Engagement activities, to get media coverage, to write a conference abstract, or to feed back to participants?
- You can evaluate a variety of areas, such as: design of the activity, delivery of the activity, acceptability of the activity, or assess if the objectives of the activity were met.
- Who does the evaluation?

Example of an evaluation of a guided visiting tour to a zoo:

Drawing of a camel in its habitat pre presentation (left) and post presentation (right) by male, age 10
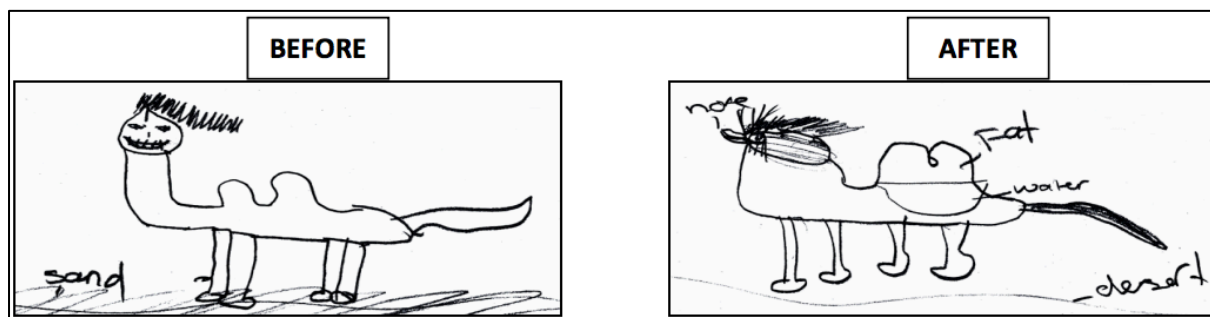
In: Wagoner, B. & Jensen, E. Psychology & Society, 2010, Vol. 3(1), 65 - 76

Evaluation (Toolkits):
https://www.qmul.ac.uk/media/qmul/publicengagement/Booklet-2-(part-3)-final2-(300-dpi).pdf
https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/evaluating-public-engagement
https://www.qmul.ac.uk/media/qmul/publicengagement/Booklet-1-(parts-1-and-2)-final2-(300-dpi).pdf

STEP 5: Public Engagement Plan

Once you have a shortlist of ideas for engagement activities, please fill in the Public Engagement plan (supplement 2), each line should be one single activity. Please use separate lines for each activity at the same event.

STEP 6: Public Engagement Checklist

Fill in the checklist (supplement 3) for each event. Just one checklist for a whole event (even if there are several activities involved).
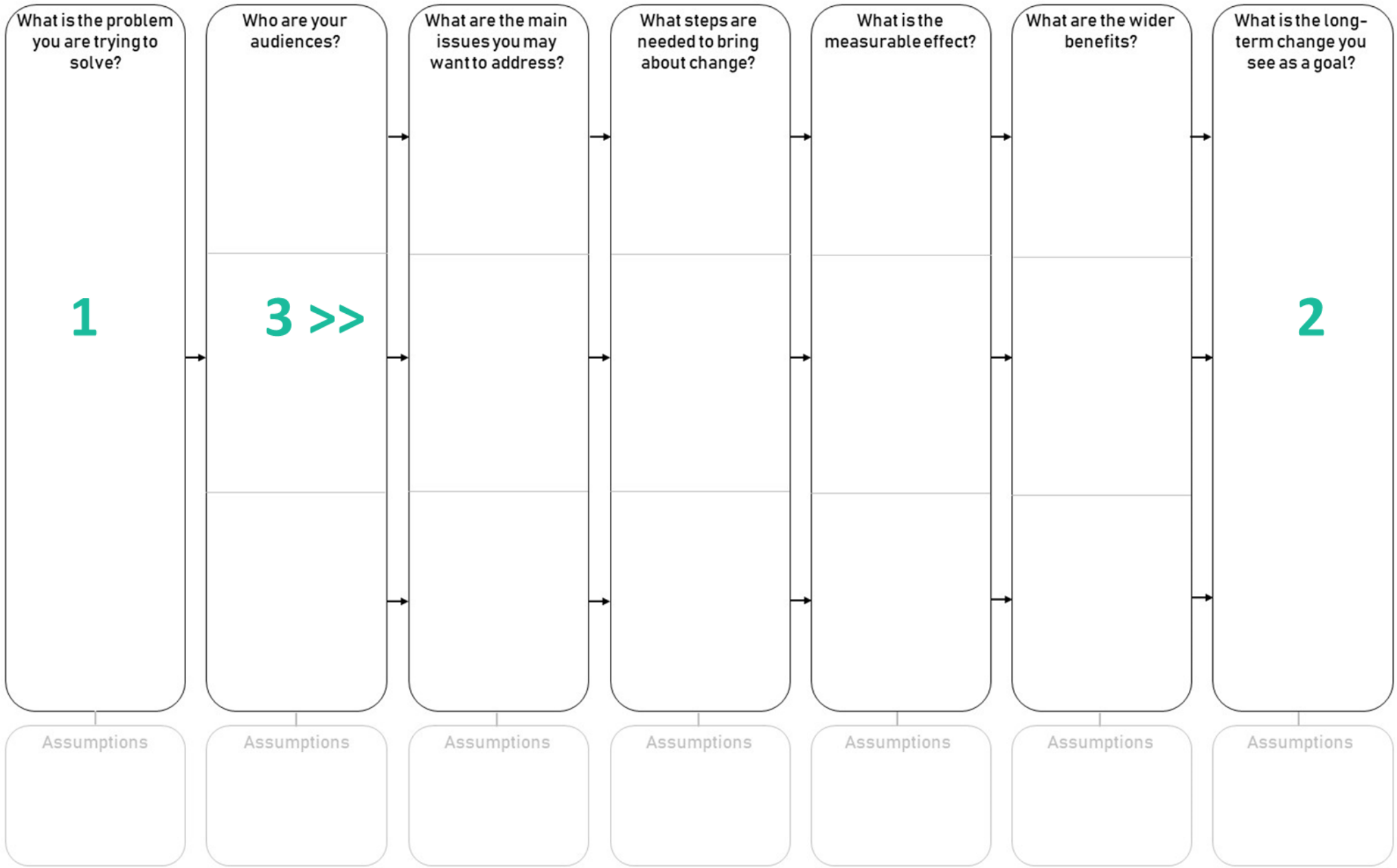
References

- [1]NCCPE website: https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/
- [2]National Institute for Health Studies. Institute of Development Studies. 2019: A resource guide for Community Engagement and Involvement in global health research. 16p. https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/researchers/manage-your-funding/NIHR-Community-Engagement-Involvement-Resource-Guide-2019.pdf
- [3]CEI's effectiveness is strongest when involving people with lived experience of the condition cf. Boivin et al., Evaluating patient and public involvement in research BMJ 2018; 363:k5147 https://www.bmj.com/content/363/bmj.k5147
- [4]Jurdant B., 1973. Les problèmes théoriques de la vulgarisation scientifique, Paris, Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2009
- [5]Jensen, P., Rouquier, J., Kreimer, P., & Croissant, Y. (2008). Scientists who engage with society perform better academically. Science and public policy, 35(7), 527–541.
- [6]Bentley, P. & Kyvik, S. (2011) Academic staff and public communication: A survey of popular science publishing across 13 countries. Public Understanding of Science, 20(1), 48–63.
- [7]Besley JC, Dudo A & Storksdieck M, 2015. Scientists' Views About Communication Training. Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 52(2).
- [8]Poliakoff, E. & Webb, T. (2007). What factors predict scientists' intentions to participate in public engagement of science activities? Science communication, 29(2), 242–263.

Supplement 1: Theory of Change

- A roadmap that outlines the steps by which you plan to achieve a wider goal for the scientific project

- Helps to clearly articulate and connect your work to your bigger goal

- Start filling in the field marked 1, adding any potential underlying assumptions (below), then the field marked 2 with its assumptions, then 3, …

acacia
achieving control of
asthma in children in africa

Theory of Change (based on a template from Development Impact and You)

What is the problem you are trying to solve?	Who are your audiences?	What are the main issues you may want to address?	What steps are needed to bring about change?	What is the measurable effect?	What are the wider benefits?	What is the long-term change you see as a goal?
1	**3 >>**					**2**
Assumptions	Assumptions	Assumptions	Assumptions	Assumptions	Assumptions	Assumptions

Supplement 2: Public Engagement Plan – by single activity

Write down your planned activities with the objectives and aims they relate to, as well as the relevant audience as shown in the example below. Use a separate line for different activities at the same event.

Example:

Public Engagement Aim	Public Engagement Objective	Planned activity	Activity detail	Audience	Opportunity for Activity	Comment
Increase awareness of asthma symptoms in parents and teachers	*Improve understanding about airway inflammation*	*Example 1: stall at school fair (airway prop)*	*interactive prop about airway inflammation*	*Parents, teachers, children*	*Upcoming school Easter parties in 3 ACACIA schools*	
Improve image/stigma of asthma in society	*Show that many successful people, especially sports people have asthma*	*Example 2: stall at school fair (poster)*	*background poster pointing out celebrities with asthma (e.g. David Beckham, Idris Elba)*	*Parents, teachers, children*	*Upcoming school Easter parties in 3 ACACIA schools*	

Supplement 3: Public Engagement Checklist, summarising considerations relevant for organising a Public Engagement event (e.g. stall, talk, meeting)

Consideration	Done? Please tick	Short description
Main aim(s) of Public Engagement event		
Objective(s) of Public Engagement event		
Type of audience?		
Equipment needs?		
How do you engage your audience?		
Do you need props?		
Audience – how many do you plan for?		
Number of helpers needed?		
Public Engagement team – which skills are needed?		
Public Engagement team - training needs?		
Which costs do you need to cover?		
Total cost?		
What do helpers get reimbursed for?		
Who covers the costs?		
How does the team get there?		
Who is the main point of contact?		
Is the length of event appropriate?		
Are there breaks needed?		
Location		
Do you need to communicate with participants before or after?		
Which contacts do you need?		
Do you need consent, e.g. to take pictures?		
Who is reporting on event details and participation		
How do you evaluate that the activity fulfils your goals?		
Who is in charge of evaluation		
For whom are you evaluating?		
Have you considered health & safety? Is there a need for a risk assessment		