THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Centre for Data, Culture & Society

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS

Guidance for Researchers

DCS DATA CULTURE SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus pandemic has required researchers to use online, virtual and remote methods of communicating with participants and audiences. While online and digital ways of working are not new, for many researchers the use of online events such as virtual exhibitions, hybrid outreach or online conferences became the only means of continuing to engage others with their work. Now, emergency measures and temporary pivots to digital ways of working have been replaced by reflection on how digital, remote and hybrid ways of working can be incorporated into future practices.

Online events may have a larger geographical reach, allow different forms of engagement between participants, incorporate pre-recorded and live content, have a lower environmental impact, a lower financial cost, and allow more equal access to individuals who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised. Conversely, it can be difficult to replicate engagement in a digital medium, and there may be extra concerns around data privacy, inequalities in access to adequate internet speeds and technological skills, environmental concerns over the CO_2 emissions generated by online activity, and digital tools that impose extra barriers to access on some individuals.

This document aims to provide introductory guidance for researchers at the University of Edinburgh who are considering undertaking online engagement activities. It outlines potential online engagement activities, events, research-led exhibitions, and creating online research-led resources, and offers examples of good practice from University of Edinburgh research projects. This guide is designed to point to existing sources of information, support and inspiration within the University of Edinburgh and beyond.

DIGITAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The online dissemination of research to non-scholarly audiences can be approached in many ways. Here we focus on academic blogging, podcasting and social media.

As a first step, it is important to consider both the intended audience and what you hope to get out of the experience. Although the focus is on sharing one's research, public engagement is always a reciprocal process with impact on both researcher and audience. As well as testimony from researchers who have found that outreach has improved their academic writing and argumentation and that dissemination can have a long-lasting effect after a project is finished, there can be unintended outcomes. Researcher Dr Luis Eduardo Pérez Murcia found that sharing research with participants was an unexpectedly emotional experience, and the experience of some researchers has proved that making oneself visible online may draw unwanted attention.

Blogging

Academic blogging has been a popular method for research dissemination and participating in scholarly networks for many years. Writing up shorter, more accessible versions of research that may be in-progress, published or awaiting publication elsewhere and posting it on a personal website or contributing to a scholarly blog that aggregates the work of multiple writers can be an effective way of reaching new audiences, practicing writing for different audiences, getting ideas into the public domain quickly, stimulating or contributing to ongoing conversations, growing networks, testing out new ideas, or establishing a public academic profile.

The University has lots of **practical advice on starting to blog**, including types of blogs, how to write effectively for the blog medium, privacy and copyright laws, and connecting a blog with other social media output. There is also a dedicated **Academic Blogging Service**, which can be used to create your own blog.

A good example of an effective research blog is the **Political Settlements Research Project (PSRP)**, which conducts research into how peace processes navigate inclusion between political and military leaders, and rulers and those they rule over. PSRP has a dedicated website where it aggregates many different outreach channels. As well as a searchable list of publications related to the project, there are links to lectures, toolkits, datasets, blog posts and the podcast series War, Peace & the In Between, and the project is an example of how to successfully combine multiple outreach channels targeted at different audiences. See our Case Studies section for a case study of how the PSRP responded to the coronavirus pandemic.

DIGITAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Podcasting

Podcasting has become an accessible activity due to the increased availability of audio equipment and software on mobile devices. Podcasts come in a variety of formats, usually featuring one or more people talking about a subject in an interview, journalistic or magazine format. There are many online resources that cover the planning and technical aspects of making a podcast..

Social Media

Social media can be used to disseminate a particular project or be one part of a researcher's public profile. The medium is likely to influence which platform is most useful: Twitter for short text, Soundcloud for audio, Pinterest or Instagram for images, and YouTube or Vimeo for video. The **A-Z of Social Media for Academia** is a comprehensive list of social media tools and platforms.

The University of Edinburgh's Research Office offers **tips for effective engagement** through social media. However, using social media is not without risk, and researchers should familiarise themselves with the University's guidance around social media and its **social media policy**.

Improv Bot is an example of an engagement project that effectively used social media. While the 2020 Edinburgh Festival Fringe was unable to host live performances due to the coronavirus pandemic, Improv Bot, led by Melissa Terras, Professor of Digital Cultural Heritage at CAHSS, mined the festival's back catalogue and, using an artificial neural network, came up with suggested event blurbs for a programme of fictional events. As well as the **project's website**, it was made visible via a **Twitter account** and an **Instagram account**. The suggested shows were even used by comedy group **The Improverts** to create live (filmed) performances.

IMPROVBOT WEBSITE

THE IMPROVERTS

ONLINE EVENTS

Online events can take many forms, and range from large conferences, which may feature keynotes, panels, workshops and Q&As, to a meeting between only a few people. As we begin to move towards hybrid formats, there will need to be even more flexibility. A lecture might take place in an on-campus lecture theatre with a small audience while synchronously being streamed to a remote audience and being recorded for asynchronous viewing at a later time. Or an art installation may involve participants moving around a physical space while using their mobile devices to access digital content.

The types of events covered by this guidance document – public engagement, knowledge exchange and exhibitions, as well as online learning and conferences – all have different purposes and will include different elements, but there are some planning processes and digital platforms that are common to many of them.

Planning

The University's Online and Digital Events Service has extensive **advice and guidance for planning online and hybrid events**, from setting objectives to choosing suitable digital tools and platforms as well as budgeting, scheduling, communication with participants, the role of facilitators, and social media coverage. They also offer tips on minimising or troubleshooting technical problems, and communicating with participants about protocols around microphone and video use, as well as ice breaker and moderator questions. As evaluation is an important aspect of outreach events, it is worth making the most of analytics and real-time data as well as traditional modes of information-gathering like post-event surveys.

This guide from The University of Exeter covers some of the other **major steps involved in planning an online event.** They are: setting objectives; promoting the event; scheduling the event at a time suitable for those in different time zones, with caring responsibilities and religious holidays; choosing the best platform; communicating effectively with participants before, during and after the event; making sure speakers and facilitators are briefed; testing the technology and being prepared for tech failures; and incorporating any relevant branding.

The Centre for Data, Culture & Society has written a **series of blogs on online events** covering platforms, planning, accessibility, data and recordings, and post-event actions.

ONLINE EVENTS

Platforms

The type of event will determine which platforms and tools are most appropriate and the Online and Digital Events Service have provided a detailed document with **advice on how to use university-supported tools** (Microsoft Teams, Microsoft Teams Live Events, Blackboard Collaborate, Microsoft Stream, Zoom, EventsAir). Many of us are now very familiar with meeting and webinar platforms, which can be used for events that are primarily presentation-led, but for more socially-oriented events there are also options that mimic networking and mingling such as **Wonder** or **Gather**. These platforms are used less often and not supported by the University, so attendees/participants may require more support to navigate them.

Whatever platform you choose, it is important to spend time familiarising yourself with how it works and drafting instructions for joining and using it so that people can get the most out of your event.

Knowledge Exchange Events

Knowledge exchange involves sharing research, often with non-academic audiences, in a way that is mutually beneficial. While this can take many forms, such as consultancy, or commissioned work (see the **Edinburgh Research Office KE webpages**), it often involves events with external audiences.

The University's CAHSS Research and KE portal has extensive **advice on all parts of the KE process**, including developing a strategy, designing events, engaging with policymakers and industry, using social media, and evaluating impact. Certain processes apply to all KE events, whether in person or online, like identifying a target audience, planning for the two-way flow of information, and capturing the outcomes of the event. This blog post offers lots of advice on **University support for distanced KE events.**

ONLINE EVENTS

Conferences

Virtual conferences have quickly become a common way for researchers to share their work with peers and online or hybrid conferences seem likely to continue. Although the main platforms used for giving papers, attending panels and having Q&A sessions are similar to those used for other online events, online conferences have a specific set of requirements. To try to replicate some of the other functions of conferences, especially the opportunities for informal networking, tools like Twitter, Discord or Slack are popular.

The University's Online and Digital Events Service is a good place to start for advice and **choosing University-supported tools**. They also have a quiz to help choose the right tool, which covers some of the functions that might be required for an online conference, such as exhibitor booths, concurrent webinar sessions, registration management, University branding throughout the event and live event data.

For further tips on the practicalities of organising an online conference, this blog post discusses moving the annual conference of the Software Sustainability Institute, **The Collaborations Workshop**, from an in-person conference online and what that involved. They used Zoom and Slack for a range of activities that included keynote speeches, lightning talks and mini-workshops. Some of their key take-aways were to communicate clearly with participants and session facilitators, to use Slack or similar for informal and social interaction, and to make sure the event's Code of Conduct is adapted to an online setting. This article describes taking the **2019 Educational Developers' Caucus** in Canada online. Some of their tips are thinking about whether shorter sessions over a longer time period might work better than a few packed days, using software that is familiar to participants if possible, offering training before the conference, and dedicated technical facilitators in each session.

Now that organisations have potentially held online conferences in 2020 and 2021 as a reaction to the coronavirus pandemic, as well as organisations who have a longer history of meeting virtually, there are a number of articles that reflect on this practice and that consider the larger implications for holding conferences online. In the further reading section of this document see Gichora, for practical advice on virtual conferences with an emphasis on the global south, and Haji-Georgi for a model for adapting conferences and poster sessions to virtual formats.

Although online events may eliminate some of the physical barriers to access imposed by in-person events, there are many **accessibility issues and considerations** and thought should be given to **inclusive conference planning.**

Conference organisers should ask the attendees for their access requirements as part of the registration process, and leave enough time to meet these requirements. The University provides guidelines for **booking British Sign Language interpreters** and advice for **working with interpreters remotely** for online meetings. Speakers at the conference can be encouraged to provide their presentations in written form to be circulated in advance. During the conference, a live transcription feature can used and those chairing each panel can ask for written questions to be submitted through the chat function.

EXHIBITIONS

Research-led virtual exhibitions can be a great opportunity, and something that is being explored by <u>many institutions</u> as well as individual researchers.

Josh Goldblum discusses how the most common response to the coronavirus pandemic has been to **convert exhibitions from physical to digital**, and offers some tips on how to do this successfully. He argues for working with the characteristics of each medium rather than trying to replicate an in-person gallery experience and urges practitioners to explore tools like virtual reality and augmented reality. An interview with David Drake explore some of the choices he made in creating the digital exhibition **The Place I Call Home**, commissioned by the British Council.

For individuals, there are a number of tools for creating virtual exhibitions. This list of **free and open-source tools** covers some of the pros and cons of each. One of the most popular options is Omeka, an open-source web publishing platform that enables the creation and sharing of digital collections and online exhibits. A guide to getting started with Omeka and this tutorial on **getting started with Omeka** offer practical advice, and the Digital Detectives project report by researchers from the School of Divinity demonstrates how to **use Omeka as a teaching tool**.

Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality

As well as attempting to replicate exhibitions online, creative practitioners are also exploring AI, VR and AR in their work to create media experiences that could not exist offline. The University's **uCreate Studio Makerspace** offers support with VR, including University-branded cardboard headsets, which students can use with a smartphone to access immersive VR, and examples of existing VR experiences created by the University and others. Drew Hemment is leading a project, **The New Real**, "an initiative by University of Edinburgh, working with Edinburgh's Festivals and The Alan Turing Institute, to showcase the extraordinary creative potential of AI, and support resilience and recovery in the arts and creative industries".

Another artist at the University who incorporates augmented reality in her work is Beverly Hood, artist and Reader in Technological Embodiment and Creative Practice at Edinburgh College of Art, who faced the challenge of adapting her project **We Began as Part of the Body**. This resulted in two exhibitions, one fully online, as part of the Being Human festival and the other exhibition held in a gallery space using video projection, 3D prints and an augmented reality app, presented by Summerhall and ASCUS Art and Science as part of the Edinburgh Science Festival.

CREATING ONLINE RESOURCES

The increased use of online, remote and hybrid forms of engagement have also increased interest in the production of online resources, including research-led educational materials and methods.

The University has support in place for the creation and sharing of **open educational resources (OER)**, which are educational materials that are available under an open license, and free for others to reuse and remix in their learning and teaching. The **Open.Ed website** collates information about OER, websites for sharing resources, how-to guides, training events and a blog. It also features an extensive list of existing OER projects, such as a wizard-themed introduction to chemistry, logic and language concepts, an open licensed **Lego design of the University of Edinburgh's Main Library**.

Remembering Sugaropolis, led by Marisa Wilson, is a project that offers a suite of sensory teaching materials for primary and secondary school-aged children. It offers digital activities designed to explore the role of sugar in shaping the history of Greenock using multiple engagement routes, including a smell walk, video games, museum curation activities, sensory oral histories, and an online exhibition called 'Sugaropolis'. The project was created by heritage officers, scholars and GIS practitioners from the Universities of Edinburgh, St Andrews and Abertay, and funded by the Scottish Crucible / Royal Society of Edinburgh and the British Academy / Leverhulme Trust.

Another good local example of online engagement through the creation of a resource is the **Curious Edinburgh** tour. Led by Niki Vermeulen, this prize-winning initiative offers tours of Edinburgh's scientific, social and cultural heritage. The tours cover the city's history of geology, physics and medicine, as well as specific topics like women in STEM, brewing, Jewish history, and the Black Lives Matter Mural Trail. The information for each self-guided tour is available on the project website or via the project app.

ACCESSIBILITY

Virtual events, just like in-person ones, will require planning around accessibility. While accessing events remotely will likely mitigate some issues for some individuals, it will impose barriers to access for others.

When organising online events or conferences, accessibility considerations should be part of the planning process rather than an afterthought. Organisers should consider multiple routes to access, make attendees aware of accessibility options, make attendees aware of how to discuss their accessibility requirements, and be flexible in accommodating different access needs.

Accessibility considerations can include mechanical solutions such as live captioning, making material available ahead of time, using a microphone, creating accessible PowerPoint presentations, scheduling regular breaks and sticking to that schedule, or making written materials available in multiple formats (PDF, Word, braille). There are also empathetic measures, like discussing at the beginning of a session whether cameras need to be turned on or off and why, and establishing whether questions should be asked using the chat function, the raising of hands or verbally.

Online exhibitions and resources should also follow up to date accessibility guidelines. Many platforms will provide detailed accessibility advice: an **Omeka accessibility toolkit** is available, for example.

For those creating web-based resources, there is detailed advice on how to **fulfil accessibility requirements** and a survey of **assistive digital technologies** used in the UK, such as screen magnifiers, screen readers and speech recognition tools gives an overview of how those technologies are used and an indication of what to consider when making web-based resources accessible.

ETHICS

Moving to a digital environment requires consideration of the specific ethical concerns of each event.

There are issues around data protection, data storage and data pertaining to vulnerable individuals, and these are likely to be different depending on the digital platforms and tools used. The University offers **training on data protection** for researchers as well as **tools supported by the University**.

Additionally, the CAHSS Research Ethics Committee has collated a frequently-updated document with extensive guidelines on the **ethical considerations of research** under difficult circumstances, the British Sociological Association (BSA) has developed **Ethics Guidelines and Collated Resources for Digital Research**, and researchers at the University of Aberdeen have compiled an **accessible guide to social media research ethics**. See also **Social Media Research: Ethics Guidance for Researchers.**

CASE STUDIES

The following case studies offer examples of University of Edinburgh academics who have successfully pivoted to using remote and digital methods.

James Cook
Two Case Studies on Research Adaptation

James Cook is a Lecturer at the Reid School of Music. The video covers two projects, one of which is a case study of an in-person outreach event using virtual reality to reconstruct performances of historical music that was diverted at the last minute by a pandemic-related lockdown.

TWO CASE STUDIES ON RESEARCH ADAPTATION

The Political Settlements Research Project Case Study

The Political Settlements Research Programme, based in the School of Law, examines peace processes and peace agreements from around the world. The following video discusses their strategy for pivoting to online methods.

THE POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS RESEARCH PROJECT CASE STUDY

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

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SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH: ETHICS GUIDANCE FOR RESEARCHERS

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