



National
Co-ordinating
Centre for
Public Engagement

How to... ...develop a public engagement strategy

Examples of how universities are developing strategies for public engagement

Getting started

A good public engagement strategy addresses the same questions that any effective strategy attends to. It clarifies the purpose of the activity – why it matters; clarifies the context; and sets a clear direction of travel.

It is important not to ‘rush’ the writing of a strategy, or to do it behind closed doors. By approaching the process in an open, iterative way and by involving a range of people for across the university and beyond, the process can deliver a lot of ‘buy in’ to the result, and ensure that the strategy draws on a variety of perspectives and expertise.

It is also vital that the strategy aligns with other key institutional strategies, and as far as possible is cross-referenced with them. A strategy which helps deliver value to other core areas of university activity, and which explicitly cross references to key goals and objectives for the institution, will be more likely to gain traction and secure long term support.

Below, we provide links to some examples of current university public engagement strategies to provide you with some models to build on.

What is interesting is how each of these strategies goes to some lengths to define clearly what they mean by public engagement, and what is in and out of scope. In each case, there are significant and distinctive differences in how they express what public engagement means in their institution.

Examples

[*The University of Bristol Public Engagement strategy.*](#)

This strategy starts by defining public engagement; explores why public engagement is a priority for the university; and defines a focus for their activity, which is to create an effective and supportive culture across the university. It explores the activities that constitute public engagement, the key audiences for their engagement, and articulates the benefits they see arising from public engagement. This strategy doesn’t lay out an action plan, which is dealt with separately. Its intention is to develop a clear, compelling narrative to mobilise common purpose and alignment across the university

[*The UCL Public Engagement strategy*](#)

This strategy also offers a definition of public engagement and a vision that expresses the university’s distinctive approach. It then identifies four strategic aims, and some indicators of success. Their aims are to:

1. Enable UCL to become a global leader in listening to communities and engaging with public groups
2. Champion a culture of public engagement across UCL
3. Enable the UCL community to be effective in public engagement activity
4. Put UCL at the centre of London conversations, creating London-wide impact and being a good neighbour

[The University of Oxford Public Engagement with Research Strategic Plan](#)

The University of Oxford focuses its public engagement strategy on engagement with research, differentiating this from other types of public engagement (for instance schools outreach) happening at the university. It sets objectives and includes an action plan. The plan emphasises Oxford's ambition to promote excellence in public engagement, which they define elsewhere:

By excellence, we mean public engagement activity that either increases the quality or impact of the research; is tightly focussed on a specific research activity/ project; incorporates innovation where possible; has clearly defined objectives and target demographics; utilises the appropriate methodology; and benefits both parties (i.e. the researchers and the public).

[Imperial College's Societal Engagement framework](#)

Imperial College positions its public engagement with research within a broader societal engagement strategy encompassing four areas:

- Schools outreach and widening participation
- Local community engagement
- Patient engagement
- Engagement with research

They identify a set of initiatives through which they will realise their strategy, which include 'acting as an anchor in our local communities' and 'embedding an institutional culture of engagement with research'. They also identify four 'enablers': collaboration, evaluating impact, supporting our people and sustainable funding

[Simon Fraser University: The Engaged University](#)

Public and community engagement is a global phenomenon, and not restricted to the UK. Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada, is just one example of an international university which has developed ambitious strategic plans for their engagement. They have set five objectives, one of which is to act as British Columbia's 'Public Square' for enlightenment and dialogue on key public issues.



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