

Research Impact Masterclass Series: No 4
Engaging broad audiences
for real-world impact
WORKBOOK

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Topics:

1. Why engaging broader audiences matters
2. Audience targeting – general principles
3. Adapting your communication style
4. Engaging industry, policy makers and the public

By the end of this short course you will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the role of broad engagement in impact assessment
- ✓ Know how to prioritise and adapt your message for audiences outside of academia
- ✓ Appreciate the different writing style and outputs required for broad outreach
- ✓ Apply best practice in communicating with industry, policy makers and the public

Why does broad engagement matter?

Accountability

Increasingly, institutions need to be open and transparent about what they are spending public money on – and why.

Trust

We need a trusted evidence-base from which to make decisions – individually, nationally and internationally. Researchers need to be part of the debate on the social and ethical implications of the research they undertake.

Relevance

There is the opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of research by responding to the transformation in media to share expertise and improve understanding.

National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement
www.publicengagement.co.uk

Non-academic impact is becoming more important in research evaluation

- UK REF: impact case studies assessment inform 25% of university funding
- Australia has recently introduced Engagement and Impact assessment
- Other countries that assess research impact include Italy, France and Belgium
- The US National Science Foundation requires a statement of broader impacts
- UK Research Councils require a 'pathway to impact' plan
- Horizon 2020 funding requires a detailed exploitation and dissemination plan

Defining your impact goals

The following questions provide a useful starting point:

- What are the likely outcomes of this research?
- Who will benefit from this research?
- How will they benefit from this research?
- How can you involve potential beneficiaries in this research?
- How will you know if it has made a difference?

A typical set of objectives might be to:

- Build awareness of the project among a defined audience
- Secure the commitment of a defined group of stakeholders to the project aims
- Influence specific policies or policymakers on key aspects
- Encourage participation among researchers or partner bodies

Reference: <https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/developing-a-communications-and-impact-strategy/step-by-step-guide/setting-objectives/>

Types of impact/beneficial changes

1. Understanding and awareness
2. Attitudes
3. Economy
4. Environment
5. Health and wellbeing
6. Policy
7. Other forms of decision-making/behavior change
8. Culture
9. Other social
10. Capacity or preparedness

Reference: Mark Reed, Fast Track Impact;
<https://www.fasttrackimpact.com/what-is-impact>

Writing key messages and adapting your style

Writing a key message

Key messages are the **core idea** you want your **target audiences** to hear and remember.

Using them can help make your communications with each audience relevant, focused and consistent. Each key message should be written from a position of the *change you wish to bring about in a belief or practice*.

Remember the old adage that people have to hear something three times before they take it in? Microsoft have done research that indicates this could actually be between 6 and 20 times. So keep your top line messages simple, and **repeat, repeat, repeat**

Adapting your style

- **Keep sentences short and direct**
The next step will be to undertake a thorough analysis of the results
Next we will thoroughly analyse the results.
- **Use simple words and avoid jargon**
Write *use* instead of *utilize*, *near* instead of *close proximity*,
help instead of *facilitate*, *start* instead of *commence*.
- **Use active sentences**
Active: Passive sentences bore people
Passive: People are bored by passive sentences
- **Keep paragraphs short**
Our brains digest information better when it's broken into chunks
- **Use visual aids**
Consider how you might use infographics, videos, images

Engaging
industry,
policy
makers and
the public

Engaging industry

1. **Network, network, network** – be seen in the right places and make sure you are visible
2. **Talk in their language** – have a good elevator pitch that articulates your research and potential benefits to the industry partner
3. **Give it time to build relationships** – it can take a while to find the right partner and project
4. **Clarify Intellectual Property Rights** – the intended use of any IPRs needs to be specified in the research contract
5. **Establish clear boundaries** – be clear at the outset of the project as to what input the industry partner will have into the project as it progresses.

<https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/research-and-industry-collaborations/>

Engaging policy makers

1. **Short meetings are best** – an hour or two. Longer meetings may be possible but need to be worked out ahead of time.
2. **Take appropriate printed materials** – for a one-on-one meeting, business cards and policy briefs are ideal, as are other short communications materials. If you bring a report or journal article, include a one-page summary.
3. **Use templates for policy briefings** – many institutions make templates available – check with your communications team.
4. **Aim for 1500 words** maximum for a 2-side brief. In general, include the following sections in order: **Key points, Introduction, Findings, Policy Recommendations.**
5. **Post your brief on your website and other policy sites** – Policy Library (www.policylibrary.com) reaches an audience of hundreds of thousands, including policy makers and politicians

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Engaging the public

1. **Get to the point** – researchers are trained to provide lots of detail ahead of their conclusions, but the public want the headlines first and will then decide if they want the detail.
2. **Don't use jargon – researchers** use terms like "bias," "positive trend," and "pdf". While most scientists associate "probability density function" with "pdf," the public will think this is a file format.
3. **Use analogies and metaphors** – "weather is your mood, climate is your personality" or "if you don't like the weather wait a few hours, if you don't like the climate move".
4. **Use 'three key points'** – studies continue to show that this is a powerful and memorable way to communicate information.
5. **Relate to your audience** – adapt to the particular group you are looking to engage; there are many 'publics'.

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Exercise: consider a current research project. What are your impact goals? Which audiences do you need to communicate with to help you achieve those goals? Be as specific as you can – define their location, role etc. What will your key message be for each? How will you reach these target audiences?

Links and further reading

Links and further reading:

- www.publicengagement.co.uk
- <http://www.bath.ac.uk/marketing/public>
- <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/research-and-industry-collaborations/>
- <https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/developing-a-communications-and-impact-strategy/>
- <https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/developing-a-communications-and-impact-strategy/step-by-step-guide/setting-objectives/>
- <https://www.fasttrackimpact.com/what-is-impact>
- <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2019/08/21/where-is-the-publication-puck-going-making-research-available-upstream-of-publication/>
- <https://www.policylibrary.com/>
- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marshallshepherd/2016/11/22/9-tips-for-communicating-science-to-people-who-are-not-scientists/#2c1a4ad966ae>
- <https://www.fastcompany.com/3035856/why-were-more-likely-to-remember-content-with-images-and-video-infogr>

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Chemical Science

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Global

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countries in 2018

