ENGAGING THE PUBLIC WITH RESEARCH:

A TOOLKIT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND LIBRARY PARTNERSHIPS

Libraries Connected

collective wellbeing
Carnegie UK

ABOUT

This toolkit has been developed by Carnegie UK in collaboration with Libraries Connected. It draws on evidence collected during the Engaging Libraries programme which ran from 2016-2021. This programme supported public libraries across the UK to develop and deliver public engagement activities.

Engaging Libraries was supported by Wellcome, and the second phase (from 2019-2021) was also supported by the Wolfson Foundation. The second phase of this programme focussed specifically on enabling partnerships with universities to deliver public engagement activities on research.

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The toolkit was researched and written by Carnegie Associate Katie Pekacar, with the support and guidance of Rachel Heydecker at Carnegie UK and Marsha Lowe at Libraries Connected.

Library staff from Kent, Kingston, Manchester, Oldham, Norfolk, Suffolk and Wakefield Libraries also gave up their time to help design, review and suggest improvements to the toolkit to ensure it is relevant and helpful to library staff.

INTRODUCTION

Engaging the public with research can be an opportunity to connect communities, inspire learning and stimulate curiosity.

The Engaging Libraries programme supported public libraries across the UK to develop and deliver public engagement activities between 2016-2021. From 2019 the programme focussed specifically on enabling partnerships with universities to engage the public with research.

Evidence from the programme shows that working with higher education institutions (HEIs) on public engagement has many benefits for public library services, including:

- Bringing new audiences into library spaces
- Changing perceptions of what libraries offer
- Empowering communitie
- Showcasing the value of libraries and the trusted role that they play in communities.

Higher education institutions can also benefit from working with public libraries on public engagement by:

- Broadening reach and building links with communities
- Increasing the relevance of research to the public
- Benefitting from the unique skills of public library staff
- Inspiration, new perspectives and ideas for new research.

This toolkit includes:

- A three-step guide for libraries to start public engagement projects and partnerships
- Case studies of successful public engagement partnership projects in libraries
- Details of HEIs interested in working with public libraries on public engagement.

'I think… [the project has] shown that the actual thirst is there from our communities for this kind of information and we are the very venue to actually put it out there'
Helene Rennie, West Lothian Libraries

1.
INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WITH RESEARCH IN LIBRARIES

1.1
WHAT IS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

Public engagement is a two-way process that shares the activities and benefits of higher education and research with the public, generating benefit for both parties.

To find out more about definitions of public engagement look at the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement's website.

Good public engagement can:

Connect communities

Inspire learning

Stimulate curiosity

Public engagement activities can include:

Workshops and discussions

Exhibitions and festivals

Drama, reading, writing, comedy, art, craft and music activities

Practical research undertaken by and/or with the public

1.2
WHY SHOULD WE DO PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN LIBRARIES?

Engaging Libraries supported public libraries to work with higher education institutions to develop and deliver public engagement activities with research on health, society and culture. The next few quotes are from some of the Engaging Libraries projects and participants describing the benefits of public engagement in libraries in their own words.

'I was surprised at how much parents were absolutely enthralled by the brain development research... I think it is something that we can use and we can promote to other library services... It's a tool for getting parents to come in and share their stories and join the library'
Janette White, Glasgow Libraries

'Very informative and interesting. It has made me want to research further as subjects discussed only scratched the surface.'
Member of the public

'I didn't really like science very much - I would always see the boring and the serious side of the subject, but after this amazing experience I feel that I've come to enjoy the fun side of science and really enjoyed coming together and learning from different scientist researchers. I felt quite inspired.'
Member of the public

'The opportunity to work closely with academic institutions and researchers has been hugely beneficial. The knowledge gained will be valuable when exploring/delivering future partner projects.'
Library staff member

1.2.1
KEY MESSAGES TO GET SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES IN YOUR LIBRARY SERVICE

The benefits of projects exploring public engagement with research for decision-makers.

1 Public engagement activities can enable public libraries to build upon and explore their civic role as safe spaces for debate and participation in research.

What's the evidence?
Three quarters (75%) of those who participated in public engagement in library spaces via Engaging Libraries agreed they felt more comfortable exploring topics in a 'library held space' than elsewhere.

'That sense of libraries really being communities, community... centres almost, I think is a really important thing.'
Dr Vanessa Beck Associate Professor in Work and Organisation, Bristol University
Case study: Fife Libraries

2 Public engagement activities can bring in new audiences who are more likely to try other events or activities at or organised by the library afterwards.

What's the evidence?
A quarter (24%) of participants in Engaging Libraries were non-library members.

'Something I have never done before and it's not a conversation I'd usually have if it weren't for this event.'
Member of the public
Case study: Redbridge, Newcastle and Kirklees Libraries

3 Public engagement with research can also attract new sources of funding and partners through project activity which has a direct impact on people's lives.

What's the evidence?
88% of staff who participated in Engaging Libraries reported they feel better equipped to articulate the value of their library service as a direct result of the programme.

> *'We have far more contacts, far more widely in the community than we ever used to. Now I have named contacts across different associations all over the Western Isles. It's been significant, really significant.'*
> Kathleen Milne, Western Isles Libraries
> Case study: Western Isles Libraries

4 Public engagement activities in libraries can help people learn something new, inspiring them to be curious and think differently about topics.

What's the evidence?
84% of members of the public who participated in public engagement in the Engaging Libraries programme agreed that it had made them more curious and 89% said it had made them think differently about a topic.

> *'I didn't really like science very much - I would always see the boring and the serious side of the subject, but after this amazing experience I feel that I've come to enjoy the fun side of science and really enjoyed coming together and learning from different scientist researchers.'*
> Member of the public
> Case study: Hammersmith and Fulham Libraries

5 Public engagement activities can develop library staff skills and confidence in working with higher education institutions and engaging communities with research and new ideas.

What's the evidence?
88% of staff who participated in the Engaging Libraries programme said they have increased their confidence in working with universities and 92% agreed that they can more readily see the potential of different library spaces to deliver public engagement *activity.*

> *'It has given us the confidence to say we can do more ambitious things, longer ranging things.'*
> Wendy Cole, Treorchy Libraries
> Case study: Treorchy Libraries

1.2.2
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR LIBRARIES

In England public engagement can support and enhance the Universal Library Offers.

HEALTH

- See Calderdale Libraries case study for an example of how public engagement can contribute to the Health Offer.

CULTURE

- See the Western Isles Libraries case study for an example of how public engagement can contribute to the Culture and Creativity Offer.

READING

- See the Glasgow Libraries case study for an example of how public engagement can contribute to the Reading Offer.

INFORMATION AND DIGITAL

- See the Treorchy Libraries case study for an example of how public engagement can contribute to the Information and Digital Offer.

> **'I'm really proud that collectively we've created something that's really, really interesting as you go through the experience. It's a reader development tool in a way because it connects you to books that we have in our libraries.'** [Tickets to the Afterlife online experience].
> Anita Luby, Redbridge Libraries

In Scotland, public engagement can help libraries to fulfil the priorities in Forward:

PEOPLE:

- See the Glasgow Libraries case study for an example of how public engagement can contribute to the 'People' priority.

PLACE:

- See the Western Isles Libraries case study for an example of how public engagement can contribute to the 'Place' priority.

PARTNERSHIP

- See the West Lothian Libraries case study for an example of how public engagement can contribute to the 'Partnership' priority.

2.
STARTING A PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

2.1
WHAT COMES FIRST? THE PROJECT IDEA OR THE PARTNERSHIP?

2.2
HOW DO I FIND A PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PARTNER?

- **You can find an interactive map of potential public engagement partners on the online version of this toolkit.**

- **Sign up to newsletters and join online communities:**

  - NCCPE public engagement network

  - The Library Innovators' network is a good place to ask for recommendations from library peers. If you work in a public library you can request to join this group by emailing info@librariesconnected.org.uk

- **Find people who can help you:**

  - Higher Education Librarians can be a good starting point for navigating a Higher Education Institution (HEI)

  - Search for the public engagement team in a HEI you are interested in working with

  - Find a specific academic and contact them directly.

2.2.1
KEY MESSAGES TO ENGAGE HEIs

1   **Broaden reach. Evidence shows that public libraries can reach audiences that HEIs can find difficult to engage, including women, older people, families, disabled and deaf people.**

What's the evidence?
93% of HEI partners involved in Engvaging Libraries agreed that working with libraries had helped them reach new audiences.

'We wouldn't have the same type of access [to audiences as libraries]. And the relationships the library has built with the community are really good.'
Dr Lynne Duncan, University of Dundee
Case study: Oldham Libraries

2 Increase the relevance of research to the public. When the public participate in public engagement activities in libraries they can see how research is relevant to their lives and can access information or research they would not normally see.

What's the evidence?
67% of the public felt that Engaging Libraries had made research or complex information more relevant to their lives.

> *'I think I've got a better idea of what university researchers do. I can't say I understand it all, but I definitely can appreciate that it's useful and needed.'*
> *Member of the public*
> Case study: Falmouth Libraries

3 Build local community partnership networks. Working with public libraries can help higher education institutions to build networks with a wide range of community partners and organisations that libraries already work with regularly.

What's the evidence?
93% of HEI partners agreed that the Engaging Libraries project had helped them strengthen their rela*tionship with the community.*

> *'The libraries have so many connections to various local youth groups, and we have some psychologists that are interested in applying for some funding in collaboration with those youth groups. It's sometimes very difficult for them to source groups to work with, so actually having libraries as a mediator in the introduction has been fantastic.'*
> *Camilla Irvine-Fortescue, Public Engagement Project Coordinator, Heriot-Watt University*
> Case study: Glasgow Libraries

4 Develop public engagement practice by trying new approaches and activities in collaboration with public library professionals who are skilled in engaging their communities.

What's the evidence?
85% of HEI partners agreed that they can describe what effective public engagement 'looks like' more confidently as a result of the Engaging Libraries programme.

> *'It's been a massive extension on the work that I've been doing to this point.'*
> *Dr Stacey Pitsillides, VC Senior Fellow, Northumbria University*
> Case study: West Lothian Libraries

5 Get ideas for new research. Public engagement in public libraries can have a direct impact on researchers, sparking ideas and making new connections in the community.

What's the evidence?
85% of HEI partners who took part in Engaging Libraries agreed that they had been inspired to be more responsive to the needs of the community.

> *'I have started talking about doing different kinds of research. I think, especially with something like menopause it is very easy to work in an echo chamber of women of a similar age, or a similar kind of background… blue collar women, for example, we know very little about, we know very little about what younger women and men think about it. And that was something this project really helped push.'*
> *Dr Vanessa Beck, Associate Professor in Work and Organisation, Bristol University*
> Case study: Fife Libraries

For more information on the drivers of partnerships for HEIs, the Higher Education and Public Libraries: Partnerships Research report by Arts Council England is very useful.

2.2.2
ENGAGING HEIs – WHAT THEY WANT TO KNOW ABOUT YOU:

- Which audiences you routinely engage

- Where your libraries are located and what facilities they have

- What online presence you have and who engages with it

- What types of public engagement events you usually run e.g. rhyme times, job clubs, knit and natter sessions, cultural activities, etc.

2.2.3
ENGAGING HEIs - THINGS YOU MIGHT NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THEM:

- Timeframes for setting up projects can be very different to public libraries; they can be a lot longer and activity can take place over numerous years.

- Resource and capacity constraints. Academics tend to be busy and their time can be very constrained. This can affect communication and engagement from the HEI.

- Academic research is driven by topic/subject matter. They need to know that you understand what research they do and that you are interested in engaging with this.

- Many HEIs work across wide geographies. Your local HEI might not be the most relevant partner, depending on the focus of your public engagement topic.

2.3
HOW DO I DEVELOP SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS?

There are many other toolkits available to help you develop and deliver successful partnership working, including:

- Nesta Partnership Toolkit

- Libraries Connected Expert Bank Partnership Toolkit

- The National Co-ordinating Council for Public Engagement Museum-University Partnership resources can help with library-university partnerships.

2.3.1
TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESSFULLY WORKING WITH HE PARTNERS

These tips have been developed based on feedback from library services and higher education partners who have worked together on projects.

DO:

- Agree shared goals and aims with your HE partner. Understand what the aims of the researchers are and make sure you are both getting something out of the project.

- Have confidence in your own knowledge and expertise.

- Communicate regularly through the lifetime of the project. Online communication tools make this a lot easier to fit into busy days.

- Ensure that the library service is credited alongside the academic partner in marketing materials and literature about the project. Agreeing branding guidelines at the outset will ensure you get credit alongside your academic partner for your work.

- Have an open mind. You may have an idea about a partnership or project at the beginning but this may change as the project develops. Be open to changing your approach, but keep in mind your goals and aims.

- Look for academic partners you feel you can work well with. If your preferred choice is too busy or isn't interested in your project then you may need to look for someone different.

- Be prepared to translate academic language for your audiences. Not all academic partners are used to preparing materials and workshops for the public. You can also work with public engagement professionals to support academics so that the public can engage with their work.

'We developed a fantastic relationship with our academic researcher. It was very much a two-way process with us both using our skills and areas of expertise to enhance our project and make it a success.'
Library staff member

DON'T:

- Undervalue what libraries bring to the project. You are likely to have a stronger understanding of communities and public engagement skills than many HE partners.

- Defer to academic partners because they have a higher 'status' as an institution. You may know more than them about the communities you are engaging and the best way to do that.

- Be afraid to disagree. Honest and open communication will make the partnership stronger.

- Expect HEIs to work to the same timescales as libraries. As mentioned before, they can take a lot longer to initiate and deliver projects than libraries.

- Expect academics to have an up-to-date understanding of public libraries. You may need to bring them up to speed about what libraries offer these days.

'When I first had a meeting with [the academic partner] and they were talking, I was thinking I don't even know what that word means. And in the beginning, we said 'well they must be right, we'll leave it like that' and then after a bit we thought, no, the public won't know what that means. So it's given us the confidence to say 'we know what we're doing and we know about the people we deal with'.'
Library staff member

3.
FUNDING AND DELIVERY

3.1
HOW DO I GET FUNDING FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

A number of funders actively support public engagement projects. This is not an exhaustive list and other funders may also support public engagement activities:

UK wide

- **National Lottery Heritage Fund**

    - https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/

    - Their webpage provides the contact details for each country and area. There may be workshops running for potential applicants to attend, which can be found on the website.

    - For grants between £3,000 and £10,000 there is a 'straight to application' process so it is recommended to attend a workshop if possible, due to limited resources to provide pre-application advice and support.

    - For grants between £10k and £250k, applicants can complete a project enquiry form. This will enable the fund to respond with tailored advice and support, which could be anything from an email or telephone call to a face to face meeting.

    - For grants above £250k applicants must complete an Expression of Interest (EOI) which is a way of making sure the time and effort of making a full application will be worthwhile. Heritage lottery states that they will respond to this EOI within 20 days, either releasing an application form or not and providing advice and support as appropriate (not all applicants will receive advice and support at this level).

- **Mellon Foundation**

    - https://mellon.org/grants/

    - As the largest supporter of the arts and humanities in the US, the Mellon Foundation seeks to build just communities where ideas and imagination can thrive. They also fund arts and humanities in the UK and South Africa.

- NCCPE has put together a useful database of public engagement funding opportunities

    - https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/funding

- Grantfinder is an online database of grant and funding opportunities

    - https://www.grantfinder.co.uk/

ENGLAND

- **Arts Council England**

- https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/ProjectGrants

- Project Grants can be used for this purpose where the public engagement partnership supports the Universal Library Offers and/or enables or is linked to cultural or arts activities.

SCOTLAND

- **SLIC**

    - https://scottishlibraries.org/funding/public-library-improvement-fund/

    - The Public Library Improvement Fund (PLIF) supports creative and innovative public library projects throughout Scotland.

    - SLIC administers the fund on behalf of the Scottish Government.

- **Scottish Book Trust**

    - https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/writing-and-authors/live-literature

    - Live Literature is a Scotland-wide programme that helps fund and support author events in communities all over the country.

- **Creative Scotland**

    - https://www.creativescotland.com/funding/funding-programmes/open-fund-sustaining-creative-development

    - The Open Fund: Sustaining Creative Development is open to libraries as well as other organisations, and aims to enable organisations to explore ways of working that will help them to adapt and respond to the current changing circumstances.

3.2
DESIGNING AND DELIVERING SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS

The NCCPE has a wealth of information about how to design and deliver successful public engagement projects

Here are some specific hints and tips from Engaging Libraries projects on how to:

3.2.1
ENGAGE COMMUNITIES

- West Lothian Libraries started their public engagement activities with a listening tour. These tours invited members of the public to meet with the library service and Higher Education Institution (HEI) partners to discuss the kind of research people wanted to engage with. The aim was for the library service, HEI and the public to design the project approach together.
  See more about this project here.

- FoAM (now 'Then Try This') worked with Falmouth Libraries. FoAM used their specialist expertise to match members of the public with academics for one-to-one conversations. You can find their details in the map of HEIs.
  See more about this project here.

- It can take time to build relationships and trust with schools. But investing in these relationships can lead to very strong outcomes and legacy for projects. Calderdale Libraries worked in partnership with a local primary school to develop air quality monitoring activities. Activities were linked to the curriculum and have resulted in the partner school securing funding to support better air quality in school grounds.
  See more about this project here.

- Hammersmith and Fulham Libraries worked with a number of local grass-roots community organisations to engage young people in workshops together with academics. This included young people from refugee and other backgrounds who may not have participated in less targeted workshops.
  See more about this project on here.

- Glasgow Life worked with the council's Early Years team to identify families at risk of not engaging with reading with their children. Workshops were designed to be accessible to these families and took place in-home and online. Glasgow Life received a grant to provide technology and internet connections to families who otherwise would not have been able to engage with the online workshops during the pandemic.
  See more about this project on here.

3.2.2
USE CREATIVE APPROACHES TO ENGAGEMENT

- OnFife developed a creative project to enable members of the community to discuss menopause and break down taboos. This included bread making workshops, online comedy, a 'paint a vulva' workshop and culminated in a co-created community theatre production facilitated and led by Tricky Hat Drama Company.
  See more about this project here.

- Sutton Libraries developed an interactive online game together with their academic partner and a freelance game developer. The game itself was co-created with the Key Stage 3 and 4 schoolchildren who were its primary audience. Because the young people were involved in designing the game they were interested in engaging with it once it had been developed.
  See more about this project here.

- City of London Libraries worked with Made By Play to design and place interactive outdoor exhibits to encourage interaction and reflection on the idea of 'bumping spaces'. This was in response to the pandemic which made it difficult to achieve the project inside the library space. The public were more interested and engaged with the exhibits once they knew that they were a public library project.
  See more about this project here.

3.2.3
LOAN KIT AS PART OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Calderdale Libraries added air quality monitors to their library catalogue as they would any other asset, so that people could borrow monitors to conduct their own experiments at home or elsewhere.
  See more about this project here.

You can find more interactive content, including about designing and delivering online engagement, on the online version of this toolkit.

3.3
MEASURING IMPACT AND REFLECTING ON YOUR PRACTICE

The Engaging Libraries programme has shown that public engagement activities can have a big impact on participants and HEI (Higher Education Institution) partners as well as library staff. It also impacted public perceptions of the library service.

> 'I really enjoyed being part of this project. I have learnt new things and used to struggle with reading time with my two children due to their ages. I have now learnt new skills that is helping me and we are getting the most out of our night-time reading.'
> Member of the public

> *'The biggest impact has been engaging with people I didn't know previously. I live in Hammersmith and feel more connected to the volunteer sector here, and the library. I could pick up the phone and speak with someone, I feel this greater awareness.'*
> *Dr Austen El-Osta, Imperial College London*

The next toolkit section gives some starting points for thinking about how to evaluate and develop your projects. There are lots of helpful links in the online version of this toolkit.
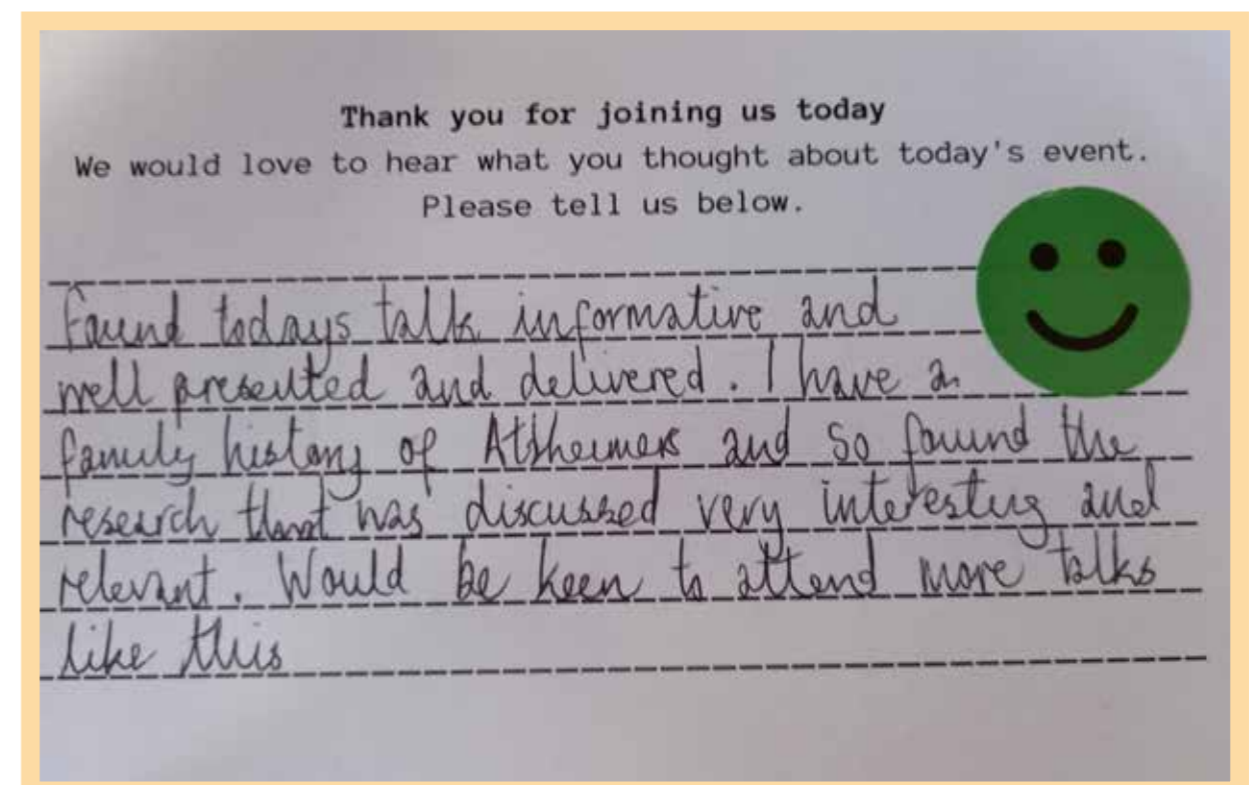

3.3.1 EVALUATING YOUR PROJECT

Your evaluation plan needs to:

- Measure what matters

- Be realistic

- Work for you and your project.

Don't be scared to flex the models and approaches you can find in the links in the full toolkit. Some higher education partners may have specialist evaluation skills or resources they can draw on so do ask them about this when planning the project.

It's important to think about what to measure and how you're going to measure it before you begin your project. If you do this:

- You'll have a clear roadmap of what you want to achieve

- You can design and pilot any tools before activity begins

- You can involve your higher education institution, partners and target audience in helping to co-create your evaluation plan

- You can collect data from those you want to have an impact on, rather than retrospectively trying to do this.

3.3.2
GETTING STARTED

Questions to ask yourself:

- Why are you evaluating your project in the first place?

- What will you do with the findings?

- What are your principles of evaluation?

- What type of evaluation will you need to do? (Front-end, formative, summative?)

- Which staff will need to be involved in the evaluation process? Do you have the resources and skills needed in-house or will you need to bring in expertise?

3.3.3
MEASURING WHAT MATTERS: THE PLANNING PROCESS

- What are your overarching project aims, inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes?

- Who are the direct and indirect beneficiaries of your project?

- Can you involve your target beneficiaries in helping develop your evaluation plan?

- What does success look like? What evidence will demonstrate that you've achieved your intended outputs and outcomes?

- Which data collection methods will you use to capture the evidence you need?

- How will you evidence unintended outcomes?

- Will you embed reflective practice for your staff, volunteers, artists?

- How can you present and communicate your evaluation plan to colleagues?

3.3.4
DATA COLLECTION AND ETHICS

- When will you collect the data? Who from? Where? How will you make sure the sample is representative, robust, and free from bias?

- What are the most appropriate data collection tools?

- What might you need to consider in order to work ethically and legally when you're collecting and storing the data?

- Do you need to consider any specific ethics or inclusive approaches e.g. if you're working with vulnerable groups or those who may not be able to access other methods?

3.3.5
ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING DATA

- How will you systematically collect and record the evidence? Where will you store it so that it's safe? How will you stay on the right side of UK GDPR?

- Which method will you use to analyse your data?

- What is the data telling you? Be cautious of unconscious bias and look for insight rather than simply reporting on information.

3.3.6
SHARING YOUR FINDINGS

- How will you tell the story in a succinct and interesting way, presenting insight rather than simply information?

- Thinking about the audience for your evaluation findings, what is the best way to share and disseminate your findings? How will you use the evidence going forward?

3.4
COMMUNICATING YOUR WORK TO OTHERS

Public engagement activities have the potential to change perceptions of the public library among the public and local authority stakeholders, open the door to bigger and longer-term project working and raise the profile of the library service in the local press.

> **'We need to demonstrate the impact we're having, and there's nothing more impactful recently than the Sharing Stories project.'**
> Christine Stewart, Glasgow Libraries

There are many ways to raise awareness of your public engagement work, including:

- **Create and disseminate a report about the project**

  - City of London Libraries published a report about their Bumping Spaces project

> **'We've used our report for advocacy. We've sent out the reports to people in the community but also to local authority leaders. I gave a brief talk about the project to a departmental leaders meeting. It's also gone to our members, the members in the City of London. I think it's helped people see and raised awareness of what libraries do and can do in the community.'**
> Helen Tremaine, City of London Libraries

- **Create a film about your project and promote it via social media and in your library**

  - Calderdale Libraries created a film about their Something In the Air? project

  - Libraries NI worked with a partner organisation to create a film about their Turning Heads project

- **Deliver presentations to other local authority departments and decision-makers about the project and use the findings from your evaluation**

  - A top tip is to think about the 'elevator pitch' for your project. If you had to get support from a decision-maker in 30 seconds or less, what would you say?

- **Work with your communications team to promote the project**

  - Libraries Connected have a range of tools to support advocacy and promotion

- Use a successful track-record to bid for a more ambitious project.

> **'We are heading into a large public engagement project through a Mayor of London Cultural Impact Award, so lots that we have learned through our [previous public engagement] project will help us with the planning and evaluation of what will be a yearlong programme of events.'**
> Siobhan Kneale, London Borough of Sutton Cultural Services