



CampusEngage

A HOW TO  
GUIDE

# A FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGED RESEARCH

SOCIETY AND HIGHER EDUCATION  
ADDRESSING GRAND SOCIETAL  
CHALLENGES TOGETHER





## Engaged research

Describes a wide range of rigorous research approaches and methodologies that share a common interest in collaborative engagement with the community and aim to improve, understand or investigate an issue of public interest or concern, including societal challenges. Engaged research is advanced *with* community partners rather than *for* or about them.

A great deal of engaged research literature refers to ‘community’ engagement. In the context of this document, ‘community’ refers to a range of public research stakeholders, including public or professional service and product users, policy makers, members of the public, civil and civic society organisations (CSOs) and others actors.

This Guide is informed by an international literature review and a Campus Engage facilitated year-long national and international consultation with over 350 researchers, policy makers, funding agency personnel and community partners. The consultation led to the development of a national report, *Engaged Research – Society & Higher Education Working Together to Address Grand Societal Challenges*. This report can be downloaded from [www.campusengage.ie](http://www.campusengage.ie).

While every research project is unique, the Engaged Research Framework presented in this Guide encourages researchers to identify opportunities for research stakeholders to be involved at each stage of the project lifecycle. This Framework emerged from the review of existing publications on the subject, and the national and international consultation.

In real world application, engaged research is messier and less straightforward than the diagram shown on page 3. Thus, the Engaged Research Framework, like Beck’s Tube map of London, is not a perfect representation; instead, it is a simplified model designed to encourage researchers to develop a clear and comprehensible plan for who is engaged across the lifecycle of the research project – when, why and how. The Framework offers key reflective questions that correspond with research activities to reduce tokenistic engagement and advance co-created research. Utilise this Framework to create a thoughtful research plan that involves research stakeholders relevant to the enquiry and to confirm that the participatory methods selected align with the aims and objectives of the programme.

# Engaged Research Framework



**Figure 1:** The Engaged Research Framework presents reflective questions to identify opportunities for community engagement and involvement across the research lifecycle. Original design by Sarah Bowman, Trinity College Dublin.



## Generating ideas

Public involvement in research is based on the idea that people who are affected by research have a right to inform that research. Engaged research is advanced with community partners rather than for them. When ideas are generated and a research plan is taking shape, there are opportunities for engagement. Meeting with key stakeholders including members of the public, technical experts, service providers and users, other researchers, community partners, policymakers, industry liaisons and funders (as applicable) allows for maximum input as the research question takes shape. This engagement not only builds capacity for the project, but ensures its relevancy. At this stage, collaborative enquiry includes the following activities:

- Identify key stakeholders and collaborators for whom the research is relevant and engage in discussions in order to refine the research questions / hypothesis.
- Identify the key issue of public concern or the societal challenge that is relevant to the research team and community partners.
- Undertake literature, data and policy reviews to map the research and policy landscapes.
- Draft the research question / hypothesis and confirm its relevancy with key stakeholders and community partners.
- Refine the research question / hypothesis through dialogue with key stakeholders and community partners.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Who has the research team engaged with and why?

Has the research question / hypothesis been advanced in dialogue with key stakeholders and community partners?



## Research Planning & Design

There are dozens of participatory methods for engaged research which span dialogue, consultation, collaboration, involvement, empowerment and direct decision-making. Whether the research project is large or small, the techniques chosen should ultimately advance the goals set forth by the research team and the objectives of the award. The engagement methods selected should focus efforts, encourage dialogue and debate, build new knowledge, address key issues, and result in research that is relevant, timely and beneficial to the community. This includes the following activities:

- Identify relevant funding sources.
- Confirm the project team and collaborators, clarifying roles and responsibilities.
- Develop the budget and confirm resource allocations align with roles and responsibilities for the entire project team, including community partners.
- Advance the Campus Engage Impact Framework with research partners to confirm inputs, activities, outputs, desired outcomes and potential impacts, along with the project's timeline and milestones, with clear pathways to impact established with each partner.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

With whom will the project team engage with, when, why and how often?

Which participatory methods align with the aims and objectives of the research?

Have key stakeholders, for whom the research is relevant, informed the research plan?



## Proposal Development

Proposal development offers opportunities for engagement and involvement across sectors. This may include focus groups or workshops with the project team to develop ideas; site visits with organisations and service providers to secure letters of support and to identify roles on project tasks; and interviews with other key stakeholders, such as industry partners, to document the challenges, opportunities and constraints of the proposed research effort. This stage focuses on how the research will be undertaken, by whom, and results in a proposal which clearly outlines roles and responsibilities. At this stage, engaged research opportunities can be found in the following activities:

- Finalise the research question / hypothesis and develop the conceptual and methodological frameworks.
- State the aims and objectives of the research and clearly explain how the participatory approaches selected align.
- Refine the Campus Engage Impact Framework to confirm inputs, activities, outputs desired outcomes and potential impacts, along with the project's timeline and milestones, with clear pathways to impact established with each partner.
- Document support for this project across key stakeholders. This might include public or professional service and product users, policy makers, civil and civic society organisations, other researchers, industry partners, students, and members of the public.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Is the research team appropriate for a successful project from design to completion, including dissemination and knowledge exchange?

Do community partners have clear roles and responsibilities, including advisory or governance duties?

Is engagement adequately resourced across the project budget and timeline?

Does the allocation of resources align with the responsibilities outlined for all project partners?

Will community partners be joint grant holders or co-applicants with higher education institutions?



## Project Kick-Off

At this stage, the project team may include representation from various sectors, including community partners, who have informed the research methods and operational plans. Given the length of time between proposal and award, it is important for the project team to identify complementary research, data and other activities which may engage new or disadvantaged populations, challenge the hypothesis, or otherwise refine the research approach. The project team will need to address how others provide input during the project. This includes identifying the opportunities for dialogue that the project provides and whether information is accessible and usable for all stakeholders. As the project launches, the engaged research team will collaborate on the following activities:

- Evaluate the methodology, research design, participant settings, recruitment, instruments, methods, measures, assessments, procedures and quality assurances.
- Negotiate and finalise the research agreement with the funding agency and host institution or organisation.
- Set up the project's administrative mechanisms and agree on the operational plan, timeline and reporting schedule with the project team, funders and host institution or organisation.
- Secure ethical approvals, as appropriate.

- Advance the data collection, management and analysis plans with the project team, funders and host institution or organisations.
- Advance the public engagement and communications plans with the project team, funders and host institution or organisations.
- Agree on the ownership of Intellectual Property, access to data, and address other contractual and proprietary issues.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Are the research methods chosen compatible with a collaborative and participatory approach?

Does the project team tap the expertise and tacit knowledge of community partners and research team members?

Do all members of the project team have access to the resources needed for sustained involvement?

Is training required to encourage authentic community involvement?



## Data Collection & Management

Researchers occasionally underestimate how government agencies, community service organisations, members of the public, students and researchers from other disciplines might contribute at the data collection and management stage. The systematic collection and management of data can be achieved with diverse stakeholders when training and data protection protocols are in place. Rather than consider data collection as a discrete stage unrelated to public involvement, consider how collaboration may be initiated and sustained during this stage. The project team should have a clearly-stated rationale for who will participate in this stage and this must align with the aims and objectives of the award in order for it to be meaningful. This may include the following activities:

- Implement quality control and data protection procedures in agreement with ethical approvals, as required, including safeguarding data and anonymity.
- Collect, clean and screen the data in agreement with the project's data collection, management and analysis plans.
- Complete transcription, where applicable, and implement data management protocols.
- Test the reliability and validity of the data.
- Store data in agreement with the project's data management plan.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Do data collection and management plans align with the project's goals for involvement?

Have community partners been approached to gather and manage data or provide the public perspective during this stage?

What supports and safeguards are needed to encourage greater participation in data collection and management? This might require training, protocols, insurance, indemnity and confidentiality agreements are in place.

Does the approach meet the transparency, security and accountability requirements set forth in the General Data Protection Regulation?



## Data Analysis

Recognising that non-researchers can make useful and meaningful contributions to research is at the heart of engaged research, especially when it comes to data analysis. An open and distributed approach to data analysis reduces researcher privilege by empowering lay audiences to develop valuable skillsets. Genuine involvement at this stage of research has been conceptualised, strategically planned and then recognised as central to the success of the project. This is where involvement becomes progressive, resulting in co-produced knowledge across stakeholders and sectors, which is communicated through diverse voices and outlets. Activities may include:

- Analyse the data.
- Manage and impute missing data.
- Develop analytical categories and, if appropriate, undertake modelling.
- Interpret, critique and share the findings, encouraging research partners to communicate through their networks, maximising the reach.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Which stakeholders can access, analyse and communicate findings about this data?

How might the project team encourage participation and broaden inclusion, especially for research-relevant communities?

What barriers to involvement exist at this stage of research that must be overcome to reach your desired impact?



## Data Access

Offering others the body of evidence through data access for meta-analysis or review allows for the critical evaluation of previous findings, providing opportunities for comparative analysis of distinct datasets and systematic reviews of data. Providing access to data ensures transparency and reproducibility, while also allowing for unexpected results as interpretations are challenged. Within the confines of confidentiality and anonymisation, open data proponents note that public monies used to support research should advance public knowledge and accelerate discoveries. To encourage involvement, research teams will undertake the following activities:

- Anonymise the data, as applicable.
- Create a clear process for how data can be accessed in alignment with the project's data collection, management and access plans.
- Publicly archive the data, if so desired.
- Promote the data and its use to a range of audiences.
- Capture data access requests and consider whether these requests may spin out new projects or collaborations.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Are systems in place to encourage data access and analysis?

Are systems in place to capture data access requests?

Is it possible for the project team to engage with other researchers who are accessing the data?  
How will the impact of data access be measured over time?  
If open access is not desired by the project team, have efforts been made to promote the data in user-friendly and accessible formats to diverse audiences and through varied outlets?



## Knowledge Production and Exchange

The goal is to ensure that the knowledge produced is communicated in a timely manner through clear, accessible and usable formats, appropriate to each audience. Activities should take place at various times throughout the project with practitioners, policymakers, members of the public and with others for whom the research is relevant. For activities to be engaging, they must enable dialogue and participation. When planning knowledge exchange activities across the project timeline, think about the language used and the media chosen. Is it possible to bring the findings to the attention of policy makers, practitioners, and service providers to support evidence informed decision-making and improve long term outcomes across impact categories? Are there other disciplines to liaise with in order to develop fun, unconventional or unusual events? When reviewing the dissemination activities planned for the project, which methods are used and which audiences are reached? Activities may include:

- Release project reports, research policy briefs and other deliverables, encouraging dissemination through community partners directly to their networks.
- Issue publications to both academic and non-academic audiences, as applicable, identifying opportunities to reach communities for whom the research is relevant.
- Host dissemination and knowledge exchange events.
- Meet with stakeholders to share findings to promote evidence-informed policies, services and processes.
- Map research findings to policy documents at local, regional, national and international levels, as applicable.
- Present findings at conferences and other events.
- Engage with the media through press releases, interviews and opinion pieces.
- Issue newsletters or an annual review for multi-year projects.
- Provide online resources and website updates, including social media posts and tagged campaigns, as appropriate.
- Identify technology outputs, intellectual property and the potential for commercialisation activities.
- Develop proposals for spinout projects, utilising this Engaged Research Framework.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Are findings shared to encourage dialogue, debate or consultation with service and product users, providers, policy makers and members of the public?

Is it possible to bring together diverse stakeholders to challenge, discuss or question findings?

Are there local, regional, national or international events which might encourage engagement with diverse or underserved populations?

Can the project team tap partners' networks and communications channels to ensure maximum reach?

What mechanisms are in place to solicit and receive feedback across the research lifecycle?



## Project Review & Impact Assessment

Reviewing progress and evaluating impact requires monitoring of outcomes against the intended targets. This stage offers opportunities for engagement as the project team decides on which information needs to be collected, when, how and by whom. Once collected, the information is reviewed and decisions are made on how to act on that information. Strategically evaluating impact can deepen ongoing engagement by assuring partners and funders of the project's merit and by using lessons learned to strengthen future engagement and involvement. In order to assess the impact of a research programme, utilise the Campus Engage Impact Framework which assesses outcomes and their impact based upon the following classification categories:

- Economic Impacts
- Environmental Impacts
- Health and Wellbeing Impacts
- Policy and Product Development Impacts
- Professional and Public Services Impacts
- Social and Cultural Impacts
- Internationalisation Impacts
- Capacity Building Impacts

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Using the Campus Engage Impact Framework, how can the project team measure success across the impact categories through both quantitative and qualitative measures?

Can project partners evaluate the project against their own strategic documents or institutional / organisational performance metrics?

Are partners' contributions recognised and disseminated through other partners' communications channels?

Recognise that outcomes and longer-term impacts may not be captured by final project reporting. Consider how impact will be measured over time.



## Project Close Out

As the project closes, engagement can continue through the networks developed by the team and through potential spin out projects. Over the course of the project, new research needs may have been identified with partners. Reflecting on the engagement methods chosen and why these were selected will help the research team to increase their comfort level and possibly encourage the use of new methods moving forward. Ultimately, engagement supports relationship-building over time. A key consideration at individual, organisational and institutional levels is how engagement can be sustained in the periods between funded projects and in the absence of third party funding. Opportunities for engagement exist within the following activities:

- Complete final reporting.
- Update and share the team contact database, as applicable.
- Identify potential spin out projects and/or new collaborations.
- Develop proposals for spinout projects utilising this Engaged Research Framework.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

What steps have been taken to ensure post-project sustainability of outcomes?

How will engagement be sustained once the project ceases?

What expectations have been set with research partners and community members as this project closes?

## Engaged Research Checklist

As you refine your research plan to develop a clear and thoughtful approach to community engagement and involvement, ask the following questions to identify overlooked opportunities and to confirm the approach:

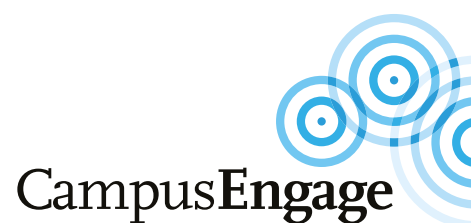
- ✓ Has the research question / hypothesis been formulated in dialogue with community stakeholders from whom the research is relevant?
- ✓ If your research is addressing a societal challenge or issue of public concern, have you engaged those stakeholders most affected?
- ✓ Does the proposed research tap the expertise and tacit knowledge of both researchers and community members?
- ✓ Does the design of the research ensure that stakeholders and researchers are clear about the extent of their collaboration, their respective roles and responsibilities, what they can expect to gain from the research, and what they will be expected to contribute?
- ✓ Is the allocation of funds appropriate for the roles and responsibilities assigned to each teammate?
- ✓ Can the research findings be utilised by researchers and stakeholders in order to address the societal challenge or issue of public concern?
- ✓ How will community members be recognised and acknowledged in research outputs?
- ✓ How will this research result in positive steps towards addressing the issue of public concern or societal challenge?
- ✓ What does success look like and how will it be measured?

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