5 Top Tips for Engaging the Public

BRITISH SOCIETY OF SOIL SCIENCE

1 Who is your audience and why should they care?

A question to ask yourself throughout an engagement project. Both parts of the question can have multiple answers, and those answers may even change depending on the stage of the project.

Who is your audience? Identify the audience you are wanting to engage, and be as specific as possible

- **Who are they** – decide on your target audience(s) and think carefully about them. Keep them in mind throughout the planning process.
- **What is the best way to engage them** – once you know who you want to talk to, how are you going to do it? What is the best method to reach them?
- **Language** – think about the level of language you should use with your audience as different audiences will need different vocabulary. It isn't about simplifying what you are saying, it's about finding a common language and clearly defining any words that may be new to them.

Why should they care? Your audience is under no obligation to listen to you, so you need to make them care! There are many ways to do this, the methods below will hopefully give you a good start:

- **Tell a story** – humans connect through stories. Let your engagement tell a story, something with a beginning, middle and an end. And make sure it has an internal logic, people notice plot holes!
- **Make it personal** – connect to your audience in a personal and relevant way to them. Think about how your research may intersect with or impact their lives.
- **Making memories** – memories stick when something unexpected or with a strong emotional connection happens. So try and create that when telling your story.
- **Empathy and kindness** – put yourself in their shoes when planning the activity and be kind.

2 What does good look like?

When you have selected your audience, method of engagement and thought about how to connect to them, you need to think about what success looks like at the end of the project. Is it a smile on their faces, contribution to your research or raising career aspirations? This can connect to what your engagement will look like and any evaluation taking place.

3 Practice, practice, practice

It takes time to get good at science communication, it's a whole new and different skill set to doing research. Try to do plenty of practice before 'going live' and make sure you are confident with what you are doing. It will not go perfectly every time, so be prepared for things not going quite right in some cases. And if it does go wrong, pick yourself up afterwards!

4 Enjoy yourself

You want to be enjoying yourself, so make sure you are feeling confident. When you are enjoying yourself, your passion will shine through and that is the most important thing in a lot of cases. Audiences will see your passion and love of your research and connect with that, it makes them more likely to listen and connect to you.

5 Don't be afraid to ask for help!

The science communication community is very friendly, so reach out to others if you need help or support. You may have public engagement staff within your department or organisation, beyond that Twitter, BIG-Chat and the PSCI COM mailing list are great places to start as well.

Biography

Chris Snowden has worked in public engagement and science communication for nearly 10 years and in that time, engaged thousands of people in subjects from across the STEM spectrum. He has created, directed and presented shows, workshops and hands on engagement experiences for a variety of audiences; presented at international conferences and trained people from academia and industry in engaging the public. He currently works as a freelance STEM Communicator and Public Engagement Consultant. You can find him at **www.chrissnowden.co.uk** or **@snowd99** on Twitter.