

# Doing Public Dialogue

*A support resource for research council staff*

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[www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk)

Images by Involve & Jake Bouma

## Contents

At a glance .....	3
Who is this guide for?.....	3
Why this guide? .....	3
How to use this guide .....	4
SECTION I PUBLIC DIALOGUE: WHAT, WHY AND WHEN.....	5
What is public dialogue .....	6
RCUK definition of public dialogue.....	6
Why public dialogue? .....	9
What can public dialogue bring you? .....	11
Things to bear in mind.....	13
Find out more .....	14
Public dialogue: yes or no?.....	15
Assessing your situation .....	15
Purposes of public dialogue .....	17
Patterns in public dialogues .....	19
Ways of engaging the public .....	22
Forms of public dialogue .....	22
Other methods of public engagement .....	24
Find out more .....	24
SECTION II PUBLIC DIALOGUE: HOW.....	27
Preparing a public dialogue.....	28
Running a public dialogue .....	36
Following-up a public dialogue.....	37
SECTION III FIND OUT MORE .....	38
Guiding principles.....	39
Practical tools .....	39
Evaluation guides.....	40

## At a glance

### Who is this guide for?

This guide is for research council staff who are involved, will be involved, or are interested in designing and delivering public dialogues. These dialogues could be for their research programmes, the conduct of research, or in governance and regulation of a research programme.

Are you a programme or portfolio manager with **limited experience or knowledge of public dialogue**?

This resource will help you to understand what public dialogue is and how it relates to other forms of public engagement. It will help you think through whether public dialogue is appropriate, and guide you through the process of preparing and delivering a public dialogue. Drawing on learning from a variety of RCUK public dialogue and consultation exercises it will give you a practical overview of what public dialogue with RCUK research programmes could involve.

Do you already have a **good understanding of public dialogue**, but would find a reminder of the most important issues useful in supporting you to deliver a public dialogue?

This resource will reacquaint you with how to ensure influential and cost-effective public dialogue. It will provide you with inspiration and resources which you can take away and adapt for your own specific circumstances.

### Why this guide?

This guide is designed to give practical advice based on an accompanying review<sup>1</sup> of research council public dialogues and consultations. The review underscores three common features of effective public dialogues:

- **Clarity about the purpose of the dialogue** at the outset. This is critical for ensuring that it is successful and influential;
- **Agreement from relevant decision makers** that they will respond to the outcome of the public dialogue. The more concrete this commitment, the easier it is to develop clarity about the purpose of the dialogue.
- **Time and resources invested up front** during the 'set-up' phase of the dialogue. This helps clarify the purposes and questions and helps put in place commitments to respond to the dialogue from relevant stakeholders inside and outside research councils.

In addition, the review highlights ways that public dialogues can be part of an on-going process of 'social intelligence' gathering and reflection and contribute to the overall capacity for organisational learning within programmes and within councils more widely.

This resource will help you:

- Decide whether public dialogue is the right approach to take for an RCUK research programme;
- Think about contracting organisations to advise you about the dialogue process or run it for you.
- Gain a better understanding of what a public dialogue could look like, including a step by step overview of the public dialogue process, from preparation to commissioning the work to follow-up, including commissioning an independent evaluator;
- Increase your knowledge and confidence about public dialogue;
- Gain an insight into the responses of the public in previous dialogues, and what this might mean for your research programme; and
- Know how to maximise the impact of the public dialogue within the research council decision making process and possibly beyond.

<sup>1</sup> Doubleday, R. Teubner, R. (2012) Public Dialogue Review: Lessons from public dialogues commissioned by the RCUK

## How to use this guide

The guide is divided into three sections:

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### Section I      **Public dialogue: what, why and when**

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This section is particularly useful for those with limited practical experience in public dialogue and for senior staff who are helping to make decisions on whether, when and about what to run a public dialogue. It provides background on what public dialogue is, and place it in the context of other forms of public engagement. It also provides you with a list of questions, the answers to which will help guide your decision making about whether or not public dialogue is appropriate as part of your research programme.

The section is split into three sub-sections:

*'What is public dialogue?'* explains what public dialogue is in the context of the research councils. You should read this if you would like to find out more about the benefits and limitations of public dialogue.

*'Public dialogue: yes or no?'* provides a simple list of questions which will help you think through whether public dialogue is right for your situation. This section also provides framework for understanding generic issues the public have raised in response to other research council dialogues. This will help you to frame any dialogue you develop in order to get the most from it.

*Ways of engaging the public* talks you through the different purposes of public dialogue. It provides an insight into which forms of public dialogue are relevant for these different purposes. It also presents examples of a few other methods if you still need to engage the public, but dialogue is not the right method at the moment.

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### Section II      **Public dialogue: how**

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This section walks you through how to prepare, commission, run and follow-up a dialogue process.

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### Section III      **Find out more**

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In this section you will find a themed overview of short guides, reports and websites that provide additional depth on key issues raised in this resource.

**SECTION I PUBLIC DIALOGUE: WHAT, WHY AND WHEN**



## What is public dialogue

### RCUK definition of public dialogue

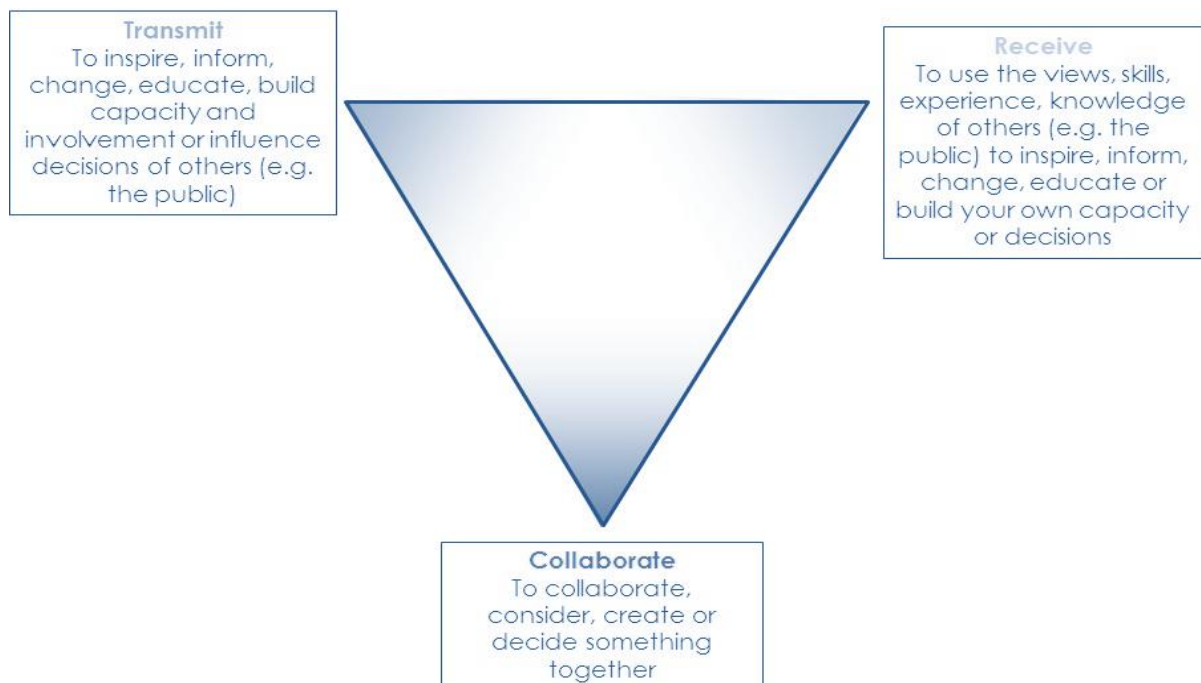
The RCUK definition of public dialogue is:

*'Deliberative (i.e. over time) participatory engagement where the outcomes are used to inform decision-making'.<sup>2</sup>*

People sometimes talk about public dialogue when they mean public engagement. However, the two are not synonymous; public dialogue is one type of public engagement. It can be used in combination with other forms of public engagement such as science communication in science centres or festivals, or consultation, depending on what you are trying to achieve.

A useful model to understand the different purposes of public engagement is the public engagement triangle,<sup>3</sup> which shows three broad, but overlapping purposes labelled 'transmit', 'collaborate' and 'receive'. Different methods and techniques would be used in each category. Public dialogue would usually fall on the spectrum between 'receive' and 'collaborate'. It is important to note that the triangle is not a hierarchy of engagement strategies, all are useful and valid in their own way and no activity is likely to fall entirely under one category.

Figure 1 The Public Engagement Triangle



<sup>2</sup> RCUK Public Engagement Frequently Asked Questions:

<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/scisoc/peupdate.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Colbourne, L. (2010) Science for All Conversational Tool (BIS)

<http://interactive.bis.gov.uk/scienceandsociety/site/all/files/2010/10/PE-conversational-tool-Final-251010.pdf>

**Examples:**

- A user preference survey may fall almost entirely under the Receive category
- A consultation to inform future policy may fall under a mixture of Receive but also Transmit if the public are being educated about the topic in the process and Collaborate if something is being decided together
- An information campaign may fall entirely under Transmit
- The activities of a researcher wanting to respond to the concerns of the public and be influenced about the direction of their research may fall between Receive and Collaborate as their research is shaped by the community with which they are engaging

Table 1 Terms that are often associated with each type of engagement<sup>4</sup> :

Transmit	Collaborate	Receive
raise awareness	partnership	insight
outreach	co-design	information gathering
education	conflict resolution	market research
communication	mediation	social research
behaviour change	consensus	consultation
promotion	co-inquiry	influencing decision making
opinion forming	co-governance	give a voice to...
dissemination	sharing decision making	understand strength of feeling

One way of thinking about public dialogue is as a more involved approach to public engagement than science communication alone: it is a ‘two-way’ conversation between scientists, decision makers and the public which can be useful to find out people’s hopes, fears and aspirations about potential new areas of science and technology.

<sup>4</sup> Colbourne, L. (2010) Science for All Conversational Tool (BIS)  
<http://interactive.bis.gov.uk/scienceandsociety/site/all/files/2010/10/PE-conversational-tool-Final-251010.pdf>

### Box 1 Synthetic Biology

The Synthetic Biology public dialogue project was a series of public workshops and stakeholder interviews on synthetic biology and the issues surrounding it. Synthetic biology is an emerging area of science and technology, using developments in engineering and biosciences to create new biological parts or to redesign existing ones to carry out new tasks.

The project took place during 2009-2010 and was carried out by TNS-BMRB, initiated by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), and with support of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' Sciencewise-ERC programme.

The aim of the dialogue was to allow the diverse perspectives of a range of people to be articulated clearly and in public in order that future policies can better reflect these views, concerns and aspirations. The synthetic biology public dialogue involved members of the public in discussions with specialists on the science, governance, application and control of this emerging area of science and technology. The process was overseen by a steering group.

The dialogue consisted of:

- Twelve deliberative workshops that brought 160 members of the public together three times in four locations along with scientists, social scientists and representatives from the Research Councils;
- A reconvened workshop involving eight public participants (two from each location);
- Forty-one stakeholder interviews. Stakeholders including scientists, engineers, social scientists, Government, Research Councils, Sciencewise-ERC and NGOs were engaged through the dialogue Steering and Oversight Groups.

Findings from the dialogue showed hopes and concerns around synthetic biology. There was conditional support for synthetic biology. While there was great enthusiasm for the possibilities of the science, there were also concerns. Who will control it? Who will benefit? What are the health and environmental impacts? What about misuse? How do we govern science give uncertainty?

Overall public participants were capable of engaging with the complex issues around synthetic biology and reflecting on the views of experts in ways that helped to open up the debate. The dialogue provided some ideas for future discussion - in academic institutions, at the research councils, by regulators and with the public - on how to begin to think about governance and control in the area in the future.

Six key questions emerged:

- What is unique about synthetic biology?
- What are the leadership and funding roles of the research councils?
- How do we develop the capabilities for scientists to think through responsibilities?
- What does innovation look like under these circumstances?
- How do we control the science?
- What should future dialogue look like?

The synthetic biology dialogue was not conducted to inform a specific review or a piece of new or changing legislation. Its findings have wider implications for the way that sciences and new technologies are developed. Four key areas of work that the dialogue had influenced: engaging the regulators, EPSRC's work on responsible innovation, BBSRC's work on ethics in funding applications and the study to draw out learning from public dialogues on emerging technologies.

*Information taken from Synthetic Biology Dialogue reports: TNS-BMRB (2010) Synthetic biology dialogue report, and, Laura Grant Associates (2011) Synthetic biology dialogue Follow up evaluation report.*



## Why public dialogue?

*“Science engagement can help the public become part of a national conversation on some of the big issues like climate change and renewable energy, ensuring that researchers and policy makers understand the impact of leading research”. (David Willetts)<sup>5</sup>*

As the examples of GMOs and nanotechnology show, the public are becoming increasingly willing to challenge complex technological developments that have significant impacts on society. This is fuelled, in part, by increasing demands for openness, transparency and accountability in the context of the spending of public money. Each year the research councils invest around £3 billion in research and research training in the UK covering the full spectrum of academic disciplines, and this has a huge impact on the wellbeing and economy of the UK.

Evidence suggests that the public see a variety of benefits to greater public involvement in decision making about science. There is in fact a high level of interest in science. For example, data from an Ipsos MORI poll on Public Attitudes to Sciences indicate that public interest in science has increased since their first study in 2000.<sup>6</sup> Around three in ten state that they either want more of a say, or want to become actively involved in public dialogue on science.

At the same time there is a growing desire from policy makers, researchers and others for the public to understand and ‘own’ technologies. Policy makers hope that this might lead to behaviour change (in relation to dealing with technology’s impact on society, for example), or wider acceptance of developments.

There is also a growing awareness among some policy makers and scientists that involving the public earlier on in the research process can lead to a framing of research programmes that better meets the needs, desires and wants of the public. Involvement early on can ensure that public values are taken more into account in the framing of the research questions.

There are six key drivers why you might want to do public dialogue listed below.

Table 2 Six drivers for public engagement

1	<b>Better governance</b>	Increased democratic legitimacy for controversial decisions, increased trust, or a desire to promote active citizenship
2	<b>Social cohesion and social justice</b>	Stronger relationships, to empower citizens or groups of citizens
3	<b>Improved services</b>	Creating more efficient services or technologies that meet the public’s needs
4	<b>Capacity building and learning</b>	Building understanding of trade-offs within the public, promoting learning about a technological development
5	<b>Greater ownership</b>	Increasing public participation in science and science decision-making
6	<b>New legal and regulatory structures</b>	Increased public knowledge, policy influence or trust in regulatory structures

<sup>5</sup> National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/>

<sup>6</sup> Ipsos MORI (2011) Public Attitudes to Science (PAS) 2011 <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/sri-pas-2011-summary-report.pdf> (4<sup>th</sup> in a series of PAS studies since 2000).

Public dialogue can bring the social framings and assessment of risks and benefits around particular technologies into sharper focus in ways that engaging stakeholders, or other types of research cannot.

Holding dialogues on difficult and controversial issues with the public can be a fundamental enabler for decision makers to feel confident in the public's ability to hold decision makers to account.<sup>7</sup>

Public dialogue allows a diverse mix of public participants with a range of views and values to:

- learn from written information and experts;
- listen to each other, and share and develop their views;
- reach carefully considered conclusions in discussion with experts and researchers; and
- communicate those conclusions directly to inform RCUKs decision making.<sup>8</sup>

A public dialogue offers you the opportunity to engage directly with a wide range of people, including scientists, specialists, policy makers, stakeholders, patient groups and other members of the public.

It can provide you with much richer data on attitudes and values, and offer opportunities to explore more fully why people feel the way they do. Especially if the dialogue has an interactive element the interaction between experts and 'lay' participants can help the emergence of a new consensus about a controversial issue as participants move towards deeper understandings.<sup>9</sup> Through public dialogue, the participants can potentially influence the way research and the resulting technological developments are governed and regulated.

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<sup>7</sup> Involve and Sciencewise-ERC (2010) "What the public say"

<http://www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/What-the-public-say-report-FINAL-v4.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Sciencewise-ERC Guiding Principles for Public Dialogue

<http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/guiding-principles/>

<sup>9</sup> Method description "Deliberative engagement", National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement:

<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/methods/upstream-engagement>

### What can public dialogue bring you?

Public dialogue can contribute to the work of research councils in the following ways:

- Participation in the dialogue process by research council staff increases organisational awareness and learning about the public dimensions of research; and
- In cases where dialogue processes are linked to Research Council decision making, they can contribute useful insights to the shaping of Research Council funded research.

In an environment where the public increasingly expect to comment on, and influence, policy, the decision-making processes within RCUK could benefit from public dialogue as a way of:

- generating strategic insight into publics as stakeholders, who are often the ultimate ‘users’ of research; and
- promoting open governance of research in the public interest, demonstrating responsiveness and openness.

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*“Yes, I do, I think the results were helpful to NERC in its decision making on geoengineering, I mean I don’t know exactly how NERC operate but I think there’s enough in there to say, look the things that people are really worried about are this, this and this so if you’re going to go ahead and develop these things or you are going to sort of move them politically then here’s what you need to worry about and here are some recommendations about how that’s communicated.” (Expert Participant Geoengineering Dialogue)*

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### Box 2 Geoengineering

'Experiment Earth?' was a public dialogue conducted for the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) on geoengineering – technologies that involve the deliberate and large scale manipulation of the Earth's climate system to reduce the extent and impact of climate change. The dialogue was supported by NERC, the Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre (supported by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills), the Royal Society, and the multi-agency Living With Environmental Change (LWEC) programme. The aim was to identify and understand public views on geoengineering research and deployment, including its moral, ethical and societal implications. The dialogue was run by Ipsos MORI along with Dialogue by Design and the British Science Association.

The aim of the public dialogue was to identify the public's preferences around the future of research into geoengineering, in particular the moral, ethical and societal implications of funding decisions, in order to influence NERC's strategic decision making, and the decision making of other funders and policy makers.

The discussions provided insights into the public's priorities and how their opinions were formed. The dialogue process helped NERC to understand what lay people think about geoengineering. Such information can be used by NERC and other funding bodies when considering the future planning, conduct and communication of geoengineering research. It may also be of value to science users, such as industry and policy makers, who may play a role in further research and deployment of geoengineering, and to science communicators both of geoengineering and climate science more generally.

The event had a positive impact on participants (both experts and members of the public). Initial findings from the dialogue fed into an EPSRC-led 'sand pit' and the two geoengineering research projects that were funded both drew explicitly on lessons learned from the public dialogue. The dialogue has also fed directly into NERC's climate research strategy. The findings will help policy makers get an idea of public opinion, and this is likely to affect scientists and those involved in terms of the way they communicate.

In summary, public participants offered conditional support for geoengineering. The dialogue participants brought up a few key questions which they suggested should guide decision-making about the technology:

- How controllable is it?
- How reversible is it?
- How effective is this? i.e. consider overall costs and benefits of particular approach.
- What is the appropriate timescale for implementing geoengineering solutions?
- How can this be regulated and implemented fairly?

*Information taken from Geoengineering Dialogue reports: Ipsos Mori (2010) Experiment Earth? Report on a Public Dialogue on Geoengineering, and Collingwood Environmental Planning Limited (2011) Evaluation of 'Experiment Earth?' Public Dialogue on Geoengineering.*

### Things to bear in mind

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*“It was really important to us that we had something clear to be asking. And something we could use. I don’t think there’s anything worse for a member of the public than to put their time aside, to talk around something and then not see anything come out of it.” (EPSRC member of staff)*

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- **Public dialogue should not be used when crucial decisions have already been taken** or if there is no realistic possibility that the process will influence decisions: tokenistic deliberation will probably do more harm than good by reducing the trust of participants and other stakeholders in those taking the decisions. If nothing can change as a result of participation it is often better to rely on traditional, one way communication methods, such as lectures, newsletters or exhibitions.
- **Care needs to be taken with interpreting the results from public dialogues**; these exercises provide snapshots of responses of particular groups rather than being representative of society as a whole. The value of lessons from public dialogues comes when these snapshots are placed in their wider context.
- The views of dialogue participants are developed through deliberation, and the processing of new information and arguments. The results are often qualitative and indicative rather than quantitative. **They may not be statistically representative of the wider public**, so be careful when making false claims of representativeness. However, deliberative research carried out by means of public dialogues does have the advantage of giving an indication of the opinions of members of the public when presented with information and allowed to deliberate about the issues and it can provide important insights that other forms of public engagement and research cannot.
- Often the agenda for unsuccessful public engagement events are set solely based on the interests of the sponsoring organisation. **If you do not consider what your potential participants might get out of the process you risk failure.** People may be encouraged to be involved, and even paid for involvement, but effective participation requires them to choose to be involved. Participation cannot be compulsory.
- It can be challenging to run a participation process when those who hold the power are unwilling to listen. **You need to be aware of the extent to which the decision makers have bought into the participation process.**
- **Public dialogue is not a means to persuade the public**, it is independent, unbiased and should be inclusive of key perspectives.
- **Public dialogue is not a talking shop**, rather it is a structured and deliberative form of participation with complex issues which is designed and customised. For this reason it is often good practice to commission a separate body to carry out the dialogue interventions, while the research council manages the process.

### Box 3 Sciencewise

Sciencewise-ERC aims to help policy makers commission and use public dialogue to inform policy decisions in emerging areas of science and technology. They can help you to understand what is involved in public dialogue.

There are many aspects that have to be considered in order to achieve a successful dialogue process. They provide a comprehensive online resource of information, advice and guidance together with a wide range of support services aimed at policy makers and all the different stakeholders involved in science and technology policy making involving science and technology, including the public. Sciencewise-ERC developed a set of helpful guiding principles around the essential elements of public dialogue on science and technology.

The results of in-depth deliberative public dialogue exercises designed to help policy makers to take account of the public's views, concerns, hopes and expectations in the development of better policy on science and technology issues can be found on their website.

Sciencewise-ERC works with central Government and its agencies, and executive, advisory and non-departmental public bodies. They can help with commissioning a dialogue. Sciencewise-ERC also provides co-funding to Government departments and agencies to develop and commission public dialogue activities.

Visit [www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk) for more information and guidance.

### Find out more

- Research Councils UK Pathways to Impact diagram  
<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/impacts/RCUKtypologydiagram.pdf>
- Sciencewise-ERC Guiding Principles  
<http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Project-files/Sciencewise-ERC-Guiding-Principles.pdf>

## Public dialogue: yes or no?

The previous section described public dialogue and outlined what it can and cannot deliver. This section will help you think through if public dialogue is appropriate as part of your research programme.

These questions are designed to help you to explore whether running a public dialogue is appropriate. You don't have to be able to answer all of these questions with certainty yet. However, you might find it a useful starting point to start thinking through some of these issues. If you do not know all the answers yourself, perhaps you need to find support within the organisation to help you.

Keep in mind that there might be experts in-house you could talk to. Dialogue processes can be quite complex, and there is no need for you to think of all the details yourself or reinvent the wheel. There is a lot of experience out there already; you just need to get the right people involved.

### Assessing your situation

If you can answer yes to the majority of the questions below then public dialogue might be appropriate for your situation and is worth exploring further as an option.

✓ **Can anything change as a result of a public dialogue process?**

Is there a prospect of the public's views actually influencing the research programme? In order for a dialogue to be successful there has to be scope for making a difference to the decision making process. In particular it is important to be clear about things that cannot be changed as a result of the dialogue. Public dialogues can make a difference on a variety of levels, for example:

Table 3 Different scopes for change of RCUK dialogues

Public dialogue:	Made a difference to:
Geoengineering (NERC)	the strategy for this emerging research area.
Living with Environmental Change (LWEC)	scoping a new programme.
Nanotechnology for healthcare (EPSRC)	the development of a call within a programme.
Synthetic Biology (BBSRC and (EPSRC))	both research council strategy and specific research projects.

✓ **Is the decision maker supportive of wider participation in this area?**

In order for the dialogue process to have impact on the decision-making process, it is important that the decision maker sees the value of public dialogue. Are they bought into the process? Getting early buy-in would also be useful to get a sense of whether other senior decision makers within the organisation are supportive of public dialogue in this area.

✓ **Can you clearly state the purpose of the dialogue you are considering?**

It is crucial to have a clear purpose and objectives from the outset. Why do you want to engage the public in a dialogue? Can you clearly and simply explain the purpose to a range of different audiences?

✓ **Will the informed view of the public add a new dimension to the issue?**

Is a public dialogue likely to give you new insights that are potentially of value, beyond those which technical expertise and stakeholder views are able to provide?

✓ **Is there potentially strong public interest?**

Are there potential impacts of the research area that will have an effect on the public or certain publics? Perhaps public interest is not very strong at this stage, but how about later on? It might also be worthwhile thinking through if the public would be interested in this area if something went wrong. Will it be useful finding out the public's hopes and concerns about your research area? Think through some negative scenarios, what would the media say? How might the public perceive the issue?

✓ **Are you able to explain clearly to everybody involved how the results from the public dialogue will be used?**

It is good practice to run an open and transparent dialogue process. This means you will have to be clear about the extent to which participants will be able to influence outcomes. At the end of the process you should be able to provide clear evidence of how decisions have been informed or influenced by the public dialogue. In other words, what is up for grabs?

✓ **Can you identify the type of participant you will need to involve to make the process successful?**

To ensure robust outcomes of the dialogue process, you will need to think about who should be involved. The number, demographic and diversity of the participants should be decided on a case-by-case basis. Sometimes a small group is appropriate, for example if you are seeking views early on in decision making on an issue that is not yet known about by the public. Where the impact is likely to be wide-ranging you may want to involve a larger number of people.

✓ **Can you identify stakeholders that are likely to be involved?**

Getting stakeholders involved from the start of the dialogue process in defining the purpose, framing the issues and shaping the design of the process can be valuable in ensuring that there is wider buy-in. However, care needs to be taken that it is not 'captured' by one side of a debate.

✓ **Can you identify experts likely to participate in the dialogue process?**

A meaningful deliberative process requires that participants are given solid and balanced expert input, and are able to ask for clarification on complex issues. Getting experts involved who are competent in their own areas of specialisation and also likely to be supportive of public dialogue will be critical to ensuring this. Experts in turn may find it a useful opportunity to engage directly with the public and hearing their views and questions on their research area.

✓ **Do you have at least 6 to 12 months to set-up and run the public dialogue process?**

The time you would need for setting up and running a dialogue process will vary case by case, however, you should take into account that from start to finish it will take six months at the very least.

✓ **Do you have enough resources (both people and money) for your intended process?**

If you map the availability of staff and funding at the start of the process you will avoid nasty surprises later on.

✓ **Can the learning gained from this process be built back into the research programme and the wider organisation?**

For the process to have a legacy, it is useful to start thinking about how the learning can be built back into the research programme and the wider organisation.



### Purposes of public dialogue

In order to have impact it is important to identify a clear purpose of the public dialogue. The first question you should ask is: “Why are we doing this”?

For research councils the rationale for engaging the public in dialogue around science and technology is to inform the research council’s work and to contribute to wider debate about the public dimensions of emerging areas of research.

The review of 14 public dialogues and consultations that represent a significant series of reports documenting public attitudes to science, technology and research has identified the particular relevance and value of these exercises to research councils.

Broadly speaking, these public dialogues have benefited research councils in six different ways. These are:

1. Better understanding of **public attitudes** relating to an emerging area of research
2. Better understanding of publics as potential **end-users or consumers** of research
3. Researchers stimulated to reflect on the **social implications** of their research
4. Directly **inform research council thinking**, strategy and decision making
5. Promote stronger **stakeholder engagement** with NGOs and civil society
6. Contribute to **wider public debate** about emerging research and technologies

**Box 4 Thinking exercises**

Below are three thinking exercises that can help you think through **why** you are engaging the public in a dialogue. Here are a few basic questions that will help you think through your dialogue. These exercises will take about 20 minutes. They can be undertaken alone, but may be most useful if done together with others involved in setting up the dialogue.

**Exercise 1**

Can you answer the following questions:

- ‘What could go wrong if we do not do a public dialogue?’
- ‘What could go wrong if we do a public dialogue?’
- ‘What could go right if we do a public dialogue?’

**Exercise 2**

Brainstorm answers to the following questions:

- What is the emphasis of your activity? (Eg. to inform people about your work? To gauge other people’s views? To seek collaboration with others?)
- Who is making the decision?
- What is up for grabs?

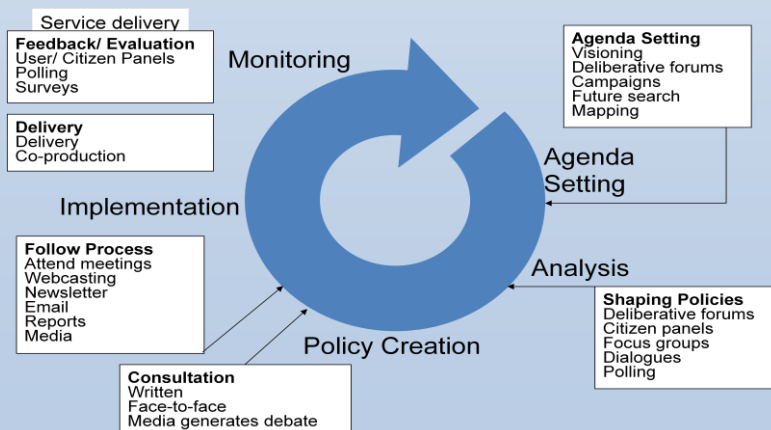
If you want further help thinking through these questions, the Science for all Conversational Tool for Public Engagement (BIS) may be helpful. You can download this tool here:

<http://interactive.bis.gov.uk/scienceandsociety/site/all/files/2010/10/PE-conversational-tool-Final-251010.pdf>.

**Exercise 3**

Look at the diagram below. Ask yourselves where the public dialogue process sits within the policy cycle of the Research Programme.

There are different stages in a policy cycle which will influence the impact the public dialogue can have. For public dialogue to inform the shape of the research programme it will need to be held in the early stages of the policy cycle, when there is still scope to shape the policy.



### Patterns in public dialogues

This section provides insight into some of the most prevalent generic issues of the RCUK dialogues and will help you think through when understanding the implications of those issues in relation to a specific technological development or programme could be useful and when not.

The review of public dialogues finds that there is a consistent set of views and responses from public participants across the dialogue projects. The eight most common responses are:

1. **Conditional support** for the area of research being discussed
2. Desire to see **equitable distribution** of both potential benefits and potential risks
3. **Business** participation in research is welcomed; however, society as a whole rather than business should set public research agendas
4. Desire to see research focused on **clearly articulated societal needs**
5. Preference for targeting **incremental solutions** to societal challenges
6. Valuing **'naturalness'** – that is scepticism of the precision and controllability of high-tech solutions to complex social and environmental problems
7. Focus on **value for money** of both the research and the envisaged applications of research
8. **Anticipatory regulation** of emerging technologies should be considered simultaneously with the research and innovation of these technologies.

These generic issues have been distilled from the review of the research council's public dialogues. This is not an exhaustive list of issues that come up in public dialogues around complex research areas, nor does it mean that these issues will always be brought up. Understanding what common issues might arise can be useful in preparing a dialogue project, because it will help you to anticipate certain areas of discussion and results.

This is not to say that because these are generic issues, they should be skipped in the dialogue. On the contrary, there is strong evidence that discussing these themes is an essential part of the participant journey in getting to grips with the often complex issues up for deliberation. Trying to shortcut these discussions could lead to participant perceptions that the dialogue is ignoring critical issues.

However, the categorisation is intended to help you anticipate these discussions. It can be useful in getting the design of the public dialogue process right, because it will help you to:

- identify the type of resource people you need to have present to have a productive conversation;
- formulate the right questions to stimulate the debate; and
- reach these generic issues quicker and potentially move beyond them, to reach an even deeper understanding of what the public thinks.

#### Box 5 Thinking exercise 'Patterns in public dialogues'

When you start designing the public dialogue process, spend some time considering the following questions:

- What questions have the public asked around your research area that you are aware of (perhaps from previous public engagement in this area, or in the media)?
- Can you make an informed presumption of the hopes and concerns the public have?
- Which of these would you like to explore further with the public?

Table 4 gives an example of each of the generic issues highlighted above. It also gives you an idea of the things to bear in mind when these issues are discussed.

Table 4 Patterns in public dialogues

Issue	Things to bear in mind	Examples from Public Dialogues
1 <b>Conditional support</b> for the area of research being discussed	Public participants generally welcome the idea that public money is being invested in research to tackle problems and create new opportunities.	“Findings from the dialogue showed there was conditional support for synthetic biology-while there was great enthusiasm for the possibilities of the science; there were also fears about control; who benefits; health or environmental impacts; misuse; and how to govern the science under uncertainty.”(Synthetic Biology Dialogue Report, page 7)
2 Desire to see <b>equitable distribution</b> of both potential benefits and potential risks	Specific attention should be paid to questions of equity of access to benefits and liability of harms.	“Fairness and ethical concerns centred on whether the energy source being researched can potentially offer benefits cutting across the whole of society.” (Energy Dialogue Report, page 68)
3 <b>Business</b> participation in research is welcomed; however, society as a whole rather than business should set public research agendas	Public participants generally understand there is a role of business as partners in research. However, the business should not be setting the agenda.	“The involvement of the private sector raised new questions about both the means and ends of research. Participants expressed concern about the social purposes to which stem cell technologies were directed, particularly if governed by private rather than public interests. The values of openness, transparency and disclosure must not be lost in commercialisation.” (Stem Cell Dialogue Report, page vii)
4 Desire to see research focused on <b>clearly articulated societal needs</b>	A common theme is that public funds should be directed towards research that addresses societal needs, and that these agendas should be set through an open and accountable process.	“I just feel [Government] is investing in science that is of value to the UK industry, “well what about the patient”, I ask myself?” (Male, London) (Nanotechnologies for Healthcare Dialogue Report, page 19)

## I. PUBLIC DIALOGUE: WHAT, WHY AND WHEN

<p>5 Preference for targeting <b>incremental solutions</b> to societal challenges</p>	<p>Public participants generally have a preference for pragmatic solutions addressing societal challenges.</p>	<p>“Across the three sessions, they emphasised the need for action orientated research, which has a clearly defined purpose and is designed with its application in mind.” (LWEC Citizens Advisory Forum Report, page 37)</p>
<p>6 <b>Valuing ‘naturalness’</b> – that is scepticism of the precision and controllability of high-tech solution to complex social and environmental problems</p>	<p>Public participants can be sceptics of high-tech approaches and often seem to value more natural processes because they assume this will lead to fewer problematic unintended consequences.</p>	<p>“Naturalness was an important theme underpinning many of the principles. Most participants believed that natural systems are balanced and self-contained and that geoengineering should be considered in terms of how well it preserves natural systems.” (Geoengineering Dialogue Report, page 31)</p>
<p>7 Focus on <b>value for money</b> of both the research and the envisaged applications of research</p>	<p>Public participants consider ‘value for money’. In terms of the ‘return’ on the research investment and in targeting research towards technologies that will offer affordable solutions to the problem under consideration.</p>	<p>“[Citizens Advisory Forum] members emphasised the need for research within the current financial and political climate to be ‘value for money’. To be considered value for money, research should aim to produce new information and solutions, which cannot be obtained elsewhere, and have a strong potential for application and use by principle stakeholders. A primary concern within this context was that research produces cost effective solutions, which are more likely to be implemented at this time of budgetary constraint.” (LWEC Citizens Advisory Forum Report, page 37)</p>
<p>8 <b>Anticipatory regulation</b> of emerging technologies should be considered simultaneously with the research and innovation of these technologies</p>	<p>Public participants tend to assume there will be unforeseen and unintended consequences from research. A system for managing these risks is often discussed.</p>	<p>“In terms of the UK, on the whole and given their experiences of other technologies, participants were reasonably trusting that the safeguards in place were likely to be effective at controlling current research. However, one of the biggest issues was for regulations to be able to keep pace with scientific developments. One concern was that, given that any synthetic pathway or micro-organism is by definition novel; whether current regulatory systems were adequate.” (Stem Cell Dialogue Report, page 43)</p>

# Ways of engaging the public

## Forms of public dialogue

Like the purposes of public dialogues, the forms of public dialogues can also vary. There are many different forms of public dialogue to suit different purposes, contexts, participants and resources.

The following broad categorisation of public dialogue will give you an idea of the range of different forms it can take:

### Upstream deliberative public dialogue workshops

One model for deliberative public dialogues that is often used is a relatively large scale, comparatively resource intensive series of face-to-face workshops where members of the public get the opportunity to deliberate on a certain research topic. They do this through engaging with written materials, videos or expert presentations and then discussing their hopes and concerns with experts, and other interested parties, based on the information they are receiving throughout the process, thereby forming and adjusting their views. These are often reconvened deliberative workshops, held in different locations throughout the country. With a well facilitated dialogue the participants can set the agenda and discuss the issues they see as important.

An example of such a public dialogue is the Nanotechnology for Healthcare public dialogue. This process aimed to identify public concerns and priorities in relation to the development of nanotechnology for healthcare. Four deliberative workshops brought members of the public together twice (in London, Sheffield, Swansea and Glasgow) along with scientists and social scientists as expert witnesses. 88 members of the public were recruited and 13 different experts participated.

### Emerging forms of ongoing engagement

The review of RCUK dialogues shows there is a move from public dialogue as a 'one off exercise' to an ongoing process of receiving, reflecting on and responding to public views expressed in a wide variety of ways.

An example of such a dialogue is the Living With Environmental Change (LWEC) advisory panel. The method used for this dialogue process was a citizen panel. The forum was intended to provide for the involvement of a broad cross section of individuals within a relatively small group. A broad public group of 18 forum members were recruited – though membership fell to 13 by the end – who were working together over a period of time.

### Mixing methods

Often a public dialogue process is used as part of a wider mix of methods to gain insight into public views. Other methods used in combination with public dialogue could be online surveys, discussion groups and open access events. Using a mix of methods means you can potentially reach a wider range of people, giving those who wouldn't be able to attend a public dialogue workshop other opportunities to get involved.

A current, ongoing example of a public dialogue with citizens is the City of Geraldton, Australia. Geraldton 2029 is a long-term initiative to improve sustainability in the Greater Geraldton City Region of Western Australia by implementing a form of participative governance called deliberative democracy as a way of life.<sup>10</sup> A series of public deliberation techniques have been implemented, each building on the other to broaden participation, encourage egalitarian deliberation and ensure

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<sup>10</sup> Hartz-Karp, J. Tillman, C. (2010) Geraldton 2029 and Beyond: Developing Civic Deliberation and Collaborative Governance to Co-create a Sustainable Future [http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/cps/rde/xbcr/SID-2F361BED-59CF835B/bst\\_engl/Geraldton\\_engl.pdf](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/cps/rde/xbcr/SID-2F361BED-59CF835B/bst_engl/Geraldton_engl.pdf)

the results influence policy and decision making. They have diverse opportunities to take part in serious, in-depth, mutually respectful discussions, exploring and explaining their reasons for the positions they take, considering and carefully weighing options, and cooperating to arrive at decisions. For example, these activities included community champions running World Cafés, online deliberative engagement and participatory budgeting.

### **Distributed dialogue**

A next step might be scaling up the ongoing process of public dialogue, and getting many more people involved over a much longer period of time.

This model of engaging the public with complex issues is explained in a pamphlet called 'Talking for a Change'.<sup>11</sup> This approach presents a fundamentally different way for the government to engage with the public about complex issues. The model advocates the need for ongoing and active participation of citizens, where control of the conversation lies with both government *and* civil society; a conversation that requires government to play the vital role of creating an environment in which it can happen, but also requires it to give up control of all aspects of the conversation.

For example, the Environment Agency is testing a new approach for encouraging greater local participation in 25 pilots at catchment level. The aim is to improve the health of waters and habitats. Through these pilots they are developing an approach to explore better ways of engaging with people and organisations at a catchment level in ways that can make a difference.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Anderson, E. Burall, S. Fennell, E. (2010) Talking for a Change A Distributed Dialogue Approach to Complex Issues <http://www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Involve2010TalkingforaChange2.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Environment Agency website: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/131506.aspx>

### Other methods of public engagement

It might be that public dialogue is not appropriate for your current situation. For example, if you have limited time before a decision needs to be made, or you do not have enough resources to run a public dialogue effectively. Table 5 below present a few other example methods you could consider if public dialogue is not the right form of public engagement for your objectives. You should use methods and processes appropriate to the aims of the process. Multiple techniques may be used within an engagement process. Methods can be combined and elements of methods can be incorporated into others.

Before deciding *what method* to use:<sup>13</sup>

- *Why* are you consulting? – What difference do you want the dialogue process to make?
- *Who* are you consulting? – Who do you want to engage and what is in it for them?
- *Where* are you consulting? – What is the landscape in which you are operating? What is the history? What are the threats and opportunities?

Figure 2: An idealised formula for ensuring a public engagement exercise is tailored to the specific circumstances:



Methods differ according to:

- Where they originate from, for example market research, social research or organisational change.
- Number of participants
- Time and cost
- Level of engagement
- Intensity of discussion

Table 5 shows a few examples of other participation methods. These are methods of engagement you may find useful instead of public dialogue, or in combination with the public dialogue you are running. Are you interested in gauging the perspectives of a much broader audience? You could consider doing an online survey. Would it be useful to get the views and opinions of a few members of the public in shaping the process at an early stage? You could consider running a few focus groups. These and other methods are described in more detail below.

### Find out more

- How to do public engagement: Method descriptions (National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement) <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/methods>
- People and Participation (Involve) [www.peopleandparticipation.net](http://www.peopleandparticipation.net)

<sup>13</sup> Involve and Consumer Focus. (2008) Deliberative public engagement: nine principles <http://www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Deliberative-public-engagement-nine-principles.pdf>



Table 5: A selection of public engagement methods<sup>14</sup>

Method	Description	Cost	Time requirements	When to use	When not to use
<b>Online consultation</b>	Online consultation is often used to give a large number of people the opportunity to comment on an issue, or where it is difficult to bring participants together physically. Online consultations can take different forms and have different levels of complexity. For example you could use an electronic survey programme such as Survey Monkey, social networking sites, online forums, and wiki's.	Hosting an online consultation cuts costs for venues etc. However, you will need to take into account costs for process design, technology set-up, and recruitment.	Depends on the level of complexity of the technique you choose, most online consultations are only in existence for a few months.	When you are dealing with a large or widely dispersed group of participants  When your participants are more comfortable participating online than in other ways.	When you cannot ensure everyone has the opportunity to join.  If you need to deliver intense deliberation.
<b>Focus group</b>	Focus groups are guided discussions of a small group of citizens. They are normally one-off sessions. A typical focus group normally lasts one or two hours and is run with a small group of 6 to 12 participants. Focus groups provide useful information on how people respond to particular questions or issues, but the short amount of time limits the depth of discussion.	Costs of focus groups are generally not high. An incentive may have to be offered to citizens in order to get them to participate.	The focus group itself is relatively short, but you will require time to plan the event, recruit participants, and write up the results.	When you are looking to explore views of a specific group or the wider population.  When you want participants to interact in a small group.	When you are looking for a detailed and in-depth exploration of an issue.  When you want to make a decision through participation.

<sup>14</sup> Method information based on [www.peopleandparticipation.net](http://www.peopleandparticipation.net)

## I. PUBLIC DIALOGUE: WHAT, WHY AND WHEN

<b>Future search</b>	A future search conference is a way for a community or organisation to create a shared vision for its future. It engages a large group of stakeholders who take part in a highly structures process.	Usually between 5,000 and 20,000 GBP.	Ideally a future search conference lasts around 2 days.	When you want commitment from all stakeholders.  When you are looking to create a shared vision and action.	When you can't get all stakeholders who should be part of the project in the room.  When you do not have a clear follow-up plan to implement the actions coming out of the conference.
<b>Democs</b>	Democs is a conversation game that helps small groups to discuss (complex) issues, for example climate change or human enhancement. No experts are needed, as pre-prepared cards contain all of the necessary facts.	Existing kits can be purchased for less than 50 GBP or are free to download online. Developing new kits costs around 10,000 GBP.	It works best in small groups of around 6 people in a 2 hour session.	When you want to increase public understanding of an issue  When you want to give participants a chance to participate in their own time and place.	If you want a method which includes lengthy deliberation, direct decisions, tangible outcomes or follow up.  If you want direct interaction between citizens and experts.
<b>Citizen's Jury</b>	Citizen's Juries consist of a small panel of non-specialists modelled on the structure of a criminal jury, set out to examine an issue in detail and deliver a 'verdict'.	Usually the costs are between 20,000 and 40,000 GBP.	The set up time for a Citizen's Jury can be anywhere between 2 and 4 months.	It can deliver decision-making that better reflects the public's views.  It can deliver a high profile example of public engagement.	When the issue is not of significant public interest.  When you seek public agreement.

SECTION II PUBLIC DIALOGUE: HOW

Meeting in pro

Meeting in progress

### Preparing a public dialogue

Devote sufficient time to **upfront planning** of the dialogue. This will be critical in determining the success of the public dialogue process. The longer you spend on this part, the more successful your public dialogue process will be.

#### Box 6 Contracting public dialogue specialists

Often research councils work together with organisations that are specialists in designing, running and delivering public dialogues. Many large, well funded dialogues are run by professionals in designing and running dialogue processes. Much of the decision making around the agenda, the discussion materials, recruitment of participants, venue etc. would be done by them in collaboration with the programme manager based at the research council.

#### Why work with contractors?

Firstly, recruitment of participants, liaising with venues, facilitation and reporting are all activities that require specific skills which you may not have in-house.

Secondly, an important factor that should never be underestimated is the time that is required to organise a public dialogue process. Being able to delegate these tasks to a professional whose day to day job it is to organise public dialogues will enable you to focus on the high level issues related to the public dialogue.

Thirdly, a contractor will – as an external and semi-objective party - be able to challenge your ideas based on their expertise. You may find this useful, particularly in your dealings with senior staff within the research council.

#### Warning!

Deploying an external party to organise the public dialogue is not a license to disengage. On the contrary, being actively engaged with the process from the start will help you target the commissioning and will give you a possibility to steer the process much more effectively.

The tools in this resource will help you to think through the process and ask yourself and others the right questions. Creating this space from the start will help you effectively commission and contracting an organisation who is working to a clear brief, rather than a vague rationale.

#### Commissioning

Fortunately, there are various organisations in the UK that can be deployed to support you in running a successful public dialogue. Make sure the parameters of the consultation are broadly set before you commission (see Figure 3). The more specific you can be in your tender document, the more the proposals are likely to meet your needs. The risk of keeping it too broad is that the proposals will be quite generic. This can cause problems later on in the process, for example if the purpose of the dialogue changes or all of a sudden a lot more capacity is needed.

Before deciding on which specific method or form of public dialogue to use, you need to consider a few important issues. It is helpful to think about these issues in the order they are presented here before beginning to identify and plan how you will use the methodology you choose. It is your answers to the questions posed here that will help to determine the methodology used. The **Public dialogue: yes or no?** questions in Section I are an important part of this upfront planning as well.

The process of thinking about these issues is **iterative**; the answer to each question will depend on the ones before it. The key issues to consider upfront are:

### 1. Why are you engaging?

The first step in every public engagement activity should be to ask yourself why you want to engage. What are you trying to achieve? What will change as a result of the public dialogue?

Once you have established a clear purpose you can use this as a reference point throughout the public dialogue process.

You may find that public dialogue is not the most appropriate technique to achieve your desired outcomes. Please find a selection of other methods in Table 5.

### 2. Who should be involved?

A public dialogue ideally has an appropriate mix of participants. In order to have a two-way discussion that goes beyond informing and awareness raising, it will be useful to get a proportionally higher engagement of stakeholders, experts and decision makers taking part in the deliberation with public participants. Where earlier public engagement activities were predominantly held with public participants, more recent dialogue processes have seen an increase in stakeholders and experts involved. This has arguably had a positive effect in ensuring a genuine two-way communication takes place, where all parties have had a chance to express their views, learn and influence the issues at stake.

- **Public participants**

One of the questions you and the contractor need to answer is what type of public participants you want to involve. Once you have established the audience, the contractor can start thinking about how to recruit the public participants. There are numerous ways to select participants, for example based on demographics, interest group or random selection. All choices are valid, just make sure that the process the contractor chooses meets the purpose of the public dialogue.

The contractor will have to get people interested to take part in the public dialogue. If appropriate, the public participants can be offered incentives or other support, for example travel expenses.

Consider what the public participants might get out of participating. Is the issue you want to consult on something that interests your intended participants? Remember, it's not just about 'receiving' input from your participants. It's also important to provide learning and development for those involved.

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*"It was heart-warming in a way - people have turned into robots but when you give them a chance to sit down and talk they really open up and reach their own insights." (Public participant, Energy Dialogue).*

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### Box 7 Oversight Group

In a public dialogue, it is good practice to establish a steering group/oversight group who will be involved with the public dialogue process from the get go.

Appropriate oversight by advisors from within research councils and external stakeholders is critical to steering a successful dialogue, but also an important mechanism to link the dialogue into relevant council processes and external agendas.

An oversight group can be made up of a policy team, other key departments, key stakeholders representing a balance of opinions and motivations, Sciencewise, and the delivery body once they are commissioned.

An oversight group is useful because it can help to:

- define the purpose of the dialogue
- frame the dialogue
- develop the key questions the dialogue should attempt to answer
- input into the tender for the delivery of the process and the independent evaluation
- oversee the format and design of the stimulus materials
- bring in intelligence from their own organisations

- **Decision makers / senior managers**

For the public dialogue to have an impact on decision making within the research council you will need to get buy-in from senior managers at an early stage in the process. You could for example establish an oversight group and get some of the key decision makers involved in that, or perhaps have discussion at already established groups within the research council. Getting senior managers involved from the start, and keep them engaged throughout the dialogue process will hopefully support you in making the case for the value of public dialogue in shaping the research programme. The sooner you get them involved, the better. Make sure you get a few key senior managers involved in the public dialogue events as well. Often first-hand experience of a public dialogue process gives them a much better understanding that the public is capable of discussing complex research and technological issues in a structured and deliberative way.

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*“[I] found attending in person and listening and participating much more useful and valuable than looking at the report.” (Expert participant, Synthetic Biology dialogue)*

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- **Stakeholders**

Stakeholders can be campaign groups, research institutions, businesses or other organisations who are likely to be affected by the issue, either now or in the future. To maximise the impact of the public dialogue you should invite stakeholders to take part in the process from the start. Good practice is to invite a few stakeholders to become part of an oversight group. You could also run a larger stakeholder event where they can be involved in developing the topic of discussion and perhaps contributing to and reviewing the materials you will use with the public.

Inviting stakeholders to take part in the public dialogue process as experts and encourage them to join in the conversations with the public participants can contribute to a successful dialogue. Particularly for public dialogue on potentially contentious issues it is important to start early with

involving stakeholders and senior managers to define the purpose and framing together. The success or failure of the dialogue will depend on the extent to which key stakeholders support the dialogue, its framing and are willing to support the outcome. The choice of stakeholders is very important, so time spent early on thinking through the implications of who you involve and how you involve them could help determine the success or failure of the dialogue and will certainly save you time in the long run.

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*“The workshop gave me a really good exercise in explaining things in lay terms. Something that doesn’t happen every day. So this was a really good thing for me. Also, the vision of the patients, which I hadn’t really included in my thinking – I now think it’s very important. When you’re deciding what to include [in your research], you need to include all those aspects. So, I think the community needs to do that. I’m going to try to include that in my research and convince colleagues to do the same.”* (Expert participant, Nanotechnology in Healthcare dialogue)

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- **Experts**

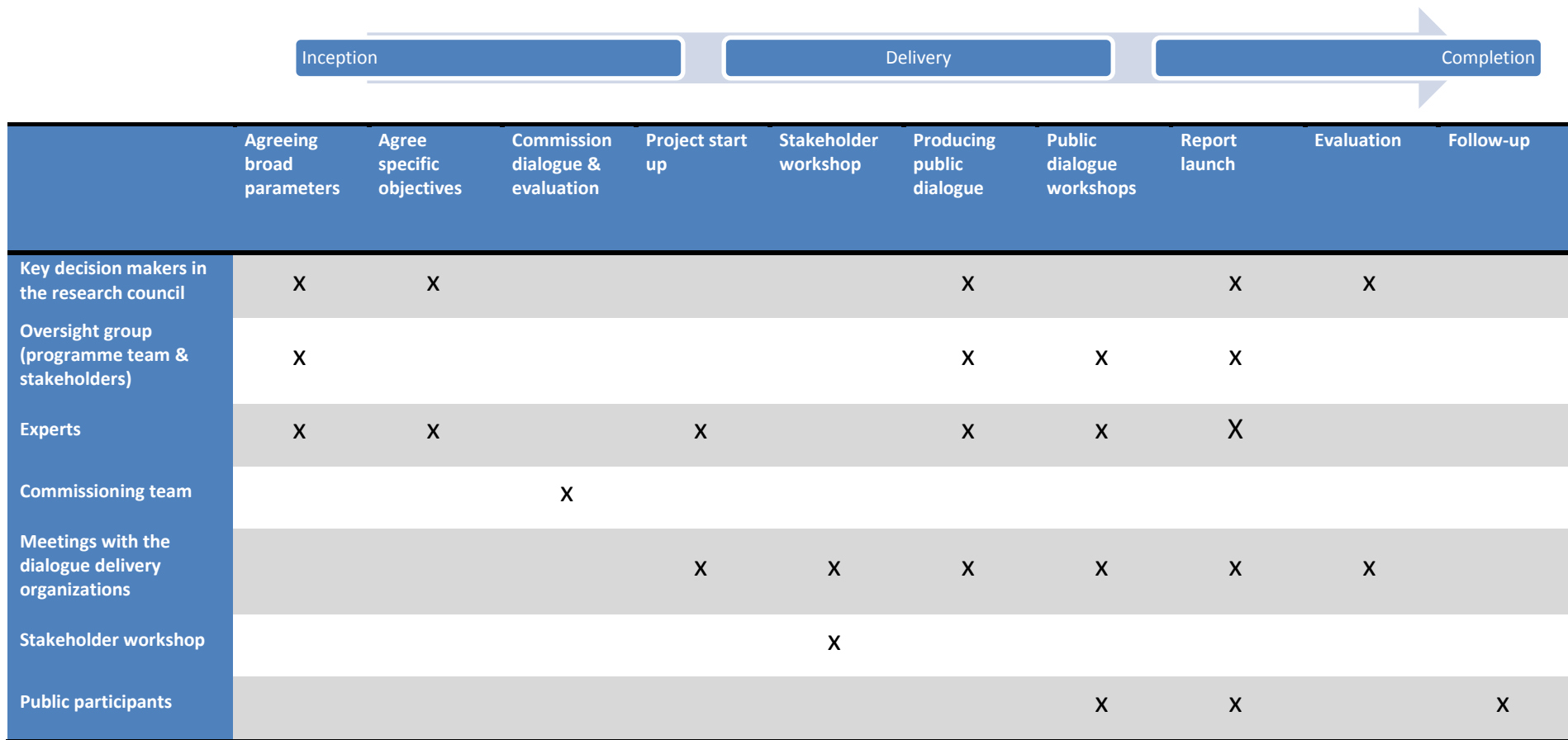
Getting experts involved at an early stage is also good practice. An expert may be a leading scientist on the issue or someone who makes decisions about the issue professionally. The experts can help you in setting the parameters of the public dialogue, designing the materials and bring specific intelligence to the process. The experts could be part of the oversight group, or could be asked individually for their support. You will have to be clear about what their role in the process is so they can contribute adequately and are also clear on what they are getting out of this process. It can certainly help to ensure that they are ‘bought into’ the process later on when they are supporting, and deliberating with, the public.

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*“I just thought it would be a general discussion, I didn’t think that you would have scientists there explaining different things to you...that was the best part about it really.”* (Public participant, Geoengineering dialogue)

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Figure 3 Who should be involved at which stage?



Ideally allow at least 6 to 12 months to set up and run a public dialogue process, it could even take up to 24 months, depending on the nature of the issue. Be realistic about how long things take; always allow more rather than less time. As soon as you can, forewarn the intended participants.



### 3. What is the context in which the public dialogue will fit?

Think about the context into which the public dialogue process will fit. Are there any past participatory exercises on the same subject? What are your public participants' characteristics and capabilities? How controversial is the issue and to what extent will this impact on the public participants' views and attitudes before they engage?

### 4. How do I managing the impact of a dialogue?

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*"I won't say I have read all of it but I thought it was quite a good, quite a useful report. The difficulty is how do we use it? That is the real big question. My own personal opinion is that it doesn't necessarily impact the direction of the research but it does impact how we approach that research."*  
(Expert participant, Geoengineering dialogue)

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Identifying the desired outcomes is a crucial part of the planning process. Outcomes are in fact a clear statement of exactly what difference the process will make. You may find it useful to distinguish between primary and secondary outcomes, and short term and long term outcomes. This will help you plan how the outcomes from the process are taken forward.

The processes of analysing, interpreting and presenting back the results also have to be designed in advance. Depending on the audience you are trying to reach, it is useful to consider different formats of presenting them with the results. Do not send the senior level decision makers a full account of the dialogue. Rather send them a short and snappy overview of the key results.

Also think about who needs to take action on the outcome of the public dialogue? What response is required from the research council? What needs to be done if the dialogue throws up issues outside the remit of the research council? Who would you need to respond, within government, the media, or wider academia? Thinking through these issues upfront – in collaboration with the contractor – will make the dissemination afterwards much easier and more effective.

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*"I think that fact that we can say it did have an impact straightaway on some things that were funded [as a result of the sandpit] because that's what people will forever ask and you know, there's been a heck of a lot of dialogues in the past, which is quite hard to pinpoint actually tangible things that have come out."* (Expert participant, Geoengineering dialogue)

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### 5. How should I feedback to participants?

An effective public dialogue process is transparent. This means the information provided to the participants, the reporting of their views, and how their views feed into decision-making processes need to be transparent. It is important to plan how the process will:

- Provide balanced information to the public participants, coming from clearly identified sources and accessible to all participants. If the subject is controversial you will want to present opposing expert opinions. This may mean more than opposing views within the discipline; your deliberation could be enhanced by drawing in the views of economists, political scientists, anthropologists as well as philosophers and religious leaders to help participants explore the ethical and moral dimensions more deeply.
- Inform the participants how their views are being recorded and reported. It is good practice that participants have access to a report summarising their views.
- Make clear to the participants how the results are intended to be used in decision-making processes. After the public dialogue is finished you will also need to clarify how their input has had an impact.

Transparency at the start will help participants to make informed decisions about the best way they can help you and what they will get out of the discussion.

### 6. How will I know if the process has been a success?

It can be useful at this stage to formulate 'success criteria'. This can simply be a reformulation of the original objectives of the process. Evaluation is an integral part of good public dialogue management. Planning a review process in advance is also important to ensure that the learning is gathered from the work as it happens. Also, developing a robust review process from the start can be an effective form of risk management.

For example, key evaluative questions could include:

- Have the objectives been met?
- Was the method appropriate?
- How many people participated?
- If representativeness was the goal, has this been achieved?
- Were the results satisfactory?
- How were results communicated to participants?
- What has changed or will be changed as a result of the exercise?
- What did the process cost?
- What could be improved next time?

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*"I liked the idea of taking part in consultations and of my view being listened to. I liked the whole setup and the mixed groups ... it did change my attitude towards perhaps me thinking they paid attention to my opinion."* Public participant, Geoengineering dialogue

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It is encouraged to contract an **independent evaluator** to review the process. Sciencewise-ERC requires this for their public dialogues. The Requirements for Evaluating Sciencewise-ERC projects can be found on the Sciencewise-ERC website.<sup>15</sup>

Most research councils have **impact teams**. It is recommended to get them involved at the early stages and have them monitor the results and the impact of the dialogue over a longer period of

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<sup>15</sup> Requirements for evaluating Sciencewise-ERC projects: <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Project-files/SWP07-Requirements-for-Evaluation.pdf>

time. Don't expect immediate results though: sometimes it can take a number of years for the impact of a dialogue to come to fruition.

### Find out more

- Process planner (Involve)  
<http://peopleandparticipation.net/display/ProcessPlanner/Home>
- Dialogue designer (Dialogue by Design)  
<http://designer.dialoguebydesign.net/>
- Making the case for public engagement (Involve and Consumer Focus)  
<http://www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Making-the-Case-for-Public-Engagement.pdf>

### Running a public dialogue

#### The process

To prepare for the event(s) the contractor will need to work out the programme of the event. Ensure there is a logical path through learning and discussion. The programme will need to allow participants to build on and use the information and knowledge they acquire as the process develops. Be prepared to be flexible both in timing and in having to change a process as it is running in case it takes an unexpected direction.

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*“I’ve learnt a lot more about public dialogue and about how difficult it is to conduct a dialogue that’s effective, it’s a real challenge and very messy, it’s a messy business, you don’t always – things don’t always go in the direction you expect.” Stakeholder participant, Synthetic Biology dialogue*

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#### Things to bear in mind

You will want to make sure that the contractor has thought about the following issues:

- Ensure all your participants are clear about their role, and how the process will work.
- If you are inviting experts to present or observe, brief them beforehand so they clearly understand their role.
- Make sure the time allocated to participants’ discussions is maximised.
- Provide a safe environment in which they can express themselves freely.
- Recognise the value of expertise from all participants.
- Ensure the discussions are carefully recorded. This means you note down ‘agreed’ statements from group discussions on flipcharts or laptops. Taking notes in an open way will give the participants a chance to see what you are taking away from the discussion. If using audio or video recording, the participant’s consent for using that material is needed.
- Vary the ways in which participants can express their views throughout the process – collectively in group discussions and individually through other methods such as sticky dot voting, paper table cloths and post-it notes.
- Allow for time for plenary feedback and summing up so that participants can check and validate points that are being interpreted as the main results.

#### Find out more

- Effective public engagement, A guide for policy-makers and communications professionals (COI)  
<http://coi.gov.uk/documents/guidance/effective-public-engagement.pdf>

### Following-up a public dialogue

#### Wash up

Directly after the public dialogue it is advised to do a wash up with all actors involved in the organisation of the public dialogue. It is useful to get instant feedback on the process; this input can be used in analysing the results as well as informing future public dialogues.

#### Disseminating feedback

One of the aspects of public engagement that most annoys the public is the lack of response when people have bothered to participate. In the planning stages the process of feeding back has already been thought through and the participants have been informed about how they were going to be kept informed. Make sure these promises are kept, and follow up with the participants after the dialogue has finished.

#### Follow-on activities

People that have participated in the dialogue might be keen on staying informed or even involved in future stages of your work. The findings of a pilot research project<sup>16</sup> suggest that there is some appetite from participants in (Sciencewise-ERC) dialogues to maintain contact and potentially participate again. A good experience is critical to sustained involvement.

You could think about setting up structures to give people an opportunity to stay informed and give their views on an ongoing basis. For example by sending the participants the dialogue report, keep them updated by newsletters, setting up a Facebook group, or perhaps organising a public meeting later on in the process where you can present further developments and perhaps gauge the participants' views again.

You could consider surveying past participants of the public dialogue after a period of time to build up an evidence base of the longer term and wider impacts of these dialogues.

Pro-actively reconnecting with participants could be made easier if you:

- Encourage participants to give their email address
- Make contact as soon as possible after the dialogue, and give participants an option to update their contact details.
- Encourage participants to join a group via a social network.
- Develop an ongoing relationship with people who agree to be re-contacted.

However, ensure you understand the data protection issues associated with asking people for their contact details.

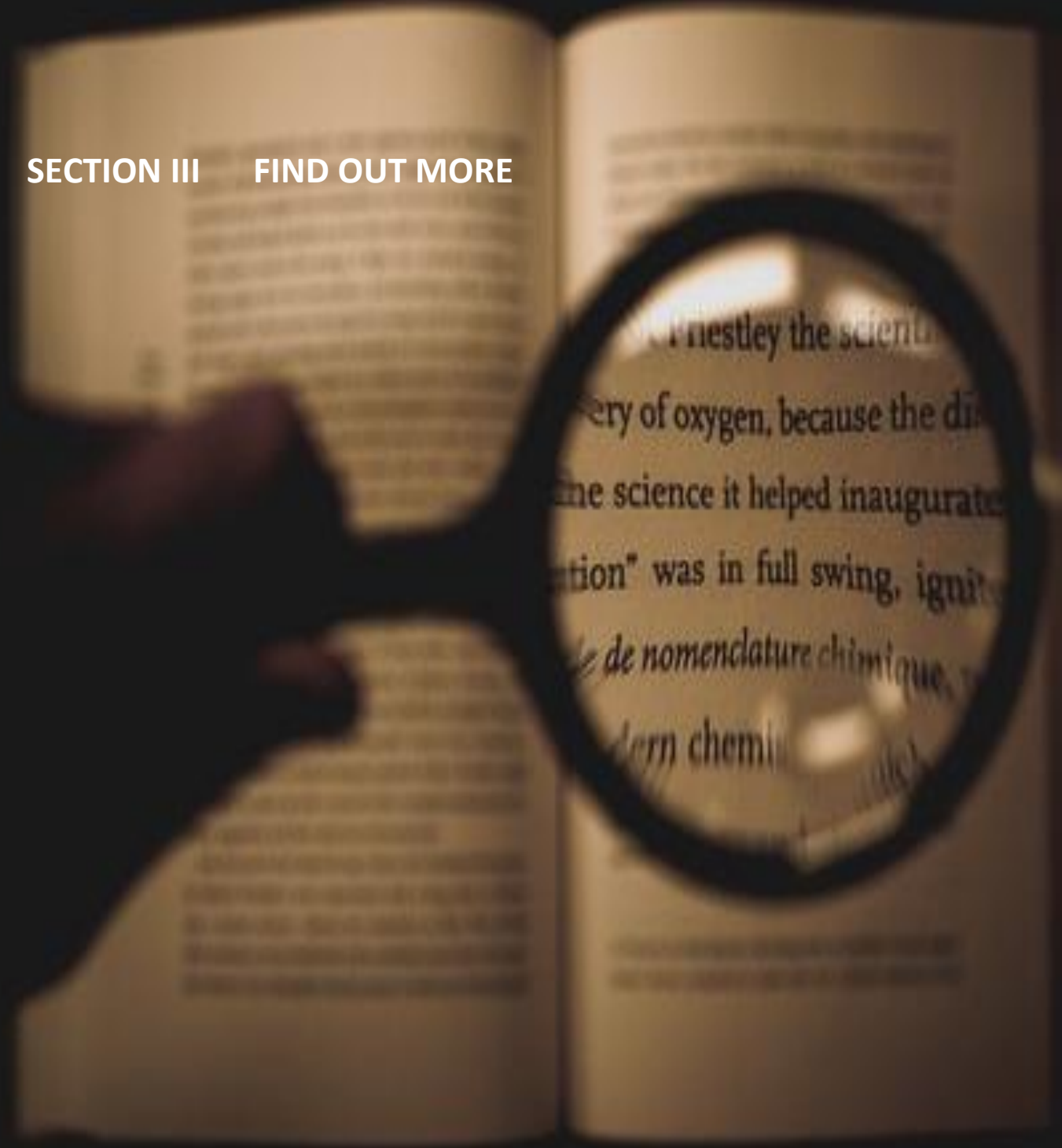
#### Find out more

- Introduction to evaluation (National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement)  
<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/guides/introduction-evaluation>
- Making a difference: A guide to evaluating public participation in central government (Involve and Shared Practice)  
<http://www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Making-a-Difference-.pdf>

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<sup>16</sup> Warburton, D. Hughes, T (forthcoming) Public Participants.

SECTION III FIND OUT MORE



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## Guiding principles

### **Deliberative public engagement: nine principles (Involve and Consumer Focus)**

This document encourages and supports deliberative public engagement in public policy. It explains that deliberative public engagement is a distinctive approach to involving people in decision making, and how it is different from other forms of engagement in that it is about giving participants time to consider and discuss an issue in depth before they come to a considered view.

[www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Deliberative-public-engagement-nine-principles.pdf](http://www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Deliberative-public-engagement-nine-principles.pdf)

### **Sciencewise-ERC Guiding Principles**

This document outlines a set of guiding principles for public dialogue on science and technology-related issues. These guidelines have been developed by government through the Sciencewise-ERC programme, in collaboration with policy makers, practitioners, academics and representatives of the scientific and business communities working in the areas of science policy and public engagement.

[www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Project-files/Sciencewise-ERC-Guiding-Principles.pdf](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Project-files/Sciencewise-ERC-Guiding-Principles.pdf)

### **Research Councils UK Pathways to Impact diagram**

RCUK want to encourage researchers to be actively involved in thinking about how they will achieve excellence with impact and to explore the pathways for realising the impact. The Pathways to Impact diagram shows ways will help develop potential economic and societal impact.

[www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/impacts/RCUKtypologydiagram.pdf](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/impacts/RCUKtypologydiagram.pdf)

## Practical tools

### **Impact Toolkit (Economic and Social Research Council)**

The Pathways to Impact Toolkit gives you everything you need to achieve the maximum impact for your work. The toolkit includes information on developing an impact strategy, promoting knowledge exchange, public engagement and communicating effectively with your key stakeholders.

<http://esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/tools-and-resources/impact-toolkit/index.aspx>

### **Effective public engagement, A guide for policy-makers and communications professionals (COI)**

This guide supports policy makers who are involved in public engagement programmes. It will help to ensure that you, the policy maker, can consider the most important issues before creating your engagement plan or procuring an engagement expert.

[www.coi.gov.uk/documents/guidance/effective-public-engagement.pdf](http://www.coi.gov.uk/documents/guidance/effective-public-engagement.pdf)

### **Process planner (Involve)**

The process planner helps you choose participatory methods that are suitable to your situation. It also helps you plan your process. You answer a series of questions which are compared to a database of methods to determine which methods best fit your needs.

[www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/ProcessPlanner/Home](http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/ProcessPlanner/Home)

### **Dialogue designer (Dialogue by Design)**

Dialogue Designer is an online process design tool provided by Dialogue by Design. It will help you choose the right method in the right situation. The choices you make in response to each question will help you plan your consultation.

<http://designer.dialoguebydesign.net/>

### **Making the case for public engagement (Involve and Consumer Focus)**

This practical Toolkit will help users understand and make the business case for engagement and present it to internal and external audiences. It can be used for all kinds of engagement from small scale 'one off' projects to major exercises.

[www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Making-the-Case-for-Public-Engagement.pdf](http://www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Making-the-Case-for-Public-Engagement.pdf)

### **How to do public engagement: Method descriptions (National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement)**

The NCCPE website supports universities to engage with the public, providing tools and resources to help you engage with the public.

[www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/methods](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/methods)

### **People and Participation (Involve)**

This site is a central portal for information and inspiration about participation to practitioners across the world. The methods and principles we promote through these sites will be of use to people in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

[www.peopleandparticipation.net](http://www.peopleandparticipation.net)

### **Beginner's guide on how to use new technologies for engagement (NHS Armchair Involvement)**

This site helps you find out about the new technologies available to engage patients, carers, staff and public for service improvement. It is called armchair involvement because new technology enables public service providers to enable participation from the participants' own 'armchair', or anywhere else they find convenient to participate from.

[www.institute.nhs.uk/building\\_capability/armchair\\_no\\_comment/armchair\\_involvement.html](http://www.institute.nhs.uk/building_capability/armchair_no_comment/armchair_involvement.html)

### **Democs**

Democs is a new way to help people to talk about politics. It's a game-like process which gives players all the information and structure they need to share ideas on difficult issues.

<http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/democs>

## **Evaluation guides**

### **Requirements for Evaluating Sciencewise-ERC Projects**

This document provides detail on the aims and objectives for evaluating Sciencewise-ERC projects, as well as some key questions for evaluating public dialogue within Sciencewise-ERC, and some key principles for evaluation that need to be met.

<http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Project-files/SWP07-Requirements-for-Evaluation.pdf>

### **Making a difference: A guide to evaluating public participation in central government (Involve and Shared Practice)**

This guide to evaluating public participation is intended to help those involved in planning, organising or funding these activities to understand the different factors involved in creating effective public participation.

<http://www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Making-a-Difference-.pdf>