

NERC Public Engagement with Research Strategy 2019-2024

Purpose

As environmental science will continue to be at the heart of some of society's biggest challenges NERC has an opportunity and a responsibility to find creative and relevant ways to engage the public with current research in order to promote best practice in this field. This may be through enabling public groups to have input on environmental science research from an early stage, representing the findings of research to diverse public audiences in engaging ways, and/or providing opportunities for the public to directly engage with researchers to gain an understanding of the science. Our remit is to promote public engagement with environmental science and in doing this we will support the UKRI Public Engagement Strategy.

Objectives

NERC is committed to a strategic and effective approach to public engagement with research. Our activities and those we commission will be guided by five objectives:

Supporting researchers

1. Engaged research, informed by people and of benefit to society

To enable public groups to inform researchers of the areas of environmental science about which they wish to engage and how they wish to do this. This will benefit both society, by engaging with current research, and researchers and research by providing positive opportunities to learn from the public and opening new techniques to add to the research process.

2. To foster a strong engagement community for environmental sciences

To build the capacity and capability of researchers at all academic career levels to plan, fund and deliver effective public engagement that benefits research, through for instance, developing knowledge, skills and confidence; building networks; and recognising and celebrating excellent examples of public engagement with environmental science research.

The role of NERC

3. Convene informed public debate

To convene informed public debate about contemporary issues in environmental science, including the ethical and social implications. To strive to make the topical and/or contentious NERC-funded research accessible.

4. Engaged NERC: a responsible organisation

To carry out public dialogue which informs NERC-led research and actively listen to members of the public to allow NERC to make decisions that are relevant to society. To learn and improve as a funder of high quality public engagement as a result of our track record.

5. Interesting and inspiring future communities

To support opportunities and resources, which will interest, inform and inspire the broad future communities of environmental science researchers and innovators. We will do this by connecting our existing communities with opportunities and broader engagement networks and skills and celebrating the science and public engagement work of our community in various ways.

Implementation

Leading the way

We will continue to build on the past twenty years where the UK has been at the forefront of research and debates into the nature and value of public engagement. We will champion best practice in PE related areas including ethics, environmental sustainability, and equality, diversity and inclusion. Central to this strategy is the NERC Responsibility Framework and the NERC Delivery Plan.

Evidence-based decision-making

Our engagement approach identifies effective ways of enabling others to use environmental science evidence in their decision-making. Similarly, we will make sure that our delivery and evaluation of public engagement champions evidence.

Partnership working

Our ambition will require strong partnerships working internally and externally, as public engagement in the UK is an increasingly rich, interdisciplinary landscape and to bring in engagement specialisms to reach diverse audiences. We

will seek to include researchers in partnerships that deliver programmes with specialist organisations/individuals, and across academic disciplines, to improve the quality, reach, and impact of the engagement and provide opportunities for researchers to enhance their skills.

Audience

At a time of unprecedented public interest in how human actions affect the environment, we aim to make our research as accessible as possible. In the [public attitudes survey commissioned by NERC](#) in 2017, over three quarters of the public feel they “ought to hear about potential new areas of science and technology before they happen, not afterwards” and 74% felt that scientists should listen more to what “ordinary” people think. This strategy will support engagement that seeks to reach defined and diverse UK audiences, relevant to the five objectives above.

Background

This strategy represents a renewed strategic commitment to public engagement from NERC, and a progression in the strategic activity achieved over the past four years. Public engagement is a condition of all NERC grants and fellowships and we will continue to capture activities and evidence through existing reporting mechanisms. Public engagement in research centres is supported through NERC National Capability funding and NERC’s capital investments will continue to be accessible for public engagement, whilst prioritising science needs for these facilities. NERC’s research community will continue to be able to apply for support through Pathways to Impact, to carry out public engagement specific to their research grant, as highlighted in NERC’s commitment to the Concordat for Public Engagement with Research.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be planned into NERC’s commissioning of public engagement activity. We will enable researchers to evaluate their public engagement, and to capture proportionate evidence to measure outputs, outcomes and impact from the public engagement activities, some of which may be relevant for use in impact case studies in the Research Excellence Framework (REF), Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). We will strive for high quality and transparency through sharing best practice and effective evaluation. Our approach to evaluation follows the UKRI Monitoring and Evaluation framework. As well as specific reporting and evaluation for individual projects, we gather outcomes information on all of our investments including through the Researchfish® system.