

## **Lunch and Learn – Community Engagement**

### **Notes on session and useful links**

This series is organised by the LSE KEI Integrated Service, a coordinated internal infrastructure to communicate, support and assess knowledge exchange and public engagement activities, as well as other pathways to impact, within the School. We aim to encourage LSE researchers to think about opportunities for knowledge exchange and public engagement throughout their research projects; to communicate the value of engaging non-academic audiences in research to LSE researchers and the wider LSE community; to showcase “effective” engagement activities; and to equip LSE researchers and research support staff with the skills needed to carry these out.

Find more information at [lse.ac.uk/kei](https://lse.ac.uk/kei)

[Link to slides from this session \(via Google Drive\).](#)

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**Sarah Allan, Head of Engagement, Involve** (<https://www.involve.org.uk/>)

Definition:

COMMUNITY = geographic/demographic/groups with a special interest or shared experience

ENGAGEMENT = exchange of knowledge, with a clear purpose, developing a relationship (i.e. not a one off)

Why would you want to do it?

- Ground experience in people’s lives
- Understand preferences/attitudes
- Define/refine research questions
- Collaborate to answer research questions

How should you do it?

Not all methods are suitable for everything. You need to ask yourself questions to define your **engagement plan/strategy**- take a couple of hours to work through this checklist of questions, try to do it all at once.

### **Scope**

What issue are you looking at?

Think about POSITIVE and NEGATIVE perspectives – what is covered in your engagement, but also what isn’t covered. Think about this from the perspective of participants. What is the level of involvement that you are offering people?

Sherry Arnstein’s [Ladder of Citizen Participation](#)

Roger Hart’s [Ladder of Participation for Children](#)

### **Purpose**

Clarify your objectives – is it co-creation? Or answering questions?

### **Outcomes**

What is it that only the public can tell you?

Live experience/attitudes/preferences – make sure you frame your outcomes in this way

Think about primary and secondary outcomes. A secondary outcome might be the creation of a network, or of some behaviour or attitude change.

### **Outputs**

Which audiences are you targeting? Think about *how* they will understand what you are communicating, e.g. an accessible report? Something co-created?

### **Method choice**

Do you need to make sure that your group is balanced in terms of demographics, for example? You may need to use a polling company to achieve a truly representative group if that is a key concern, i.e. through sortition, based on the electoral roll.

Make sure you think about access requirements. Are they time poor? When might they be able to convene, if at all? Should you be thinking about a digital space rather than a physical one? Do you need a budget for translation/braille, e.g.?

How do you involve decision makers?

Make sure you consider your timeline, your capacity to do the work involved (can you delegate to others in your team? who can do what?) and your budget.

Now you have worked through these questions, this is a good time to **seek advice**. Is your brief realistic?

Example of engagement methods –

<https://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/sites/default/files/Engagement.pdf#page=9>

<https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Not-Another-Consultation.pdf>

### **How to avoid common pitfalls and getting the most out of your engagement**

Working through the questions above should certainly help. Scope is particularly important – it must be clear to participants what is involved. One of the most common pitfalls is a misunderstanding of the issues being discussed/of the degree of involvement/of what they will get out of it.

Make sure you make use of networks and already existing groups to reach the right people, rather than trying to build connections from scratch.

Think about whether you need to incentivize people to take part. Think about what people will get out of a project, why would they stay involved – it could be that you need to pay them, or it could be for the social/networking aspect in which case make sure you facilitate this, provide tea and coffee etc.

Think about unintentional barriers people may face to being involved – timings, language, travel, child care. Do you need to cover the costs of these? Can you pay for travel up front? Think about how your participants would be most comfortable, how do you go to them (rather than asking them to come to somewhere possibly intimidating like a university)?

Make sure you ask people questions they can identify with and understand. Remove all jargon.

Get advice about GDPR.

Be prepared to adapt as you go along, use formative evaluation so you can adjust your plans to make them as useful as possible to your participants and to your research.

People get involved if they think they are going to be listened to.

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### **Ezra Wallis and Kirsten Zeller, City of Westminster**

(contact them via Greg Taylor, Senior Public Affairs Advisor, Communications Division, LSE [g.taylor1@lse.ac.uk](mailto:g.taylor1@lse.ac.uk))

See slides.

City of Westminster has just under a quarter of a million residents, but millions more workers and commuters. It includes the 10% most deprived and least deprived communities in London. 150 different languages are spoken in Westminster schools.

There isn't an urban policy challenge anywhere in the world that doesn't exist in Westminster. Their policy priorities at the moment are: housing (including affordable housing); rough sleeping (including antisocial behaviour and family breakdowns); and air pollution and the environment.

They are interested in working with LSE researchers to address these challenges.

#### **What do they do?**

City plan

Statutory policy

Strategies (for example, to be a dementia friendly city)

They have a strong ethos about transparency and involving local people in decision making.

#### **Tips for community engagement**

Start with a **logic model** (see slides 7-9). This ensures that you know what you want to achieve, and that your participants understand what is involved.

Carry out **stakeholder mapping** (see slides 10-12). Spending time on this is essential at the start so that you don't miss out people/groups who could have really added to the project. Suggest holding a workshop to do this. Consider stakeholder priorities, views, level of interest and level of power.

For each stakeholder ask:

What are their main concerns?

How will you communicate with them? What are the barriers?

Are there project champions?

Are you GDPR compliant?

Make sure you think about **the bigger picture**. Do a PEST/SWOT analysis (see slides 14-18), think about opportunities and threats.

#### **Tips for working with local government**

Academia and local government work on different timelines – government needs things quickly, you have to be prepared for that. Be frank about different time pressures/priorities. A long project from a local government point of view is 6 months. But long term relationships and collaboration is possible and valuable.

Take out all the jargon – make sure information is accessible to non specialists.

Find a topic that can weather political change.

Local council policy does filter in to wider London policy and, from there, to national policy.

Local government does fund research, addressing specific problems they are facing.

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### **PROJECT EXAMPLES:**

Fanny Blanc ([F.Blanc@lse.ac.uk](mailto:F.Blanc@lse.ac.uk)), LSE London

#### **More homes in less space: living at high density in London**

(see slides)

Project website: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/lse-cities-density-homes?asasdfg>

The project involved working with London residents as well as practitioners.

They used surveys, focus groups, walking interviews, workshops, structured observations and interviews.

The objective of the survey was to reach as many people as possible and they used postal invitations. This is both expensive and time consuming, but it did prove to be worthwhile. It is a topic that residents are interested in, which helps with response rate. On the survey they asked people to include contact details if they wanted to be further involved in the project – so they could invite them to the focus groups and walking tours.

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Flora Cornish ([F.Cornish@lse.ac.uk](mailto:F.Cornish@lse.ac.uk)), Department of Methodology, LSE

#### **Community-led disaster recovery in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire**

The project is trying to use an “engaged research” model, starting with the community, what their priorities are locally and what knowledge they would be interested in. Sense of epistemic justice – nobody wants to be “the community” that is descended on to be engaged, they have a stake in the knowledge and a right to tell their own story. It’s a complex dynamic. People are sensitive about being talked about by outsiders, not just in very contested areas like Grenfell– this is why they need to be involved right from the start. Research can be a part of a community making sense of something.

Here is an example of how the project communicated with participants about what was involved, which may be of use for other projects:

<https://www.kcsc.org.uk/sites/kcsc.org.uk/files/documents/Grenfell/LSE%20Grenfell%20volunteers%20interview%20project%20.pdf>

In this project Flora has worked with a local artist to make a timeline of events that people can interact with and contribute to. You can see a first version of one of the timelines here:

[https://cdn.knightlab.com/libs/timeline3/latest/embed/index.html?source=11cvlcX885PLew8yZiRACyKPEcgbvuY3iL76xbqrA1Ug&font=Default&lang=en&initial\\_zoom=5&height=650](https://cdn.knightlab.com/libs/timeline3/latest/embed/index.html?source=11cvlcX885PLew8yZiRACyKPEcgbvuY3iL76xbqrA1Ug&font=Default&lang=en&initial_zoom=5&height=650)

And a twitter thread version:

<https://twitter.com/FloraCornish/status/1114869825568944130>

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