English
2023

THE PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

How we shape the dialogue between research and the public

Cyber Valley

BERLIN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND OPEN SCIENCE

WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

Public Engagement refers to an exchange between researchers and the public, for example pupils, politicians or citizens. These Principles form the basis for Public Engagement practice in Germany. This document reflects a co-created, shared vision of professional practice that Public Engagement practitioners in Germany have agreed upon, and is addressed to all those involved in Public Engagement with research, in institutions in the research sector, and other interested parties.

The Principles are intended to help establish and professionalise Public Engagement in Germany so that links between society and researchers become an integral part of the research process. Public Engagement has become part of the research excellence criteria in European research funding, so it is to be expected that interactions between research and society will strengthen across Germany. The Principles build on existing guidelines and frameworks on research communication and research Public Relations, and contribute a practitioner-led perspective on the values Public Engagement practitioners in Germany should embrace in meaningfully connecting research and society.

The first Principles were published in 2022. The Mission, Vision and Principles were co-created by Public Engagement practitioners in an open and iterative consultation process lasting 18 months. The 2023 Principles were supplemented by Values on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. A list of contributors can be found online and a link to more information is placed at the end of the document. These Principles constitute an evolving document under periodic review. Interested parties are cordially invited to help shape it (see QR code on the last page).

WHAT IS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

Public Engagement activities can actively and continuously involve anyone in our society in research, regardless of identity or background, particularly those with an interest in or connection to the topic. This aims to enrich the discourse around research topics with lived experience and valuable societal perspectives outside of academia. These contributors can be citizens, experts, NGOs, schools, children, associations, politicians or companies, to name just a few examples. Through Public Engagement, researchers, students, professors and representatives of research institutions enter into an equitable exchange with these communities. Public Engagement is an English language term that has become established internationally. By focusing on mutual benefit and exchange supporting society-oriented research, Public Engagement clearly differs from other forms of science communication.

Public Engagement describes a **field** in the German research landscape, the **practice** of exchange between researchers and the public, and stands for the **attitude** that research and society benefit from mutual interaction.

Field

Public Engagement is expanding as a field in the German research community. Public Engagement can integrate into all research disciplines and at all phases of the research process, for example by external stakeholders and scholars jointly identifying research priorities and questions, selecting research proposals and exchanging ideas about projects and their goals.

Practice

Public Engagement formats offer a spectrum of opportunities for participation: people can obtain information, contribute their expertise, their concerns and ideas, and will ideally participate in decision-making. Public Engagement shapes the exchange between research and society in a constructive, collaborative, and critical way. Society is expected to take an active role – participation in studies or passive data contributions, for example, are not Public Engagement formats.

Attitude

In order for Public Engagement to become established in Germany, we need a fundamental culture change in the research landscape. If researchers value and include as many societal perspectives and ideas as possible, this creates the conditions for ethical, socially reflective and society-oriented research.

What can Public Engagement achieve?

Without restricting research freedom, Public Engagement involves different perspectives and expertise. This can help research to result in socially and ethically reflective innovation. Furthermore, Public Engagement has a beneficial effect on democracy: when many people with different backgrounds are actively involved in research processes, research gains support in society. The open orientation of Public Engagement formats also promotes scientific literacy and creates an understanding of scientific methods.

Different interest groups benefit from Public Engagement, as the following list exemplifies: Funders gain a realistic insight into the social resonance of the funded research. Institutions garner awareness, esteem and trust, and can integrate external feedback. Researchers reflect on their research focus ethically and socially, and combine lived experience from outside of academia with subject expertise, keeping their research societally relevant. Public actors help shape innovations in ways that benefit them. To achieve this impact, Public Engagement needs sufficient resources, both human and financial, and an institutionally anchored strategy.

VISION – WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

Research and society will be brought together to shape research through exchange. The public will be involved in the scientific process, for example through advising on where research funds are used. In this way, the public has an understanding of the scientific method, researchers' perspectives, and better understand the scientific process and classify results. Experts will continue to decide on research results and their quality.

Public Engagement is an integral part of the research process, opening research to societal inputs and interaction. The importance of research for society will steadily increase; researchers will thus assume more social responsibility, practicing Public Engagement from the beginning of a research project. Public Engagement will be integrated into workload models. New key indicators will help researchers to focus on the quality of the interaction rather than the number of people reached. Public Engagement will be professionalised, established, embedded institutionally, and become the subject of research and research funding.

MISSION – HOW DO WE GET THERE?

We, the Public Engagement practitioners, advocate for a new attitude within research communities that is open to and values the exchange with the public. We are building a community of researchers, institutional representatives and external actors at research institutions and universities and are creating a greater awareness of Public Engagement among science communicators and scientific institutions.

To achieve this, the framework for Public Engagement with research must change: We need to define Public Engagement as a field of practice and research, and raise awareness with funders so that Germany follows the European example and Public Engagement becomes a fixed component in calls for research funding. In order to achieve a culture change, we advocate that Public Engagement also becomes a criterion of research excellence, and integral to the career development of researchers in Germany. Public Engagement practitioners empower researchers to engage and support them in implementation. Public Engagement can come from communicators, but also from researchers themselves and all other actors.

We develop formats in which society and researchers work towards equity in an open and co-created process with all those with whom we interact. Where it makes sense, we use the advantages of digitalisation to scale our formats and make them accessible to a broad population. We analyse and reflect on our approach and develop formats strategically, methodically and experimentally.

GUIDING VALUES

that underlie our work

WHICH **VALUES** DOES PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT NEED?

Public Engagement that is meaningful and beneficial to both research and society has to take into account the needs and lived experience of the different publics we work with. Otherwise we fail in creating the opportunities for dialogue with people who are not like us. As a community of practitioners, we therefore commit to educate ourselves about the systems of oppression that exist, how they shape our work, and how we can best use our resources to reduce their impact in our activities. This is not just about choosing our target groups, but how we work in our projects, our own institutions and all our engagement activities.

What do we need to know?

Different forms of systemic oppression exist in our society: historical (colonialism), institutional (medicine, authorities), structural (laws), symbolic (media) and interpersonal (reproduction of the other levels). Examples are ableism and hostility towards people with disabilities, racism, classism or sexism. Affected persons or groups can be, for example, womxn, people of colour or LGBTQIA+. A person's identity consists of several components and be discriminated against on several levels.

Why is it important?

A commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) underlies all our Principles, in an effort to actively contribute to overcoming these systems. Taking EDI into account allows us to work with different groups in a more refined way. High quality engagement is target group specific and considers different needs. It is accessible and creates the feeling of belonging. Therefore, EDI are fundamental values as we make decisions on how to engage, reflect upon our own work and our own potential biases and privilege.

EQUITY

We take positive action to achieve **equity**. Each person and group has different conditions and prerequisites (partly) assigned by society. We are considerate of the needs of marginalised people. These are persons and groups affected by systemic oppression.

DIVERSITY

We support **diversity** by asking ourselves who is not yet there, identifying and defining these persons and why they are absent. We leave our own "comfort zone" to learn why and how we do not yet understand each other, and to unlearn the systems of oppression so that marginalised people can be present.

INCLUSION

In order to **include** people who would otherwise not be there, we need to create the institutional and interpersonal conditions that enable sustainable collaboration. Only then can people feel safer and more comfortable to participate as their authentic selves.

PRINCIPLES

We, the Public Engagement practitioners, adhere to the following Principles.

ACT TRANSPARENTLY

In Public Engagement activities,
we communicate who we work for,
who is involved in research results and
projects, and what our goals are.

WORK STRATEGICALLY

We push the development of the field forward, ensuring the quality of our formats through evaluating them.
At the institutional level, Public Engagement must be strategically designed as a process that requires time and strategic planning. From the start, Public Engagement will have a schedule, goals, and defined impacts. Overall, we seek to maintain and nurture long-term relationships with society.

ORIENTATE TOWARDS CIVIL SOCIETY

Public Engagement activities serve the common good and are democracy-oriented. They are only carried out in cooperation with actors who respect human rights.

CLASSIFY RESEARCH FINDINGS

Public Engagement highlights differences between results, interpretation and opinions.
We do not exaggerate in the presentation of research successes and identify risks of scientific research, failures, and mistakes.
We work carefully and focus not only on the results but on the methods and framework conditions under which new findings emerge.

PRESENT CONTROVERSIES

In the spirit of truthfulness, we do not leave out any critical aspects of a topic. What is discussed controversially in research must be reflected accordingly in Public Engagement without creating distortion or a 'false balance'.

PROMOTE DIALOGUE

We encourage researchers to be open to dialogue with society and to actively include societal perspectives in their work. To this end, we support them through building confidence and competence. We advocate for Public Engagement to become an integral part of research and act as advocates for Public Engagement to create the necessary framework conditions.

INTEGRATE A DIVERSITY OF PERSPECTIVES

We involve all people, even those who are not active in the field of science.
We, therefore, communicate in an accessible way.
Our activities include time for outreach, participation, and clarifying our target groups as well as their needs and ideas.

ENABLE OPINION FORMATION

We present research in an accessible way.
Stakeholders are encouraged to interact,
form their own opinions, contribute their ideas,
experience, and knowledge.
Personal opinion should not, however,
lead the dialogue.

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION

We employ different levels of participation to avoid pure dissemination and extractive consultation, and seek to actively engage people to have a say and have decision-making power.
Ideally, researchers and external actors work together on research questions and agenda setting.

WHO ARE WE?

The Principles were developed by Cyber Valley and the Berlin School of Public Engagement and Open Science together with the "Public Engagement Principles" Working Group and practitioners in several open workshops. The text was formulated by Public Engagement experts, interested parties, academics and communication experts from agencies in an open process to agree on common values and to professionalise Public Engagement. EDI experts were consulted for the revision in 2023.

This document is designed to be revised through community input on a yearly basis with the next iteration published in October 2024.

Help shape the Principles:

www.linkedin.com/groups/12721155

For more information about the authors and the Principles:

www.publicengagement.berlin

Cyber Valley

www.cyber-valley.de

BERLIN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND OPEN SCIENCE

www.publicengagement.berlin

Design: www.kuegler.design