

How do I get people involved in my engagement activity

Getting collaborators, investors, volunteers and consultants on board

Whether you are trying to get a partner confirmed or need a lot of volunteers to pull off your event, this guide will help you recruit people to your public engagement project.

1 | Who should you involve?

We can split the kinds of groups you might want to involve into the three categories. For each group there are different benefits to gain and different methods needed to approach them.

Collaborators and investors

Whether it is time, expertise or funds, these groups have resources that could be invested into your project. Look to funders, charities and professional bodies who have the resources or access to the audiences you need. There are lots of great benefits of working with investors and collaborators. These include:

- Access to different skillsets and resources
- Added perspectives to refine your project
- Access to specific audiences
- Gravitas for your project

Volunteers

These groups might not have additional resources but they are willing to invest valuable time to help you deliver the project. Look to colleagues, students or members of the public. The benefits of having volunteers are:

- Increased capacity
- Filling any skills gaps
- Increased back up for if things go wrong (e.g. illness)
- Multiplier effects – expansion of your project

Consultants

These kinds of groups are involved mainly to give you advice in designing and delivering the project. Look to professional bodies who have the knowledge and experience you need or who could act as representatives of your audience. The benefits of having consultants are:

- A sounding board for ideas
- Expertise that will help your project be more successful
- Help tailoring to your specific audience
- Access to networks that may help promote your project
- Increased capacity within your project team



2 | How to pitch it to them

Investors and collaborators

Try to be clear how their resources are being used to maximum effect in a way that is already in line with their own priorities.

- **Mutual aims** – Do you have similar goals? For example, do you want to reach a disadvantaged group that matches the mission of a charity or funder?
- **Benefits to their audiences** – Be clear about what the benefits will be
- **Increased opportunity / recognition**

Volunteers

For volunteers, it will be good to focus on how this experience will not only be enjoyable but could help their own professional development.

- **Skills and attributes** – Public engagement will help them develop and evidence transferrable skills and attributes such as communication skills, time management and organisation.
- **Taster for public engagement** – Public engagement is growing in importance to a researcher's career. Your project might be a good opportunity for colleagues to get a taster of it before they need to lead their own project.
- **Recognition** – There are numerous grants and awards available in public engagement. Be upfront about any that you've received in the past or that your project might be suitable for.

Consultants

For consultants, it's important to show that their insights are valued and that they will be used responsibly to achieve something beneficial to society. Whilst you are likely to be paying consultants for their time, you may still need to pitch your project to them in a brief.

- **Positive impacts** – Even a small amount of their time will give you the guidance to strengthen your project, which will lead to a positive impact on society.
- **Recognition** – Your success will be in part due to their helpful advice and therefore it is good to offer that you will name them in any reports or communications. This will help them attract new clients.
- **Be heard** – This is an opportunity to have their voices heard and influence how you go about your project. This is particularly relevant to your audience group, as they will be the target of your activities.



3 | Persuasion techniques

Below are some persuasion techniques, developed from social science studies that might help you convince others to get involved:

Personalised request – Rather than sending out mass emails, send a single email to each person with their name. If possible, you might also skip the email altogether and give them a phone call or meet face to face. The more personal the request, the more inclined we are to say yes.

Publicly voiced commitment – We will be more likely to stick to a publicly voiced commitment than a written or assumed one. Another reason to speak to people face to face!

Compromise strategy – When recruiting collaborators or investors, you might want to consider the different levels of support you need. Potentially starting for a larger request can lead to a compromise at a slightly smaller ask if a collaborator is unable to be as involved as you hoped.

Reciprocity – We are more inclined to do favours for those who have done them for us in the past. Consider how you can support others in their projects and what you might be able to offer them, alongside asking for their help.

Legitimise small commitments – When recruiting volunteers, reassure them that even a small amount of their time would really help. Similarly with investors – a small amount can make a difference.

Foot in the door – People are more likely to do another larger favour for you, if they've already done a small one.

Progress effect – People are more likely to work to a goal if they've already made some progress towards it.

Combine these techniques! You can start by asking volunteers for only a small amount of help and build on this later. Remind them that they have already helped get the project rolling and with a little more of their help you will complete it together.

Uniqueness and rarity – Describe your project as a unique or rare opportunity, this will suggest people are missing out if they don't get involved. Engagement is fun and exciting – try to get this across in your ask!

4 | Recruitment calls

While we recommend going through your contacts and their networks to address people directly, it may be that you need to put a call out to get people involved. This is particularly relevant if you need to recruit volunteers or consultants from outside your normal circles. When you write a recruitment call:

- Be very clear upfront about what, when, where and who. Give them enough information so that they know what the commitment might involve but make it easy to scan text using bullet points and bolded keywords.
- Describe the specific benefits to them. Make it convenient for them to express interest. For example, don't have them click on a link and fill in a multi-page survey with their details. Ask for something quick such as their email address – you can get the remaining details later once they've committed.

As for where to advertise your recruitment call, this will depend on the target audience but some ideas you might consider are:

- Imperial mailing lists
- Presentations at departmental meetings or other internal events
- Mailing lists of organisations who work with your target audience
- Social media
- Networks of colleagues or friends
- Community centres, supermarkets, libraries and other public places

Case study: Public Engagement volunteer programme

What is it?

Our [Public Engagement volunteer programme](#) involves recruiting volunteers to help deliver our engagement activities such as Imperial Lates and the Great Exhibition Road Festival.

Why is it good?

We advertise opportunities throughout the year through internal communications channels such as newsletters and on social media. When volunteers sign up they have the opportunity to join our mailing list so they can volunteer at future events. Volunteers receive training or briefings and are always given a big thank you in the form of a party and a hand-written thank you card. This ensures they feel valued and more willing to volunteer again in the future.



Further resources – Let us know of others!

Recruiting volunteers:

<https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/volunteer-recruitment-getting-word-out/>

Getting people to collaborate:

<https://innovationmanagement.se/2013/02/05/the-persuasive-innovator-influencing-people-to-collaborate/>