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Arts-based engagement with research

A guide for community groups, practitioners and researchers

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Increasingly, the arts are being used to enable people to actively and meaningfully engage with academic research. This guide, aimed at artists, community groups, researchers and anyone with an interest in engaging audiences in research, explains what arts-based engagement is all about and how it might be done well.

The guide was developed in collaboration with a steering group of artists, community members and researchers, and draws on a report by RAND Europe (available **here**) as well as interviews conducted specifically for the guide.

What is public engagement and why do it?

Public engagement in research is a two-way process involving listening and sharing expertise between researchers and communities. It aims to:

- help empower people to contribute to, understand, or respond to research
- help researchers recognise and respect people's perspectives, priorities and contributions
- promote critical thinking and dialogue about research
- help ensure that research is informed by real-world concerns and makes a difference to people's lives.

What are arts-based approaches to engagement?

Arts-based approaches involve using the creative arts to engage people with research. Examples include:

- **Performing arts** Theatre, storytelling, audio drama, dance, body mapping, music
- **Games** Video games, board games, street-based games
- **Immersive art installations** Immersive experiences, often incorporating multiple arts-based approaches
- **Literary arts** Storybooks, comic books, oral histories, poetry
- **Other approaches** Helplines supplying research-based ideas to artists, visual minutes for events.

Among the more commonly used techniques are theatre, video (including film and animation) and photography.

> " I've often felt like a little island all by myself with only a bit of support from public engagement managers and others who aren't researchers but support this kind of work. So it was really nice to read this report and to find that actually a lot of the struggles and experiences I'd had are universal." Clare Oliver-Williams, research fellow

Using arts to inform policy

To make sure public health and wellbeing policy in the Welsh town of Merthyr Tydfil was tailored to local need, researchers worked with people across the community to gather insights about how they live their lives.

People took part in interviews, focus groups and observation alongside creative activities, such as theatre, poetry and drawing. The project culminated in the People's Platform – a performance-based debate, co-produced and performed by community members of all ages.

Audience members, who included policymakers, said the show powerfully communicated messages that would challenge stereotypes and inform more appropriate local policy.

One community member said: 'From this experience, I'm going to take confidence. It doesn't matter where you come from, what qualifications you've got, what experience. Give us opportunities, because what we can do will shock you!' Another said: 'This felt like something big – the start of something new.'

Read more: https://tinyurl.com/people-platform-article
Watch a video: https://tinyurl.com/people-platform-film

> " I firmly believe that working with us, and meeting more people that suffer with the conditions they study, gives some very clever researchers a view of why they are doing what they do – and who they are doing it for."
> Bob Bragger, carer and volunteer

Image credit: Cheltenham Science Festival cr. Still Moving Media.

Who is involved?

Arts-based approaches are designed, developed, delivered and experienced by people with different forms of expertise – often through close collaboration. They include:

- people and communities with lived experiences of, or close connections to, the research topic – including, for example, people using healthcare services, their families, carers and healthcare professionals, or people who live, work and study in a particular community or area
- artists, other creative professionals and arts advisers
- researchers
- public engagement professionals and project managers
- technical professionals, such as IT or lighting professionals, to advise on content production.

Participants in engagement activities may be anyone, although some activities are targeted at members of particular groups or communities. For example, a project looking at local water quality might engage people who live next to a river and local schoolchildren. Participants may also include patients, professionals, students, educators, academics, or policymakers, and many others – anyone with a stake or interest in a particular issue.

It is important that participants are included in developing the activity to ensure that it is relevant, accessible and resonates with the target audience. They are usually involved in co-producing these activities, to varying degrees, depending on the resources available and the aims and nature of the activity. Involving participants early and often also helps the team involved be transparent, accountable and reflect and respect the lived experiences of these individuals. This, in turn, may help ensure that the group adopts the activity and sustains interest over time.

The projects are often led by academic researchers – not least as they often manage the funding and have expectations from funders. The design itself may be led by others, such as artists, working closely with the academic researchers, other professionals or people with a particular condition or using a service, along with their family or carers. The professionals involved benefit from interdisciplinary exchange with those in other roles, so everyone validates and strengthens each other's work, perspective, and profile.

Examples of the types of artists involved in arts-based public engagement include:

- **Visual arts:** Sculptors, printmakers, interactive artists and painters, curators, art historians
- **Performing arts:** Theatre producers, theatre companies, dancers, scriptwriters and actors
- **Digital design and arts:** Game designers, graphic designers, animators, film or audio editors, data visualisers.

> One might think of the researcher as doing the planning and organisation of public engagement, the artist being creative and the participants contributing their lived experiences – but often the roles become interchangeable. Try to be flexible and open to what emerges during the project.

> **"** To be effective, this work needs to be built around trust and collaboration amongst all involved – researchers, artists and participants. This work is sometimes thought of through an academic lens with the researcher holding ultimate power – but all three groups play an equally important role and are all vital to its success." Tracy Gentles, creative director

> **i** Avoid specialist language that may exclude or intimidate some people. Emphasise that if a term comes up that anyone doesn't understand, it is because it hasn't been explained clearly enough.

Terms used in this guide

Activity	An arts-based intervention
Arts-based public engagement with research	Any method of public engagement that draws on (but is not limited to) visual, literary, decorative, graphic or performing arts or music. This could be, for example, illustration, graphic design, sculpture, photography, video, storytelling, poetry, theatre, game design, comic books or dance. Often referred to in this guide as 'arts-based engagement'
Approach	A way of doing arts-based engagement
Audience	The people interacting with an arts-based activity
Co-production	Working alongside participants to co-create, co-design, conduct and deliver engagement
Collaboration	Working together over a period of time with individuals, groups or communities on various aspects of a project to contribute to some decisions and activities, but without ultimate responsibility for delivery
Consultation	Seeking views and listening to the experience of individuals, groups or communities
Involvement	An active contribution to research – for example, prioritising and optimising the research questions, being involved in design and conduct, selecting measures that matter to individuals, groups or communities, and shaping and helping to disseminate results and impact. This is related to – but different from – public engagement (see below)
Person with lived experience	Someone who contributes their personal or individual experience (for example of having a healthcare condition) to a project
Project	The piece of work around an activity, including planning, preparation, recruitment, delivery and evaluation
Project team	A team of people involved in running and delivering a public engagement activity. This may include a range of people such as research staff, artists and other professionals, for example those providing technical or evaluation support. Also referred to in this guide as 'the team'
Public engagement	A two-way process involving listening and sharing expertise between researchers and particular groups or communities (see [page 1]). All instances of 'engagement' in this guide refer to public engagement
Public engagement professional	Someone whose job is to support and facilitate engagement with research
Participant	Individual taking part in an arts-based engagement project, not in a professional capacity

> **"** Projects are often led by academic researchers – but if they aren't working alongside a community partner that believes in the project, and unless participants take ownership of the project alongside them, it leads to people dropping out, and the project can just fizzle out."
> Bob Bragger, carer and volunteer

Summing up

- This guide looks at using arts-based approaches to help share research with individuals, groups or communities and gain their input (public engagement)
- Arts-based approaches to public engagement are ways of sharing research with individuals, groups or communities, using creative arts as a vehicle
- Arts-based approaches include visual arts, performing arts, games and immersive installations, including theatre, video, photography, infographics, digital graphics, drawing, painting and sculpture, storybooks, comics and poetry
- Projects can involve a wide range of people including artists, researchers, people and communities interested in the research topic.

Image credit: Maggie McCurdy's Out of Indigo exhibited at What A Nerve! for Growing Art Partnerships and the Wellcome – MRC Cambridge Stem Cell Institute. © Nils Jorgensen, 2019.
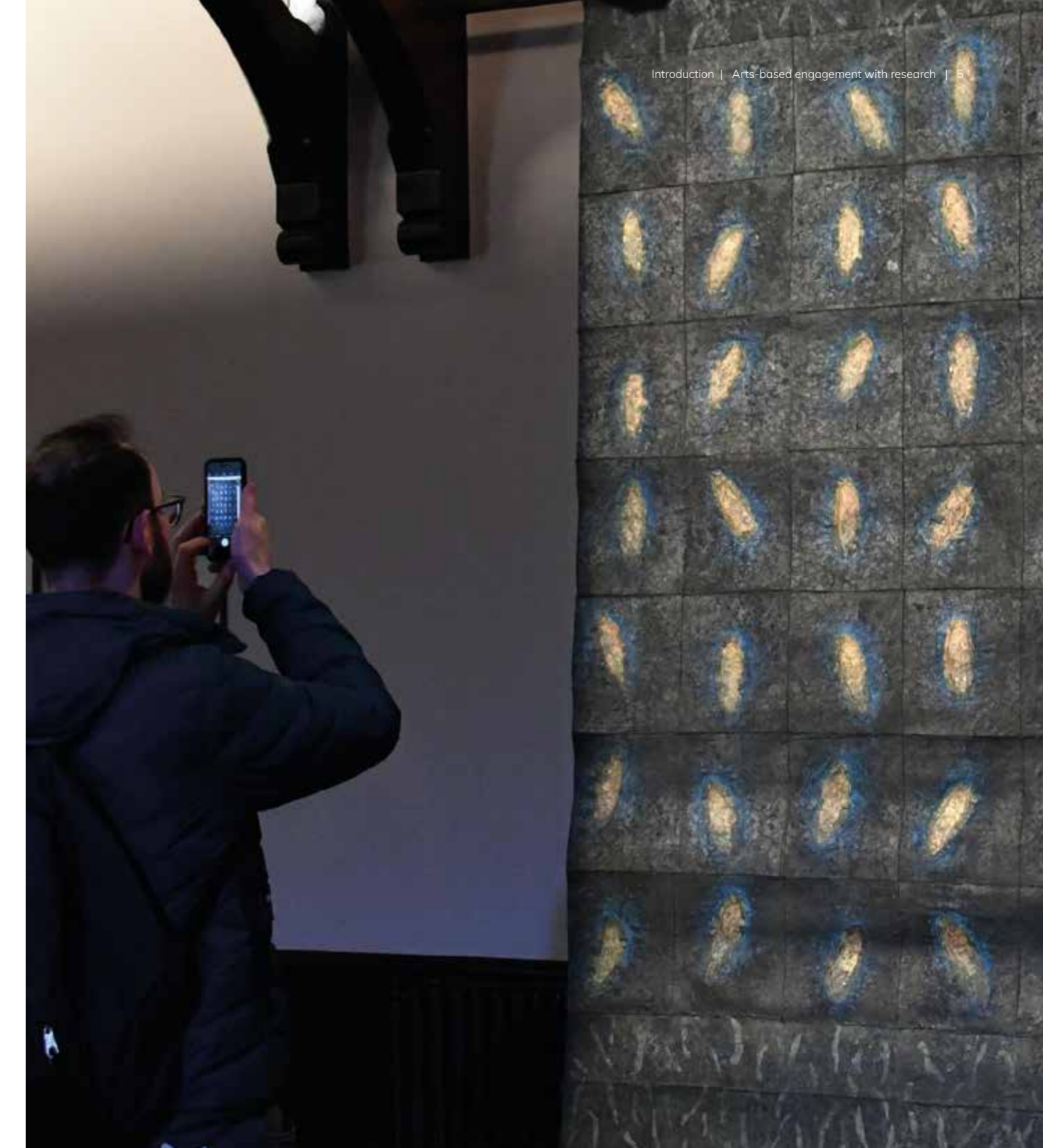
Case study 1

The Weight of Expectation – telling the story of research on embodied experiences of obesity stigma

The Weight of Expectation project produced a comic to engage readers with research on how stigma associated with bodyweight and size gets under the skin and is felt in the flesh.

Image credit: Illustration by Jade Sarson in collaboration with Act With Love.

What was the aim?

To tell the story of research about how stigma associated with bodyweight is experienced by individuals, in order to challenge and change weight-based stigma and dominant obesity discourses emphasising individual moral responsibility.

The research

Sociologists Oli Williams and Ellen Annandale spent a year carrying out participant observations in weight loss groups in one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England. They investigated how obesity stigma made group members feel – both emotionally and physically. This contributed to understanding how and why obesity stigma is unhelpful and does not promote health.

The engagement

The researchers collaborated with illustrator Jade Sarson to develop a comic visualising the research, drawing on the experiences of research participants. The comic was accompanied by a touring exhibition of screen prints. Education packs of comics were distributed for free to those who could put them to good use in their practice in teaching, healthcare or the fitness industry. The project team presented the comic to a parliamentary conference and the British Science festival, spoke on radio and podcasts and gave talks at local libraries to promote the resource.

Outcomes

- The comic engaged people outside of academia with important evidence about obesity stigma
- The approach selected enabled researchers to communicate across disciplinary and professional boundaries
- The project resonated with people's experiences of obesity stigma and created a resource to allow them and others to challenge unhelpful yet dominant narratives.

Learning points

- Once funding was available, delays in the funding process meant the initial illustrator envisaged for the project was no longer available. The illustrator was able to recommend Jade and this collaboration was an important factor in the success of the project. The project team was able to embrace the unexpected and benefit from this change.

Find out more: https://tinyurl.com/obesitymag
Read the comic: https://tinyurl.com/obesity-comic
Read the research: https://tinyurl.com/obesity-journalarticle

> So many people, of all shapes and sizes, come up to me, describe a scene from the comic and say 'that's me – I've felt that'. Dominant yet discriminatory ideas about bodyweight need to be challenged. The Weight of Expectation comic has given me a way not only to agitate for change but to support it. I think that is the most important thing – creating something that speaks to people's experience and helps people to actually change things for the better. Oli Williams, sociologist and health equity researcher.

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2. Why do people use arts-based approaches to engagement?

The arts offer multiple possibilities to enhance any research engagement work. But why choose this route? And what aspects of this work appeal to artists and communities? This section sets out the reasons people have given for getting involved in arts-based engagement with research.

The desire to engage

When people use arts-based approaches, it is often in an effort to find more effective ways of engaging people with research. This often applies to projects needing to reach a broad population or a diverse audience on complex or sensitive topics, or that work with people who may not find traditional approaches accessible.

Arts-based approaches are sometimes more accessible than some other types of engagement, for example focus groups or written information. They may offer advantages such as:

- **Content:** More simply communicated with less technical, specialist language
- **Form:** Relying less on written materials, perhaps incorporating visual or interactive elements
- **Location or distribution:** For example in a public setting.

> **i** Talk to the people participating to assess how long the engagement sessions should be. For some, an hour will be enough, while others may be happy to take part all day.

Addressing complex issues

Some arts-based approaches have been particularly effective at communicating complex or sensitive topics in a way that a target audience can relate to – for example, visually, using stories, or through drama. They have used tools such as metaphor to approach topics, providing a space where assumptions can be challenged and explored. Creative approaches are sometimes especially helpful in shaping otherwise dry, formal prose into something people can easily engage with.

> **"** Publishing papers in peer-reviewed journals is necessary but insufficient. Collaborating with artists and designers has given me the opportunity to communicate research in ways that are accessible and engaging for diverse audiences. Lots of researchers think and talk about issues with other researchers – artists and designers have helped me to go beyond that." Oli Williams, sociologist and health equity researcher (see also page 6 [case study 1])

> **"** Emotional impact in itself isn't necessarily a negative if it's handled with care and a group is prepared for it. I've run events where patients were crying but would leave saying being able to share their experiences had been really helpful. What was important was they knew that they were being put first and were in control of what they shared." Hana Ayoob, science communicator and illustrator

Image credit: The Big Stem Cell Knit by Neural Knitworks and the Wellcome – MRC Cambridge Stem Cell Institute. © Greg Palmer, 2018.

Ethnodrama to encourage men to visit the doctor

In Durham, North Carolina, United States, researchers seeking to understand why African-American men were less likely to seek preventive healthcare and treatment collaborated with journalist, producer and actor Anita Woodley to put on a hilarious but poignant one-woman performance, sharing the research results through a series of cleverly drawn impressions.

The project adopted the ethnodrama approach, writing a script based on the experiences of more than 300 men who had taken part in the study. The show was performed to the local community and health professionals, followed by a post-performance discussion to engage the audience with the findings.

Based on a survey of audience members, 67% of respondents said they would change their future health behaviour based on what they had experienced during the event, while 84% of healthcare professionals watching said the performance would affect service provision.

Find out more: https://tinyurl.com/ethnodrama-blurb
Read the research article:
https://tinyurl.com/ethnodrama-article
See the trailer: https://tinyurl.com/ethnodrama-trailer
Watch the whole show:
https://tinyurl.com/ethnodrama-show

Image credit: Not Quite Right. A Menagerie Theatre Company production for THIS Institute. Image credit: THIS Institute.

Reaching specific communities

Arts-based approaches are also used at times to engage marginalised communities. These approaches use art forms that are meaningful to individuals or communities so that the messaging is culturally relevant. They may be especially valuable in highlighting the skills and abilities of these populations – helping to address, challenge and rebalance power relationships that can exist in how research is carried out.

Using the arts for public engagement with research may also be helpful when working with people with limited literacy or language proficiency as well as some people with disabilities.

Arts-based approaches are sometimes also used as part of efforts to help address inequalities by engaging with marginalised groups throughout the research process and using collaborative approaches to share findings. Some have been shown to be effective at promoting social change and involving members of communities in those processes.

This section has set out the reasons that people have tended to use these approaches to date. To find out about the evidence behind this, see section 6.

Summing up

- Arts-based approaches may satisfy the need to engage
- Arts-based approaches are sometimes more accessible than traditional academic approaches to engagement in terms of content, form and location or means of distribution
- Arts-based approaches may help engage broad or diverse populations or specific groups of people, as well as addressing complex issues or helping tackle inequalities.

Some experiences, such as pain, may be hard to put into words. The arts can offer alternative means of exploring or conveying them, such as colour or sound.

" **For a lot of the patients, this work is about expressing what their condition means to them. And sometimes that's very angry. Sometimes it's very dark. And it's a difficult thing to get across. Some of the engagement work we've done has been used to break down that negativity – through the outcome of the project, they start to see it as a positive." Bob Bragger, carer and volunteer**

Case study 2

Engaging people in stroke research through visual arts

This project used art to bring research about stroke to life, sharing the real-life experiences of people who had survived stroke at exhibitions and events around South London.

Image credit: Charlotte Morrison's porcelain neurons exhibited at What A Nerve! for Growing Art Partnerships and the Wellcome – MRC Cambridge Stem Cell Institute. © Nils Jorgensen, 2019.

What was the aim?

To highlight the real experiences of people whose data had been used in research with the South London Stroke Register.

The research

The South London Stroke Register is an ongoing population-based stroke register recording first stroke in patients of all age groups living in inner city South London. Researchers at King's College London use data from the register in research that aims to improve stroke care.

The engagement

The researchers enlisted art students to work with stroke survivors who were members of a support group. The students, stroke survivors and researchers met to agree a plan, including getting funding, and discussed how to visually present the reality of stroke. The stroke survivors and students developed the exhibition theme and content and arranged exhibitions at several venues. The final outputs included photographs, handwritten texts describing experiences of stroke, three short films and an art installation

The researchers evaluated the activity using data gathered from their own notes and diaries, reflective group discussions and feedback from exhibition managers and audiences.

Outcomes

- The researchers' aims were met in terms of giving stroke survivors an opportunity to express themselves creatively, tell their story and inspire other stroke survivors
- The project enabled student artists to work on a meaningful project and learn new skills.
- It brought two generations together so they could learn from each other
- The project enabled a successful application for further funding from a different institution.

Learning points

- Struggling to find time for the project, the researchers involved outsourced the project management to a lecturer at the students' college. This saved time but left the researchers feeling somewhat distanced from participants
- Artists and stroke survivors had freedom in developing the themes and content. This had multiple benefits but occasionally the intended meaning of an artwork was unclear to others viewing the installation
- Communication was largely via email, which sometimes led to misunderstandings
- Complex administrative processes made it hard to establish agreements on deadlines and expenses.

Find out more: https://tinyurl.com/stroke-arts
Read reflections on the project: https://tinyurl.com/stroke-researcharticle

3. Choosing the right approach

Arts-based engagement includes a huge range of possible artistic methods and practices. Collaborations led by and including artists will have artistic practice and experience to draw on, but for others starting out the wealth of options can be overwhelming. This section sets out some factors that practitioners consider when choosing an approach to engagement.

Image credit: The Liminal Space.

The decision about which approach to use for public engagement with research needs to take into account many factors, including:

- the aims of the work – what will hopefully happen as a result of the activity
- the research topic
- the target audience for engagement
- the context in which the activity will be delivered.

Above all, making assumptions about what type of activity would resonate with what type of audience may well backfire. The best way to find out what is likely to work is to open up conversations with the target group about how to engage with them.

The aims

The approach must be aligned with what the engagement project sets out to achieve. This includes how many people it wants to reach and who. For example, digital channels may be very helpful in reaching a mass audience on a low budget.

Projects may aim for their audience having 'an active learning experience', in which audience members contribute to delivering the activity itself, as well as participating in it, such as in participatory theatre. On the other hand, a project seeking to engage a disadvantaged group or to spur policy change may use Photovoice. This approach uses photography not only to conduct the research, but also to engage people in consciousness raising and advocacy (see page 32).

The research topic

There is no well-established evidence that any particular approach is better suited to specific project aims, situations or audiences than others: choosing the best approach to use is very context specific. But, anecdotally, some practitioners have found certain types of art form useful in some areas of engagement – for example:

- **Sculpture or photography** have sometimes worked well for activities that feed into participants' personal development
- **Theatre** has helped draw out and explore healthcare professionals' perspectives and feelings about an issue or topic (such as delivering compassionate care), enabling debate and new conversations
- **Approaches based on music, performance or film** have helped engage children or people with communication difficulties.

> **i** Researchers and artists sometimes work together on a one-off basis. Sometimes they collaborate over time, for example to formulate ideas about how to develop their future research.

" Mental health comes up time and again as a subject area that is very well suited to collaborative approaches – not least, because the problems are so longstanding and intractable and don't seem to have been solved by classical medical approaches. So there is a space there for an alternative way of thinking." Alice Carey, arts adviser

i

Non-verbal approaches such as visual arts, movement or music can be very helpful when exploring sensitive topics that are distressing, socially taboo, embarrassing or that could trigger conflict.

The target audience

Any activity must resonate with the backgrounds, interests, preferences, experiences, values, beliefs and needs of its audience, even when the work is designed to challenge their own world view. This includes taking into account anything contentious (for example topics causing conflict within a community, which need to be approached sensitively) or any nuance (for example terms that may appear disrespectful or hurt people's feelings) in order to build trust. There may also be practical considerations of access, such as what times people are available, which location people can easily get to, or cost of travel.

Arts-based approaches are not always as accessible to audiences as project teams hope, so sometimes bringing in a facilitator helps to realise the full potential of the approach (see, for example, the case study on page 28).

The context

Whatever approach is used, it needs to be sensitive to the context in which it is being deployed – including the physical or online space, but also the wider situation in the community or beyond. This involves being aware of any political issues or events in the local area or for the community that could impact on the project.
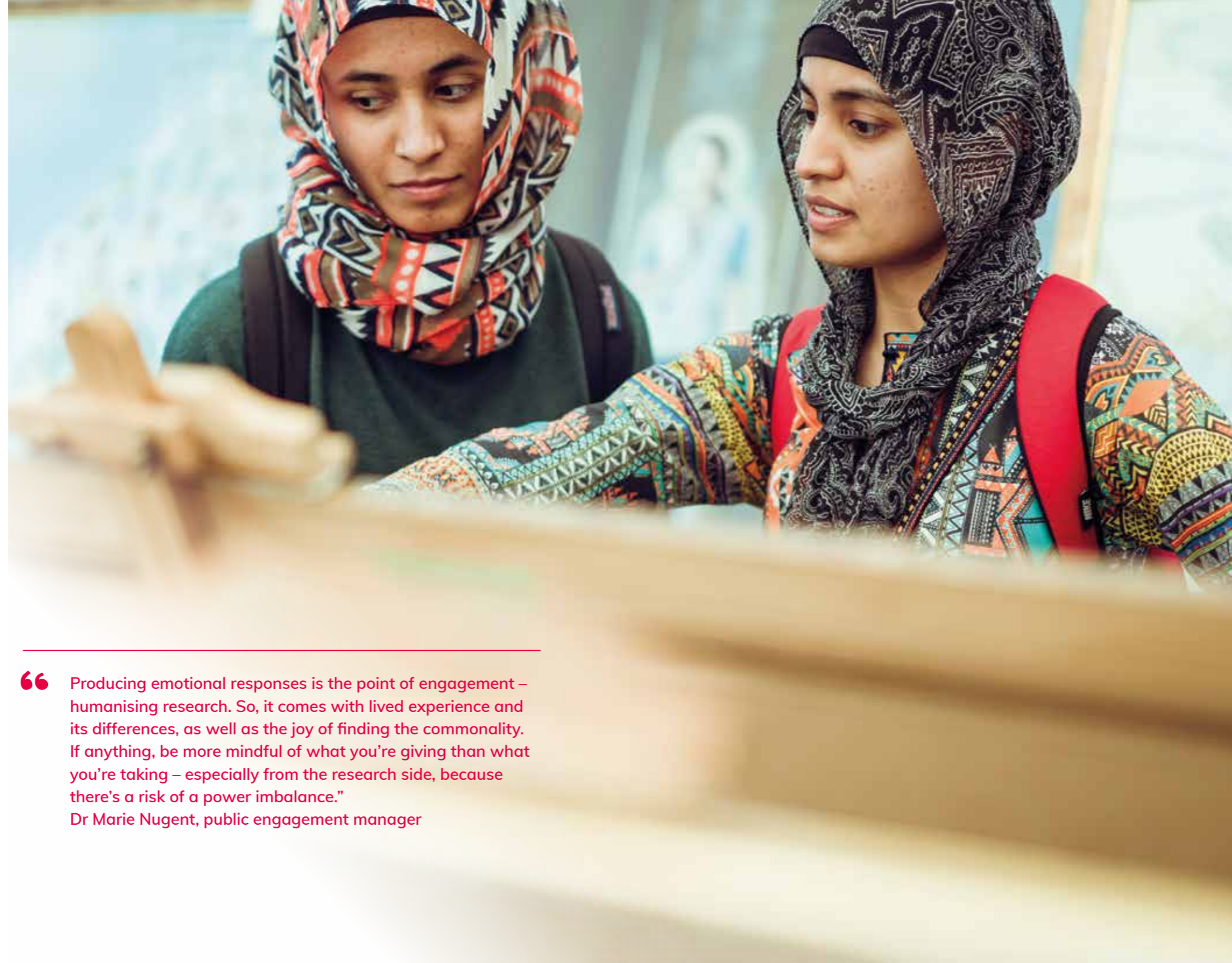
"
Producing emotional responses is the point of engagement – humanising research. So, it comes with lived experience and its differences, as well as the joy of finding the commonality. If anything, be more mindful of what you're giving than what you're taking – especially from the research side, because there's a risk of a power imbalance."
Dr Marie Nugent, public engagement manager

Drawing to overcome language barriers

Researchers in Wales wanted to develop a method for gathering data about where language could be a barrier, such as in immigrant communities or where an issue is so taboo that people are reluctant to speak the word (for example, in death, illness or sex).

The result was a structured drawing workshop called DrawingOut. The research team invited nine women with minority ethnic or religious backgrounds to a workshop to capture sensitive health experiences. Alongside the artwork, the team recorded conversations during the workshop.

The researchers captured rich visual and textual data about diverse views and experiences of sensitive health topics, including relationships and experiences of healthcare. They shared these with participants, the wider community and other interested stakeholders, in a booklet. The workshop was a positive experience for participants who found it enjoyable and empowering.

Read the article and view the drawings: https://tinyurl.com/drawing-out-workshop

The level of complexity

Engagement projects must balance breadth and depth with the scope and scale of issues they seek to cover. Overly complex activity designs may be a barrier to effective engagement. Some activities may need an explanation to the audience, such as a talk before or debrief after a performance.

The practicalities

The project has to work at a practical level, too, if it is to be successful. Consider other factors that could make a difference:

- **Guidance:** Are there individuals or organisations you could reach out to? Do you have access to any instructions, checklists or templates that will help you use a particular approach more easily (see page 36)?
  Participants: Are there any approaches in which participants have particular experience or enthusiasm?
- **Resource:** What resources are available? What are the implications of different approaches in terms of budget and time needed? Don't forget the cost of insurance, materials, technology and software, venues, refreshments and travel
- **Funder requirements:** Does the funding body specify any requirements or limitations to the project?
- **Ethics and wellbeing:** What arrangements are needed due to ethical requirements and participants' wellbeing – especially if any vulnerable people will be involved?

Summing up

- There is no one-size-fits-all guidance about which approach is best for which project aim
- Make sure the project takes into account the backgrounds, interests, preferences, experiences, values, beliefs and needs of the audience
- Make sure it is aligned with what the engagement sets out to achieve.
- The approach must take into account the wider context – including the physical space and the situation in the community or beyond
- Choose an approach that is practically feasible and not overly complex.

If you're new to this way of working, start small and then build on each subsequent project, so that over time you take on bigger and bigger challenges. Use your evaluation to see what worked and use that to inform future projects.

> Again and again, I've observed the importance of hospitality, conviviality, generosity, a sense of respect, dignity and pleasure and joy. All those things are often brilliant at finding fresh and uplifting ways of mobilising and can really alter a space and alter the interaction." Alice Carey, arts adviser

Image credit: Harold Offeh's A Pattern for Progress, commissioned by the Wellcome – MRC Cambridge Stem Cell Institute.

Case study 3

Ensnared: the inescapable reality of fatigue

Experiencing Fatigue is a collaborative arts and neuroscience project involving stroke survivors, the University College London Institute of Neurology, and artist Sofie Layton. Through a series of workshops, participants explored the multi-sensory nature of fatigue and ways of expressing this through artistic practice, narrative and metaphor. Initiated before the Covid-19 pandemic, the original plans were for a series of in-person workshops. Instead, workshops were held online and the final artworks were reconfigured to be shared digitally.

Image credit: Ensnared: The Inescapable Reality of Fatigue. From the Experiencing Fatigue project by Sofie Layton and the UCL Institute of Neurology. Image credit: Sofie Layton

What was the aim?

To make visible the invisible and multi-sensory condition of post-stroke fatigue, with the aim of informing scientific research and deepening researchers' and stroke survivors' understanding of the physical and emotional challenges of fatigue.

The research

Dr Anna Kuppuswamy and team at the University College London Institute of Neurology investigate chronic, irreversible fatigue, one of the most common symptoms in neurological conditions. Their research uses a range of techniques, including brain imaging and computational modelling, to investigate the causes of fatigue.

The engagement

The multi-sensory nature of fatigue means it is often difficult for those living with it to put into words. In this project, stroke survivors worked with an artist to express their experience of fatigue through narrative and metaphor. The team worked with two groups in a series of online workshops in which participants – all stroke survivors – responded to creative prompts:

- If fatigue were an animal, which animal would it be?
- If fatigue were a colour, which colour would it be?
- If fatigue were a sound, what sound would it be?

The artist then worked closely with other commissioned artists to weave these metaphors and narratives into a series of digital artworks including an animation and sound piece. The animation premiered as part of a work in progress discussion at both Bloomsbury Festival and UCL's World Stroke Day Forum 2020. The final pieces will be hosted on the project website .

Outcomes

- Though the project did not intend to be therapeutic, participants' overwhelming response was that workshops had created a space in which they found solace and validation in their experience, something they had not encountered elsewhere
- Participants found watching the final animation uncomfortable, but they felt able to convey their experience to friends and family in a way they hadn't before
- Neuroscientists developed a new hypothesis and are thinking about how to design an experiment to explore the idea of sensory overload and its impact on fatigue.

Learning points

- Adapting to the pandemic posed challenges. Online workshops needed to be much shorter than those done in person, and there was less room for shared making. The kinds of conversations that build rapport and spark new ideas, which can often happen around the edges of an in-person workshop, were notably absent
- Fatigue is a multi-sensory experience, but, because of the limitations of digital art and online interactions, the artistic research process and outputs emphasised sound and vision over other senses
- Involving researchers in public 'work in progress' discussions and finding opportunities for the artist and researchers to meet in an informal environment - such as socially distanced walks – were successful in overcoming some of the challenges in connecting people with the project.

Find out more: https://www.experiencingfatigue.org/
Watch the animation: https://www.experiencingfatigue.org/ensnared

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4. What can increase the chances of success?

The success of an engagement project depends on a range of different factors. This section sets out the factors that may make a difference to whether a project runs smoothly and, ultimately, whether it has the desired impact.

Image credit: The Liminal Space

Whichever public engagement approach is chosen, some factors will be crucial to its success: how it is run, who is involved and how they work together, and how long its impacts last.

How the activity is run

There are a number of important issues to consider in relation to how the activity is run. They include:

- **Style of delivery:** It is important to balance the emphasis on scientific elements with the artistic input. Reconciling the different perspectives, priorities and expectations of researchers, community members and artists may be challenging.
- **Resources and infrastructure:** Intensive engagement and collaboration with participants requires time and funding, so teams need to be clear what level of commitment is feasible from the outset. Many successful projects work in a very open and collaborative way, while others may ask collaborators to respond to a more specific brief.
- **Timeliness:** As well as being realistic about time needed, projects must be run in a way that is timely for participants, with activities planned around other events, whether personal (such as school holidays) or external deadlines (such as local government decisions).
- **Facilities:** The facilities used to deliver an arts-based activity need to be carefully considered and fit for purpose. Considerations include size, comfort (such as heating, catering and furniture) and access (such as transport, disability access and childcare for participants). In some situations, such as when working with marginalised groups, a facility may need to induce a sense of belonging or neutrality. For example, many people feel that universities or museums are not 'for them' or feel uncomfortable in those types of venue.

- **Sound governance and administration infrastructure:** There must be clarity on payment or other rewards for participants, ownership and responsibilities among everyone involved, and legacy and sustainability of the work. Ethical considerations include arrangements for data governance of personal information, emotional support where activities trigger emotional distress, and consent.

> **i** Don't forget to include remote projects and online events as options. They have a lot of benefits, including being more accessible for many people who might want to be involved but are unable for geographical or mobility reasons – although it is important to be aware of the risk of digital exclusion.

> " Often in healthcare settings, things can be a bit spartan – hot, airless rooms with strip lighting. But when a room is set up well, you can see people's faces change as they come in the room, thinking 'Wow! This is lovely!' It frontloads the encounter with a lot of positive energy that can help to get things going." Alice Carey, arts adviser
>
> "One of the things I found most personally challenging was balancing the two sides of my role in this work: building up the relationship with the creatives – finding shared ground and mutual respect, working towards a shared goal – but at the same time being in charge of the financial arrangements and managing those dynamics." Clare Oliver-Williams, research fellow

Recruiting and consulting the project team and participants

The ability to recruit and retain the right people in an arts-based engagement project is key to success. It's important to balance efforts to attract the right profile, number and variety of individuals within the available budget. (See also possible benefits, by audience, page 34.)

It can be helpful to:

- think carefully about how to word invitations
- send invitations from trusted, credible and respected individuals or organisations
- tailor communication to each group as needed
- get buy-in from senior leaders, to help mobilise others.

Skills and experience

The skills and experience of everyone involved, including the target audience, have a major influence in how the activities unfold and their success, including:

- the ability of team leaders and coordinators to facilitate effective interactions and communications
- technical skills
- specific educational and research backgrounds
- lived experience – for example, among service users – which brings authenticity and credibility.

Some of these skills may develop through previous experience of public engagement projects or through direct experience of the world in which an activity will be implemented or in a related field. But it is important that that experience does not lead to assumptions about how things should be done. Projects may involve training, to make sure everyone involved has the information and skills they need to actively participate, or may provide training or support for audiences.

Involving the artist

Not every creative project needs a professional artist. But for those that do, it is best to ensure collaboration early in the development phase, with enough funding in place to pay for all of the artist's time, including planning and development work.

The role of the artist varies from one project to the next and must be negotiated so everyone is clear about roles and expectations. It is important to clarify how much autonomy the artist will have and which voices should take highest priority. How far the artist may collaborate with others will depend on the resource available. An artist involved from the start of the project may have greater autonomy than someone brought in once the direction of the project has solidified.

Relationships and collaboration

Doing arts-based engagement well involves securing and nurturing effective relationships between the target audience, artists and the research team.

> **i** Make sure you have enough resource – including time and funding – to do some scoping and also to build relationships with the other people involved in the project.
>
> Allocate time and effort to planning how you will build trust among everyone involved in the team – especially at the start, but throughout the project.

Image credit: Elizabeth Fraser's Multiple Sclerosis Metaphor exhibited at What A Nerve! for Growing Art Partnerships and the Wellcome – MRC Cambridge Stem Cell Institute. © Nils Jorgensen, 2019.

> **"** The secret to successful arts and research collaboration is translation. Everyone knows that a great translator 1) respects and desires to engage with people who speak both languages; 2) understands that you have to translate context as much as you do jargon; and 3) schedules with an appreciation of the fact that translating takes time and adds time to the overall project."
> Brian Lobel, artistic associate

HIV stories from a Dublin jail

As part of research into health in prisons, a play was commissioned to share oral history research on HIV/AIDS in Irish prisons for live performance at arts festivals. The first script was a fictional account that the author and scriptwriters felt was very powerful, but other research participants felt it insensitive and overly critical of the Irish prison system – and noted that everyone involved in the scriptwriting process was English.

In response, the project team revised the script to a recorded docudrama called Positive in Prison, incorporating the real words of prisoners, voiced by actors, with a narrator and an epilogue explaining the research process.

The project successfully shared findings with people who would not usually engage with academic research and gave voice to marginalised people whose experiences are seldom heard or valued. The recording was later used as a staff training resource by a drug treatment service.
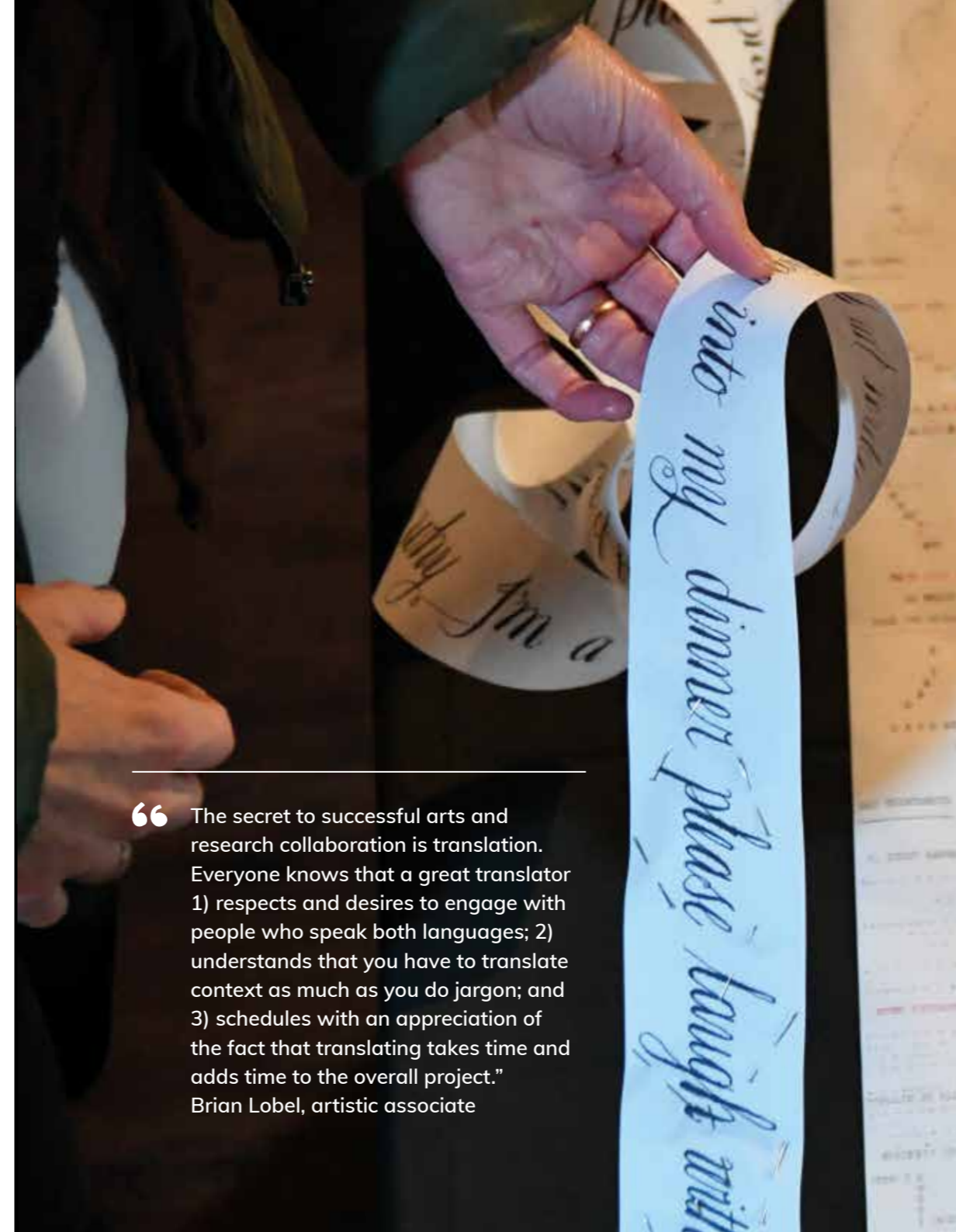
Hear the audio drama:
https://histprisonhealth.com/arts-projects/positive-in-prison-hiv-stories-from-a-dublin-jail/
Read the article:
https://preview.tinyurl.com/HIV-audio-drama-article

Enabling interaction throughout the process

It is important to consult participants and project team members about design, development, implementation and adoption early on in the engagement process. Careful preparation and planning can help ensure an appropriate project plan.

Often public engagement projects with very good outcomes involve artists at every stage of the process, from design to evaluation. Involving artists late on may limit opportunities for teams to learn from the process and to respond to emergent lessons.

It can be helpful to:

- communicate clearly about the project from the outset and make sure everyone involved has a clear understanding
- create opportunities for exchanging ideas and knowledge early on in the project
- build interactions based on genuine respect and trust between researchers and artists, ensuring mutual understanding about the relationship from the start
- be aware of language differences, power differentials, and misconceptions about each other's work as potential drivers of misunderstandings between different parties involved – and find ways to mitigate them
- create opportunities to openly and transparently talk through different perspectives or conflict
- plan in advance while still allowing ideas to emerge over time
- balance control, freedom and autonomy among artists and other team members and participants with the need to communicate the research-based findings accurately.

Sensitivity to context

It is essential to be aware of, and sensitive to, cultural issues and the wider context to avoid alienating the target audience. This includes being mindful of the wider historical and political context and the demographics of research participants, such as their age.

Planning for longer term legacy

Several elements influence whether an activity has a longer term legacy after the end of the project:

- **Well-planned evaluation:** Building in mechanisms to evaluate the success of an activity to understand impact and inform future efforts. Evaluation is central to the process and is essential for any funded project – see pages 30–38 for more detail
- **Funding:** Availability of funding to help apply project findings in order to meet need
- **Timely feedback:** Sharing the results of an engagement effort with participants and relevant communities in the right timescale
- **Participant support:** It can be useful if participants help disseminate and promote the results of the engagement effort.

> " Sometimes the act of having outsiders in, such as an artist, creates space in which new conversations can be had and we can then reflect those ideas back to the participants or the people in the room."
> Bella Eacott, research manager

Summing up

The main factors that influence the engagement process, and the success of the project, are:

- how the activity is planned and delivered
- the availability of resources and the infrastructure that supports the work behind the scenes
- the relationships between the people involved and how they collaborate
- the skills and experience of audiences and those involved in designing, developing and evaluating the activities
- plans for a longer term legacy from the project.

> **i** It is hard to get funding for an engagement project without setting out specifics on how the project will run. However, it is normal for projects to evolve over time. This may well mean that the end result differs to some degree from the initial plan, while still having the same aim.

Image credit: Harold Offeh's A Pattern for Progress, commissioned by the Wellcome – MRC Cambridge Stem Cell Institute.

Case study 4

Using theatre to reduce tobacco use in community psychiatry

Interactive theatre was used to bring together mental health providers and service users in Canada to talk about the harms and use of tobacco in psychiatric settings.

What was the aim?

To find new ways to share research about the harms of tobacco and to open up dialogue between service users and professionals to re-examine tobacco use in psychiatric settings.

The research

Researchers at the University of British Columbia investigated mental healthcare providers' attitudes to tobacco use, and how those attitudes influenced smoking cessation support provided to clients. Researchers documented high rates of tobacco use among clients and providers in a local mental health system and recommended interventions to support a shift in attitudes about the role of tobacco use in mental health.

The engagement

Mental health service users who used tobacco and mental health professionals attended training in theatre techniques and developed, rehearsed and performed forum theatre scenarios based on study findings and their own experiences. Performances were introduced by facilitator, who encouraged other actors and audience members to step in and change the course of a scene. Performances were followed by group discussion.

Outcomes

- The project enabled service users and providers to share knowledge about the effects of tobacco use and re-examine their practices and values
- Participants saw the project as a stepping stone to changing tobacco-related behaviours
- Most audience members said they would recommend the approach, while 73% said they felt better able to help people reduce their tobacco use
- The audience found forum theatre a positive and compelling approach to public engagement and teaching.

Learning points

- Using fictional scenarios based on real-life experiences enabled sharing of people's experiences without invading their privacy
- There was some evidence of short-term change but longer-term effects of the project are not known. The authors highlight a need for more research into how to evaluate outcomes of this kind of engagement.

Read the paper: https://tinyurl.com/forumtheatre1

Image credit: The Story Collider: Regeneration at the Cambridge Junction.
© Claire Haigh, 2018.

5. Evaluating the project

Evaluation is a vital stage of any arts-based public engagement project. A good evaluation will assess whether the project has achieved its aims, enable improvements to be made, and produce learning and evidence for future arts-based engagement.

Image credit: Cheltenham Science Festival cr. Still Moving Media

Evaluating arts-based approaches to engagement is not always straightforward. One challenge is the multiple – and sometimes competing – goals of the projects, which may arise because of the diverse range of people involved and their different perspectives and priorities. Some projects do not have predictable final outputs, instead deliberately seeking to emerge and iterate over time. And, quite often, impact may not be realised until months or even years after the activity has ended.

Why is evaluating arts-based engagement tricky?

- There is a lack of guidance on how to evaluate arts-based engagement approaches and their constituent activities well and there's a recognised need for further work to be undertaken to develop reliable evaluation methods
- Within one project, different professionals and participants may have different goals – so, figuring out which ones to study may not be straightforward
- Many arts-based engagement activities are intentionally emergent with respect to their final design, so may evolve over time, making them hard to study
- Many arts-based engagement projects are run on small budgets that lack the time or sufficient resource for evaluation
- Impacts from arts-based approaches and associated activities may unfold months, or even years, after the engagement activity is completed
- Some people want to see clear statistical evidence – but, by their nature, arts-based approaches are likely to be reflected most meaningfully through qualitative data (for example, rich data captured through audience feedback, case studies and process reviews) and these findings may not be quantifiable.

> **i** Cost in evaluation from the beginning of the project rather than seeing it as an 'add on'.

Photovoice to empower mental health professionals

In a research project looking at poor mental health of recent Latina immigrants, community health volunteers in North Carolina, United States, shared insights through a Photovoice project. The project involved participants taking photographs reflecting their experiences and then discussing what the images represented at a series of workshops.

The research team gathered data from the photos and the discussions and organised findings into different key concerns. These included education, parenting, racism and transitioning to life in the United States.

The findings were shared at community forums, attended by other community members and local policymakers, which included an exhibition of words and photographs from the events and discussion of an action plan.

The research participants felt empowered by their experience, describing personal growth and being better able to help their communities.

Read the article:
https://tinyurl.com/latina-healthworker-article

Image credit: The Liminal Space.

Setting the baseline

The first step in considering an evaluation is deciding what to measure. Where possible, taking measurements at the start of a project, as a baseline, and again towards the end of the project will help to assess what has changed as a result of the engagement.

Examples of indicators to measure

- Any change in audience awareness of the empirical evidence or developments on a topic
- Any new space created for debate and dialogue around pressing societal issues
- Any change in accessibility of research (for instance where language, literacy or cultural barriers exist)
- Level of audience engagement with research content at an emotional level (through stimulating the senses and tapping into emotions)
- Whether the profile of the research study, programme or institution of the engagement effort is raised
- Whether research is changed or improved by the creation of new knowledge or alternative ways of thinking about a topic
- If sustainable relationships have been built that support further research or other opportunities
- Whether capacity and implementation support for further arts-based engagement has been built
- If activities inform the design of further engagement efforts or dissemination strategies
- The quality of artistic outputs and enriching experiences as the basis for public engagement
- Whether individuals have been empowered to manage their own lives or contribute to their communities

> " We've got our own evaluation framework that we apply to all of our projects. At the beginning of the project, we set out the outcomes that we want to achieve at three layers: individual change, organisational change and finally universal or society level." Sarah Douglas, creative director and educator

- Changes in (or intention to change) individual behaviour within the target community
- Practice, programme or service change or impact on policy debate
- Whether art influenced how memorable a research output was (to help inform the design of future engagement efforts).

> **i** When you are choosing indicators, it is helpful to consider two categories: the process of collaborating (which is about the impact it has had on the people involved) and the generation of higher-quality outputs as a result of diversifying the people creating it. Think about which of these is most important and focus the evaluation on measuring that well. Then, think of everything else that could be captured as a bonus.

Considering outcomes and impacts

When identifying the outcomes (change that has happened as a result of engagement) and impacts (the often broader, longer-term effects of engagement) to capture, think about all the different people who have been involved in developing and delivering the work – not just the target audience.

Different factors might need to be measured in different groups. For example:

- **Participants and their families and carers:**
  Has their awareness been raised, knowledge gained or behaviour changed? What has changed in feelings, including emotional state or levels of motivation, action or confidence?

- **Groups (for example professionals or policymakers) or communities:**
  Have attitudes have changed? Has awareness has been raised or behaviours changed?

- **Organisations:**
  Has practice changed? Have cultural markers changed, such as language used, attitudes or behaviours?

- **People across a wider geographical spread:**
  Such as beyond a single community, organisation, city, or whole region or country. What societal outcomes and impacts have been seen? For example has the profile of the topic been raised? Has there been increased debate? Has there been a change in policy?

Possible benefits of arts-based approaches, by audience

Use the information in this box to think about evaluation methods or when approaching different groups of people to take part in a project.

Participants:
- Increased awareness of empirical evidence or developments on a topic
- Opportunity to contribute to dialogue
- Opportunity to engage with research in an accessible way
- Enjoyment, entertainment or enrichment of experience through exposure to high quality artistic outputs
- Changes in own intentions with respect to individual behaviour, with potential to impact on health, wellbeing or professional practice.

Participants involved in co-production:
- Opportunity to contribute as part of a meaningful partnership
- Development of new skills in research or arts-based approaches
- Empowerment to control own life or therapeutic benefit from being involved
- Change in environment, for example improved services or local environment for communities .

Artistic partners collaborating in engagement efforts:
- Opportunity for interdisciplinary dialogue or validation of work
- Benefits relating to the nature or quality of artistic outputs
- New audiences for work.

> **i** Prioritise respect for participants. Consider what you are actually asking them to do, from their point of view, and ask yourself how each activity is beneficial to them.

Researchers
- Benefits associated with achieving public engagement goals
- Stronger research findings as a result of incorporating new insights or ways of thinking, through access to 'other knowledges'
- New skills and learning to facilitate the conduct of further arts-based engagement
- Increased ability to communicate with other parties outside of research.

Others who may benefit include:
- Policymakers and those responsible for clinical decision making and healthcare planning
- Representatives from charities and research councils
- Arts industry organisations (for example, representatives from the film, TV or video game industries) that use research evidence to inform content.

Planning timing and staging

Make sure each stage of the design, development and delivery of an arts-based approach is evaluated – along with any associated activities – and tweak areas that need improving. Think about whether the evaluation can be incorporated into the engagement activity itself a single city or a whole region or country. What societal outcomes and impacts have been seen – for example, has the profile of the topic been raised? Has there been increased debate? Has there been a change in policy?

> **i** Consider working with the artist involved in the project, or drawing on art forms used in the project as inspiration for presenting your evaluation findings.

Tailoring evaluation methods to the audience

Evaluation often involves some form of feedback, such as through comment cards or surveys, from the various parties involved. Think about who is involved in the project and the situation in which it takes place. Make sure the evaluation methods are accessible, acceptable and proportionate to the situation. In particular, ensure the approach is accessible and acceptable to everyone involved, to enable and encourage them to contribute and maximise the number of responses.

Ideas to gauge audience reactions include:

- 'vox pop' videos showing people's brief, informal reactions
- focus groups
- social media (for example, running polls or recording statistics such as the number of times a hashtag has been used)
- remote devices to enable anonymous participant feedback
- surveys of key parties involved in the project.

Tailoring evaluation findings to the audience

Just as the evaluation methods must be targeted to the audience, so must the evaluation findings. These need to be credible but appropriate for whoever they are aimed at. So, as well as written reports, consider other formats such as a presentation or multimedia.

> " It is important for medical researchers to work alongside the people with the condition they are studying as it brings people's day-to-day concerns into their research. It also shows them that, although they work on one tiny piece of the puzzle, collectively they can – and do – make a difference. Bob Bragger, carer and volunteer

Using existing frameworks

It can be useful to draw on existing frameworks for arts-based engagement, which can be followed or adapted. Three examples are set out below.

Framework 1

The arts-based knowledge translation framework is the most comprehensive and specific framework found in the course of our research. Developed by Kukkonen and Cooper in 2017 and 2018, it suggests goals and impacts to be measured, with ideas of how to go about it. It is designed to guide teams in planning and evaluating arts-based translation – communicating and disseminating findings, rather than public engagement more broadly – but it is still very useful.

The framework sets out four stages for planning and evaluation (although in practice, the process is often not linear):

1. Identifying goals and target audiences
2. Choosing the appropriate art form or medium
3. Building partnerships with artists
4. Considering which impact indicators are appropriate (in other words, what factors will be measured) and what methods should be used to capture them.

See https://tinyurl.com/framework-no1

Framework 2

The Guiding Arts-Based Research Assessment (GABRA) framework was developed specifically to assess the quality and effectiveness of arts-based approaches used to represent research findings.

It sets out four criteria against which to consider success:

1. The acquisition of knowledge
2. A change in initial understanding
3. The generation of questions from the findings
4. Intent to change own practice.

See https://tinyurl.com/framework-no2

> **i** If you are thinking of hiring a consultant, try contacting your research funder for suggestions.

> **"** Measurement likes to measure what can be measured. In a dominant culture of quantifiable data, that does not work out well for the arts. If you did only measure the things you can measure, you would get very useless and boring reports. So there's striving all the time to come up with mixed forms of evaluation, with baselines but also anecdotes, to build a holistic picture." Alice Carey, arts adviser

Framework 3

The Liminal Space framework was developed by the creative agency featured in Case study 5 (page 38) and is a framework to evaluate the impact of its public engagement efforts, including immersive art installations and initiatives. The approach considers impact on all the key parties involved, including the target audience, collaborators and wider society.

It aims to measure change at three levels:

1. Individual change – any changes that the project aims to bring about in individuals, including awareness raising, increased knowledge or behaviour change
2. Organisational change – changes in organisational practices
3. Universal or societal change – social impact, policy change or affecting the national conversation.

You can see this framework in use in Case study 5.

Considering outside support

Evaluations are usually conducted by the researchers or project team, but where resources allow, some arts-based engagement teams consider outside support for evaluation. External evaluators are sometimes useful. They may bring extra time, skills and specialist ways of working to the project, along with rigour and objectivity, and may potentially help establish more credibility. They will also bring their own sets of skills and perspectives – raising new questions and opening further dialogue.

On the other hand, using a consultant will increase the budget and it is important to choose someone with the flexibility to select a method driven by the project needs and what emerges during the process, rather than based on the rigid application of a formulaic evaluation approach.

Summing up

- Evaluating arts-based engagement is often challenging
- It is helpful to tailor data-collection methods to what will work best for the audience and think about the wider impacts for everyone involved
- There are several existing frameworks that can potentially be adopted or adapted
- It is worth considering bringing in external expertise, while recognising and managing the potential tensions
- Evaluating the project well does not only benefit the project and meet funding requirements, it also helps build the evidence base for this area of work.

Case study 5

Using immersive art to improve health in nightshift workers

A mobile nightclub experience shared research evidence about sleep hygiene with shift workers in grocery warehouses.

Image credit: The Liminal Space

What was the aim?

To help improve sleep health and reduce the negative impacts of night work.

The research

Research from the Sleep and Circadian Neuroscience Institute at the University of Oxford demonstrates how disrupted sleep can lead to health problems ranging across heart disease, increased risk of cancer, emotional and cognitive problems and many other issues.

The engagement

Built in a shipping container, Night Club is an immersive art installation that can be transported to warehouses around the UK and can meet nightshift workers where they work. The project involved sleep researchers from the University of Oxford, the Co-op and creative consultancy The Liminal Space, who developed the immersive art installation.

The Liminal Space conducted preliminary research to better understand the target audience – 98% male, long-term nightshift workers with multiple health conditions – so the team could tailor the activity to fit their needs and interests. Alongside the installation, the project team offered to recruit and train peer-to-peer sleep champions at each workplace.

Outcomes

- Of 4,000 employees reached in 2019, 78% said that they had learnt something new and 51% said they would change their behaviour. Participating workforces saw reduced absenteeism and presenteeism.
- Commercial partners improved working conditions for nightshift workers and improved awareness of sleep health among managers, leading to better leadership and management scores in staff engagement surveys. Commercial partners said Night Club had reduced the stigma around discussing mental health.
- The Liminal Space, Co-op and government officials at Westminster wrote a white paper about sleep health and nightshift work, which was presented to the UK Parliament. Commercial partners have seen raised profiles through the project's local and national media attention.

Learning points

- The installation was designed to travel to people's workplaces, so that workers could experience it in familiar, easily accessible surroundings.
- Getting buy-in from commercial partners helped Night Club achieve some of its impacts. They were asked for support in various ways – for example, in providing time off or incentives to visit the installation and being prepared to evaluate and change internal practices to improve employee health.

Find out more: the-liminal-space.com/all-projects/nightclub

6. What is the evidence?

So far, the evidence base on arts-based approaches to public engagement with research is limited. This is partly because it is hard to evaluate and measure. But there is emerging evidence for some positive impact.

" In some cases, public engagement might be seen as a tick-box exercise as a mandatory part of a project. However, it is a crucial part of the research. It is important to develop a research base and literature for the field of public engagement. This will make the practice more rigorous, enriching the research as well as the engagement and communication aspects of the university work. "Rhys Bevan-Jones, psychiatrist and clinical research fellow

Cheltenham Science Festival is a celebration of the wonder of everyday science in the world around us. It creates unique experiences by giving audiences access to ground-breaking scientists to debate, discuss and explore www.cheltenhamfestivals.com/science

Image credit: Cheltenham Science Festival
cr. Still Moving Media.

What we know so far about the evidence on arts-based approaches falls into three categories:

- helping teams achieve engagement as a goal in its own right
- improving the quality or effectiveness of research and public engagement activities
- achieving wider research impact through arts-based engagement.

Public engagement as a goal in itself

In some projects, the very act of engaging communities is a goal in itself. Several outcomes may relate to this goal:

- **Increasing audience awareness of evidence or developments:** This is effectively achieved through various activities, including performing arts, games, immersive art installations and visual arts
- **Creating spaces for dialogue:** For example facilitating conversations between groups of people who might not have met otherwise
- **Increasing accessibility of research:** For example, it can help overcome language, literacy, or cultural barriers
- **Increasing audience engagement with research content:** For example, engaging with research at an emotional level and in directly evaluating audience response
- **Raising the profile of a research study, programme or institution:** Evidence here is mixed. Positive outcomes may include significant media coverage or raising further funding, but some efforts have failed due to a lack of institutional support or because the media coverage focused on the activity rather than the underlying research.

These outcomes may be interrelated – for example, how far an activity increases an audience's awareness may depend on how accessible it is to them.

An installation to promote death literacy

Evidence shows that 'death literacy' (understanding the dying and the services supporting people at this time) can improve people's experiences at end of life. However, levels of death literacy are low – especially among lower socioeconomic groups. The Academy of Medical Sciences worked with design agency The Liminal Space to build The Departure Lounge: a playful installation in Lewisham Shopping Centre, south east London, to engage people in discussions about end of life.

The installation was a physical and digital space modelled on an airport with suitcases and departure boards, including words and people's stories. Members of the public were supported by volunteer 'guides' who explained the project and answered questions. By choosing this location the team attracted a far more diverse audience than might normally attend a gallery or museum.

More than 2,500 people visited during its 24-day run. The project successfully sparked public dialogue about death and dying, with many visitors wanting to talk about their experiences of bereavement. However, the project achieved less success with another project aim: engaging people with academic research about end-of-life care.

Read the evaluation report:
https://tinyurl.com/departure-lounge-evaluation
See the website and accompanying film:
www.the-liminal-space.com/all-projects/the-departure-lounge

Image credit: The Liminal Space.

Improving quality and effectiveness of research and engagement

There is some evidence that arts-based activities have:
- helped improve the quality or effectiveness of current and future research
- informed further public engagement activities.

The outcomes that relate to these goals include:

- **Strengthening research through creating new knowledge or alternative ways of thinking:** Evidence generally shows that arts-based approaches may have a positive result by bringing new perspectives to research questions and building knowledge through:
  – helping researchers refine or develop existing research findings by offering new insights or putting existing findings into context
  – facilitating relationships to co-produce new knowledge (for example, by bringing together audience members as co-researchers or co-creators)
  – artists and researchers collaborating, and producing reciprocal learning and mutual benefit – reinforcing each other's work and increasing their visibility outside their usual discipline.

- **Building sustainable partnerships:** Collaboration may lead artists, audiences and researchers to develop sustainable partnerships that support further work together. Researchers and artists may forge relationships that connect the work to different community settings, influencing future programmes. Collaboration with policymakers in developing the engagement approach may support further opportunities too.

- **Building capacity and support for arts-based engagement:** Arts-based approaches may help build capacity and support for future activity:
  – establishing key learning or practical recommendations
  – learning what works and how to evaluate it
  – gaining understanding about how they work
  – learning new skills or ways of thinking about how to communicate creatively
  – creating supportive communities or infrastructure for arts-based engagement.

- **Informing the design of further work:** There is some evidence that arts-based engagement leads to the development of plans for wider public engagement.

- **Creating high quality artistic outputs and enriching experiences:** The creative element of arts-based approaches often leads to high quality artistic outputs that are enjoyable, entertaining and aesthetically pleasing or rich in terms of visual quality, that reflect the culture of target communities and that lead to positive, inspiring or enriching experiences.

66 **For me, some of the most successful projects have been the ones where impacts happen way after the project itself. Ideas sit with you or return to deepen your other work, or you remain connected with researchers years after the project ends – these legacies speak to the value of this work. The potential to build connections to feed longer-term change is huge." Tracy Gentles, creative director**

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Types of impact

Evidence about the link between arts-based engagement and research impact is limited by the lack of systematic evaluation. However, there is some evidence of impact on individuals, communities and the practice or policy landscape, including:

Empowerment: There are several examples of arts-based approaches empowering individuals within the target community to make decisions, manage their own lives or contribute to their communities. A key feature of these has been members of the target community creating or co-creating artistic outputs for wider engagement.

Long-term behaviour change: None of the articles included in the review reported evidence of measured changes in individual behaviour among the target audience (for example, in health-seeking behaviours or individual practices). This could be linked to the lack of long-term follow-up. However, a few reported on intention to change behaviour as a consequence of the activity.

Impact on local culture or community resources: Our research found just two examples of activities leading to cultural or community-level impact, along with anecdotal evidence.

Wider change: There are few studies reporting on impact at the level of practice, programme or service change, or change in policy debate, but where they do, evidence is broadly positive.

> 66 Arts-based engagement with research helps individuals and communities understand how valuable their experience is in improving things for people like them. That's very empowering for them – not least, as it can turn difficult experiences into useful insights that can help shape the future." Bob Bragger, carer and volunteer

Unintended consequences

Like any activity, arts-based engagement projects may have some unintended consequences – both positive and negative.

Unintended negative consequences include:

- **Negative emotional impact** as a result of engaging with sensitive issues of reliving past experiences
- **Feelings of helplessness** to impact on the topic highlighted
- **Concern about privacy** or of personal experiences becoming shared in public
- **Anxiety or mistrust** of the approaches used.

Positive outcomes that go beyond the original aims of a project and that have been mentioned in literature include:

- **Social support and improved wellbeing** among target audience members also involved in co-production – resulting from catharsis or their experiences being normalised
- **Professional opportunities for artists** including further projects or collaborations, further funding and increased visibility outside of their discipline
- **Professional opportunities for researchers** including new connections in the community, ideas about new related topics for research, new related projects or opportunities, and raised professional profile or visibility.

> **i** Working in this way often produces surprises along the way. When it does, you may need to hold your nerve! This might take you out of your comfort zone, but often in the art and design process the unexpected can turn out to be a positive.

Conclusions

Overall, the evidence for the effectiveness of arts-based approaches and related activities in engaging research participants is promising but weak. This is due to a lack of sufficient – and sufficiently robust – evaluation in this area, which reflects the challenges associated with evaluating this type of work (see Section 5). There are limited reports of approaches that failed to meet their goals, or where evidence in support of effectiveness was lacking.

The evidence does show a link between some types of outcomes and some arts-based approaches, but it is not possible to show which activities are more effective than others. Perhaps the strongest message from this research is the importance of avoiding making assumptions.

Overall, the evidence is not definitive but it is promising. This research has identified many practical examples of approaches that used arts-based approaches to great effect. For now, the evidence is limited but growing, and what we know so far provides welcome support to the enthusiasm of the researchers, artists and community members working in this area.

Summing up

- The evidence available indicates that some arts-based approaches may be effective for engaging people and may help improve the quality or effectiveness of current or future research
- There is limited evidence of a link between arts-based approaches and research impact, though individual projects often report positive outcomes
- It is important to be aware of potential unintended consequences of arts-based approaches and to try mitigate them
- Overall, the evidence for the effectiveness of arts-based approaches and related activities in engaging research participants is weak, due to a lack of evaluation in this area, but promising.

Image credit: Cheltenham Science Festival cr. Still Moving Media

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There is a Light: BRIGHTLIGHT. A Contact Young Company production with Adura Onashile and Brian Lobel. Image credit: Joel Chester Fildes

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