

NERC Public Engagement with Research and Innovation Strategy 2020-2025

Purpose

As the UK's largest funder of independent environmental science, we have a responsibility to share the science we fund with society. Beyond communication, we will engage and involve people with current environmental science which has relevance to all our daily lives and maximise the impact of the research we fund. By, engaging the public, we aim to fund the best environmental science relevant to society, and to enable informed, evidence-based decisions to be made.

Our aim is to build a cohort of credible, confident and expert ambassadors to engage the public in diverse ways with environmental science. We will create hope for the future, allowing public audiences especially young people to engage with current issues raised by environmental science.

This strategy supports the [UKRI Public Engagement Vision](#), and supports engagement for world-leading research and innovation to create a more productive, healthy and resilient environment as outlined in the [NERC Delivery Plan](#).

Objectives

NERC is committed to a strategic approach to public engagement and our activities, and those we commission, will be guided by five objectives:

1. To build the capacity of our researchers to engage.

Goal: NERC-funded environmental scientists will have the capability and skills to engage with different audiences about their research and increase its impact.

How: We will build the capability of researchers to engage, for the benefit of research and society. We will fund researchers to deliver innovative public engagement and build public engagement into their research. We will also help researchers develop skills, networks and collaborations, as part of a wider UKRI approach to improving the quality, reach and impact of public engagement activity. We will recognise innovative approaches to public engagement with environmental science and celebrate excellence.

Measure of Success: We will have a cohort of researchers that are confident to engage the public and advocate for their area of expertise. We will increase the number and diversity of researchers engaging with the public, and the quality of engagement. We will measure success through outcomes based public engagement.

2. To promote engaged research.

Goal: NERC-funded research will include public engagement (where possible) so that the research and the public will benefit. The benefits of engaging society with research will be maximised, and the outcomes will be a shared responsibility between researchers and the public.

How: We will support NERC-funded researchers to involve public stakeholders throughout the research cycle. We will support engagement that enhances the research process, including where research is co-created, for instance citizen science.

Measure of Success: We will demonstrate the outcomes and impact of research which draws on engagement with various audiences including youth groups. We will recognise and celebrate engaged research. In alignment with the Research Excellence Framework criteria, the public engagement activity we fund will have made an impact by enabling, enriching, influencing, informing or changing the performance, policies, practices, products, services, understanding, awareness or wellbeing of the beneficiaries.

3. To convene public debate about contemporary issues in environmental science.

Goal: NERC-funded science is shared and debated with confidence, and evidence is used to show how it is relevant to daily lives and used in decision-making by researchers and those outside research. NERC research has a demonstrable impact on current public debates in areas not traditionally considered to be linked to environmental science.

How: We will convene debate about environmental science on a local and national scale; this is likely to include multi-disciplinary approaches including from the social science, engineering and the arts. We will provide opportunities for conclusions drawn from the synthesis of evidence to be shared. We will gain insight into current public debate and consider the role of research in these debates.

Measure of Success: We will track the issues being debated, how evidence is used to support this, who is engaging audiences at local and national level and how they are doing this. We will look to support this as a growing cohort over the term of this strategy and will demonstrate the impact and outcomes of this engagement. We will share evaluation of what works well and how we can improve.

4. To inspire public audiences with environmental science.

Goal: People will be inspired and curious into the what, how and why of environmental science. We will make it accessible and seek to attract a diversity of people to become environmental scientists in the future. We will inspire people to enjoy, contribute to, question and critically think about research and its processes, making the link between the environment and their everyday lives and interests.

How: We will deliver activities that inspire the public with environmental science. We will work in partnership to support engagement that specifically identifies and engages communities that are not already inspired by environmental science, considering issues of equality, diversity and inclusion.

Measure of Success: Through evaluated activities we will inspire audiences to be engaged with environmental science topics and connect the relevance to their daily lives. We will generate partnerships which have a demonstrable impact, particularly on youth audiences to create hope for younger generation, measuring our engagement and impact. Those that we engage will take action on topics that are grounded in environmental science and that build hope for the future.

5. To listen to the public through public dialogue to inform NERC.

Goal: NERC processes will be informed by societal concerns and aspirations. NERC, researchers and stakeholders will consult, listen and respond to diverse perspectives to provide insights to meaningfully shape future research programmes and increase impact.

How: We will deliver public dialogue activities to receive input from the public and ensure that our science considers societal concerns and interests, whilst continuing to listen to our researcher community.

Measure of Success: NERC can demonstrate how it has listened to public concerns and aspirations in how it sets future strategy and research programmes. Where we fund public dialogue, this will have measurable outcomes of how it has contributed to research programme direction.

Our Approach

Our activities and those we commission will be guided by the following principles:

Our ambition will require strong **partnerships and collaborative working** both externally and within UKRI to ensure the environmental science we fund is made **relevant and accessible to all**. This includes

working with public engagement professionals with best practice applied and case studies shared with the community.

We will support engagement both with defined communities for a specific purpose, including with young people and with those under-represented by research and engagement, so that those who discuss, create and participate are reflective of society.

Evidence-based and outcomes focussed: NERC public engagement programmes will have a major focus on demonstrating the outcomes and impact of public engagement activity. Researchers will be encouraged to build evaluation into their work and share lessons with the wider community. We expect researchers to consider evaluation as integral to the activity design process. Our approach follows the [UKRI Monitoring and Evaluation framework](#).

This strategy is supported by a public engagement **glossary** which is available on the NERC website and an annual **implementation plan**, which will be published as a separate document and identifies specific milestones.

[The NERC commitment to engagement](#)

Public engagement with research is part of a broad landscape of engagement that NERC, researchers and public engagement professionals take part in. This strategy is also supported by a number of other mechanisms:

- Public engagement is supported through all NERC funding schemes and award-holders
- Public engagement in research centres is supported through NERC National Capability funding and NERC's capital investments will continue to be accessible for public engagement, (prioritising science needs).
- Reporting on public engagement outcomes through [ResearchFish](#) and [NERC Impact](#)
- Use of impact from relevant public engagement activities in the Research Excellence Framework (REF), Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)
- Our [Responsibility Framework](#) outlines NERC's broader approach to sustainability
- [Equality, diversity and inclusion](#) as part of the URKI vision
- [Social and ethical considerations](#) are included in the lifecycle of research and engagement
- [Free and open access](#) to publicly-funded research is vital for social and economic benefits