

Participatory Research Fund: The value of peer-learning

Events

At King's College London, the Public Engagement Manager and Participatory Research Co-ordinator collaborated with 15 academic and lived experience co-researchers to co-create an exhibition exploring the value of participatory research. The group were involved throughout, from developing the concept to designing the content of the exhibition, entitled 'Experts by Experience: Who Knows Best?', which advocates for the value of lived experience in research. The exhibition includes a manifesto for participatory research, games to encourage visitors to reflect on the concept of 'expert' and case studies of best practice of participatory research. The exhibition is on display at Science Gallery London.



Project Funding

The University of Plymouth's Get Involved Awards, fully supported by the Participatory Research Fund and led by the public engagement team, connects researchers and community groups across Plymouth. This collaborative initiative focuses on solving local issues through community-driven research, where local groups, charities, and social enterprises partner with researchers to address pressing community challenges. From looking at how to raise awareness of skateboard safety following the death of a young skater, to assessing the impact of racist incidents on the community in Plymouth, the Get Involved Awards have supported over 20 projects since 2021 and symbolise dedication to supporting and nurturing partnerships that make a real difference.



Communication

The University of Bristol funded nine participatory projects in 2023. These brought local people, communities and University researchers together to create knowledge, build strong partnerships and make a positive change in the city of Bristol. Public Engagement staff (in roles also funded by the PRF) looked for opportunities to document and celebrate the projects. Several of the projects were written up as case studies, a professional photographer captured images of workshops and events, and short films were made about four of these projects, in collaboration with local creative agency Eight. Read about the case studies and watch the film here.



Evaluation

Training

Commissioned Work

Resource Development

Building Communities of Practice

Mapping

Project Funding

The University of Bath have co-created a funding call, the Participate Grant, with researchers and collaborators from a local community group and a local grant-giving organisation. Collectively, this group decided on the definition of participatory research, the levels of funding available, who should be eligible to apply for the call, the application process, and the assessment criteria. Activities funded under the Participate Grant will involve community organisations in the Southwest of England and researchers working together on research activities that are collaborative across the research cycle and bring benefits to everyone involved.



Strategy Development

University of Exeter have a Public Engagement Strategic Advisory Group (PEG) currently made up of 13 members (academic and professional staff across faculties). The purpose of PEG is to provide strategic and thought leadership around demonstrating the value of public engagement with research, engaging with a diverse set of publics, and developing a thriving engaged research culture. The Engaged Research Manager, a role supported fully through the PRF, acts as Secretary of the group. PEG is a sub-group reporting to both the Research and Impact Executive Committee (RIEC) and Business Engagement Innovation Committee (BEIC).



Staffing

Imperial recruited Dr Tom Morton into the role of Public Engagement Participatory Research Lead in November 2023. Tom joined us from the Open University. His PhD research looked at co-production in urban redevelopment, and he has worked with many other universities to help embed participatory research. This dedicated role has enabled a step change in how the Public Engagement team is able to support staff and students in participatory approaches. Work to date includes mapping current practice, interest and barriers to participatory research at Imperial, scoping a new seed fund and associated co-production process, and supporting projects through advice and guidance.



Since 2021, Research England has allocated funding to higher education providers in England to be used for participatory or co-produced research. In 2023, colleagues at six universities formed an informal network to share what they were doing with their funding.