

2020/1 GRC Statement of Principles on Public Engagement



Preamble

Humankind is increasingly confronted by escalating and interdependent social, economic, political, and ecological challenges at an accelerated pace and on a historically unprecedented scale. Whilst global integration and digitalisation expand access to information within and across countries, society should always be able to understand scientific research, its presuppositions and assumptions, together with its methodological choices. Public engagement offers the possibility of reducing the distance between science and society, through enabling inclusion, facilitating participation, widening the integrity of research, obviating unwarranted attacks against science, and supporting public investments in scientific research.

As a part of society, funding agencies are essential actors in their respective knowledge eco-systems and are expected to mediate between society, its multiplicities of publics (including various civil society formations, the variety of branches of the state, the private and public enterprise sectors, and a myriad of scholarly and academic organisations), and the various domains of science by defining research priorities, securing resources, and setting agendas.

Overarching Considerations

1. Knowledge emanating from publicly funded research belongs to the public.
2. Public engagement expands education and training across society whilst also fostering inclusivity and critical thinking amongst all participants.
3. Public engagement widens meaningful participation and improves trust in scientific expertise.
4. Public engagement takes a variety of forms and practices that include the involvement of a diverse range of publics in knowledge-sharing, the setting of research priorities, advising on resource allocations, and determining the outcomes and impacts of science.
5. Whilst all fields and domains of science may benefit from public engagement, practical emphases vary between more fundamental and more applied research activities.
6. Funding agencies constitute a main intermediary between the sciences and publics in supporting research, expanding the capacities and capabilities of knowledge ecosystems, and ensuring improved accountability for the investment of public resources.

Principles

GRC participants:

1. Recognise public engagement as purposeful and meaningful activities facilitated between researchers and their various 'publics', whereby the co-construction of knowledge is enhanced, and mutual learning generates benefits for all.
2. Agree that specifically targeted, and nuanced approaches are required to maximise productive engagement with science by the various publics within their respective fields of knowledge.
3. Recognise extensions in the mandates of public funding agencies, from their historical roles in exclusively, yet narrowly, funding research towards including the funding of public engagement.

4. Acknowledge that an appropriate leveraging of resources is required to further support and facilitate wider public engagements with science.
5. Agree that knowledge co-creation with various publics takes place at all stages of the research process, including at the early stage: through the identification and development of research priorities and strategies; midstream: through the involvement of publics in research; and downstream: through the public's benefit from, and understanding of the impact and scientific output of research.
6. Acknowledge that the sharing of monitoring, evaluating, and learning metrics for public engagement will assist funding agencies in adapting to their organisational capabilities, and encouraging inter-institutional partnerships.