



PEPing it up...

a grounded guide to
embedding public
engagement practice

for academics and community
partners

UNIVERSITY OF
EXETER

**CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART
AND THE NATURAL WORLD**

Background

The production of this guide was supported by a University of Exeter Catalyst project Seed Fund award to the Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World (CCANW), based at the Innovation Centre on the Streatham Campus.

CCANW's mission is to explore new understandings of our place within nature through the arts, in the belief that the arts can touch people in ways that conventional education and advocacy can rarely do. Established as a Community Interest Company, CCANW is an example of a professional community partner organisation keen to develop mutually beneficial collaborative engaged research with a positive public impact.

Based on the project consultant's conversations with University staff with an existing or potential interest in CCANW's work or experience in related areas, this guide brings together transferable good practices in the processes around public engagement.

With reference to the EDGE self assessment tool produced by the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), it is designed as a contribution to the University's approach to: begin to tackle access issues to open up the institution and its activities to the public...using insight and feedback to inform its strategy and plans.

Drawing on what has been a 'live' contact building project, the guide is grounded in both community partner and academic perspectives to help embed public engagement practice in mainstream University culture...PEPping it up.

January 2015

Since 2006, CCANW has been supported by Arts Council England and it operated from Haldon Forest Park, just outside Exeter. Photographs in this guide illustrate exhibitions and activities which involved linking research in Higher Education Institutions with the wider public. On the covers are snapshots of collaborations with Helsinki University of Technology, Manchester Metropolitan University, the London College of Fashion, Met Office and University of Westminster.

Having moved to the Innovation Centre in 2013, its focus has been on the 'Soil Culture' programme, a partnership with Falmouth University linked to the United Nations International Year of Soils 2015.

University of Exeter Catalyst project
www.exeter.ac.uk/research/inspiring/projects/catalyst
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National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement
www.publicengagement.ac.uk

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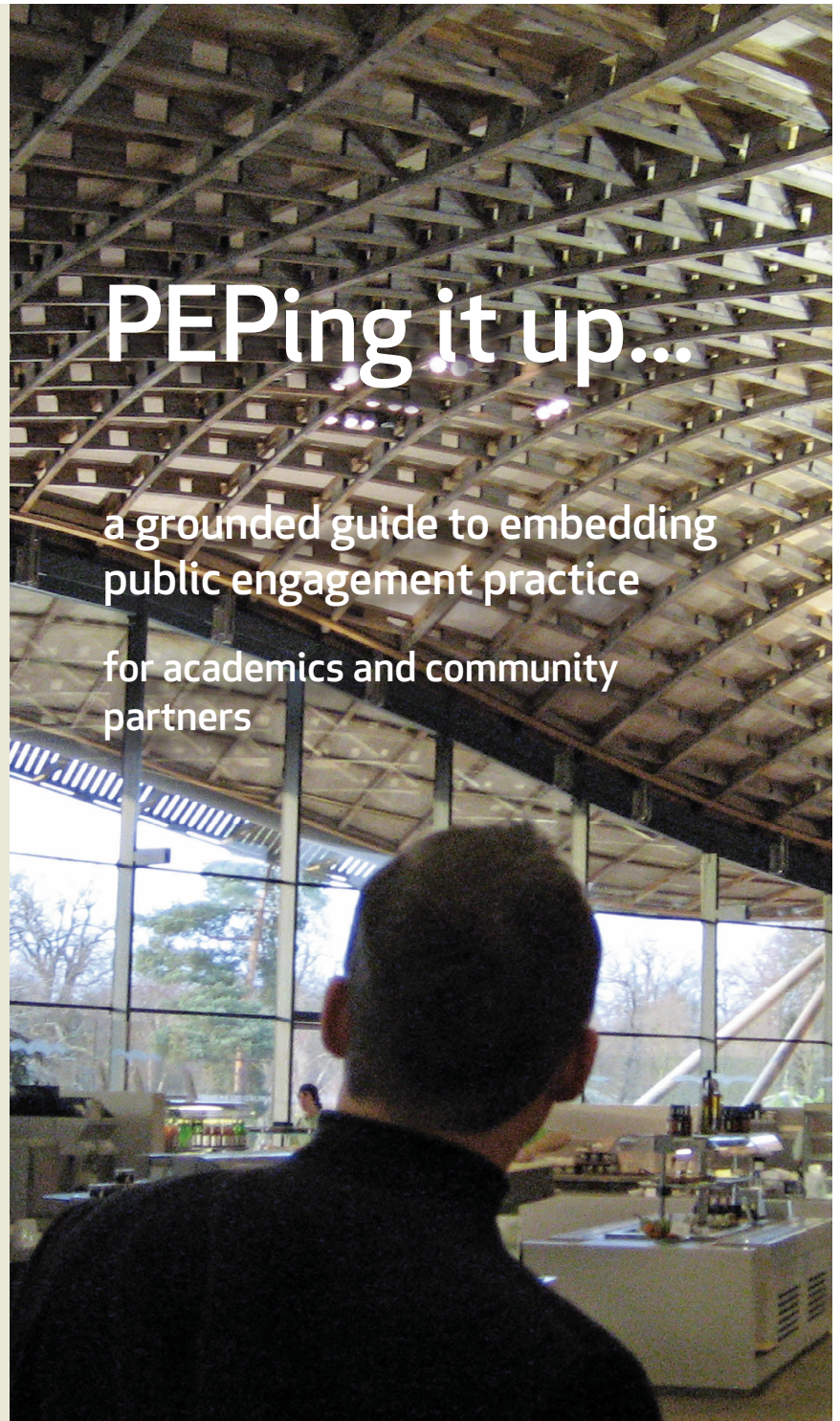
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To coincide with an exhibition in 2008 showing work from the Wood Studio, Helsinki, CCANW brought their Director to the UK (shown at the Savill Gardens gridshell) to talk to students of architecture at the Universities of Bath and Plymouth. CCANW also contributed to the major 'Building with Wood' conference at the Peter Chalk Centre, University of Exeter. (see back cover)



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Introduction

This guide is written for academics and community partners – the wide range of organisations outside the University which can engage with research through a process of ‘interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit’ (National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement).

It comprises three sections covering the key topics of finding potential partners; developing partnership working; and delivering collaborative engaged research. In each section there is a wealth of suggestions and

learning points collated from the direct experience of people undertaking collaborative engaged research.

We hope those coming new to public engagement practice will find this guide a good starting point for pursuing exciting explorations – and for those with experience, a useful checklist that prompts some new approaches.

Still from the video ‘Dog of My Dreams’ by Roz Mortimer from ‘The Animal Gaze’, an exhibition from London Metropolitan University brought by CCANW to Haldon and four major arts venues in Plymouth to mark the Darwin 200 celebrations in 2009. Details of photoworks by Kate James (middle row) and Mary Britton Clouse (bottom row) are reproduced on the front cover.



Section One

Finding potential partners: learning from the project

Suggestions drawn from the project process of identifying and contacting relevant University members as well as advice shared by interviewees.

Whether you're a community partner or a University academic seeking to collaborate, having a planned approach to finding a potential partner will maximise your chances of success.

The following are key suggestions based on approaches used to develop this guidance document and what people interviewed during the project shared. As effective public engagement and collaborative research rely on understanding partner perspectives, understanding both the initial 'instigator' and 'recipient' roles is a good foundation to establishing a mutually productive partnership.

When planning to approach potential partners:

- Be clear about what it is that you want to achieve and what you have to offer
- Let this inform identifying the sort of person or organisation with whom you want to work
- Think broadly about the resources you can use to find the specific contacts – who are usually the 'doers' in an organisation rather than the 'head of' – who might make an appropriate fit with your ideas, including:

- existing professional (and possible personal) contacts – past and present – and their contacts
- organisation websites and individual profiles, searched through relevant key words
- publications, newsletters, mailing lists and social/professional networking opportunities
- Find out people's names if possible: addressing a person rather than their position will be more effective
- Avoid 'cold calling' individuals if you can, as this can have a 'positively negative' effect in terms of people 'being bothered by an opportunistic stranger just interested in what they need or want'
- Send an email, rather than ring, if you have to cold call, as this is less intrusive and less immediate, placing the recipient – your potential partner – in control of their response
- Think carefully about your email – your 'calling card' – to make a good (and enticing) first impression
 - send a personalised email to each individual you're contacting
 - be strategic about what you put in the subject line to catch their attention – what's the most effective 'hook'?
 - give a context to which the recipient can relate
 - don't be afraid of 'honest flattery' – your recipient is genuinely a 'key contact' and if they've been recommended by someone else, say so



"Making contacts is often a story of personal connections, strategy and serendipity"

- highlight a point of connection as early as possible
- write clearly and concisely about yourself and your idea (less is more)
- be clear about your initial (realistic) expectations (in respect of talking, meeting etc) so people are provided with an opportunity to decline rather than ignore
- end with an offer to follow up if you don't hear back
- giving yourself permission to re-try and relieving the recipient of the initial effort to respond
- Try to generate new contacts face to face if possible – whether you take or make opportunities, which can include:
 - joining and participating in relevant networks and exchange-based meetings
 - attending events and conferences
 - arranging and promoting networking and exchange opportunities that 'piggyback' on existing events you organise, with a clear 'take away' (ie benefit) from attending for those outside your regular contacts
 - arranging and promoting specific new networking and exchange events, again with a clear 'take away' and with the added attraction of food, around which conversations take place so well

'Fashion Footprints: Sustainable Approaches' was a programme devised in 2010, based on the book by Dr Kate Fletcher 'Sustainable Fashion and Textiles' and curated by four of her graduates from the Fashion and the Environment course at the London College of Fashion. The exhibition toured to Bristol and was shown at the University of Exeter's Environment and Sustainability Institute.

- Develop environments in which you can 'maximise serendipity' – bringing different people together so unplanned and unexpected exchanges can occur

If you're more often the recipient of a partnership approach than the instigator, the suggestions above might helpfully prompt you to:

- Think about how you present yourself or your organisation to the outside world – it's helpful to be explicit and strategic in how you describe and disseminate your work in ways that partners can easily access and easily understand
- It's often useful to explain your underlying interests and forward plans, as well as current projects: if you only did the latter, you may be missing out on catching the attention of someone with whom it would be really interesting to engage...
- Consider how to respond to a 'cold call' email, making clear your own expectations and interests
- Explore holding a focused networking and exchange event so that you can bring together and connect with everyone approaching you, rather than dealing with them all separately – which may lead to even better joined-up working for all

Being clear in your 'call to collaborate', keeping up your contacts over time (in particular making effective use of social media) and making links across your networks all increase the chance of conversations turning into collaborative work...even if it's somewhat later down the line.



"It's great to explore the added value of what's achievable through working together, from the very start"

Section Two

Developing partnership working: key considerations for positive practice

What to bear in mind and what works well, based on the experiences of academics from across different University colleges and departments

Timing, 'content' and embedding added value are key initial considerations when developing partnership working. The following summarises reflections and suggestions gathered:

Understanding each other's time and timetabling

- Academic and community partner worlds operate on very different timescales. While they can both experience 'two months to deliver a project yesterday' imperatives, underlying planning cycles and organisational pace are often mismatched. When the mismatch isn't understood and accommodated, this can create tensions and problems
- Community partners need to be enabled to appreciate the dominance of teaching within the University's work, with programmes being planned a couple of years in advance. In addition, researchers may be moving quickly from one funded project to another, with little free time to explore the potential of other partnerships. Likewise, academics need to be enabled to appreciate the policy and funding vulnerabilities community partners experience, which can impact on their ability to plan for the longer term

- With planning, making funding applications and undertaking research happening at both short and long notice, depending on context and circumstance, being clear about the 'when and how' of community partners' involvement, with appropriate resourcing, is vital

'Content'

- Exploring and establishing a shared interest or problem to be solved is of central concern. The preparation suggested in the first section should help academics and community partners focus on these as quickly as possible. For community partners, understanding the need that any solution has the potential for wider applicability or to reach a wider audience is important – as is there being no guarantee of making a difference, because of the nature of research
- There's always the 'hook' of a 'years of' or 'notable anniversary' approach to harness, as well as pressing current issues and future challenges, in terms of developing engaged research projects

Embedding added value

- Community partners need to remember in terms of the arts, that if there's no academic research interest or the proposal doesn't have a 'payback' in terms of, for example, a teaching spin-off or an academic publication, then creative activity can be seen as just an 'interesting add on' and not prioritised

The 'University of the Trees' is a long-term CCANW collaboration with the Social Sculpture Research Unit at Oxford Brookes University, started in 2007. A kit of several 'instruments of consciousness' was developed; the tree sling was used in the forest with numerous local school and community groups.



"Using an artist commissioning service ensures high quality art work and high quality public engagement"

- There's a real opportunity for academics to look to arts organisations and artists to provide the time, as well as the creative knowledge and skills, to help deliver their impact strategies
- Academics and community partners can encourage each other to think about how public engagement with research can link to other agendas, such as widening participation, student employability or knowledge exchange, as well as support impact activities and evidence
- Developing public engagement with research can still be seen as 'time away' from writing publications and applying for funding, so sharing success stories about embedding added value can help make the case

The other underpinning consideration for positive practice is creating the right environment in which relationships can develop – which may involve plenty of coffee and cake...

The following points were shared as key to effective partnership working:

- Ensuring community partners are involved from the very beginning of a project whenever possible
- Coming with an open mind and acknowledging that ideas and knowledge come from both parties
- Understanding relationships develop over time

During a CCANW Soil Culture residency at the Environment and Sustainability Institute in 2014, artist Marissa Benedict worked on research into the response of soil carbon sequestration to climate change. The initial phase of Soil Culture was supported by an Arts and Humanities Research Council grant to Falmouth University. See case study three overpage.

Photo: Zoe Young

- 'Busting assumptions' and building mutual understanding of each other's
 - agendas, expectations and pressures
 - working practices and language
 - drivers and imperatives
 - outcome needs and desired impacts
- Taking time to build
 - credibility on each side
 - a trusting and flexible relationship
 - respect for each other's brand
 - a shared agenda
 - getting the research question right
- Being clear about
 - everyone's roles and responsibilities
 - communication channels and regularity
 - dissemination methods and requirements
- Noting down agreed decisions and action points from meetings for ongoing reference
- Listening well, being flexible, patient, willing to change and adapt to other ways of working
- Making space for creative criticism
- Working to specific events and to agreed deadlines
- Letting others lead at particular moments
- Respecting people and data, being responsible to your organisation and the public
- Recognising the equality of different sorts of input
- Recognising that everyone's participation has to be 'funded' in some way. This needs to include initial explorations and be discussed with expressed mutuality about all the investments (time as well as money) being made

Section Three

Delivering collaborative engaged research: academics and artists working together

What to bear in mind and what works well, based on the experiences of academics from across different University colleges and departments.

CASE STUDY ONE

Night Walks: seeing the light, in the dark

Hannah Guy, Plymouth based visual artist, and Dr Thomas Davies, Associate Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Environment and Sustainability Institute (ESI), University of Exeter, Penryn Campus.

Project outline

St Just residents participated in workshops and night time photography walks facilitated by Hannah and Tom, exploring their experiences of naturally and artificially lit environments. During each walk, Tom talked to participants about the ecological and aesthetic impacts of light pollution. The project culminated in a public exhibition of participants' photographs at the ESI, raising awareness of the issue. The project

was supported with University of Exeter Catalyst seed funding and developed through the ESI-RANE Creative Exchange programme. RANE is Falmouth University's Research in Art, Nature and the Environment research group, led by CCANW's Co-Director, Dr Daro Montag.
www.exeter.ac.uk/esi/research/creativeexchangeprogramme/nightwalks/

CASE STUDY TWO

Leverhulme Trust Artist in Residence

Jonty Lees, Cornwall based artist, and the European Centre for Environment and Human Health, University of Exeter Medical School, Truro.

Project outline

Jonty met with staff and students across the Centre to discuss his and their research, training, other interests and activities. He created different interactions and art works at the Centre; worked with staff and students out in the environment; made presentations at staff seminars; and exhibited work, including an interactive piece about interpretation of data at the Newlyn Gallery, which was captured in photographs and on film.
www.ecehh.org/research-projects/artist-in-residence/

CASE STUDY THREE

CCANW Soil Culture residency

Marissa Benedict, Chicago based visual artist, and Dr Gabriel Yvon-Durocher, Senior Lecturer in Natural Environment, ESI, University of Exeter, Penryn Campus.

Project outline

During this CCANW commissioned residency, part funded by University of Exeter Arts and Culture, Marissa worked closely with Gabriel to engage in depth with his research into the response of soil carbon sequestration to climate change and land use management. She accessed specialist equipment at the ESI labs and in the Geophysics Department. Her work was presented in the ESI Creative Exchange Studio and will be developed for the Soil Culture touring exhibition.
<http://www.ccanw.co.uk/artist-residencies/esi-marissa-benedict.htm>

Drawing on interviews with those involved and review of existing project documentation, the following key benefits and indicators for success are offered in support of transferable good practice in embedding public engagement practice, harnessing the role of artists and art.

KEY BENEFITS FOR...

Academics and other University staff

- enjoying the challenge (and fun) in exploring research vision and impacts in a different way
- appreciating the diversification of interactions within a staff team and ways of communicating research
- seeing research through others' eyes with little or no background in the subject – gaining 'new angles' from both the 'public eye' and an artist's views and interpretation
- being able to check what concepts have been effectively communicated to external audiences through the project process
- developing qualitative evaluation methods for measuring impact in addition to using quantitative tools
- generating new ideas for research
- re-connecting with your own creative personality
- supporting team building including in settings away from the workplace
- developing how to communicate better to diverse audiences, including changing colleagues' understanding and perception of your research as well as successfully reaching wider public audiences, through a range of different media

- being prompted to have a 'walk the walk' approach beyond the 'talk the talk' in terms of direct 'physical' engagement with areas of research, not just studying them
- realising the importance of process and recognising how art works produced can hold the memory of that transferable experience
- making ongoing use of art works to support further conversations about collaboration

The wider college/University

- establishing public engagement as an embedded element within the whole research cycle, including as a key dissemination tool for research ideas and outputs
- growing an integrated presence in the locality
- widening the reach of research to different audiences
- raising community, business, arts and media profile
- attracting interest from potential partners, leading to new collaborations and projects
- developing new ways of communicating research (eg through film) for use in national and international presentations

"The arts can help drive research impact... changing attitudes and behaviours more successfully than a graph"

Artists

- having access to a range of academics, research and specialist equipment
- learning how to engage with academic staff, structures and ways of working as well as contributing other ways of doing things
- appreciating how University research functions at both a local and international level
- opening up scientific and arts processes through collaboration and creative exploration
- realising how creative (non-arts) academic research can be
- working as a catalyst in addition to making, and supporting the making of, art works
- appreciating the wider support from University staff in considering future projects

Community

- meeting and working with an active researcher
- meeting and working with a creative practitioner
- participating in active and creative learning about an issue, as well as contributing to its exploration
- reaching wider numbers of community members through 'people to people' exhibition dissemination

Indicators for success

- ensuring public engagement activity is approved, embraced and embedded, with appropriate support in place
- budgeting realistically to cover all costs (eg including travel, meeting and preparation time)
- clarifying allocation of funding at the start
- establishing clear roles, responsibilities, timelines, tasks and communications
- determining and undertaking necessary liaison with other external parties whose own organisational and communication working practices require consideration
- addressing any 'science vs art' stereotyped perceptions through having an open mind and appetite for learning
- keeping flexible and managing the expectations of all parties, including participants
- working with the University's Public Engagement Manager and marketing and events colleagues as appropriate to ensure public engagement and reach is maximised at different stages of a project...and celebrated and shared

As part of the Cultural Olympiad in 2012, CCANW presented an ambitious programme 'Games People Play' which explored what games can tell us about 'human nature'. Among these were re-creations of war games devised by Guy Debord (shown here) and H.G. Wells (see back cover, off centre) led by Dr Richard Barbrook from the University of Westminster.

Photo: Izla Black

“Visual and performative methods of communication can successfully give voice to those who might otherwise not be able to contribute to research, as well as make findings more accessible”





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