

## Common themes in Beacon funding panel meetings

### Project approach

The awards are for public engagement and consequently it's important to make the public engagement element of the work clear. If public engagement isn't the primary goal of the project, but there is a public engagement element that you would like to have funded by the Beacons for Public Engagement funding streams, and only ask for funding for this part. The Public Engagement Unit here at UCL have a lot of experience in the area and are very happy to help you think through your plans and work out the aspects that have the potential to engage members of the public, just get in touch using the details at the bottom of this document.

The panel has seen several projects in which views from people outside UCL are invited by the project and then go on to influence UCL research. We see these projects in a positive light, as they embody some of the goals of UCL's programme as a Beacon for Public Engagement. At the same time, the panel has also seen several projects in which the main goal is to recruit public participants for research projects (for example in epidemiology and health). This is not the aim of these funding streams.

### Writing the application

As with any grant application, once you've finished writing, we advise that you give your application to someone else to read. The members of the panel are not experts in your field, so explain or remove any technical language and jargon. Too often the panel felt that a good project was struggling to emerge from opaque descriptions. With a large amount of material to read through, the well-written applications really stand out.

When writing, bear in mind that the panel may not know you and are unlikely to be aware of all your skills. Take the opportunity to explain why you are well-placed to deliver the project – explain your previous experience and the skills that you bring. If you need to develop skills in order to deliver the project, consider including training costs or consultants' fees in the application costs.

Be clear about the outcomes and outputs of the project. What exactly is going to happen during the project? Would a timeline or Gantt chart help you to describe what is going to happen and when it's going to happen? Make sure that the panel can understand what you are planning.

### Planning and budget

We recognise that there is a great deal of expertise in the field of public engagement here at UCL, and we're really pleased to be able to support some of it. There are also a lot of opportunities beyond UCL for researchers to get involved in public engagement (for example at Wellcome Collection or the Dana Centre). We sometimes see applications where researchers are putting a lot of effort into finding venues and audiences for a talk where in fact they might be able to save time and effort by slotting their event into an existing programme at another organisation. The Public Engagement Unit is keen to help you with this, so do get in touch with them using the contact details below.

The panel looks positively on projects that engage the public at the planning stage (often called "upstream engagement"). This sometimes means that the later development of the project is unpredictable. Under these circumstances, be clear that this is the case and outline some of the possible paths the project might take.

Value for money will be considered when the project is reviewed by the panel, who will weigh up several factors against the cost of the project. These include the length and depth of impact (will the audience still be thinking about it tomorrow? Next week? Next year? For the rest of their lives?), time spent with the audience, and size of audience. Another key measure is how it will change UCL or its staff or students. All of these factors are important and the panel **does not** calculate the value of each project based on a cost-per-head basis.

Your project may include a request for an item with an unusually high cost – for example a specific piece of equipment or a contractor who brings certain skills. If you are intent on using this person or item, think about justifying this to the panel, perhaps comparing its advantages to any possible alternatives. One question the panel commonly asks is whether applicants have considered hiring technical equipment instead of buying it.

The panel members are experienced in running projects of this kind and are aware of the costs that can be incurred. Consider whether the budget is realistic – whether all of your costs are necessary and if there are other costs you've

not thought of. While using a venue outside UCL is often appropriate, the panel have been surprised by the number of people who choose to hire an external venue where UCL would provide a venue for free. Additionally, given the amount of expertise in UCL and London, it's surprising how many people feel the need to bring in experts from overseas for public engagement projects.

## **Audience**

Of course, the audience is central to your project. There are several questions here that many successful applications address:

- Who are the intended audience? (e.g. are they people local to UCL, from a particular cultural, age, or ethnic group? Are they people with a particular interest in your subject? Are they people who are particularly affected by your research?)
- Thinking about this group of people you want to engage, why do you think they would want to be involved in the project?
- How will they engage with the project? Is the group you want to work with interested in – and able to access – the materials you're preparing? For example, are they interested in watching a video on the internet, or looking at a leaflet (in what language?), or in attending a talk? Are they able to do these things?

Successful applications usually start with the audience in mind, and then work on how this audience's needs can be addressed by a UCL project.

There are, of course, many ways of working with an audience. Different methods will be appropriate for different groups and for different aims. Simply giving a talk can inspire and enthuse a group of people but asking them to take a more active role in a project can create a longer-term impact.

What happens to the audience when the project is over? Do you want their involvement in your work to continue? Development of a meaningful long-term relationship between your project's audience outside UCL and you and your colleagues can have advantages for both groups. The audience's enthusiasm after a project is a great resource, and rather than leaving them 'high and dry', you can deepen the impact of the project by continuing your relationship with them.

## **Evaluation and sharing what you learn**

Evaluation allows you, as well as others in the university, to learn from your projects, avoid replicating unnecessary work, and improve future projects. Dissemination of your work can also inspire others and help you gain recognition for your hard work.

We know that it can often feel as if funders don't use the evaluation you provide, but in the case of the Public Engagement Unit, this isn't the case. One of the five main goals of the Unit is to test different methods of public engagement and to share learning.

We're interested in evaluation of your projects from two sides – we need you to measure the quality of your project, but we also need to find out whether your project has managed to meet its engagement aims – if you said that your audience would be affected in a certain way (for example a change in attitude), has this happened?

If you have any queries about these notes, please don't hesitate to contact the Public Engagement Unit – [publicengagement@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:publicengagement@ucl.ac.uk).