



Designing an event for a policy audience

Why hold an event?

Holding an event aimed at a policy audience can be a very effective way of communicating your research expertise. It can also provide a valuable opportunity for engagement and for developing useful contacts.

The purpose of an event can vary but can include:

- to promote a piece of research or a research centre, or launch a particular activity
- to map stakeholder interests or engage them with your research
- to establish longer-term relationships with policy stakeholders
- to better understand the policy landscape you wish to engage in
- to provide an opportunity for dialogue and debate on a particular issue.

Questions to ask yourself

- Why are you holding the event?
- What do you want the event to achieve?
- How do you plan to engage a policy audience?
- Is the event primarily intended to showcase research, provide an opportunity for dialogue, to build a relationship, or something else?
- What outcomes would you like to see from the event? How can you evaluate these?

What format?

Consider a number of different formats, including:

- **public event** – a larger event, open to all, focused on a policy issue. Usually includes both academic and policy speakers, and audience questions
- **seminar** – a smaller event, usually with an invited audience, with short presentations and a discussion
- **roundtable** – a small, invitation-only event with chaired discussion on a particular issue
- **workshop** – a small, invitation-only event with a particular focus on participants identifying and working through solutions to problems.

Topic

To attract a policy audience, your event should be focused on a policy-relevant issue. Generally speaking, the more topical an issue is or the more your event addresses a policy 'need', the more likely you are to engage policy professionals.

Try to use an engaging but clear title for your event.

Partnering with a policy organisation to co-produce the event, or otherwise involving policy stakeholders (e.g. through an invited speaker), is likely to increase its appeal and impact.

Audience

Try to tailor your event to those audiences you wish to reach (e.g. Government officials, Parliamentary staff, local government, practitioners, non-governmental organisations, particular interest groups). This includes consideration of content, but also practicalities such as timing and location.

Speakers

Academic speakers should be good communicators and able to present research expertise succinctly. You should consider inviting policy speakers (to share their perspective or respond to academic ideas).

Speakers should be willing to participate in open debate and be challenged. Identify a strong chair who can facilitate productive discussion.

Brief all speakers and the chair in advance with information on the audience, purpose of the event, and their role.

Ensure there is a balance of and diversity among speakers at any event.

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Presentations

Ensure that you have engaging speakers who can communicate clearly.

Keep presentations short (ideally five minutes, no more than 10). Focus on findings and key messages. Think about the policy context / policy implications. Be as clear and definite as possible in presenting conclusions.

Content should be accessible: no academic jargon, and don't get bogged down in intellectual frameworks or methodologies.

Discussion

Ensure there is sufficient time for discussion. Promote interaction and try to involve all your invited policymakers. In smaller events, try to ensure the discussion moves towards some sort of conclusion, next steps or recommendations.

Use the event as a networking opportunity for you and your attendees.

Advertising

Target invitations to people with a relevant interest. Use personal invitations to increase attendance. You may need to research and target a particular audience.

Offering access to academic expertise is valuable but it should be timely, relevant, and appropriately communicated.

Take advantage of UCL dissemination channels (e.g. the UCL Public Events website, UCL Grand Challenges, UCL Public Policy, the UCL Events Blog, UCL Events on Twitter; UCL's public events e-newsletter (produced monthly), the Events & Public Engagement YouTube page and UCL's public events listings).

If your event is public, consider using a hashtag so that people can tweet about it and those who are not present can follow the debate on the day.

UCL Public Policy can help you to identify and reach relevant audiences.

Top tips

- Think carefully about speakers
- Presentations of academic research should be results-focused
- Brief the chair and speakers in advance of the event on the audience, purpose and expectations
- Have a running order or agenda and keep to time
- At a smaller event, keep attendees fed and watered during the meeting
- Including informal drinks after (or before) an event can be an additional draw, 'reward' people for attending and enable useful networking and connections to be made.

Follow-up

After the event, you may want to produce a document, e.g. a policy briefing on the issue or a high-level summary of the research. Producing a note or blog of the event can aid its longevity and reach a wider audience.

You should consider evaluating your event (e.g. attendance and participation, or through a feedback form or questionnaire) to see how useful or successful it was and how it might have been improved.

Logistical considerations

To run a successful event, you will need to:

- have access to one or more appropriate rooms
- have access to a contact database that fits your audience profile or a list of appropriate invitees
- devise a budget and ensure you have sufficient funds
- consider dissemination and advertising
- consider what additional support you may need
- build in evaluation of its success (see UCL Public Engagement's general advice on evaluation).

Relevant UCL services

UCL Corporate Events provides a range of support for events planning and management, as well as an UCL Events Toolkit, including room bookings, audiovisual services, digital and creative media services, catering and external suppliers.