



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 balance and diversity of speakers.

Presentations

Ensure that you have engaging speakers (especially if academics).

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 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 [Week@UCL](#) (internal staff newsletter), [UCL Minds](#) (shares the knowledge, insights and ideas of our UCL community and are accessible through a wide range of events and activities, open to all, in and outside of UCL) and Twitter. 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.

Follow-up

You may want to produce outputs associated with or after the event, 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, participation, a feedback form or questionnaire) to see how useful or successful it was and how it might have been improved.

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, and catering.

UCL Room Bookings

The UCL Room & Conference Booking Office is responsible for all centrally bookable space in UCL and will be able to provide you with a full list of venues and their capacities. You can [check availability and book space online](#) or contact the team to discuss your requirements further directly by [email](#) or telephone (x41819).

UCL Audiovisual Centre

The [UCL Audiovisual Centre](#) supports audiovisual and IT facilities in UCL's centrally bookable spaces. It can be contacted by [email](#). The UCL Room Bookings team will be able to advise you about what equipment is available in centrally bookable spaces.

UCL Creative Media Services

UCL [Creative Media Services](#) provides digital and creative media services, including photography, video, design and print. The team should be your point of contact with regards to queries about filming and event live streaming. See key contacts and costs of services.

Catering

Sodexo is UCL's preferred supplier for hospitality and events. See more information and the hospitality brochure; [place orders here](#). For all catering enquiries [email](#) Sodexo or by telephone (x32153).