

How do I fund my public engagement activity?

Guidance for costing a project and securing funding

This guide will help you plan your budget for your engagement activity as well as offer advice for how you can cut costs, where you can find funding and tips for creating successful funding applications.

1 | Create an itemised budget

In order to secure funding, you'll need to know how much money you need. Creating an itemised budget is a good place to start. This will help you:

- Consider how much you need
- Identify areas where you can trim budget down
- Highlight your highest costs

To help you do this, have a look at our example costings sheet on our webpages. This will give you some ideas for what your costs might be as well as some cheaper alternatives.

2 | Review and revise your budget

Funding is often limited (or non-existent!) so you may find you need to trim your budget. Consider what your non-negotiable items are – which are the key expenses that your project cannot do without (perhaps a high-quality video, or a well-catered event).

Then, if needs be, consider how costs in other areas could be reduced.

Venue: Can you take advantage of a free venue? Community centres, libraries and schools may have spaces to hire at low costs and would be convenient for your participants if you are hoping to engage a particular community.

Catering: Can you provide your own catering? Buying some refreshments and snacks from a supermarket can be much cheaper than hiring a caterer.

Materials: If you need specific materials for demonstrations and activities, you may be able to borrow them. Get in touch with the [societal engagement champion](#) in your department as they may know of materials specific to your needs. If not contact the [societal engagement team](#) to see whether they are available elsewhere in the College.

People power: Do you need volunteers? What about professional services such as graphic design, videography or photography? There may be people in your team who have skills in relevant areas outside of work. You can also see if there are any students around the College willing to work with you to gain experience.

Partnerships: Working with others can strengthen your project by providing access to skills, materials, venues, volunteers and other resources. Consider if you could benefit from partnering with an organisation or freelancer.

3 | Internal funding

Imperial can support and fund some public engagement activities. It's worth asking those in your department if there is any money available. Check with your manager, Head of Department or [societal engagement champion](#).

If your engagement activity is suitable for one of our [Lates](#) events or for the [Festival](#), there may be some funds available for the resources you need – check with your contact within the public engagement team. Participating in the Lates or Festival can also be a great

way to kick-start your idea with professional guidance. If it's successful, you can evidence this and use it as leverage to apply for bigger funding pots to expand your project.

For other projects you can apply for our annual [Societal Engagement Seed Fund](#) – for new projects that will engage the public with Imperial research in innovative ways.

4 | External funding

There are a [wide variety of funding sources](#) outside of Imperial.

When applying for external funding remember to check you are eligible, check your project meets the funder's aims and check you've included the right evidence in your application. Below are some tips taken from funders' criteria, application forms and guidance documents.

1. Clearly identify the **outcomes** you hope to achieve with the project. Funders are looking for clearly articulated aims – not just what you would like to do, but **why** you would like to do this engagement and what you hope it will achieve. Think about outcomes not just for the public you are interacting with but also yourself, your work, team and research area.

“Explain what you expect to happen:

- *Articulate anticipated outputs, outcomes, and potential impacts from your work.*
- *Consider the outcomes and impacts on the grant holder, their team, institution, and partners, alongside the audience.”*

[STFC Public Engagement Awards](#)

2. Most funders are looking for projects **which involve two-way communication**, where audiences are not only being informed but are also being actively heard. See the [IA2 Spectrum of Public Engagement](#) for more details.

“The engagement activities [must] encourage two-way engagement. For example, audiences and/or collaborators are involved in the development of the engagement process and/or involved in an Imperial research process – rather than solely being a recipient of the dissemination of our research and/or engagement activity.”

[Imperial Societal Engagement Seed Fund](#)

3. **Show the work you've already put in.** Evidence any skills you have that will be required for the project and let funders know what you have been involved with already. Are there any partnerships that you've already confirmed? Do you have any interest to participate from your chosen audience already?

“The panel will also want to know whether you have buy in from your partners, whether you have spoken to them about your project and whether they are willing to contribute their time, skills or resources towards it.”

[The Royal College of Pathologists Public Engagement Innovation Grant Scheme](#)

4. **Target your audience.** Make sure you identify a clear group of non-specialists who you hope to engage with. Often funders are looking for applicants to be more specific than 'general public'. Can you target a new audience group that is normally overlooked? Or perhaps a group experiencing a form of disadvantage? Funders may be particularly interested if you plan to work with a group they do not normally reach.

“We are interested in projects that reach diverse and underrepresented audiences including communities in the top 25% most deprived neighbourhoods in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and that engage with engineers and publics of different genders, ages and ethnic backgrounds.”

[Royal Academy of Engineering](#)

5. Tailor your activity. Ensure your activity is well-designed and tailored to your target audience. Design the activity with your audience's interests and needs in mind rather than trying to cater for all. For more information on tailoring your activity to your audience see our resource on choosing an audience to engage with.

"The best applications tend to have a clear audience (i.e. not 'the general public') and show why the proposed project is relevant to that audience, rather than taking a 'build it and they will come' approach."

[Wellcome Public Engagement Fund](#)

6. Include an evaluation strategy. Showing you have solid plans for evaluating your activity will appeal to funders because they will know you are being reflective, taking your methods seriously and that you will be able to evidence that the aims of the project were achieved. For help evaluating public engagement activities, see our resource on evaluating your engagement activity.

"How will you know whether you have met your objectives? The panel will be looking for evidence that you have thought about the evaluation of your project... What evaluation methods or tools will you use? You should tell the panel how you intend to collect data for your evaluation."

[Institute of Physics Public Engagement Grant Scheme](#)

7. Make your project sustainable. Funders want to know they are getting the most value for their money, so demonstrate how your project will have legacy and consider any multiplier effects. How will you share your learning, such as your evaluation findings or your experiences? Will the activities be able to continue in some capacity? Could the project be rolled out to other contexts or with new groups? And what will happen to the relationships you have built through the project?

"The panel will also look favourably at evidence that you have considered the legacy of your project and given due consideration to any future development and sustainability of the project beyond the grant period."

[Royal Society of Chemistry Outreach Fund](#)

Multiplier Effect

A multiplier effect is anything that will allow the impact of the project to expand beyond the main activities of the project. For example, could you use the knowledge gained from your activity to train others e.g. researchers, doctors or teachers?

5 | What if I can't get funding?

Try again! If your application for funding was not accepted, ask for feedback. Tweak your proposal and see if there is another source of funding you can apply to in the meantime.

Downsize! If you can't get the funding to match your project, go back to your budget and start thinking of alternatives. Is there a smaller part of the project that you could pilot as a 'proof of concept', enabling you to collate evidence for an even stronger proposal.

Plenty of great public engagement activities start small. A small pilot can be the stepping stone to future expansion. Once people are aware of what you're doing and can see it in action that can bring buy-in from colleagues or stakeholders. Evaluation can evidence that your idea works and is worth investment. Build your momentum and then try again for bigger pots of funding when you're ready.

Case study: I-Cell (led by Neil Dufton, NHLI)

What is it?

The aim of I-Cell is to help people vocalise about science through symbols rather than words. The idea began as an activity for the Imperial Festival, using basic materials such as a hand-made spin wheel.



Why is it a good example?

Neil later successfully applied for funding through the Imperial Societal Engagement Seed Fund which will help him expand his concept into an interactive game for students. He is trialling digital aspects of the idea and is hoping to put together a larger funding proposal in the near future. This is a great example of how a project can start small and build momentum!

Ten questions to ask yourself when applying for funding:

1. Who is your target audience? (Not ‘general public’)
2. How will you reach them? (Which partners might you work with?)
3. What are the impacts & benefits to your public group, you/your team and more widely?
4. What are the key deliverables and milestones? (Your plans can be flexible)
5. What activities will you carry out, and are they suited to your audience?
6. How will you draw on available support? (I.e. within your institution)
7. How will you evaluate and capture the impact you have?
8. Is your engagement specific and directly linked to your research? (For funding tied to research projects)
9. Are you planning two-way engagement from early on in the research cycle?
10. What is your experience in this type of engagement? (Try to be brief and specific!)

Further resources – Let us know of others!

Wellcome blog

<https://wellcome.ac.uk/news/what-were-looking-public-engagement-fund-applications>

This is relating to Wellcome’s large Public Engagement Fund. This is a useful place to look for examples of what has already been supported through the scheme, what successful proposals look like, and their priorities for future funding.

The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement provide a list of many funding opportunities for different areas of research

<https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/funding>

Why not take a look at some of the previous winners of the Societal Engagement Seed Fund?