A HOW TO GUIDE
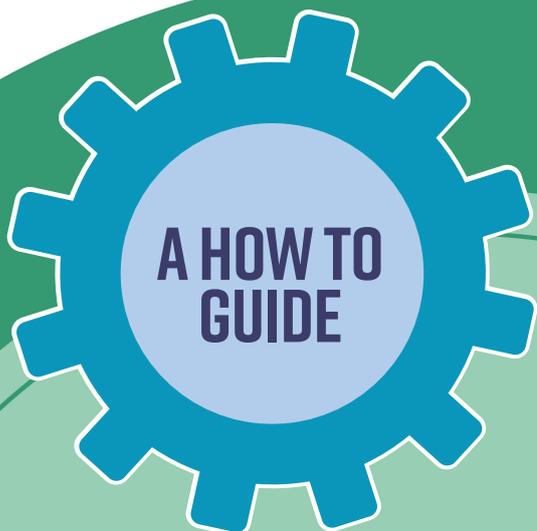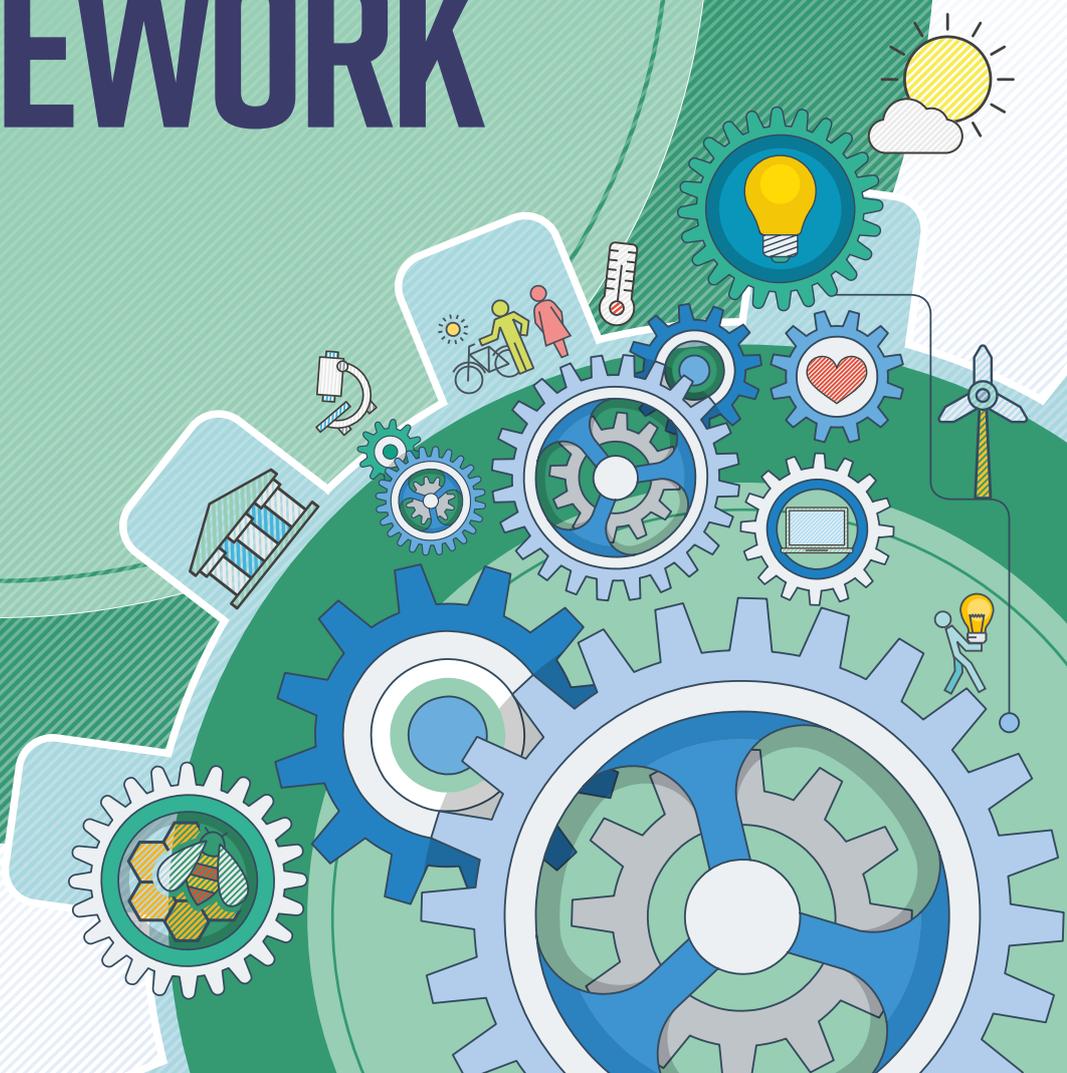
CampusEngage

ENGAGED RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

2022

Engaged Research

Engaged research describes a wide range of research approaches and methodologies that share a common interest in collaboration with societal partners. Engaged research aims to improve, understand, or investigate an issue of public interest or concern, including societal challenges and sustainable development goals. It is advanced ***with*** societal partners rather than ***for*** them.

Societal partners include service users, product users, policymakers, civil and civic society organisations, industry partners, members of the public, and other relevant stakeholders.

About this Guide

This How-To Guide was informed by a literature review and year-long national and international consultation with over 350 researchers, policy makers, funding agency personnel and societal partners (Campus Engage, 2017). The consultation led to the development of a national report, Engaged Research – Society & Higher Education Working Together to Address Grand Societal Challenges (2018) which offered initial how-to guidance to research teams.

In 2022, Campus Engage, the Irish Universities Association, the Higher Education Authority, and the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning partnered to advance training and resources on engaged research and innovation for societal impact. Content was informed by the latest European and Irish policy for research innovation, including Horizon Europe and national policies and funding strategies. The Project Advisory Group included representation from Enterprise Ireland, the Irish Research Council, Science Foundation Ireland, the Health Research Board, Health Research Charities Ireland, the Royal Irish Academy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Technological Higher Education Association, as well as researchers, academic and professional services staff from Trinity College Dublin, University of Limerick, University College Dublin, National University of Ireland Galway, Maynooth University, Waterford Institute of Technology, Dublin City University, Technological University Dublin, and University College Cork.

What is Engaged Research in Practice?

There are numerous discipline-specific terms used to describe engaged research. For example, some researchers use the terms 'applied' or 'real world', whilst others prefer the term 'community-based' or 'participatory'. Engaged research is not about the recruitment of research study participants, or simply raising awareness of research through online or print media, publications of research findings, and outreach activities. For engaged research to be authentic and ethical, all members of the research team should meaningfully and actively collaborate across the stages of a research life cycle. Given differences in terminologies across sectors and disciplines, the following definitions have been developed by Campus Engage:

- **Engagement:** Refers to building relationships, raising awareness, empowering societal partners in and through research, and other activities focused on mobilising knowledge. Engagement activities are required for both participation and involvement in the research process.

- **Involvement:** Refers to co-production of activities across across all stages of the research and innovation process – and within all levels of project activities and governance – from agenda setting, to design, implementation, dissemination, and evaluation activities.

- **Participation:** Refers to the recruitment of study participants and their collaboration in a research project.

While every research project is unique, the Engaged Research Framework presented in this Guide encourages researchers to identify opportunities for research stakeholders to be involved at each stage of the project lifecycle, including in advance of making funding applications.

In real world applications, engaged research is messier and not as linear as depicted in the diagram shown in this document. Thus, the Engaged Research Framework, like Beck's Tube map of London, is not a perfect representation; instead, it is a simplified model designed to encourage researchers to develop a clear and comprehensible plan for who is engaged across the lifecycle of the research project — when, why and how.

The Framework offers key reflective questions that correspond with research activities. These are designed to reduce tokenism and advance co-created research. Utilise this Framework to create a thoughtful research plan that involves research stakeholders relevant to the enquiry and to confirm that the engaged research methods selected align with the aims and objectives of the project.

Engaged Research Framework

Co-Generating Ideas

People who are affected by research have a right to inform that research. Public engagement and involvement in research are based on this idea. Engaged research is advanced with societal partners rather than for them. When ideas are generated and a research plan is taking shape, there are opportunities to engage. Meeting with key stakeholders including members of the public, technical experts, service providers, service users, community organisations, other researchers, policymakers, industry liaisons and funders (as applicable) allows for maximum diversity of input as the research question takes shape. This engagement not only builds capacity for the project but ensures its relevancy. At this stage, collaboration with partners includes the following activities:

- Identify key stakeholders and collaborators for whom the research is relevant and engage in discussions in order to refine the research questions / hypothesis.
- Identify the key issue of public concern or the societal challenge that is relevant to the research team and its potential partners.
- Undertake literature, data and policy reviews to map the research, practice and/or policy landscapes.
- Draft the research question / hypothesis and validate its ethical implications with key stakeholders and societal partners.
- Refine the research question / hypothesis through dialogue with key stakeholders and societal partners.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Who has informed the development of the research question and does this include a diversity of perspectives?

Which experiences have informed the development of the research question?

Why does the research team believe they are asking a central research question or posing a valuable hypothesis?

Research Planning & Design

There are dozens of methods for engaged research which span dialogue, consultation, collaboration, involvement, empowerment and direct decision-making. Whether the research project is large or small, the techniques chosen should ultimately advance the goals set forth by the research team, including societal partners, and, if the research is funded, the objectives of the awarding body or programme. The engagement methods selected should focus efforts, encourage dialogue and debate, build new knowledge, address key issues, and result in research that is relevant, ethical, timely and beneficial to the community. This includes the following activities:

- Identify relevant funding sources.
- Confirm the research team, including collaborators and societal partners, clarifying roles and responsibilities.
- Develop the budget and confirm that resource allocations align with roles and responsibilities for the entire research team, including societal partners.
- Utilise the Campus Engage Planning for Impact Framework with research partners to confirm inputs, activities, outputs, desired outcomes and potential impacts, along with the project's timeline and milestones. Each partner should identify and agree on how they will work to maximise the impact of the research.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:
Whom will the research team engage with, when, why and how often?

Which engagement methods align with the aims and objectives of the research?

Have key stakeholders, for whom the research is relevant, been invited to inform the research plan?

Have appropriate resources been allocated to support the engagement methods and the scope of work assigned to all team members team members and stakeholders?

What steps has the research team taken to encourage collaboration with others?

How has the research team acknowledged and actively integrated different sectoral, disciplinary, demographic, and/or ethical perspectives?

Proposal Development

Proposal development offers opportunities for engagement and involvement across sectors. This may include focus groups or workshops with the research team to develop ideas; site visits with organisations and service providers to secure letters of support and to identify roles on project tasks; and interviews with other key stakeholders, such as community and industry partners, to document the challenges, opportunities and constraints of the proposed research effort. This stage focuses on how the research will be undertaken, by whom, and results in a proposal which clearly outlines roles and responsibilities. At this stage, engaged research opportunities can be valuable for the following activities:

- Finalise the research question / hypothesis and develop the conceptual and methodological frameworks.
- State the aims and objectives of the research and clearly explain how the engagement approaches selected align.
- Refine the Campus Engage Planning for Impact Framework to confirm inputs, activities, outputs desired outcomes and potential impacts, along with the project's timeline and milestones, with clear pathways to impact established with each partner.
- Document support for this project across key stakeholders. This might include public or professional service providers or users, product developers or users, policy makers, civil and civic society organisations, other researchers, community or industry partners, students, members of the public, and other relevant stakeholders.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Is the research team appropriate for a successful project from design to completion, including dissemination and knowledge mobilisation?

Does each member of the research team have clear roles and responsibilities, including advisory or governance duties?

Is involvement adequately resourced across the project budget and timeline?

Does the allocation of resources align with the responsibilities outlined for all project partners?

Will societal partners be joint grant holders or co-applicants with higher education research institutions in funding applications?

How has the research team addressed possible bias, for example, with regard to gender, race and class, across all stages of the research cycle?

Has the research team considered all ethical implications of the proposed research?

Project Kick-Off

At this stage, the research team should include representation from various sectors, including societal partners, who have informed the research methods and operational plans. If the research is dependent on receiving funding to proceed, given the length of time between proposal and award, it is important for the research team to continue to work to identify complementary research, data and other activities which may engage new or seldom-heard populations, challenge the hypothesis, or otherwise refine the research approach. The team will need to address how others provide input during the project. This includes identifying the opportunities for dialogue that the project provides and whether information generated by/within the project is accessible and usable for all stakeholders. As the project launches, the engaged research team will collaborate on the following activities:

- Evaluate the methodology, research design, ethics, participant settings, recruitment, instruments, methods, measures, assessments, procedures and quality assurances.
- Negotiate and finalise the research agreement with the funding agency and host institution or organisation, if applicable.
- Set up the project's administrative mechanisms and agree on the operational plan, timeline and reporting schedule with the research team, funders, if applicable, and host institution or organisation.
- Secure ethical approvals, as appropriate.

- Advance the data collection, management and analysis plans with the research team, funders and host institution or organisation.
- Advance the public engagement and communications plans with the research team, funders and host institution or organisation.
- Agree on the ownership of Intellectual Property, access to data, and address other contractual and proprietary issues, bearing in mind power differentials between partners.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Are the research methods chosen compatible with a collaborative and participatory approach?

How are different sectoral and/or disciplinary perspectives integrated?

How do project activities integrate the expertise and knowledge of societal partners?

Do all members of the research team have access to the resources needed for their involvement?

Does the research team possess the appropriate skill-sets to facilitate authentic, ethical involvement, engagement and collaboration?

Is training required to encourage authentic involvement and collaboration?

How is the research team creating an environment conducive to responsible research and innovation?

Data Collection & Management

Researchers occasionally underestimate how societal partners might contribute at the data collection and management stage. This should be explored when initially developing the project. The systematic collection and management of data can be achieved with diverse stakeholders when appropriate training and data protection protocols are in place. Rather than consider data collection as a discrete stage unrelated to public involvement, consider how collaboration may be initiated and sustained during this stage. The research team should have a clearly-stated rationale for who will participate in this stage and this must align with the aims and objectives of the project in order for it be meaningful. This may include the following activities:

- Implement quality control and data protection procedures in agreement with ethical approvals, as required, including safeguarding data and anonymity.
- Collect, clean and screen the data in agreement with the project's data collection, management and analysis plans.
- Transcribe and delete any recorded material, where applicable, and implement data management protocols.
- Test the reliability and validity of the data.
- Store data in agreement with the project's data management plan.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Do data collection and management plans align with the project's goals for involvement?

Have societal partners been approached to help gather and manage data or provide the public perspective during this stage?

What supports and safeguards are needed to encourage greater participation in data collection and management? This might require training, protocols, insurance, indemnity and confidentiality agreements.

Does the approach meet the transparency, security and accountability requirements set forth in General Data Protection Regulations and policies?

Data Analysis

Recognising that societal partners can make useful and meaningful contributions to research is at the heart of engaged research, especially when it comes to data analysis. An open and distributed approach to data analysis reduces researcher privilege and brings a diversity of perspectives to the process of analysis. Genuine involvement at this stage of research must be conceptualised, strategically planned and then recognised as central to the success of the project. This is where involvement becomes progressive, resulting in co-produced knowledge across stakeholders and sectors, which is communicated through diverse voices and outlets. Activities may include:

- Analyse the data.
- Manage and address missing data.
- Develop analytical categories and, if appropriate, undertake modelling.
- Interpret, critique and share the findings, encouraging research partners to communicate through their networks, maximising the reach.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Which stakeholders can be effectively supported to analyse data?

What systems are in place to encourage data analysis by societal partners?

How might the research team further encourage data analysis by partners?

Do any barriers to data analysis exist that must be overcome to achieve the desired impact?

Data Access

Offering others the body of evidence collected, for them to meta-analyse or review, allows previous findings to be critically evaluated. It provides opportunities for comparative analysis of distinct datasets and systematic reviews of data. Providing access to data (not just findings), also allows for unexpected results as interpretations are challenged or exploited in different fields. Within the confines of confidentiality and anonymisation, open data proponents note that public monies used to support research should advance public knowledge and accelerate discoveries. To encourage involvement, research teams will undertake the following activities:

- Anonymise the data, as applicable.
- Create a clear process for how data can be openly accessed in alignment with the project's data collection, management and access plans.
- Publicly archive the data and research instruments, as desired.
- Promote the use of data, instruments, protocols and other project deliverables to a range of audiences, in user-friendly and accessible formats.
- Record requests to access the data and consider whether these requests may spin out new projects or collaborations.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Which research data and/or instruments can be accessed and utilised by others?

Which research data and/or instruments can be placed into an open-access repository?

Which open access repository will the research team use?

Are systems in place to capture data access requests?

Is it possible for the research team to engage with other who are accessing the data?

How will the impact of data access be understood over time?

What efforts will be made to promote the FAIR use of data so that it is findable, accessible, inter-operable, and reuseable?

Knowledge Co-Production & Exchange

The goal is to ensure that the knowledge is co-produced and communicated in a timely manner through clear, accessible and usable formats, appropriate to each audience. It is at this stage that research partners must negotiate internal differences that may arise regarding how to synthesise data into agreed findings and/or recommendations. When it comes to co-production of findings, the research team might also consider how initial findings might be brought to the attention of policymakers, practitioners, service providers and other relevant stakeholders to refine and develop these ideas further. Research partners may each take different roles in the co-production of outputs, depending on their areas of expertise and the stakeholders they wish to engage. Knowledge exchange activities should take place at various times throughout the project with practitioners, policymakers, members of the public and with others for whom the research is relevant. For activities to be engaging, they must enable dialogue and participation. When planning knowledge exchange activities across the project timeline, think about the language used and the media chosen. Are there other disciplines to liaise with in order to develop fun, unconventional or unusual events? When reviewing the dissemination activities planned for the project, which methods are used and which audiences are reached? Activities may include:

- Release project reports, research policy briefs and other deliverables, encouraging dissemination through societal partners directly to their networks.
- Produce and issue publications to both academic and non-academic audiences, as applicable, identifying opportunities to reach communities for whom the research is relevant.
- Host dissemination and knowledge brokerage events.
- Meet with stakeholders to share findings to promote evidence-informed policies, services and processes.
- Map research findings to policy documents at local, regional, national and international levels, as applicable.
- Present findings at conferences and other events.
- Engage with the media through press releases, interviews and opinion pieces.
- Issue newsletters or an annual review for multi-year projects.
- Provide online resources and website updates, including social media posts and tagged campaigns, as appropriate.
- Identify technology outputs, intellectual property and the potential for commercialisation activities.
- Develop proposals for spinout projects, utilising this Engaged Research Framework.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

What knowledge will be co-produced, and how will the co-production happen?

How will this knowledge be shared and in which formats, as these are likely to vary among the diversity of research partners and their different networks?

How will the research team encourage dialogue, debate or consultation on draft and finalised research with service and product users, providers, policymakers and members of the public?

Is it possible to bring together relevant stakeholders to challenge or discuss preliminary findings?

Are there existing local, regional, national or international events, and/or might the research team run such events, to encourage engagement with important stakeholders, as the research team disseminates findings?

Which networks and communications channels will be used to disseminate findings?

What mechanisms are in place to solicit and receive feedback from others?

Are there any opportunities to ensure knowledge exchange with seldom-heard populations?

Knowledge Mobilisation & Translation

Knowledge mobilisation refers to the use of research results, including knowledge synthesis and translation into other co-produced activities. Knowledge mobilisation makes use of the knowledge that has been co-produced and advances something new in the world. This might be an evidence-informed public policy, an improved service, or the development of a product. Knowledge mobilisation is the process of connecting the research, the research team, and societal partners to translate the research in usable ways, thereby resulting in impact. The practice of knowledge mobilisation is not linear or unidirectional. It requires engagement between relevant stakeholders to recognise what information is needed and how knowledge might be used. As a research team considers knowledge mobilisation and the translation of research into new polices, products and services, they should also be mindful of the human talent that can be attracted, the infrastructure that can be created, the knowledge produced, the data and instruments that can be accessible, the relationships and networks that can be built, and other supports that can become available because the research is in the world. Activities aimed at knowledge mobilisation may include:

- Engagement with intermediary organisations, such as knowledge and technology transfer offices, business incubators, and other supports which assist researchers and social innovators to translate their knowledge for public good.
- Engagement to advance collaborations, consortia, and teaming opportunities.
- Networking, mentoring activities and coaching to exchange knowledge in formats aligned with users' needs.
- Meetings with potential knowledge users and co-creators.
- Hosting events to showcase research findings and their implications in local, regional, national and/or international contexts.
- Development of outputs based on users' identified needs, such as audience-specific policy and research briefs.
- Preparation of manuscripts, print and electronic publications aimed at furthering the use of co-produced knowledge.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Who is this knowledge valuable to?

Who might use this knowledge to inform policies, programmes, products or services?

Who needs this information in order to perform better, or to advocate for better performance?

What relationships are required in order to ensure the right people, organisations, and institutions know about and can access research findings?

What practice-based problems exist that this research might inform?

Which policies, programmes or services could be improved by integrating this research?

What practices or behaviours might be changed based on integrating this research?

Have licenses, patents, and intellectual property protections been secured?

How will relevant policymakers and decision-makers know about these research findings?

Could knowledge, attitudes and skills, whether technical or professional, be shared beyond this research project?

Impact Assessment

Impact may be broadly defined as a change or a benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life. Reviewing progress and assessing research impact requires monitoring of outcomes against the intended research aims and targets, which should have been collaboratively agreed at the start of the research design process. This stage offers opportunities for engagement as the research team decides which information needs to be collected, when, how and by whom. Once collected, the information is reviewed and decisions are made by the research team on how to act on that information. Strategically evaluating impact can deepen ongoing engagement by assuring partners and funders of the project's merit and by using lessons learned to strengthen future engagement and involvement. In order to assess the impact of a research programme, consider the Campus Engage Impact Categories and relevant indicators:

- New Knowledge Creation and Mobilisation
- Economic
- Environment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Public Policy, Practice and Services

- Industry Innovation
- Human Capacity
- Internationalisation
- Culture
- Partnerships for Change

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Reflecting on the Campus Engage Impact Categories, how might the research team capture success across relevant impact categories, using both quantitative and qualitative data?

Recognising that outcomes and longer-term impacts may not be captured by final project reporting, how might impact be understood over time?

Which assessment framework governs the research project and which indicators must the research team collect data for?

Which data would the research team, and the research participants or stakeholders, like to collect regarding research impact? How will they capture unintended consequences?

How will the research team capture, manage and report on research impact data?

How and when will the research team investigate research impact?

How will the research team articulate research impact?

Can project partners evaluate the project against their own strategic documents or institutional / organisational performance metrics?

Are partners' contributions recognised and disseminated through the project's main communications channels?

Project Close Out

As the project closes, engagement can continue through the networks developed by the team and through potential spin out projects. Over the course of the project, new research needs may have been identified with partners. Reflecting on the engagement and involvement methods chosen and why these were selected will help the research team to deliver good practices and possibly encourage the use of new methods moving forward. Ultimately, engagement supports relationship-building over time. A key consideration at individual, organisational and institutional levels is how engagement can be sustained in the periods between funded projects and in the absence of third-party funding. Opportunities for engagement exist within the following activities:

- Complete final reporting.
- Update and share the team contact database, as applicable, in compliance with data protection regulations.
- Identify potential spin out projects and/or new collaborations.
- Develop proposals for spinout projects utilising this Engaged Research Framework.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Will engagement be sustained once the project ceases?

What expectations have been set with research partners as this project closes?

What steps have been taken to ensure post-project sustainability of outcomes?

Where will information about the research project and team live post-funding and when the project is officially closed?
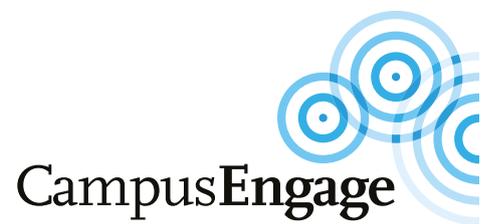
Engaged Research Checklist

As you refine your research plan to develop a clear and thoughtful approach to engagement and involvement, ask the following questions to see whether you might have overlooked opportunities:

- Has the research question / hypothesis been formulated in dialogue with stakeholders from whom the research is relevant?

- If the research is addressing a societal challenge or issue of public concern, has the research team engaged and involved those stakeholders most affected?

- Does the proposed research tap the expertise and lived experiences of both researchers and collaborators, delivering a robust and diverse research team?

- Is the research team engaging and involving others in an ethical way through inclusive, participatory methodologies in all stages of the research and innovation process, from agenda setting and funding applications, to design, implementation, dissemination and evaluation activities?

- Has the research team considered equality, diversity, inclusion and cultivating a sense of belonging throughout all stages of the research cycle?

- Does the design of the research ensure that all members of the research team are clear about the extent of their collaboration, their respective roles and responsibilities, what they can expect to gain from the research, and what they will be expected to contribute?

- Is the allocation of funds appropriate and equitable for the roles and responsibilities assigned to each teammate, and is the research team cognisant of the power and resource differentials between partners?

- Can the research data, instruments, and/or findings be openly accessed and utilised by researchers and other stakeholders in order to further investigate or address the societal challenge or issue of public concern?

- Has the research team taken appropriate actions to encourage collaboration and establish effective working relationships, acknowledging and actively integrating different sectoral, disciplinary, and demographic perspectives?

- Will the entire research team be recognised and acknowledged in research activities and outputs?

- Will this research result in positive steps towards addressing the issue of public concern or societal challenge?

- Does this research increase the relevance, acceptance and uptake of innovation or help foster lasting changes in social practices, therefore, acting as a system changer?

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