RUNNING A COMPETITION

This guide is based on the experiences NCCPE staff have of running the latest national Engage Competition that saw 230 entries of public engagement with research projects from universities across the UK.

Contents

Why run a competition?

Why would you like to run a competition or awards scheme? What's the overarching aim and purpose?

Here are some reasons you might want to run a public engagement competition:

- To recognise and celebrate excellence in engagement (or engaged research)
- To discover high quality public engagement practice
- To raise awareness of innovative practice across all engagement purposes, participants, and disciplines
- To share practices in ways that can drive change and improve quality
- To reward excellence in public engagement to encourage those already involved and to stimulate the interest of those not yet involved
- To demonstrate the multifaceted impacts that engagement can have on the participants, the researchers and the research

Being very clear about your purpose will help your planning process.

Planning

Depending on the scale of your competition, you may wish to start planning 8-12 months before your competition opens for entries. Choose the time of year that will suit your audiences – for example out-of-term-time may not be a good time to run a competition for a Higher Education (HE) or schools audience.

- Be clear about the **purpose** of your competition – what do you want to achieve? What will entrants get out of it? Who do you want to enter, and why?
- Decide what the **budget** is for your competition
- **Research** other competitions and award schemes
- Consider different sorts of competition (research-focused competition, image competition) and decide on your **format**
- What **information** do you need from entrants in their applications?
- Create a **project plan** and a **timeline** (with some contingency time planned in!)
- Assign **roles** in your team
- Who could be a **judge or assessor?**
- What **criteria** will you use to assess entries?
- Decide whether you will provide **feedback** to entries and in what form
- Book in regular **meetings** with people involved in organising the competition
- If you're running a final event for your competition, start researching **venues**

Promotion

There are 2 phases of promotion to consider when planning a competition. Firstly, you want to promote it to people who might want to submit an entry. Once entries are in, you enter the second phase of sustaining interest from a wider audience.

Don't forget to include promotion of your competition in the project timeline, or create a separate communications plan.

You might want to think about what 'look' and 'feel' you would like your competition promotional materials to have. Would you like a competition logo? What are the main colours you'll be using? How do these incorporate with your existing brand/resources? Talk to in-house designers if you have them.

Web presence

Dedicated web space for your competition is vital. Create a simple url to your competition information and make sure this is easily accessible from your homepage and regularly updated. (It's helpful to include the date and time a page has been updated.) You might want to include the following in your web content:

- The competition entry form
- Terms and conditions
- Eligibility information
- Information about your judges and competition process
- Clear deadlines for when the competition closes and when winners will be announced
- The criteria for assessing entries
- Contact details

By running a competition, you may see you traffic to your website increase. Make the most of this and consider ways of promoting other services and support you could offer to this audience.

Other ways you can promote your competition could include:

- Moo cards – these are small business cards that you can hand out to colleagues, contacts and at any events you attend or run in the lead up to your competition. Keep them simple by just including the title of your competition, a url to find out more information and a tag line if you have one. You can choose different designs to make them look enticing!
- Social media – Twitter can be a great way to promote your competition to a wide audience and to build excitement and momentum. Copy in key people who would be interested in the competition and ask them to retweet to their followers. We created a logo and some graphics for use on our website and other competition documents.
- Newsletters/e-newsletters – if you send out a regular newsletter, include information about the competition and how people can get involved
- Events – if you run events or training, include a slide at the end of your presentation promoting your competition
- Networks – use your contacts; ask people who have access to your target group to advertise your competition on their websites and in their newsletters. Can you make use of any networks that already exist e.g. on jiscmail?

Process

Assessment criteria

What process do you need to put into place in order to assess entries fairly and accurately? How will you assess the quality of the entries? Keep referring back to the original purpose of your competition and be very clear about how you will do this. The NCCPE competition asked entries to evidence how their project demonstrated 5 overarching criterion: Intention, Mutual Benefit, Innovation, Quality and Sustainability. You can find out more about the NCCPE competition criteria here.

Categories

Will your competition have more than one winner? If so, some questions to consider are what will your categories be and how does this affect how people enter the competition? How does this affect how entries are judged? How do you create categories that make the most of the entries? How do you ensure that you don't have a huge number of entries in one category and none in another?

Judges

How will your competition entries be judged? A public vote? A judging panel?

Depending on the type of competition you are running and how many entries you are likely to receive, you may want to consider having 2 rounds of the judging process. If you have a high number of entries, an initial phase of assessment could be carried out, with the top x number of entries then being sent to the final judging panel.

Who do you want to judge your competition and how many judges would you like to have? Having people of high esteem in your discipline/area on your judging panel will add status to your competition and help with promotion. Consider a broad spread of judges to cover all the aspects of your competition. You will also need to consider whether any of the judges have conflicts of interest with your entries and how you will deal with this.

Some top tips for looking after your judges:

- Book time in your judges' diaries for assessing entries with as much notice as possible
- Be really clear about what they can expect from you and what you expect from them, including absolute deadlines for when you need scores/assessments returned by
- Promote their involvement through your competition promotion
- Invite them to your final event/awards event
- Ask them for feedback on how they found the process of judging

Questions to consider: How will you spread the entries between the judges? How will you send the entries to judges? How long will you give judges to score entries? Do your judges need to meet in person? Will they be on panels or judging as individuals?

Forms

Terms & Conditions
You will need to put together terms and conditions for your competition. The Independent offers some advice on this. If your organisation has a legal department, ask them to help.

Eligibility criteria
This will be specific to your competition and organisation. Be really clear about eligibility in your competition information or you'll end up having to answer lots of queries about this. Try to consider every possible scenario that your entrants will be coming from – can they find everything they need to know?

Competition entry form
Looking back at your competition aims and type of competition, carefully consider what information you need from applicants to fairly and thoroughly assess entries. Don't waste time for you and your applicants by collecting information you won't use. Will it be easy for judges to assess based on the information provided on the entry form? What do you need to see evidenced to be able to identify quality entries over weaker ones? Once created, test and pilot your entry form, incorporate feedback and test again.

Assessment form
How will your judges score entries? Again, test the process and incorporate feedback. Would you like your judges to score entries as individuals, or groups or as a panel? Do your judges need to meet in person?

Prizes
If you are offering a prize to your winning entries, what prize would tempt members of your audience to enter?

There are different types of prizes you could offer (depending on your budget):

- Prizes donated by sponsors
- Monetary prizes
- Gifts-in-kind prizes
- Experience prizes e.g. a trip to CERN, BBC tour

- Awards, trophies, certificates
- Profiling of your winner - can you give them a prominent position on your website, in a magazine you produce, a prime position at an event?

Winners

How will you announce winners? Will you have a final event? If so, remember to tell your finalists with as much notice as possible when the event will take place to ensure they can make it. Will your winners find out before the event they've won, or at the event? If you are going to announce your winners online, how can you build momentum, when's the best time in the year/week/day to do this? Write a press release that you can issue immediately after your winners are announced and if you hold an awards event, make sure you have some photos available immediately after to add to your press release whilst the information is still new and fresh!

Final event

For the NCCPE Engage Competition, we held a final event to announce and celebrate the winners of the competition. The purpose of this event was to reward and recognise winners, to raise the profile of some of the good practice public engagement that is taking place, to encourage others, to inform others and to continue on our mission of creating a culture of public engagement in higher education. If you are debating running an event, consider what your objectives would be and what it would achieve. A high profile event can be costly!

Competition legacy

Running a competition doesn't have to be a one-off event, it can provide a wealth of content and learning. When planning your competition, consider how you can make the most of your entries and contacts with them. Can they provide case studies for your website? Can you use submitted images in your competition promotion? Can you run a training event around the competition? Could entrants run an event in their organisation showcasing their entry? How can you use this year's entries and winners to promote next year's competition?

Top tips

- Set up a separate email account for your competition so you can keep track of correspondence more easily
- Set up template responses to emails to save time
- Have a plan in place for if you receive more or fewer entries than you had planned. If you don't have as many entries as you'd hoped for, how can you drum up more interest, can you extend your closing date for entries? Or if you have more entries than planned, how does this affect the assessing of them?
- Manage expectations with all people involved – and give yourself a bit of leeway.
- Be transparent about the process
- Make sure you obtain permission to use any images or film that you collect
- Find a way to make those people who haven't won an award or category feel like entering was still worthwhile – a personalised thank you email, an offer to include their project/image/research in a case study or blog for example.

Examples of public engagement competitions and awards

- The Open University Engage Awards http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/per/?page_id=4377
- University of Bath, Images of Research http://www.bath.ac.uk/research/images-of-research/
- Engage U http://www.engageawards.org
- National Science and Engineering Competition http://www.nsecuk.org
- 60 Second Science http://www.60secondscience.net
- Famelab http://famelab.org
- Royal Society Exhibition proposals http://royalsociety.org/summer-science/proposals/
- Google Science Fair online voting https://www.googlesciencefair.com/en/2013/
- RCUK Excellence with Impact http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/media/news/2007news/Pages/070921.aspx

- Wales Beacon PE Competition http://www.engagingwales.org/news/exploring-the-what-why-how-of-public-engagement-conference-held-on-tuesday-6th-july/pictures-of-public-engagement-competition
- Manchester Images of Research competition http://www.manchesterimagesofresearch.co.uk/
- Royal Society of Chemistry video competition http://www.rsc.org/AboutUs/News/PressReleases/2013/take-1-video-competition.asp
- Strathclyde University Images of Research http://www.strath.ac.uk/engage/imagesofresearch/

You can read more about the NCCPE Engage Competition here.

The overall NCCPE Engage competition winners: The CAER Heritage project team at the final event.

National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement's vision is of a higher education sector making a vital, strategic and valued contribution to 21st-century society through its public engagement activity. We are working to help support universities to improve, value and increase the quantity and quality of their public engagement and embed it into their core practice.

www.publicengagement.ac.uk