

Mapping Funding for Public Engagement with STEM at a System Level

BRIEFING PAPER

National Forum for Public Engagement with STEM

September 2016

Introduction

This paper summarises the findings of a review of funding for PE STEM activities, to which a number of Forum members submitted data. The review was not intended to be an exact mapping of the funding landscape, but to take a high level view of the key trends in how funding is currently targeted.

The work was conducted in two phases. A first phase reviewed 39 small grant schemes¹. A second, project looked holistically at how Forum members were investing in a wider programme of activities.

Review of small award schemes

This project reviewed the focus and assessment criteria of 39 small awards schemes to support PE with STEM. It revealed a fragmented and often confusing funding environment:

- Dominated by investment in biosciences and health (£8.2M) by a very considerable margin, with physical science and technology (£956K), engineering (£500k) and generic STEM (£405k) with considerably lower levels of investment.
- The majority of the schemes focussed on inspiring and informing the public.
- The assessment criteria against which grant applications were reviewed prioritise scientific content (n=21), realism/feasibility of project plans (n=17) and the relevance of the activity to audience group (n=16).
- Just over 50% of funders indicated that an evaluation report would be required on project completion. A small percentage of these provided clear information and guidance on the nature of the information required.
- Very few schemes (n=6) mentioned engagement with under-served ('hard to reach') audiences in the high level information about the scheme, although 10 schemes did reference such audiences in their criteria for assessing grants.

Review of funding across the STEM informal learning system

Following on from the review of small awards, the second review was tasked to explore:

- To what extent is the current funding system geared to meet the strategic priorities of the sector (i.e. engaging underserved audiences, promoting science as part of culture, developing reflective practitioners etc.)?
- Are we achieving the most effective balance between the categories? If not, what balance would produce a thriving funding ecosystem?
- How 'joined up' is our investment? What value would there be in 'pooling' spend' or aligning it more strategically?

Funders were asked to report spend across sixteen categories broken down into four key areas as detailed below (see Figure 1).

¹ https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/national_forum_scheme_funding_summary.pdf

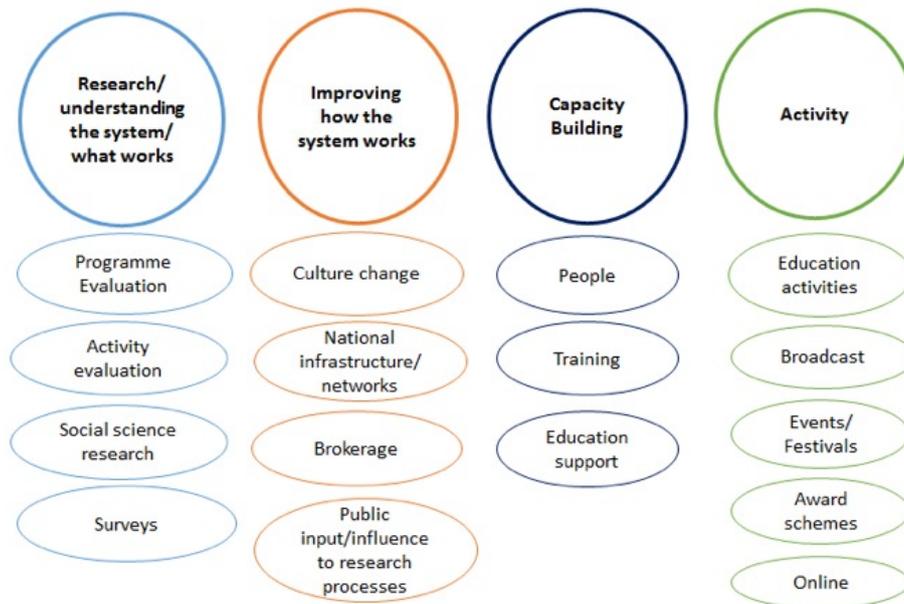
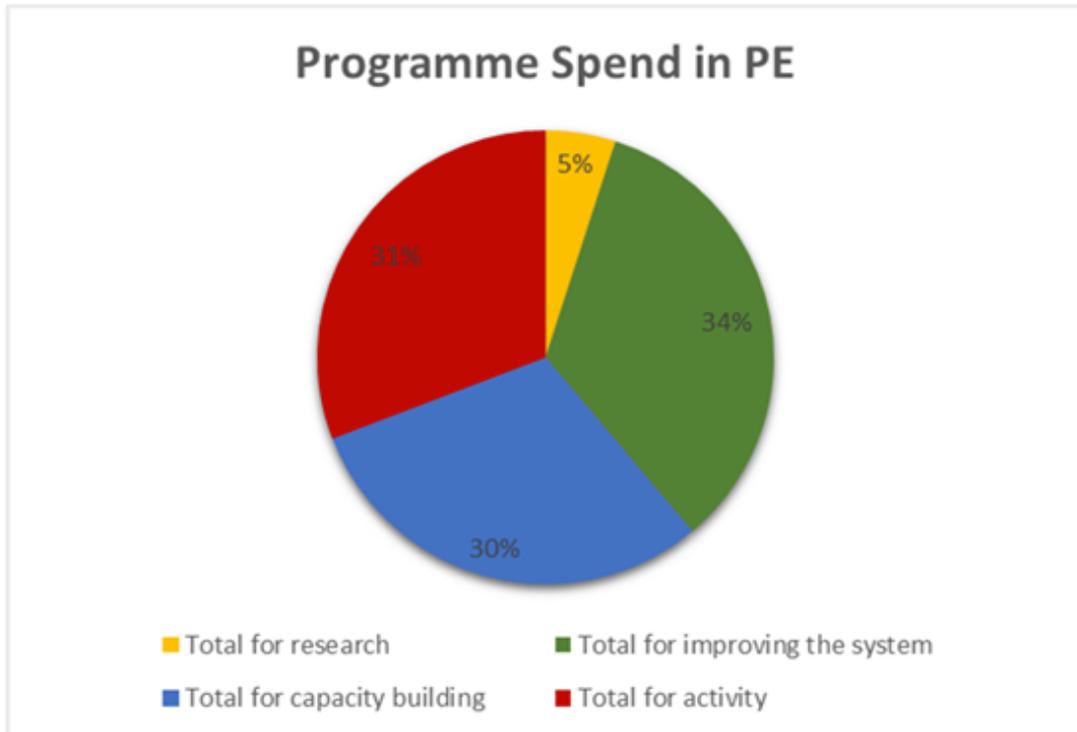


Figure one: Framework used to map the funding system

Key Findings

- 92% of overall spend is on programme costs and 8% on administrative costs (mainly staff time). As a comparison, on average, administrative costs represent approximately 4% of the Research Councils' total budget (2012/13) and 10.5% of the Arts Council in 2012.
- The split across the four categories was:
 - Research/understanding the system/what works (5% of total spend);
 - Improving how the system works (34% of total spend)
 - Capacity building (30% of total spend)
 - Activity (31% of total spend)



- Award schemes accounted for 15% of the total spend on Public Engagement and represented 49% of the activity category. The funding for such schemes was reviewed separately (see above) and is largely skewed towards investment in Bioscience/medicine through the Wellcome Trust.
- Schools and young people receive a very significant proportion of the total funding, with 34% of overall funding directed at schools.
- In comparison with these larger areas of investment, just 1% of overall funding is spent on supporting individuals ('people') through fellowship/ambassador roles and even less on training and development (0.3%).
- 5% of the total programme spend is invested in research. Social science research dominates with 75% of the total and, of this, the Wellcome Trust is contributing 60%.
- 'Public input' (e.g. through upstream dialogue) accounts for approximately 4% of the total programme spend on PE in STEM. The vast majority of funding appears to be directed at activities to 'inspire / inform' the public
- Only 0.8% of the funding is directed towards online/ new media. And there is little obvious targeting of investment to address emerging areas of strategic opportunity (e.g. web/social media; reaching underserved audiences)

Some questions posed by the review

- Less than 5% of the total programme spend is invested in research: **should we be investing more to address key 'unknowns' such as costs and benefits; longer term impacts arising from projects?**
- 'Public input' (e.g. through upstream dialogue) accounts for approximately 4% of the total programme spend. **Should more be spent on public input, given the evidence of the benefits?**

- Very little is spent on supporting individuals, and even less on training and development. **Is more funding needed to support people, training and development? Is there an appetite for this from the sector? What areas should be targeted for support – e.g. engaging underserved audiences; evaluation etc?**
- We estimate that 34% of the programme spend is invested in engaging schools / young people. **Does the very large relative investment reflect the balance we need to produce a thriving funding eco-system?**

Forum follow up

Informed by the review the Forum has established two working groups and a pilot programme focussed in the following areas:

- An **evaluation working group** which has since commissioned a scoping study to explore current and potential future evaluation practice within the funders on the Forum and the wider UK STEM PE community.
- An **engaging underserved audiences working group**, the group has developed a working definition of underserved audiences, to identify areas of strategic work for the Forum in this area and to develop and test the ‘five traditions of public engagement’ concept.
- A **pilot programme supporting the professionalisation of public engagement**. The pilot seeks to explore ways in which providers in the South West could collaborate with a long-term vision to develop skills and advance practice through sharing of expertise and resources.

For further details about the National Forum for Public Engagement with STEM and our work:
www.publicengagement.ac.uk/national-forum