



Community Engagement

A beginner's guide

Introduce self; whistlestop tour of community engagement, and some top tips if you want to have some of that pie for yourself.

What is it not?

- Public engagement
- Public relations
- Corporate social responsibility



To save any confusion, let us start by saying what it is not.

It is not public engagement, as that is understood by the academic community, that is taking your research out to the wider public.

It is not public relations, as that embraces the wider public, whether it be through the media, or your peers, investors, funders etc

It is not corporate social responsibility, although some people would argue this is part of public relations; that is where a company commits to ethical behaviour in terms of its behaviour, and also investing in charitable projects and partnerships.



The positive management of your interactions with the community within which you dwell



Difficult to get a one size fits all definition. This is as good as any.

Bear in mind that community engagement can be on a whole spectrum of activity; at the one end it could be a local authority or development NGO in a drought stricken area. There the may be a great deal of time/energy and resource put into consultations; events and ongoing neighbourhood support officers. At the other end it could just be making sure your office block is not causing a nuisance to passers-by. You will need to be clear what sort of resource you have, and I would guess that you do not have a great deal of resource, and if you do any engagement at all, then this is probably adding more work load to an already busy person. I am very much bearing this in mind when talking about this.



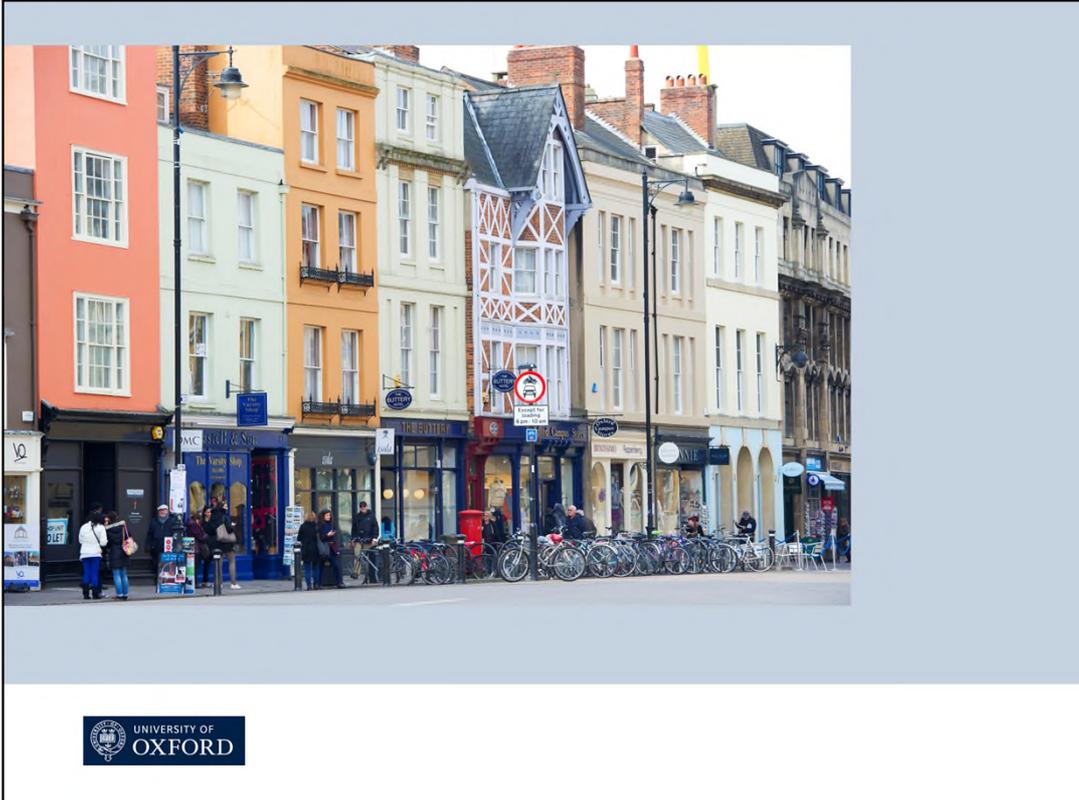
why bother? This is a university, which is about teaching and research; its resources are strapped enough with our core mission without this “nice to have”.

My answer always is that community engagement will occur anyway, whether you plan for it or not. Your building does occupy space; your students and staff do arrive and leave in the morning and evening; cars go in and out; your buildings use waste disposal, your staff’s family will use the schools and social services. If you do not consider how you should be doing it, then you risk at least a chaotic set of message, and some very damaging ones at the very worst

Why does it matter if your community relations are poor? Day to day attrition. Moaning neighbours, difficulty in getting planning permission, stand off on access. Also missing out on potential positives for you and your staff. There is a reason why so many big corporates now invest time and money in community relations. The University has ups and downs built in for community engagement; one of the downs can be seen here; the architecture of the colleges which can feel forbidding and unwelcoming, they tell a historic message of town and gown separation. But there are ups as well



On the other hand we do have some enormous advantages in the facilities and learning opportunities that we provide for the City, as well as the wider, less visual things such as our economic impact etc. Need to tell this aspect of our story better. (Star gazing and spin outs)



We also are not a campus university, our students live cheek by jowl with the city, and this can cause conflict. This is Broad St, which is a bustling commercial space, and an attraction for tourists etc. Not unnaturally the City would like to use it for performances and events; but it is also the home of a lot of students, who have periods in the year when they need to study. Negotiation with the City to stop conflict.

Step 1: Where do I start?



Basic information gathering; what ward are you in? Names and phone numbers of your local councillors.

Build a basic database:

- Other stakeholders: Local churches/mosques/temples/synagogues, schools etc
- Neighbourhood groups, businesses



So, what are some of things that you could be doing from your perspective?

It is very difficult to do a “one size fits all” approach. Looking down the list of attendees there are people here. Such as the OUP who already have community recognition and who already do some community initiatives. Whereas there are others here from Wellington Square who do not have any distinct community identity beyond that of the University. However most of you are from separate parts of the University and already have a separate physical presence. I am going to direct most of my remarks to that group; and apologies to those for whom this is not massively relevant. However if you want individual support then do get in contact.

(Also next three slides have a lot of text on them; but this is because I will be making them available, so did want you to have the main points.

Step 2: Basic audit

What are the flash points? (If any?) car parking? Access?
Noise? Planning?

Are there other points of contact? Dual use of facilities?
Any historical links (ie is it an old building much loved by
locals?)

What are the plans for your department for the next few
years? Expansion? Moving? Change of use? What are the
pressures on the local community in the next few years?
New infrastructure? Studentification?

Internal champions?



Basic Audit

You may have come along here today because there are already
problems in your area, and you would like to be able to deal with them.
What are they? Focus on dealing with one problem, but then make sure
that you let people know..

It could be that there are other links into the community

Look ahead; what could be the problems?

Step 3: Identify some basic actions

- Invite your local councillors to visit the building, meet some key people, give them a contact point.
- Work on remedying one of the flashpoints.
- Push through one “common good” initiative, ie old computers to the local school, dual use? Open Doors?



Do something

And follow up



Basic principles: Start small and do not over-promise
Make sure appropriate people know when things have been delivered
Keep lines of communication open, and make sure people have a reply
Keep in touch across the university