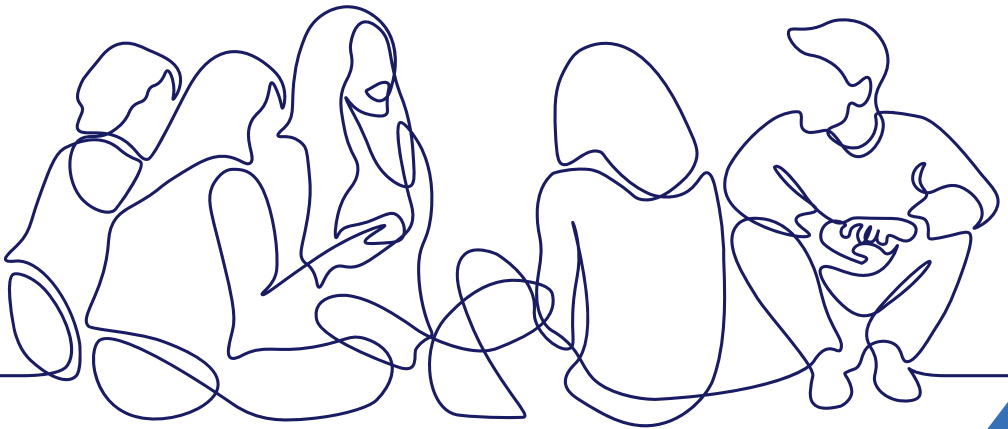




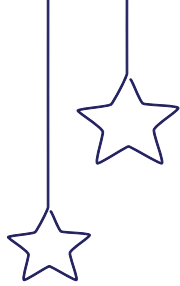
Science and
Technology
Facilities Council

Working with Wonder Audiences



Wonder initiative focuses on working with participants from the 40% most socio-economically deprived areas of the UK, in particular 8 to 14-year-olds and their families and carers. It aims to connect people from all backgrounds with STFC science and technology. Phase 1 of the initiative (2018-2021) was made up of 32 public engagement grant projects and 2 strategic partnership projects, plus STFC National Labs public engagement delivery.

This document is a collection of advice from some of these project leaders. Many of the lessons are examples of general good practice for public engagement, but when working with Wonder audiences, it is even more important to ensure it is done well.



Reflections from Project Leaders



Building Partnerships

“It is challenging to get to know your audiences/groups in advance of the project starting, and we found that to meet the needs, skills, interests of the audience, we needed to make some adaptations to the delivery of the programme. Flexibility to adapt the programme ultimately will make a more successful programme.”

Developing and Planning

“It was really useful to establish an online co-creation planning session with a key teacher in each partnership school as part of preparing activities and resources. This enabled us to identify connections and contexts that would enhance and support the learning journeys teachers are taking their students on – and helps to find ways of working that are relevant and beneficial for all involved in the project.”

Delivering Activities

“We found deeper engagements were possible when building in time for settling in, providing multiple activities and giving children freedom to choose their activity, and how long they spent on it, yet ensuring some consistency across sessions. This required greater allocation of time for understanding children’s skills and interests, for extra preparation so activities to be accessed at different levels, and also higher staff to child ratios.”

Evaluating

“We built evaluation into the experience – as part of the storyline. This was effective. 86% of participants completed detailed evaluation/research questions.”



Building Partnerships



- Put extra effort into making contact and maintaining relationships.
- Make sure your partner organisation knows what is available and understands the commitment, both time and finances.
- It's important to find the right contact in the organisation you are working with. Career leads at schools can be very useful contacts.
- Put in effort to maintain regular communication and answer questions.
- Get to know your group. What are their needs and interests?
- Make sure the partnership is mutually beneficial. Establish a trusting relationship and work from your partner's priorities and needs.
- If possible, offer financial contribution for your partner's time. This will help ensure enough time is available to support the project.



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Developing and Planning



- Provide support with co-creation. Start with a framework to work from as a blank sheet can be intimidating.
- Spend time with the teacher and group leader. Understand your group's skills, experiences, interests and prior knowledge.
- Don't assume over or underestimate background knowledge and experiences. This varies greatly between groups.
- Keep content relevant to the group's experience. Context is important - meaningfully represent your group and their local community in your activity.
- Ask about any additional needs in your group and discuss with your group leader on how to best support them. Adapt your session to accommodate this.
- Be conscious of teacher time and keep meetings and communication efficient. Their time is pressed!
- Coordinate with other providers doing similar activities in your area. This can create multiple related interventions.
- Involve families and the wider community. Encourage conversations and celebrate achievements.



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Delivering Activities



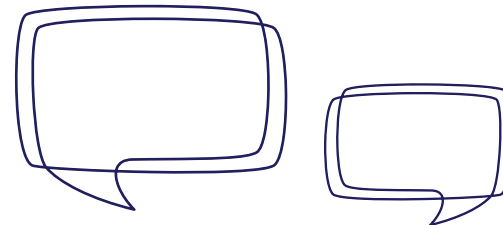
- Be flexible. Ensure the session can cater to the needs of your group on the day.
- Build in time for settling in and building relationships. If your group feels welcomed and settled, they are more likely to engage with your content.
- Start the session by asking your group to explain what they already know. This will allow you to adapt your content.
- Be adaptable. Have a variety of activities that your group can choose from, and give them the freedom and time to choose within the session.
- Keep it practical, inclusive and fun.
- Design your resources carefully. Use a balance of text, visuals, and videos. Assume a wide level of literacy and attention.
- Supply all materials. Don't assume your group will have anything. Let your group keep the materials if possible.
- Plan back up activities in case of last minute changes.



Evaluating



- Have a plan. Work with your partner to include their priorities. Discuss the best approaches to evaluating their group, and tailor your plan to the group.
- Traditional evaluation methods are not as successful. Embed evaluation into the activities as much as possible and keep it fun and interactive.
- Use observation and interviews as tools. This will give you a wider picture of engagement and attitudes to compliment any quantitative data. It will also give space for unexpected outcomes.
- Ask a small number of questions to students. Use a mix of text and visuals to support a range of literacy. Use active ways to collect survey data (e.g. vote with your feet).
- Ask adults for their impressions as well. This can give a different perspective.
- Make completing evaluation worthwhile. Make sure the group understands why you are evaluating and provide incentives if possible.



Challenges



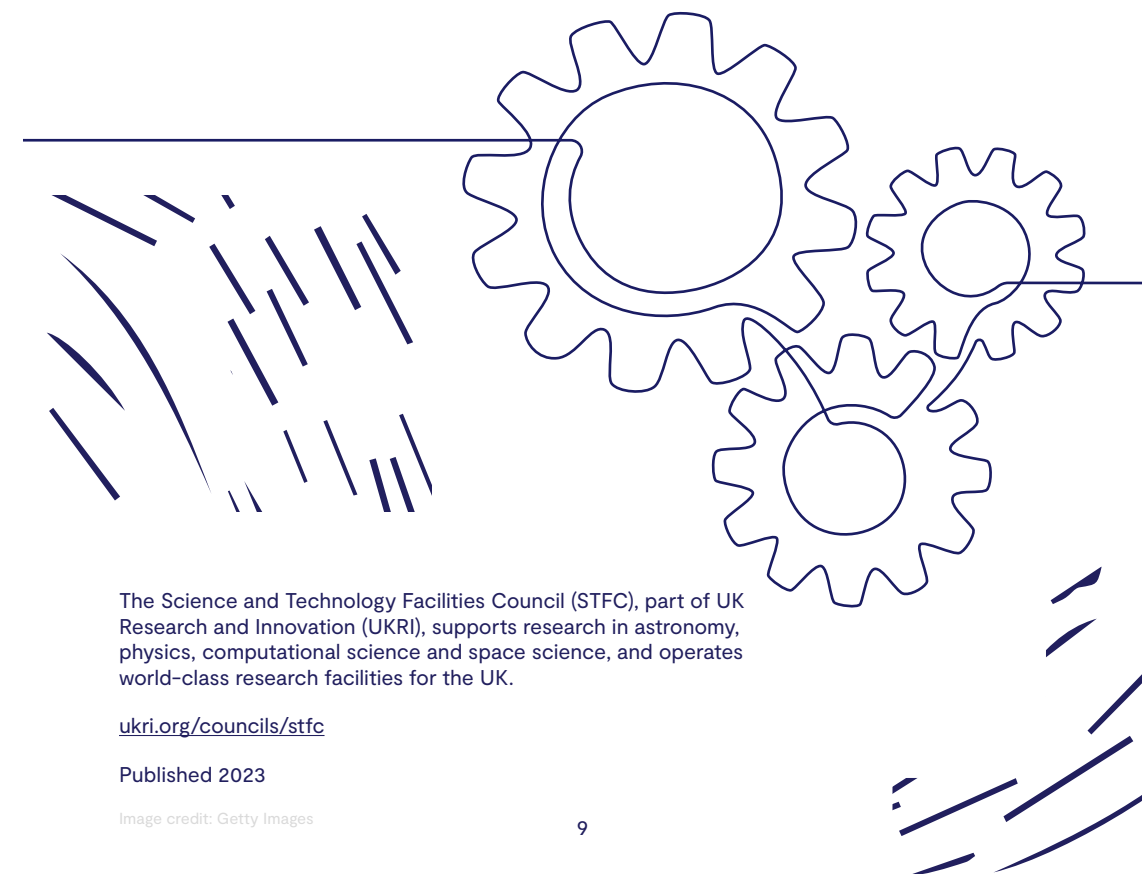
- Some organisations and schools won't engage. This can be particularly hard with Wonder schools as teachers can move on quickly and staff are pressed for time. However, finding the right partner is time well spent.
- It is very difficult to get things into school time due to how tightly teachers are constrained about the curriculum. We found the most approachable areas are through careers as STEM clubs, though not all schools have these.
- Covid-19 has impacted children's skills and knowledge across all subject areas.
- Traditional evaluation methods, such as surveys, don't work as well with Wonder audiences. We moved to capturing process data and delivery staff generated data, alongside creative methods and case-studies.



Next Steps



The Project Leaders have demonstrated a strong commitment to working with Wonder audiences through globally challenging times. The lessons learned from this project have enabled us to build a foundation and commitment for future work. The Wonder approach is part of STFC's Strategic Delivery Plan for 2022-2025 and will be fundamental to the organisation's public engagement strategy (2023-2028). This strategy, and continuing conversations with STFC's various communities, will shape the next phase of the Wonder Initiative.



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Published 2023

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