

Environmental Change Briefing #3

March 2025

Public involvement in environmental change and health research: Lessons learnt

Successful public involvement is possible on climate impacts and climate action to support transdisciplinary research

KEY MESSAGES

Researchers have set up a public involvement panel within a research unit on environmental change and health, covering a range of topics including climate change, land use, greenspace, housing and public health messaging.

- Effective Public Participation, Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) requires training and education for the research team.
- It is important to consult the panel regarding the direction of research projects.
- Participating in the panel has many benefits for the members including developing confidence in online discussions, increased knowledge on climate change and health, and upskilling.
- Online workshops are preferred and increase recruitment opportunities across UK; but it is important to have the option of in person meetings.
- Ensuring diversity and inclusion in the panel is key for effective PPIE, but requires support for panel members.

“PLANET has been extremely interesting and opened up thought provoking discussion”

WHAT IS ‘PLANET’?

Public Led And kNowledge Engagement Team

The National Institute of Health and Care Research Health Protection Research Unit in Environmental Change and Health (HPRU in ECH) is a research collaboration focusing on how climate change and the environment affect public health and wellbeing in England. PLANET is a public panel set up to support academics to co-design research that it is relevant to the general public.

HPRU in ECH has a named lead for PPIE and has published its PPIE strategy on the website. PLANET members were recruited to join the panel in January 2021 through targeted advertisements. The panel has about 25 active members.

We define public involvement in research as research being carried out **with** or **by** members of the public rather than to, about or for them.

PLANET WORKSHOPS 2023-2025



Introduction to PLANET



Flood and coastal change risks



Housing and air quality



Permitted development & health implications



Vector-borne diseases: risk communication



Local climate action and equity



Heat and health research



Emerging mosquito-borne disease risks in UK



Access to greenspace and health inequalities



Thunderstorm asthma



Net zero and low carbon transition



PLANET: lessons learnt

OTHER PLANET ACTIVITIES

Commentaries and opinion pieces

Public perspectives at stakeholder workshops

Blog posts

Input and consultation: HPRU public involvement & engagement strategy

Feedback on grant applications

External Advisory Board members

Workshops with external research groups

Research participants in focus groups

Supported UK Health Security Agency PPIE Strategy development



“I now feel confident in my technological skills and using Zoom or other software is a lot less scary!”

“I think it is important that we ensure that the panel and PPIE is diverse, inclusive and representative of the UK”

“Good that we’ve been able to bring together view points from many parts of the UK”

“Having a broad range of topics for PLANET to discuss keeps things interesting, relevant and makes me want to participate regularly!”



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SETTING UP A PUBLIC PANEL

- Ensure panel members are involved in research planning from the beginning of starting the panel and throughout the research life cycle.
- Regularly review participation and engagement.
- Consider additional recruitment to ‘top up’ the panel as drop outs occur e.g. using notice boards, social media and through mailing lists. Usefulness in talking to people who left the panel to identify what can we learn?
- Offer mentoring for new panel members for support and learning from those already involved.
- Language is important – make joining the panel attractive and interesting. Often academic invitations can be formal and lack fun. Use communications and events teams to help with recruitment.
- Be clear to the panel on the expectations of being a panel member e.g. length of project and commitment, topics of interest. PLANET members were asked to sign an agreement with clear expectations regarding their involvement.
- When starting a panel, consider evaluate the impact that public panel has had on the research.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PPIE ACTIVITIES & WORKSHOPS

- When recording meetings, the purpose and conditions need to be clearly agreed in advance. May be acceptable for taking notes and then ensure recording is deleted.
- Consider opportunities for panel members to have more roles in workshops e.g. presenting on topics of interest, facilitating discussions.
- It is essential to send pre-reading and fact sheets ahead of activities to help panel members prepare for workshops, and make a more meaningful contribution.
- Panel members prefer Zoom to MS Teams as an online interactive platform.
- Good to have a balance of online, hybrid and in-person events to maximise social interaction and participation opportunities (this minimises environmental impact but considers inclusion).
- Reduce technical language, limit jargon, avoid acronyms and make it fun!
- All panel members should feel they are heard and have equal opportunity to contribute to discussion in different ways e.g. speaking, using chat box, adding thoughts to online whiteboards.

We would like to thank the PLANET panel for their participation and valued contribution to the NIHR Health Protection Research Unit in Environmental Change and Health from 2020 – 2025. This briefing was written by Grace Turner, Sari Kovats and members of the PLANET panel. Ideas were developed at the PLANET: Lessons Learnt workshop in Feb 2025. Illustration by storyset on Freepik.