

People's Vision for R&D



**How to move from
principles to action**

September 2024

Introduction

The Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) works to champion R&D as a political and societal priority that can transform lives and livelihoods. Our Discovery Decade programme is supporting a behaviour change in how our sector advocates for R&D with the aim of **making R&D matter to more people**. We believe this can radically transform our advocacy by creating a research system that feels more human and more local.

Our extensive public attitudes research has shown that 70% of people think it's important to invest in R&D [1], and around half think funding research should be a high or top priority for UK political parties.[2] However, R&D isn't seen as urgent. Many people view R&D as an abstract activity; they don't feel a strong connection to it and can't identify how it benefits them or their loved ones, with some describing R&D as a "luxury".

Broadening public support will mean moving people from a vague sense of arms-length approval of R&D to a stronger relationship with the people, processes and places that make the system what it is. Establishing this connection requires action from the R&D sector, and a shift towards a more society-centred vision for R&D in the UK.

To support this shift, and strengthen our existing research, CaSE commissioned a deeper exploration of the public's views, through a public dialogue focused on society's stake in R&D. This was delivered by the National Centre for Social Research and the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement. The full report on the process is available [here](#).

The dialogue brought together 33 members of the public for 10 hours across four sessions in May 2024, with discussions framed around the public's emotional connection to R&D and ways in which the public can be involved in R&D. In the final sessions, participants worked collaboratively to develop four **People's Principles for Involvement in R&D**, which set out their expectations for the sector's behaviours.

CaSE believes that increasing public involvement at all stages of the R&D process will lead to research that better serves society. It will help identify new research questions, bring fresh perspectives, challenge norms, motivate researchers and open up more funding opportunities. The public will be brought closer to the research system, developing skills and strengthening their emotional connection to R&D. In turn, this will help form the basis for sustained public and political support for the R&D sector's work.

This report sets out CaSE's reflections on the dialogue and offers recommendations for those working in R&D. We urge everyone to think about how they can apply these principles and recommendations in their own work. CaSE will be doing the same.

Summary of recommendations

Our recommendations to further embed public involvement in R&D are framed around three connected challenges - culture, capacity and resourcing - and two overarching next steps.



To develop a culture that values involvement in R&D, CaSE calls on the sector to:

- Demonstrate sustained and visible support for public involvement in R&D among senior leaders and decision makers.
- Establish mechanisms to raise the profile of existing individual and organisational champions, and help them access the resources they need.
- Respond to demand for an open and honest public conversation about the people, processes and places connected to R&D and the benefits of engaging.
- Embrace new ways to engage with the public, including looking outside the R&D sector and stepping beyond our traditional comfort zone.



To increase capacity for involvement in R&D, CaSE calls on the sector to:

- Fund and develop training programmes for researchers.
- Create and promote opportunities for those working in non-research organisations or roles to develop skills in involvement.
- Increase capacity among the public by supporting greater and more diverse engagement, including by removing barriers.



To ensure proper resourcing for involvement in R&D, CaSE calls on the sector to:

- Work together to establish long-term plans for public involvement in R&D.
- Commit to long-term funding that is used wisely.
- Seek value for money and guard against tokenistic involvement.



To take steps to act on these recommendations, CaSE calls on R&D organisations to:

- Undertake an engagement and involvement health check.
- Form stronger and more purposeful partnerships and networks.

People's Vision for R&D: A public dialogue

The first step towards a stronger relationship between the public and the R&D community is to understand where we are starting from. Do people feel ownership or agency in R&D; do they feel they have a voice or influence? Would they want more of these opportunities?

The design of the public dialogue, delivered by NatCen and NCCPE, was informed by widespread consultation with the R&D sector. This included workshops with more than 50 organisations across the UK and advice from an [expert group](#) convened for this project. We refined the scope of the project from a broad question about the complex concepts of agency and ownership of R&D, to a more focused question:

How do the public feel about increased opportunities for public decision-making about, and involvement in, R&D?

This allowed an effective dialogue that focused on two aspects that we believe will support a stronger connection between the public and the R&D system:

- **The public's emotional connection to R&D**, which can offer a route towards a greater sense of ownership
- **Ways the public can be involved in R&D**, whether through shared decision-making or participation in R&D itself, which can offer a route towards a greater sense of agency

Participants took part in ten hours of dialogue across four online sessions in May 2024, hearing from subject specialists and being provided with information on how the public can influence decisions about R&D and be involved in all stages of research itself. They then iteratively developed a set of People's Principles for Involvement in R&D, which describe how the public can be meaningfully and purposefully involved in R&D.

Definitions and scope

CaSE takes a broad view of R&D, covering disciplines from STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) to social sciences, the arts and humanities. When describing the R&D sector, we include academia, charities, private sector and communications and public engagement organisations.

This project used the phrase 'involvement in R&D' to describe a range of activities. Examples shown to participants included cases where the public are involved in influencing or shared decision-making; the development of research ideas, proposals and products; the research process, including researcher-led projects and citizen science; and engaging with and building on the results of R&D. Full details can be found in the [main research report's appendix](#).

Conclusions and reflections

This section reflects on the main findings of the dialogue and their implications for the R&D sector, but we urge you to read the [full report](#) on the process and its conclusions from our delivery partners NatCen, including the development of the People's Principles.

The results of the dialogue process have emphasised to us that:

- **The public's emotional connection to R&D can be strengthened through the opportunity to learn more about, and reflect on, both R&D and involvement in it**
- **The approaches and behaviours chosen by those in the R&D system can support an increased sense of public agency and ownership in R&D**

Participants expressed a range of motivations for getting involved in R&D, with priority given to projects they found interesting, that they felt would benefit wider society, and that would allow them to learn or develop new skills. However, the dialogue emphasised that while participants should feel informed, respected and invested in the work, they do not necessarily need to be excited by it.

The resulting People's Principles show what the public expects from the R&D sector. They demonstrate that participants believe that involving the public can lead to better R&D and improved involvement; and that accountability, transparency and trust are vital.

The opportunity in front of the R&D sector is clear. Opening up R&D, in a way that respects the People's Principles, will not just improve R&D. It will bring more people closer to research and establish a stronger, long-lasting relationship with the public, grounded in mutual trust. This will bring benefits for research, society and individuals.

Adopting the principles will require a commitment to change from all parts of our sector, underpinned by honest and practical conversations about how to value and resource involvement in R&D.

We are not starting from scratch – there are many excellent examples of processes and places where R&D happens being opened up to the public – but it is clear these efforts are not cutting through as widely as we need them to.

A more concerted effort will help the R&D sector to fully shake off its distant, academic image, and embrace the mutual benefits of working in partnership with the public.

The People's Principles for Involvement in R&D

The People's Principles for Involvement in R&D were developed collaboratively by 33 members of the public, drawn from across the UK, through a public dialogue process. The principles represent participants' hopes, and address their concerns, about involvement in R&D. References to 'participants' in the principles refer to any participant in a hypothetical case of public involvement in R&D, not the participants in this dialogue process itself.

Comparison of the People's Principles with existing guidance and standards shows significant alignment, and many across the R&D sector will recognise in them commonly accepted elements of good involvement. This includes inclusivity and diversity; transparency and accountability; trust and respect; collaboration and partnership; empowerment and deliberation and dialogue. [3] This alignment shows that the sector and the public value similar things – and gives us a clear blueprint for action.

We acknowledge that this public dialogue did not focus on some known, important aspects of good involvement, including how to actively address exclusion, imbalances of power, the challenges of consensus-building, and the need for monitoring and evaluation. However, these do connect to the principles that participants developed. The sector can build on, and action, the People's Principles for Involvement in R&D alongside other best practice in these areas.

We hope that the People's Principles provoke a discussion and further galvanise action. They demonstrate a clear appetite among the public for access to more opportunities to be involved in R&D. The sector has a choice about how to live up to the public's expectations, and the next section of this report shares CaSE's recommendations.

People's Principles for Involvement in R&D

1 Public involvement in R&D should use the public's expertise to benefit the participants, the research and the wider society.



2 Public involvement in R&D should provide everything that participants need to feel properly informed.



3 Public involvement in R&D should involve the right number of people with a range of experiences.

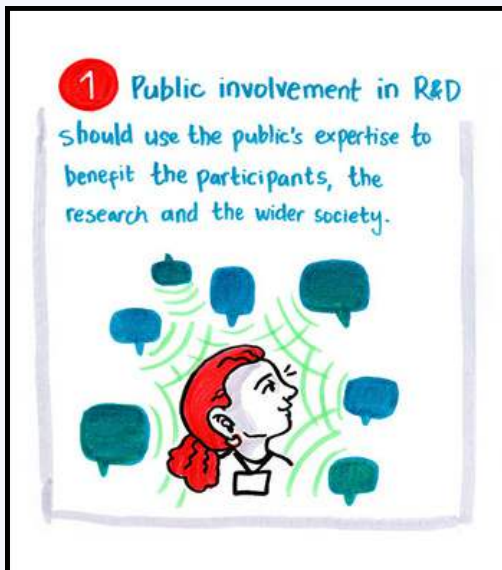


4 Public involvement in R&D should ensure that participants feel safe, heard, and invested in the research.



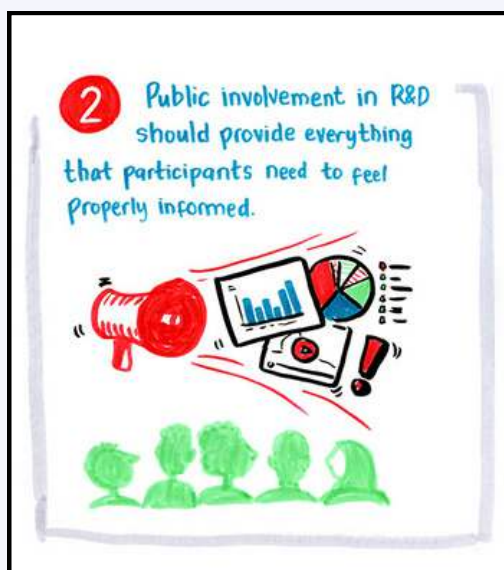
The People's Principles for Involvement in R&D

1. Public involvement in R&D should use the public's expertise to benefit the participants, the research and wider society.



- Researchers benefit when they really hear and listen to the public.
- The public gain knowledge and skills when they are meaningfully involved.
- The community benefits from the R&D at the end of the project.
- For this to happen, the right amount of time, money and energy needs to be invested in involving the public.

2. Public involvement in R&D should provide everything that participants need to feel properly informed



- Honesty about the purpose of involvement and how the public's views will be used will help to build trust.
- Transparency about who funds the project, and why, will help to build trust.
- The public should hear the results, so they know the impact of their involvement.
- All information should be clear so that people feel informed rather than overwhelmed.

The People's Principles for Involvement in R&D

3. Public involvement in R&D should involve the right number of people with a range of experiences



- A diverse group of people brings a range of experiences and perspectives to the research.
- Involving people with the right experience means researchers can learn from the public's expertise.
- The number of people involved needs to match the scope of the project, so the public have confidence in the results.
- Researchers should make opportunities for involvement accessible, well-known, and make sure no one is excluded.

4. Public involvement in R&D should ensure that participants feel safe, heard, and invested in the research



- Participants need to trust the integrity of the process.
- Participants need to feel confident that their views and data are handled responsibly.
- Participants need to feel safe to share their experiences and engage with new research.
- Participants should feel invested in the opportunity.

Recommendations

The People's Principles for Involvement in R&D offer the sector a clear set of expectations. We have a responsibility to recognise and respect the public's views and to respond with clear and sustained actions.

There is a wealth of innovative approaches and skilled practitioners working on public involvement within the R&D sector. What this dialogue has demonstrated is the urgency with which these efforts must be scaled up, and that this must happen collaboratively. Engagement and involvement must be everyone's responsibility.

Reflecting from CaSE's position as a policy-focused organisation, we know that our policy goals will not be achieved without broader and deeper buy-in from the public. This stronger connection with the public requires stronger partnerships within our sector - between the worlds of policy and advocacy and involvement and engagement. Greater collaboration will allow us to share expertise and methods, and help us collectively demonstrate the role R&D can play in society.

This section offers recommendations that can help our sector use and embed involvement as one route to nurturing a stronger, long-lasting relationship with the public. These recommendations apply not just to academia but to organisations that support the R&D system, such as those seeking to influence decision making or policy.

Our recommendations are framed around three connected challenges facing the R&D sector: **culture**, **capacity** and **resourcing**. For each challenge, we offer recommendations and suggest actions. We then offer two overarching **next steps** for all R&D organisations.



Culture



Capacity



Resourcing



Next Steps

Culture



We want to work towards a culture across all parts of the research system that values and prioritises a stronger partnership with the public, and recognises the benefits this brings benefits to research, society and individuals.

Despite many organisations already recognising the benefits of public involvement in R&D, stakeholders told CaSE that there needs to be greater humility within the sector; greater recognition of diverse forms of knowledge and perspectives; and stronger signals from leaders and decision makers that involvement is a priority. [\[4\]](#)

It is vital to nurture a broader sense of responsibility for involving the public across the whole research system, especially in how involvement is valued by leaders, funders and decision makers.

More broadly, there is currently a major shift in the culture of the researcher community, with funders and research organisations revisiting practices, behaviours and incentives. There is a natural opportunity for this transformation to extend to the public, allowing us to capitalise on common goals and create a more transparent, engaged and people-centred research system.

To develop a culture that values involvement in R&D, CaSE calls on the sector to:

Demonstrate sustained and visible support for public involvement in R&D among senior leaders and decision makers.

Those holding the greatest power in the R&D system must use their position to empower practitioners of public involvement, and prioritise these activities, even at difficult moments. They should openly seek to build their own understanding of this area as a direct signal of its importance, and identify where public involvement could be embedded in their organisation's processes. This will benefit both research and the R&D system.

Establish mechanisms to raise the profile of existing individual and organisational champions, and help them access the resources they need.

Research institutions, funders and organisations that work in roles supporting R&D should champion excellence, for instance through fellowships, awards and in communications. This will help to publicly demonstrate that good involvement is valued by institutions and incentivise others to consider it in their own work.

Respond to demand for an open and honest public conversation about the people, processes and places connected to R&D and the benefits of engaging.

There is public demand for information on how R&D happens, its funding structures, accountability and reporting processes. Additionally, the dialogue showed demand for more information on opportunities for public involvement and its benefits. Organisations involved in funding or delivering R&D should take confidence in this and embrace the public's interest, without downplaying the detail or trade-offs. In particular, organisations should emphasise potential learning opportunities for participants.

Embrace new ways to engage with the public, including looking outside the R&D sector and stepping beyond our traditional comfort zone.

Not all public involvement must happen in a formal research setting. There are numerous examples of researchers supporting public-led research and a wealth of good practice outside the R&D sector, for instance in civil society organisations. It is important to create an open-minded culture that seeks to establish new partnerships, learn from others and trial new ways of working.

Suggestions for actions the R&D sector could take:

- **R&D funders, universities and research institutions** should develop routes to promote public involvement projects through funded awards, fellowships and prizes, or in wider communications. This could include partnerships developed with organisations that are not traditionally seen as part of the R&D sector, such as those focused on democratic engagement.
- **R&D organisations, such as universities and research institutions**, should explore different models for engaging with local communities. This could include opportunities to support community-led research or by establishing groups with local citizens to advise, support and hold them accountable on their activities. This includes looking to examples of best and novel practice.
- **A coalition of organisations across the R&D sector** should explore the opportunity for a shared platform or mechanism to boost collaboration across the sector, such as sharing involvement ideas, best practice or training capacity. **R&D funders** should consider a joint funding call to support this work.

Capacity



We want to work towards a research system where those working in R&D have access to the knowledge, skills and tools to carry out effective and ethical public involvement.

The actions needed to champion and scale up excellence in involvement practice are vital. There is, however, a risk that greater awareness or emphasis on involvement in R&D will increase pressure on existing champions or practitioners. As such, efforts to increase the appetite for involvement – among both the public and the R&D sector – must be coupled with an increase in capacity to deliver high-quality activities.

However, simply increasing capacity on both sides will not help us reach our goals if we don't remove barriers to engaging. Even without detailed knowledge of involvement in R&D, dialogue participants were conscious of – and concerned about – inclusion, transparency, accessibility and equity of opportunity.

To increase capacity for involvement in R&D, CaSE calls on the sector to:

Fund and develop training programmes for researchers.

Those at the frontline of the research process should receive support to understand – and engage with – the best approaches for different projects. This should also include support to tackle known barriers for involvement at project-level (such as how to build in sufficient time for engagement or how to identify the right groups to engage) and for individuals (such as tackling concerns or misconceptions about what 'involvement' means or building confidence in involvement).

Create and promote opportunities for those working in non-research organisations or roles to develop skills in involvement.

Not all organisations will feel confident in involving the public in their work, but participants engaged positively with opportunities for involvement in strategy and policy development related to R&D. Staff in these roles should be supported to develop the skills to identify and engage with such opportunities, whether through internal training programmes or working with external experts.

Increase capacity among the public by supporting greater and more diverse engagement, including by removing barriers.

The sector should consider how to open up R&D to the public, for instance through diversifying the settings where engagement and involvement can happen or boosting the visibility of opportunities. Crucially, action must be taken to both address the barriers to effective and ethical involvement, such as transparency and inclusion, and clearly demonstrate how those risks are being mitigated. This will help build confidence in the process. The public's instinctive understanding of barriers and potential risks emphasises the importance of not avoiding these discussions.

Suggestions for actions the R&D sector could take:

- **R&D funders** should explore the value of providing more centralised training programmes to support individuals in developing skills and confidence in public involvement in R&D, tailored to researchers at different career stages.
- **Non-research organisations within the R&D sector** should identify opportunities to involve the public in their work, including by collaborating with experienced practitioners to help staff develop skills and confidence.
- **A coalition of organisations across the R&D sector** could consider the feasibility of a central public-facing repository of opportunities for involvement and the outcomes of previous projects.

Resourcing



We want to work towards a research system where predictable, long-term funding allows sustained investment in building a partnership with the public.

Funding is a fundamental concern for those working within the sector, and this saps energy and attention away from our core goals. Our recommendations on Capacity seek to increase support and demand for involving the public in R&D, but this cannot succeed without sustainable resourcing.

The risk of underfunding – at all scales, from national to project level – is that it overwhelms existing capacity and leads to ineffective, bad quality or tokenistic involvement that undermines public trust. Public demand for accountability and transparency also emphasise the need to sufficiently resource the evaluation of public involvement, as well as the activities themselves.

To ensure proper resourcing for involvement in R&D, CaSE calls on the sector to:

Work together to establish long-term plans for public involvement in R&D.

Long-term planning is needed to ensure the R&D system can understand and justify the financial, physical and human resources needed to support increased public involvement.

Commit to long-term funding that is used wisely.

Significant investment should include funding for: researcher training and incentivisation; support for community partners; the infrastructure to support these activities, such as networks; and involvement activities themselves, including follow-on funding to scale-up novel approaches to involving the public. All funding must be used effectively, and not wasted on bad quality, tokenistic or unethical engagement.

Seek value for money and guard against tokenistic involvement.

Participants were concerned about value for money and making sure it is used wisely and effectively. They do not want to see involvement as a tick box exercise – not just for the participants, but also to protect against waste. Evaluation and improvement activities should be at the heart of this approach.

Suggestions for actions the R&D sector could take:

- **R&D funders** should provide funding to scale-up novel approaches to involving the public or applying existing approaches in new settings, including for those that have been successfully piloted through existing schemes.
- **R&D funders, universities and research institutions**, should consider methods – including funding programmes – to transparently evaluate public involvement methods and their evaluation, potentially via an ‘observatory’ model. [5]
- **A coalition of organisations across the R&D sector and members of the public** should consider the value in developing an overarching 10-year roadmap for UK public involvement in R&D. This could align with the Government’s proposal for 10-year budgets for certain R&D organisations, with recipients expected to use this as an opportunity to set out a 10-year costed involvement plan.

Next steps



Reflecting on this dialogue process, we see two next steps that we believe any R&D organisation could take, regardless of how well progressed their thinking is on involvement.

To take steps to act on these recommendations, CaSE calls on R&D organisations to:

Undertake an engagement and involvement health check.

Those working in R&D should use the four People’s Principles for Involvement in R&D as a framework to review how effectively they are meeting the public’s expectations. They should use this to develop an action plan to build on areas of strength, address gaps and weaknesses, and embed public involvement in their existing processes.

Form stronger and more purposeful partnerships and networks.

Those working in R&D should look beyond their usual collaborators – whether this is in the R&D world, in public engagement, communications, industry or academia, policy and advocacy, or in other sectors, such as civic society.

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- **Holly Rogers**, Head of Engagement, Academy of Medical Sciences

References

[1] [CaSE public opinion polling](#), May 2022; 2,037 respondents

[2] [CaSE public opinion polling, October 2023](#) (58% (of 2,050) and June 2024 (46% of 4,100)

[3] [NCCPE analysis: Reviewing the People's Principles and how they relate to other Involvement frameworks and standards](#)

[4] [CaSE People's Vision for R&D: Stakeholder Workshops Report](#)

[5] One example of the observatory model is [UKERC's Public Engagement Observatory](#), which maps public engagement with energy, climate change and Net Zero; provides a network to share lessons and ideas; and experiments with new approaches to support its wider work

Contact

CaSE is responsible for the content of its report. We are committed to working with others across to strengthen the R&D sector's connection with the public. To discuss the findings, contact **Rebecca Hill** (rebecca@sciencecampaign.org.uk)



CaSE



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