



Sustainable and inclusive research practices in the social sciences

Impact and engagement checklist

Sustainable research impact and engagement practices involve designing, conducting, and disseminating research in ways that minimise environmental burden while maximising long-term social value. This means making well considered choices about travel, resource use, partnership building, and dissemination methods so that the environmental costs of engagement activities remain proportionate to the benefits they generate. By adopting sustainable, resource efficient approaches, and acknowledging and being transparent about unavoidable trade-offs, we can ensure our impact and engagement activities contribute positively to both societal outcomes and environmental stewardship.

This checklist outlines a range of considerations and steps you can take to incorporate sustainable and inclusive practices into your impact and engagement activities. Your primary reference will be the specific funder scheme guidance, with the checklist being used alongside.

Sustainable and inclusive research practices tracker

Continue to use the [tracker template](#) to explore and document how your research project team has incorporated sustainable and inclusive practices. Revisit the document at team meetings to discuss progress, document outcomes and highlight any challenges or lessons learned.

Quick checklist

Communication and engagement

- Online or hybrid v's in-person activities
- Digital materials
- Minimise printing

Inclusive practices

- Accessible and ethical engagement
- Long-term stakeholder relationships
- Community or participant benefits

Responsible engagement

- Tiered outputs and resources
- Combining activities
- Sustainable platforms and repositories
- Practice [Purposeful Publishing](#) using [SDG keywords](#)

Resource-efficient impact

- Reuse or adapt materials
- Minimise waste
- Responsible data management

Communication and engagement

Consider creating a sustainability statement for publications such as journal articles, webpages and engagement presentations. Include examples of decisions made on lower environmental impact alternative practices, social inclusion best practice, and research integrity and longevity considerations.

Prioritise digital-first dissemination where appropriate

- Consider whether outcomes can be achieved through online webinars, virtual conferences, digital workshops, and recorded presentations.
- Provide open-access publications or preprints to avoid unnecessary mailing and printing.
- Use digital materials when possible: posters, flyers, policy briefs, toolkits.

Reduce travel emissions

- Consider virtual over in-person speaking engagements.
- When in-person is essential, choose:
 - Rail or bus rather than car or flights
 - Single multi-purpose trips instead of repeated short visits
 - Local venues to minimise travel for participants

Hybrid events with sustainability planning

- Allow remote participation in conferences, workshops, training sessions.
- Reduce event catering waste and food miles; choose local suppliers and plant-based menus.

Inclusive practices

Support communities beyond the project

- Ensure events and materials are accessible for stakeholders at and after the end of the project, including people with disabilities, on low incomes, or in remote locations. [Read the University's digital accessibility guidance.](#)
- Consider how impact and engagement activities might unintentionally cause harm, such as misinterpretation, stigmatisation or political sensitivity. Use the AREA approach in your thinking: Anticipate, Reflect, Engage, Act.

- Share findings back to participants, communities and stakeholders in accessible formats (infographics, short videos using closed captions and transcripts, plain-language presentations). Share findings with participants before wider public release.
- Co-produce outputs and impact activities with communities or partner organisations so benefits continue long after the project ends. These could be online toolkits, repositories or open-access materials.
- Maintain relationships beyond the project end, where possible.
- Budget for knowledge exchange that is low-cost and accessible, e.g. community toolkits and training versus printed materials and multiple international trips for dissemination activities.
- Compensate community participants fairly for involvement in engagement activities, for example, representing the research at conferences and events.

Responsible engagement

- Produce tiered outputs and resources such as academic papers + policy briefs + community summaries and toolkits.
- Use appropriate SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) keywords where relevant to make research more visible and discoverable. For guidance and resources, visit the [Purposeful Publishing hub](#).
- Avoid "helicopter dissemination" - flying in and out for a single speaking slot without long-term engagement or combining with other activities.
- Keep community involvement meaningful and beneficial for all those involved rather than simply being extractive. Good practice includes addressing power and inequality balances, respecting community knowledge and lived experience, and producing useful outcomes, such as skill development opportunities or toolkits.
- Produce digital engagement materials, such as online courses and training, where appropriate, rather than repeat in person visits to stakeholders.
- Publish through institutional repositories and sustainable digital platforms.



Resource-efficient impact generation

Reuse and adapt materials

- Reuse or adapt presentation decks, graphics, videos, and training materials across audiences.
- Favour modular resources that others can adapt rather than creating multiple bespoke versions.
- Borrow or hire equipment from the university (recording, display equipment) when possible, instead of purchasing new.
- Use energy-efficient digital tools, such as online polling and note capturing services.

Minimise waste at events

- Avoid printed handouts; use QR codes linking to digital materials.

- Eliminate single-use plastics; provide refill water stations; use compostable utensils where catering is necessary.

Responsible data management

- Remember to conduct a data review and cleanup at the end of the project.
- Move data that could be used in the future to the [BEAR Archive](#), which is more energy-efficient for longer-term data storage.
- For open data associated with publications, the [UBIRA eData Institutional Research Archive](#) can be used. This gives your dataset a permanent identifier which can be cited in publications, so that it is openly available.

Institutional and funder policy alignment

Many UK funders and organisations expect sustainability to be embedded in research impact and engagement, for example:

- **UKRI:** expects responsible travel, digital dissemination, and sustainable event planning. View the [UKRI SPARK Hub](#) and [Framework for responsible research and innovation](#).
- **Concordat for Environmental Sustainability:** emphasises low-carbon dissemination and lifecycle thinking.
- **Wellcome Trust:** only funds research that is designed, delivered and disseminated in an environmentally sustainable and responsible way.

Include sustainability considerations and activities explicitly in:

- Impact planning and strategy sections
- Knowledge exchange plans
- Travel budgets and justifications
- End-of-project reporting



Measure and report on sustainability achievements

Use the [sustainable and inclusive research practices tracker template](#) or create your own tracker to document achievements, challenges and lessons learned.

- Estimate carbon savings from virtual versus in-person dissemination. Carbon cost information for travel options is available on the University's travel booking site, [Clarity](#). Other tools are available, for example, [University of Manchester carbon savings tool](#), which measures travel footprints and potential carbon savings.
- Note reductions in material use, such as printed materials.
- Track attendance and accessibility outcomes to show reach and equity.
- Document and share the approaches used and lessons you learned, which can be reused and replicated for future projects.
- Continue to maintain stakeholder relationships to monitor the use of research outputs over the longer term, beyond simple measures like material downloads and paper citations.

Questions to ask - sustainable research dissemination and impact

- Do your impact and engagement methods minimise detrimental effects on the environment?
- Is information about your research project accessible and understandable for non-academic audiences?
- Will outputs still be available to view in five or more years?
- Are participants and communities fairly represented and involved in the research?
- Can the research outputs be updated, reused, or adapted?
- Do your impact and engagement activities build relationships, not just visibility?

For further support and guidance for impact and engagement activities, access the [Research Impact Hub](#), or consult with the College of Social Sciences Impact Team: coss-impact@contacts.bham.ac.uk.