

Authority Sharing Guidebook





This is a guidebook on authority sharing for science and discovery centres and museums. It includes information on the authority sharing framework as well as practical tools to put it into place. These tools have been developed by We The Curious, building on work of the YESTEM project, led by UCL and further supported by the Association for Science and Discovery Centres (ASDC).

What is authority sharing?

Authority sharing is a framework for engagement initiatives with a focus on shifting power towards those who have not traditionally held it. This could include, for example, young people or people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds.

At its core, authority sharing is the idea that everyone is an expert in their own life experiences – and that this expertise has value.

Methods for authority sharing should aim to acknowledge this expertise and treat everyone as an equal partner in the engagement work.

By working this way, authority sharing methods can deliver perspectives from underrepresented voices and contribute to equitable engagement.

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Planning a project

Reflecting on practice

Planning and reflection are both essential to the authority sharing process. When planning an authority sharing project, consider the barriers to engagement and how you can reduce them. Who holds the power in the room and how can you creatively shift this power to more equitable sharing? There may be achievable changes to your plan that would make your project more inclusive.

By regularly reflecting on your processes before, throughout, and after a project you can ensure you are making the most inclusive choices available to you. This continual reflection allows you to adapt to the group you're working with.

To the right is a checklist of areas to consider when planning your project. You may be able to implement these elements fully, partially or not at all but asking the questions will help you move towards a more inclusive practice.



Planning and Reflection Checklist

Physical space

- ✓ How can we arrange the room to put everyone on an equal footing?
- ✓ Can participants choose who they work with?
- ✓ Is everyone comfortable in the space? Are you able to choose an alternative location to work in?

Agency

- ✓ Can participants choose how much they want to be involved?
- ✓ Can we be flexible over outcomes and topics?
- ✓ Does everyone have the opportunity to try all activities?

Connection

- ✓ How can we build trust between everyone?
- ✓ How can we encourage active listening in all directions?
- ✓ What do we have in common? What differences should we acknowledge?

Legacy

- ✓ Is there a meaningful legacy for this project?
- ✓ Does everyone know what the legacy of this project will be?
- ✓ How could we improve this project?

Preparing contributors

Preparing researchers for authority sharing

During engagement activities, researchers will usually be viewed as authority figures and therefore we must prepare them to actively share that authority. Some researchers may already be familiar with an authority sharing approach, whereas for others it may be a new concept. Preparing your researchers in advance is crucial to a successful authority sharing experience.

It is important to remember that you and your colleagues will also often be viewed as authority figures. For this reason, we recommend engagement professionals also take part in authority sharing preparation.

- ✓ Arrange to meet collaborators (in person or online) in advance of the main engagement activity. This gives an opportunity to discuss the approach and any questions.
- ✓ Explain the core idea of authority sharing. It can be useful here to ask collaborators to think of experiences from their own lives of when authority was or was not shared with them, and how they felt.
- ✓ Share any experiences you may have from previous projects. A quote showing the impact of authority sharing can motivate collaborators to try the method.
- ✓ Brief collaborators on planned activities, reiterating how the authority sharing approach will be applied. This could include examples of active listening questions such as:

What do you think about...? How do you feel about that? What would you change?

- ✓ Share any useful context about the participants and motivations for the work. This could include topics of interest to your participants and any aims of the funding body or your organisation.

Preparing participants for authority sharing

While focusing on preparing yourself and researchers for authority sharing, it can be easy to forget that these methods may also feel different for participants. It can take time for participants to feel sure of how to engage with new methods.

If possible, share the tone of the project with participants in advance. Show how their participation will be valued, encouraging them to view the project as a partnership. The easiest way to do this is to model authority sharing behaviour yourself. Also consider being transparent about your, or any funders', motivations for the project.

If your project involves introducing researchers and participants, share some information in advance of this meeting. Let participants know who they will be meeting and give enough context that participants feel they can ask informed questions about the research. It can be useful to begin building trust by sharing information about researchers such as photographs, backgrounds, or hobbies.



Gameshow



The purpose of this activity is as an icebreaker, particularly between students and scientists. This activity should help participants to feel they are a valued member of the conversation and able to join in with following activities.

Activity

Invite students to write down questions for scientists on post-its. This works well if it can be done in advance but can also be within the session. Students should be informed of who the scientists are, their field of study or their job as a minimum.

- Collect questions and lay them out randomly on a table or whiteboard.
- Select questions at random and invite anyone to have a go at answering them. This includes students, scientists and facilitators.
- Allow up to a minute for any question but try to get through as many questions as possible in rapid succession.
- After ~10 minutes, depending on time available, allow students to select questions that interest them.
- In small groups, encourage students and scientists to explore selected questions.

Tips

- 1** ‘Randomly’ selecting a question early on that allows for multiple opinions can be a good way to encourage students to get involved.
- 2** Seat scientists and facilitators amongst students to place everyone on an equal footing.
- 3** Giving students more information in advance about scientists, such as hobbies and interests outside of STEM, can help students to imagine them as ‘real’ people. This can make it easier to ask the questions that actually interest them.

Choose- your-own- adventure

The purpose of this activity is to support students in developing their own opinions about STEM topics. It can also serve as an evaluation tool, to gauge students' opinions at multiple stages in a project.



Activity

Invite the students to stand in the middle of the room and explain that they will be offered a series of choices that they will vote on by moving around the room.

“You have just begun your new job working at the Science and Technology Facilities Council. It is your job to make decisions about how we spend money in scientific research. Each day you will have a decision to make with two choices. There is no right or wrong answer, there will be advantages and disadvantages to every option.”

- Present the first scenario, explaining the question and options. Give students a few moments to make a decision and move to the corresponding side of the room (e.g. left for option A, right for option B).
- Invite students from both sides to explain why they have made the decision they did. Allow students to change their mind if they wish.
- Select the most popular option and explain the consequences.
- Repeat this for each scenario, making note of the numbers that picked each option.
- Finish the final scenario by thanking the students for their choices, and acknowledging the variety of opinions in the room.



Tips

- 1** It helps to begin with one or two easier scenarios – to help students feel they can express their opinions.
- 2** If working with scientists, have one scenario based on each scientist's research. This ensures students have some level of recognition of their topics.
- 3** It can be useful to model behaviour by showing different facilitators having different opinions. This reinforces the 'no right or wrong answer' approach.
- 4** There should be good and bad consequences for each option, aligned with real-world issues.
- 5** This activity is easiest with a slide deck but can also be run verbally.



Resources

University College London & YESTEM

[Youth Equity + STEM | IOE - Faculty of Education and Society - UCL - University College London](#)

YESTEM

[The YESTEM Project | FREE TOOLS FOR EQUITABLE + TRANSFORMATIVE STEM DESIGN IN INFORMAL ENVIRONMENTS](#)

Authority Sharing Overview

[2021-YESTEM-Insight-2.8-Authority-Sharing.pdf](#)

ASDC Resources

[ASDC Inclusion Handbook, Resources and Theory of Change](#)

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