

Public Engagement Case Study Genetically Modified Insects and Disease Control

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Category/type of activity: Public Dialogue

Web links related to activity:

[https://figshare.com/articles/Genetically Modified Insects and Disease Control Report on 10th February 2015 public event/2064354](https://figshare.com/articles/Genetically_Modified_Insects_and_Disease_Control_Report_on_10th_February_2015_public_event/2064354)



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1. Goal for activity:

Identify (and discuss evidence for) reasons for public opposition to the use of genetically modified (GM) mosquitoes for disease control.

2. Audience for the activity:

General public (adult, central London)

3. Key Messages for the activity:

We were not trying to convey a message. We were there primarily to collect information from the public about opinions and awareness of/understanding of evidence.

However, there was information presented on:

- Available GM technologies and their capabilities
- Risks associated with releasing GM insects
- The current global policy situation
- Taking GM insect technology from research to market

4. How did you become involved in this activity?

I co-organized the event.

5. Who were key collaborators?

A postdoc from my institution, Dr. Anusha Panjwani, who got involved as the follow-up to a policy placement with the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, and experts from universities, government and industry. We found a facilitator through [ScienceWise](#).

6. How did the activity invite and engage in dialogue with the audience?

Open to public; short presentations followed by question-and-answer session.



7. How was the activity evaluated? How was feedback incorporated and any changes to the activity as a result?

Forms distributed on entry and collected on exit. Anonymous to encourage honest opinions, but front completed before activity and back completed after, so change in opinion could be tracked at individual level.

8. How long did it take to plan and implement this activity?

Six months of between 1-3 hours/week.

9. What resources did you need to implement this activity?

Approximately £5k in room hire and refreshments, materials and security (mostly room hire); regular weekly meetings of the two organizers, some printed materials, etc. We applied for and won small amounts of funding from the British Ecological Society and the Royal Entomological Society.

10. What lessons did you learn about public engagement as a result of this activity?

See also the [detailed report](#).

The use of a two-part audience questionnaire was invaluable in monitoring audience opinions and in anonymously linking changes in position during the event.

The use of a comments wall was a late introduction (see Annex 3 for comments). Uptake of this aspect of the event was low and could have been improved by allocating more specific time for the audience to take part; however the objective of including this in the first place was not very clear. Unless there is a clear rationale for its inclusion this could be omitted from similar future events.

Little change was seen in audience understanding of the potential risks of GM. Similar future events might achieve a greater improvement in this understanding by asking speakers to include slides summarizing potential risks, or an including an explicit facilitator-led discussion of this topic and capturing audience suggestions.

None of the organizers were familiar with the use of Storify before the event but all agreed that this was a potentially useful resource for engaging with members of the public unable to attend the event itself. Social media plans for future events of this kind will include the use of Storify to collate social media activities during the event into an event timeline.