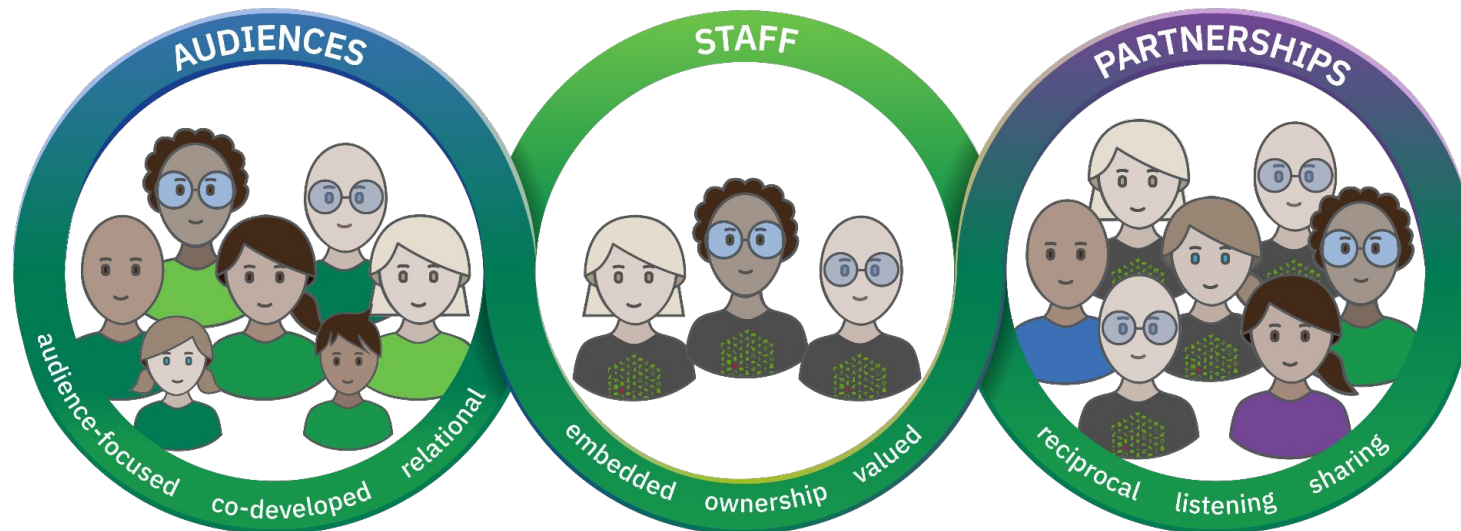


EMBL-EBI

Public Engagement

Strategy 2020-2025

Updated 2023



Introduction

At EMBL's European Bioinformatics Institute (EMBL-EBI) we are the world's leading source of biological and biomolecular data. Our core mission is to enable life-science research and its translation to medicine, agriculture, industry and society by providing biological data, tools and knowledge. We are part of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), an open-science intergovernmental organisation that has grown to become Europe's centre of excellence in life-science research, services and training.

EMBL-EBI is situated on the Wellcome Genome Campus, Hinxton, Cambridgeshire. We share the campus with the Wellcome Sanger Institute, the BioData Innovation Centre (BIC), Genomics England and Connecting Science. EMBL-EBI employs a dedicated Public Engagement Officer.

This public engagement strategy supports the delivery of the EMBL-EBI vision:

To benefit humankind by advancing scientific discovery and impact through bioinformatics.

This document sets out the strategic aims to meet the overarching goal for EMBL-EBI public engagement **to share EMBL-EBI's science and technology in context through a mutually-beneficial process of engagement with the public.**

This strategy has been informed by discussion with staff and students across all levels of the organisation and with consideration for the public engagement goals of EMBL-EBI's main funders.

This EMBL-EBI public engagement strategy is a 5-year plan. It was implemented in November 2020 and is reviewed periodically - allowing aims and objectives to be updated and for prioritisation of objectives against initial progress and existing capacity.

What is public engagement?

Public engagement is a term used across many sectors, organisations and institutions to describe activity that engages external public audiences.

Public engagement at EMBL-EBI is defined as public engagement in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) related to the activities of the institute.

We aim to bring together our staff and students from across the organisation, working and studying in the STEM sector, with publics who are not¹.

There are many ways for EMBL-EBI and the public to engage with each other, it is always a two-way activity with an audience-centred approach.

All parties should be on an equal footing with the opportunity to mutually benefit from the experience. The process involves active listening, dialogue, interaction and participation between EMBL-EBI colleagues and diverse publics. These groups come together as equals with the recognition that everyone has something to contribute from their knowledge base and lived experience.

There are a variety of engagement approaches and methods that can be utilised to engage different audiences in different places and contexts. The most impactful public engagement is co-designed and co-produced with the audience you want to engage.

¹ Engagement with other audiences such as journalists and media professionals, data users, collaborators, funders, staff, policy makers, industry, academia, job seekers, students and clinicians, is outlined in the EMBL-EBI Communications Strategy. This activity is science communication, a typically one-way process delivering information to either professional audiences or general publics, (e.g. contributing to a press release, being interviewed in a radio programme or podcast, or delivering a talk at a conference). The latter activities are supported by the Communication Officers in the Communications team, and do not constitute public engagement. There may be audience engagement cross-over at times.

Why engage?

- Our science, and the technologies it informs, are increasingly central to the life sciences, from human health to agriculture and biodiversity, and impacts the lives of everybody in society. Consequently, everyone should have the opportunity to find out more about bioinformatics - to be curious, discover, query and engage with the work we do and its impact on science and society.
- Engaging with the public benefits EMBL-EBI and the work we do, providing a different perspective for staff and students, individually, and to the institute as a whole. It creates space to build valuable connections with society and trusting relationships with communities. Our public engagement centres on working with communities - traditionally underserved by mainstream STEM engagement offers - to co-develop engagement activities.
- Our science and technology are primarily supported by public research funds and charities. Many of our grants, both publicly and privately funded, require public engagement activity alongside the scientific work. Even without this requirement we value public engagement as a vital part of what we do.
- Open science² is a set of principles and practices by which research outputs are distributed online and freely available for everyone to access and reuse. EMBL believes that the rapid and unrestricted sharing of knowledge is a key driver of progress, and hence open science is a core principle that underpins EMBL's science and technology - openly engaging with the public is an extension of this ethos. By inviting the public to be part of the conversation about science and technology that impacts their lives, EMBL-EBI hopes to contribute to increased transparency, curiosity and understanding.
- EMBL-EBI is well placed to increase the impact and reach of public engagement across the science and technology sectors through existing partnerships with local, national and international scientific and technological institutes and with the other EMBL sites.

² Open science is the movement to make scientific research (including publications, data, physical samples, and software) and its dissemination accessible to all levels of an inquiring society, amateur or professional.

Public engagement on the Wellcome Genome Campus

Wellcome Connecting Science Public Engagement offer engagement opportunities, support and training to staff on the Wellcome Genome Campus. In 2017, Connecting Science applied to the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) Watermark award. As part this process public engagement on the Campus was assessed against the NCCPE EDGE tool.

The EDGE tool is a useful benchmarking tool that assesses institutions in three key areas (Purpose, Process, People) against a scale of Embryonic> Developing> Gripping> Embedding. The Wellcome Genome Campus was awarded the Silver Watermark Award and was marked Gripping and Embedding in most areas with only one category, Recognition, seen as Embryonic. The results and recommendations were set out separately for Sanger and EMBL-EBI. In 2019 the NCCPE were commissioned to carry out a second review, outside of the awards process, but with the same methodology. The Campus was seen to be performing well in all areas, with a split across Gripping and Embedding.

Our strategy

By taking action in key areas and aligning with the [UKRI public engagement strategy \(November 2022\)](#) this strategy supports the further development and embedding of public engagement at EMBL-EBI.

By taking a collaborative approach to engaging public audiences with our science and technology, we will provide new opportunities for people to encounter bioinformatics in a context that is relevant to their lives and invites them to be part of the conversation. Working in partnership with trusted intermediaries will enable better connections with priority audiences - those not well served by existing STEM engagement offers.

Key to this is encouraging and supporting staff and students to engage with the public in a variety of accessible and inclusive ways. We will focus our topical engagement across three themes - Biodiversity, Artificial Intelligence and Genomic Medicine.

Public Engagement Aims

Aim 1: Build positive relationships with diverse public audiences

- Proactive partnership working with our audience partners to connect with community audiences
- Public engagement activity is audience-focused and co-developed and co-produced
- Leverage our technically and culturally diverse workforce to engage with, and connect to, a diverse audience

Aim 2: Embed a positive culture of public engagement at EMBL-EBI

- Public engagement is supported by HR processes and budget allocation and ownership is embedded through the leadership structure
- Public engagement is embedded within the practise and mindset of our leadership, staff and students
- Support and empower staff and students to be involved in public engagement
- Internal communication about public engagement
- Understand engagement motivations, preferences, barriers and challenges

Aim 3: Build and develop partnerships on campus, across EMBL and with external organisations

- Spread key pillars of EMBL-EBI public engagement across EMBL
- Be open to, and maximise the potential of, collaboration with external organisations to engage national and transnational audiences
- Share best practice with sector and funders to encourage more impactful public engagement

Regular review

Evaluation of public engagement allows assessment of public engagement strategy effectiveness at an institutional level.

- Staff and students' public engagement activity benefits from feedback and reflection.
- Feedback and metrics gathered can be shared with colleagues, audience partners, EMBL-EBI leadership, EMBL and funders.
- Metrics from each public engagement activity/event are recorded in the EMBL-EBI Training Database along with qualitative feedback from audience, partners and EMBL-EBI staff and students.
- This data is reported to Strategy for EMBL annual reporting.
- An annual report on public engagement will be produced against this strategy. It will be shared proactively with all EMBL-EBI staff, students, leadership and relevant EMBL colleagues and external partners and stakeholders. It will also be available to a general external audience via our public engagement webpage and relevant external communication channels.

To read the previous EMBL-EBI Public Engagement annual reports please follow the links below:

[November 2020 - October 2021](#)

[November 2021 - December 2022](#)

All future annual reports will follow the calendar year.