



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

FOR
LANGUAGES
RESEARCHERS



ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

We hope this toolkit will help Modern Languages researchers organise public engagement events, both big and small. Working with language(s) can bring a new level of complication to public engagement activities, such as:

- How do you make the invisible (language) visible?
- How do you organise events when you don't know which languages the participants will speak?
- How do you promote language diversity if there is just one shared lingua franca?

This toolkit will offer solutions to challenges you may come across, and will hopefully inspire you to find new, creative ways to share your Modern Languages research.

We will be giving some general advice about putting on public engagement events, but the main focus will be on aspects of public engagement pertinent to languages research.

WHO ARE WE?

This toolkit has been produced by Creative Multilingualism, a research programme led by the University of Oxford and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

We have run and participated in lots of different public engagement events during the four years of the programme, and we wanted to share what we learnt along the way.

WHY RUN A PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EVENT?

There are numerous benefits to sharing your research at public engagement events, such as the opportunity to have impact on your target audience, the impetus to make your messaging more accessible, the chance to gain valuable feedback from a non-academic viewpoint, the opportunity to collect data etc.

More reasons can be found at the following sites:

[National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement](#)
[University of Oxford](#)
[Wellcome Trust](#)

HOW TO RUN A PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EVENT WITH LANGUAGES

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

To run or take part in a public engagement event, the first thing you need to do is understand who will be attending so you can tailor your activity to your audience. How much will participants know about your research? This should shape the type of event you run and the kind of messages you share. If your event is open to the general public, think about how you can give your research a clear focus and concentrate it in simple key messages. In order to inspire participants to want to find out more about your research, make this as simple as possible by providing them with leaflets, links to websites or social media accounts, ways to sign up to your mailing list etc.

What age groups will be attending?

If the event is aimed at families, it's worth considering how well your activity will work for children. Consider having a simple, fun version of the activity which children can engage with, or even a completely separate activity.

Make it accessible

Don't make assumptions about what people will know and understand. For example, people may be aware of metaphors, but if you're doing an activity which involves metaphors, make sure you're prepared with a simple definition and some examples. You may also have an international audience with varying levels of English, so having clear, simple instructions will make sure as many people as possible can join in.

You could also choose an activity which offers different levels of engagement: so if the main activity is to pair some images with words, participants who are particularly interested could perhaps then go on to contribute their own words or take a short survey.

Consider personalities

As well as taking age into consideration, it's also worth thinking about the different personality types which might be attending. Extroverts might be happy to approach your activity and directly ask what to do and why you're doing it, but more introverted personalities could benefit from a more independent approach. You can therefore make your task easier for all by including written instructions (so people don't have to ask you what to do), while still being on hand to give further details about the activity or the research to those who are interested.

What languages will my audience know?

Unless you do an extensive pre-event questionnaire, it's unlikely that you will know how many and which languages your participants know. But don't let this put you off running an activity using more than one language. If you're working with just one language beyond English, you could:

- Make it possible to participate in the activity without prior knowledge of the language by using a familiar text or theme, such as a fairy tale.
- Provide dictionaries and other support.
- Work with vocabulary English speakers will have come across, such as food, musical terms, yoga positions or ballet movements.
- Teach a few words of the language through an activity (e.g. making and flying paper aeroplanes).

Or you could design an activity which doesn't require any knowledge of a particular language, for example:

- Translate into emojis.
- Translate into English with certain limitations (e.g. translate well-known song lyrics into words which don't have the letter 'e', or which keep the same first letter).
- Use images / symbols to complete a task.
- Use constructed languages such as Elvish or Dothraki.

If you want to give your participants the opportunity to use the languages they know (and to celebrate the UK's multilingualism at the same time), this opens up more options, for example you could:

- Ask people to contribute words (or idioms/metaphors) in their language.
- Ask participants to translate a book/poem/song into their own language, perhaps line-by-line.
- Run an activity which highlights the similarities and differences between languages.

What will happen to the research you are involving participants in?

Participants like to feel that they are contributing to proper research rather than just doing an ephemeral activity designed for engagement purposes. So consider in advance whether the activity could yield results that might then be published on your website.



Making the invisible visible

To make your activity look enticing from afar, and to make it easier for people to engage with the research, it's useful to have a tangible object with which participants can quickly and easily interact. This isn't always easy with an abstract topic such as languages or translation – but there are creative ways to get around this:

- Use large boards and brightly coloured post-it notes or magnets for an activity. It can be quite intimidating to approach a table full of academics to engage with a topic you know nothing about – but if you blow your activity up to a larger scale (with white boards, poster boards, brightly coloured post-it notes or large laminated images) it not only becomes more approachable, but also more fun! It also allows more people to engage with the activity simultaneously, and makes it more visible and appealing. If you're asking people to help translate a text, hang the results from a washing line or write them on a giant scroll. Buying or borrowing the extra materials does add some cost and logistical work, but in our experience it's worth it to reach more people.
- Find a prop: although languages don't naturally lend themselves to physical objects, having a tangible object at your public engagement stand can help to make the abstract more concrete. If you can link your research to a theme, it could make it easier to find a prop.

CASE STUDY: EDNA & EDDIE

We wanted to share some of our metaphor research and emphasise the connection between language and culture at a large event in Oxford. We decided to ask participants to share metaphors and idioms which are linked to body parts in any language. This is because a key part of our research was about embodied metaphors across languages. To help inspire participants, we brought along two mannequins (now known as Edna and Eddie) which not only provided a useful prompt to encourage people to think about the different body parts but whose visible presence also enticed participants to come over and find out what our stand was about. Participants wrote their body-part idioms on brightly coloured post-it notes. This also helped with evaluation as we could easily count how many people contributed to the activity. By having everyone's post-it notes on display, it also meant that participants could read through the idioms and metaphors already contributed, which helped inspire them to think up their own.

— Creative Multilingualism team



PRACTICAL TIPS

Logistics & venue limitations

When planning your activity, make sure you visit the venue and check with the relevant staff about limitations and logistical issues early on in the process. For example, many museums will not let you use pens and insist on pencils only, there may be a limited number of tables or chairs available, or your activity could be affected by the placement of power sockets. If you are expecting to communicate by phone from within the venue, you may need to check that phone reception is available.

See an example checklist on the Creative Multilingualism website:
www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/checklist

There may also be setting up or packing away issues to consider: what time can you get into the venue to set up? Is there somewhere to store your equipment? If you're bringing heavy goods such as tables, poster boards etc., how close can you get to the venue with a car?

Draw up a detailed Event Schedule at an early stage and refine it as your plans crystallise. Allocate tasks to specific individuals and include contact details.

Audio and video

You may want to use sound or an electronic display. Check what is available at the venue and ensure that it meets your requirements. You may have to hire in special equipment, which can add considerably to your costs. If you need microphones, check what the venue can supply. Test any equipment and materials in very good time and make sure the venue staff are fully aware of what you are expecting.

Catering

If you want to provide drink and/or food, find out what the restrictions of the venue are and whether they stipulate a provider.

Volunteers

Don't underestimate how tiring it is to run an activity for a few hours. If you can find friends and colleagues to help with your activity – do! If they are not overly familiar with the research you are sharing, consider creating a simple crib sheet with the key details and messages you want to share, and a link to a website where they can find out more.

Free tickets

Many public engagement events are free – which is great in that they will probably attract a large audience. What is not so great is that many people do not bother to turn up on the day, even if they have registered for a ticket.

To reduce the chance of not filling your places on the day, you may want to consider:

- Overselling the event by a small percentage.
- Contacting attendees (if GDPR-compliant) to remind them of the event and ask them to cancel their ticket if they can no longer make it.
- Limiting the number of tickets one person can sign up for.
- Charging a refundable deposit or a small entrance fee.

CO-CREATION WITH PARTNERS

Working with partners can be a great way to run an effective event if your skills and contributions complement each other.

Ways you could work with a partner

- Team up with a museum / library / school to provide a venue for your activity.
- Work with creative organisations to turn your research into a performance or piece of art.
- Partner with a relevant organisation / society who can help spread the word about your event.
- Take part in a larger event / festival – this could avoid the hassle of trying to organise your own venue and finding an audience, but could also impose certain limitations on you (e.g. how much space you have for your activity / how much time you can have to set up).



As with all relationships, any partnerships need to be handled sensitively with clear communication to avoid problems.

Pitfalls to avoid

- Ensure all partners agree on the objectives of the event (even if these differ for each partner).
- Discuss branding of the event (which logos should appear, who should be mentioned in the programme, who should be thanked in the welcoming speech etc.).
- Be clear on who is providing what equipment – a partner may be providing the venue, but that doesn't necessarily mean they will have enough tables and chairs for your activity.
- Decide who is responsible for which tasks early on in the process.
- Talk through early on with the venue staff and any helpers who will provide what and when, and include this in your event schedule.



CASE STUDY: MOON METAPHORS

In June 2018, I ran a small workshop at the Glasgow Science festival on the topic of Moon metaphors. The event was free and the audience were the general public, so people of all ages and backgrounds. The general purpose of my workshop was to show what the Moon means to people of different languages and cultures. It was really helpful to run an event as part of another event as it was well advertised and promoted in Glasgow, which took the pressure off me to conjure up an audience. The only negative to working with the festival was that I was quite restricted in space, as I'd only been allocated one table. I had ethical clearance from my institution to collect data from the activity, so I could also use the responses I gathered in my research. The workshop went really well, but I wish I had trained up a helper, as it was exhausting to run the 2-3 hour activity myself.

— Sally Zacharias, University of Glasgow

WORKING WITH SCHOOLS

Timing of activities – There are some times in the schools calendar when teachers are likely to be too busy to engage with outside activities (e.g. in the lead-up to SATs, GCSEs etc.) so find out the best time to approach a school about a possible collaboration to have more chance of success. Also make sure you check the school's holiday dates.

Permissions – If you are going to be working independently with pupils, you (and any assistants) are likely to need to be DBS checked. Moreover, you'd ideally have an Enhanced DBS check. This can take a while to process, so ensure you apply for it in good time. Also, make sure you familiarise yourself fully with GDPR requirements and check your own institutions regulations. In order to be GDPR compliant, every individual (adult or child) appearing recognisably in a film or photograph must have provided written permission. A child will need permission from their parent or guardian.

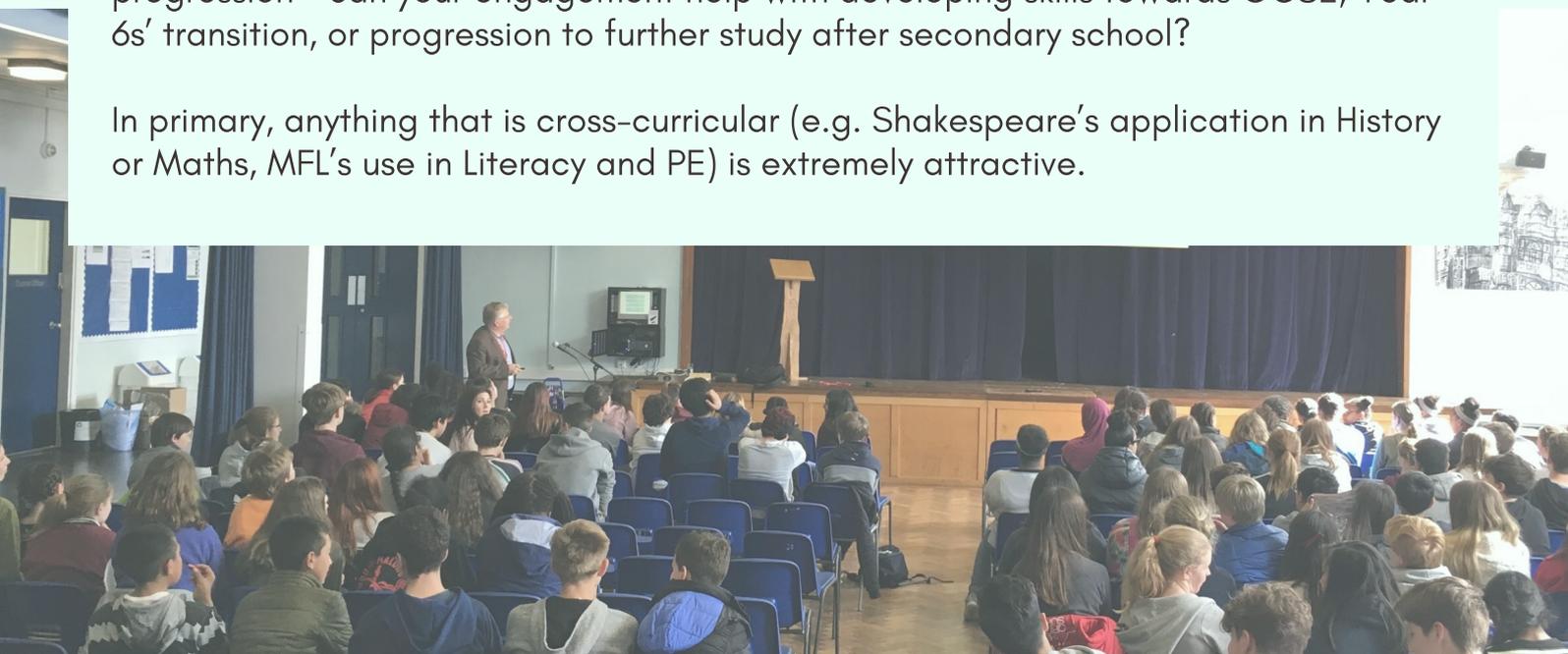
Costs – Most schools also have very limited funds. Be confident about showing them the in-kind value of what you're offering; what would the cost be if you were charging them? If you need teachers' time during the school day, consider finding funding to pay for the costs of teacher cover to make it easier for them to take the time out.

Making contact – You will often first need to engage with a Senior Leader – probably the Head or Principal – and after getting their sign-up ask for a contact teacher with whom you'll organise details going forward.

Do the thinking for them! Schools and teachers are time-poor. The more you can present a pre-designed offer, with ideas or even concrete plans for transport, resources, timings, risk assessments etc, the more likely they will focus on the benefits rather than the paperwork.

Appealing ideas – Tap into important moments of young people's academic progression – can your engagement help with developing skills towards GCSE, Year 6s' transition, or progression to further study after secondary school?

In primary, anything that is cross-curricular (e.g. Shakespeare's application in History or Maths, MFL's use in Literacy and PE) is extremely attractive.



PROMOTION

All this hard work will be pointless if you don't get anyone to come to your event, so promotion is key. The first thing you need to do is to work out who your target audience is, and then you can tailor your promotional activities to reach them first. If you're struggling to get much interest from your target audience, you can always widen the net at a later stage.

Before you start spreading the message about your event, make sure you have chosen an engaging title for the activity – if you are trying to reach a more general audience, they may be more tempted to attend 'The Spectacular Translation Machine' than 'A Translation Workshop'.

Newsletters / mailing lists – If you can find out which newsletters your target audience receives, then you can contact the people who send them to inform them about your activity and ask them to share with their subscribers. You want to make it as easy as possible for your contacts to share details of the event, so ensure you include a short, appealing summary of the activity, plus all key details (date, location, where to register) and a (copyright-free) image.

You may also be able to find a relevant Jisc mail to share details of your event. As an example, Creative Multilingualism used the popular SCUDD (The Standing Conference of University Drama Departments) mailing list to reach artists and performers for one conference.

Social Media – Research the different social media channels to work out which is most popular with your target audience (e.g. Facebook may help you reach teachers, but it's less popular with teens). If you don't have many followers, you can reach more people by using relevant hashtags (do a quick Google search beforehand to see which are popular) on channels such as Twitter and Instagram.

On Twitter you can also use images to share your post more widely by tagging (up to 10) relevant people in the image. The people who are tagged will get a notification about the tweet, so may share it with their followers if they believe it to be of interest to them. You may not have large funds, but some social media platforms, such as Facebook, offer very reasonable promotion opportunities which allow you to filter down to your key demographic (by age, location, key words etc.).

Posters / leaflets – If you know the places where your key audience is likely to congregate, a bright poster or leaflet advertising your event can be an easy way to reach potential attendees. If you haven't got funds for design work, free sites such as Canva (<https://www.canva.com/>) offer templates you can use for inspiration.



BRANDING

Once you're at the event, if you have clear branding at your stand, it can help attract more participants to do your activity and also raise awareness of your research programme or institution.

Pull-up banners: these don't cost a fortune and can be used over and over again in a variety of ways. If carefully placed, they can also be a great back-drop for photos (increasing your visibility on social media) and can help cover up unsightly backgrounds.

Tablecloths: As with the pull-up banners, these can help cover up scratched or stained tables and also help make your stand look more professional.

FREEBIES

Everyone loves a freebie. Whether it's a pencil, a bookmark, a glo-stick, a badge or a sticker – having something your participants can take away is a great way to thank them for their time. If your freebie is something visible, like a badge or glo-stick bracelet, it can also help attract other people to your stand to take part in your activity.

Another option would be to have a craft activity where the participant can take away their creation, such as a cuneiform tablet (made out of clay), or a bookmark with your name written in Elvish etc.

Branding any freebies with the name or your institution or research programme can be an effective form of promotion and if the freebie is a useful object such as a tote bag, bike seat cover or pencil, it's also likely to be seen over and over again by the participant – ongoing promotion!

CASE STUDY: INOCULATED AGAINST IGNORANCE

A virologist, a social scientist and I ran an event about contagion, vaccination, inoculation, etc. We had postcards with a question on the front and answer on the back. People felt challenged to guess the answers (some were easier than others and we were on hand to give oral clues). Participants were allowed to take away a card and enjoyed being given a colourful sticker saying they were inoculated against ignorance. Some of the props we made have been used since for other events in schools. It is worth taking the time to make good props so they can be used on multiple occasions.

— Catriona Seth, University of Oxford



EVALUATION

Evaluation is an essential aspect of any activity in order to demonstrate whether or not the objectives were met. And remember, having clear objectives makes it much simpler to design and implement evaluation tasks.

Do:

- Think about evaluation as early as possible in the process.
- Design the evaluation around your objectives.
- What do you want to prove happened as a result of your event / activity? How can this be demonstrated?
- Consider whether you need any information from participants before the event; if you want to show a change in attitude, you may need to demonstrate how participants felt before the activity AND afterwards.
- Adapt your evaluation for each event / each new audience. A conference audience may not mind an evaluation questionnaire, but the general public watching a performance might prefer to simply write a short comment on the back of a postcard.
- Think about creative ways of capturing feedback and relating the format to your research – the more fun the evaluation activity is, the more chance you have of people engaging with it.
- Consider long-term feedback – can you get permission to contact participants a few months after the activity to see if their practice has changed as a result of your event?

Don't:

- Feel evaluation has to be a plain A4 sheet of questions.
- Leave evaluation to the end of the activity in case in case people leave at different times – it helps to include time in your activity to fill out forms (e.g. save 5 minutes at the end of a workshop).
- Forget to take pens and pencils (make it as easy as possible for participants to fill out your evaluation forms).
- Count on people sending in or completing evaluation after the event.
- Underestimate people's desire to be nice and pleasing; make sure you offer more options than just 'good' or 'bad'.
- Be disheartened by some negative feedback – this shows your data is real!
- Feel you just have to use English for feedback – don't underestimate the value of letting people evaluate in their own language (especially if your activity is promoting languages) – although you may need to call on friends / colleagues / google to help translate.

Writing effective questionnaires

- People tend to want to give positive feedback, so giving them the choice between an event being 'good' or 'bad' really limits their options. Offer options such as 'ok', 'quite good', 'satisfactory', or 'not relevant to me' to help elicit more honest responses.
- Include an open box for comments you might not have expected.
- Don't combine questions – make sure each question addresses a different issue otherwise it becomes tricky to separate the data later in the process.
- Avoid writing leading questions, such as: 'Describe how this activity has improved your knowledge of metaphor'.
- Don't ask for more personal data than you need, e.g. if you want to know how far people have travelled, perhaps the first half of their postcode would suffice.
- Be clear what you will use the feedback for – if you want to use some quotes from the evaluation forms in publicity or reporting, make this clear on the evaluation form.

CASE STUDY: LINGUAMANIA

In January 2017, we ran LinguaMania, a large public engagement event in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford involving over 30 language and translation activities. We had over 2,500 participants and needed to find a creative and effective way to evaluate how they found the event. We wanted to see whether we'd met our objectives of giving visitors an increased understanding that languages are: connected with creativity, enriching and fun, and fundamental to our identity as human beings and our sense of belonging to cultural groups.

We did this in a variety of ways:

- At booking, we asked registrants to tell us 3 words they associate with languages.
- Post event, we emailed participants and asked them to fill in a short online survey (which also included 'which 3 words do you associate with languages').
- At the event, we encouraged participants to write a short feedback comment on a postcard (in any language). This proved most effective when one of us stood by the station and invited people to fill one in.
- As the participants were leaving the event, we also asked them to put a scrabble tile in a choice of 3 buckets: positive (smiley face), negative (happy face) and ok (neutral face). It proved necessary for two or three of us to hand out the tiles as participants didn't take them independently.

We found the mixture of evaluation options worked well for us as we managed to get a variety of quantitative and qualitative feedback, while nobody had to fill out a boring paper evaluation form.

– Creative Multilingualism team

LEGACY AND CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT

If you inspire and engage people at your public engagement event, they may be interested in hearing more about your work and taking part in future events. You can take advantage of these opportunities by:

- having a newsletter sign-up form at the event. To be GDPR-compliant it would be best to have a separate sign-up form for each person (so participants' email addresses are not kept on display)
- sharing social media details on any leaflets / freebies you give away on the night
- sharing links to your website or web pages where people can find out more about your project / research

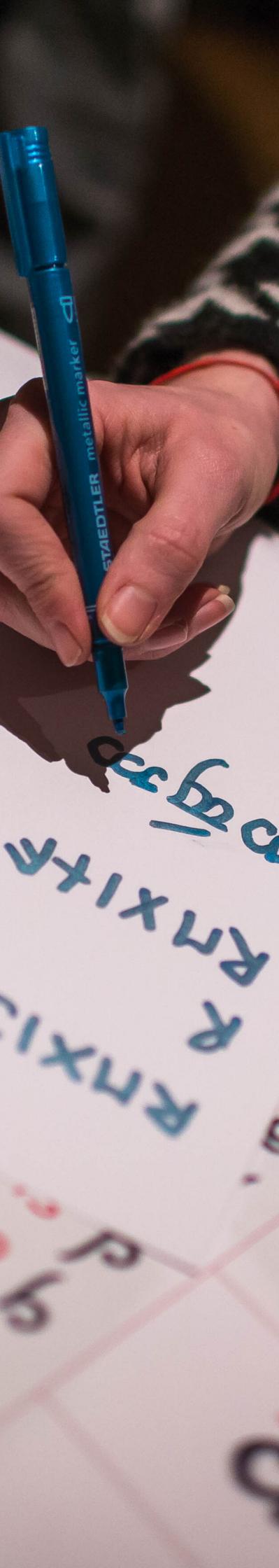
You can also reach an audience beyond the participants who attended your event by creating content for your website or your institution's website, including:

- blog posts about the event
- photos of the event
- films of the event - either an overview film of the event, or short interviews with activity organisers and participants
- vox pox with participants (on audio or film)

The cost of a photographer or camera operator can be considerable for a one-off event, and for filming you will need to factor in editing costs. But it can produce really valuable content which widens the reach of your project and is attractive to view for a long time afterwards.

However, be sure to get anyone who features on film / photo / audio to sign a consent form. You should also display signs to inform all participants that filming and photography will be taking place with details of how to notify organisers if they do not want to feature. GDPR regulations are very strict. For example, a school may tell you that it has permissions from parents but you will need to get permissions separately for every child, and it is highly likely that some children may not be filmed.

If you do not want go to the trouble of gaining consent from a large number of people, this doesn't mean you can't film the event - it's possible to create a carefully shot film which avoids filming members of the public but can still capture the atmosphere of the event.



CASE STUDY: BABEL LIBRARY LATES

We wanted to film our public engagement event, Babel Library Lates, at the Weston Library in Oxford. However, we were aware that to be GDPR-compliant, we would need to get consent from every identifiable person on film. So, not only would we need to follow the filmmaker around with consent forms for every person he filmed, we would also need to be able to identify these people when we came to edit the film to make sure only those who have given consent end up in the final edit.

In the end, we decided to go for a creative approach where we included abstract shots of people and activities and only the activity organisers were identifiable on the film (we had obtained consent from them before filming). We were delighted with the finished film – which managed to capture the buzz and energy of the event without featuring any members of the general public. You can watch the film at: <https://youtu.be/GYqmS89LevY>

— Creative Multilingualism team



BABEL

Adventures in Translation

NOW OVER TO YOU...

We hope you have found this toolkit useful and that it inspires you to run lots of creative public engagement events to share your languages research. We'd really appreciate any feedback, so please do get in touch to tell us what was helpful (and what wasn't!) by emailing us at creativemlemod-langs.ox.ac.uk.

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