Reflections from the review of the Wellcome Trust’s Public Engagement Fund

May 2019
Introduction

- This slide deck provides a summary of the work undertaken by the Institute of Voluntary Action Research (IVAR), who were commissioned by Wellcome in December 2018 to carry out a review of its Public Engagement Fund.
- The slides that follow chart the progress of the work, share emerging findings and present a proposed new funding model.
- However, the process of undertaking the review has prompted bigger questions for Wellcome, and as a result it has therefore decided to close the Fund.
- Wellcome is now taking a step back to review its approach to funding and delivering its public engagement strategy more broadly. We hope that our work will be a useful foundation from which to build the next steps.
Setting the scene

- Wellcome’s mission is to improve life for everyone by helping great ideas thrive.
- It has been a pioneer and leader in public engagement with a strong commitment to involving people in its work.

Its public engagement strategy has three outcomes:
- Empower people by helping them to access, use, respond to, and/or participate in health research and innovation.
- Improve health research by making it more people-centred, to better understand people’s experiences and draw on that knowledge.
- Help people to value and think critically about science, health research, innovation and the role these play in society.
The Public Engagement Fund, is a ‘response mode’ open funding scheme that supports the public engagement strategy by enabling individuals and organisations to use creative approaches in engaging the public with health research.
## Commissioning the review

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<th>The development of the Public Engagement Fund</th>
<th>Emerging concerns</th>
<th>What did the review set out to do?</th>
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<td><strong>2016</strong>: Creation of the Public Engagement Fund (PEF) Wellcome brought together a number of different funding schemes to streamline the approach and create the new PEF. Aimed to make the Fund more accessible to a wider audience, encouraging greater diversity of applicants and more creative approaches.</td>
<td><strong>2018</strong>: The creation of the PEF and its broad criteria opened it up to a broader range and higher number of applicants. However, it was not always clear how proposals aligned with the PE strategy outcomes. Applications had not diverged significantly from previous investment patterns, despite a desire for greater reach.</td>
<td><strong>Dec 2018</strong>: Commissioned a review ‘to improve the effectiveness of the scheme with a view to refining it’. Appointed IVAR to carry out the review with the overall objective of introducing modifications to enable fewer, better and more diverse applications.</td>
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Our approach

• Inception meeting to agree the aims, objectives and parameters of the review.

• Interviews with nine staff, with varied roles and levels of engagement in the Fund, to understand what was working well and what needed to change.

• Focus group with 25 staff to develop a greater understanding of the purpose of the Fund.

• Data analysis conducted by 360Giving to identify trends and gaps in the applicant and grantee portfolio.

• Co-design workshops with key staff to progress ideas and opportunities for change.
Data analysis – key findings (1/2)

Data supplied by Wellcome and analysed by 360Giving covering applications received and grants made over three rounds of the Public Engagement Fund (May-November 2018) showed:

• 738 applications were received and 32 grants were awarded. Grants ranged between £25,000 and £251,000 and the average grant was approximately £80,000.

• The largest category of applications received was those based overseas – 53% of applications. Less than 2% of these applications were funded. Universities made up 15% of applications – 3.4% of these were funded; nearly 13% of applications were received from UK charities and of these 13% were funded.

• Two thirds of applicants were previously known to Wellcome and had been funded before.

• Over half of successful applicants were based in London and the South East, although funded activity occurred across the UK.
Data analysis – key findings (2/2)

• Funded organisations were overwhelmingly from urban areas.

• 16% of applicants stated they were from a black, Asian or mixed background but no data is available for the percentage of work targeted at beneficiaries from these communities. Similarly, nearly 75% of applications came from female lead applicants, but again this is not a reliable indicator of the percentage of work being undertaken with women.

• Looking at the beneficiaries served by charities, most said they served the general public or children and young people. 22% of charities say they explicitly work with people of a particular ethnic or racial origin.
What emerged: What’s working well?

• Feedback from staff included that many of the grants that were funded were aligned with the public engagement strategy and successfully engaged the public with health research using creative approaches.

• Response mode funding enables crowd sourcing of good ideas.

• A highly experienced team was involved in reviewing applications, whilst retaining a ‘light touch’ approach to minimise use of resources.

• Bringing several streams of funding into one under the Public Engagement Fund has created more alignment for staff to work towards the same strategy, and there is a positive environment to challenge one another in the decision-making process.

• There was a shared ambition for the Fund to support different types of projects and develop a broader applicant base, serving a more representative range of the population and being open to a higher level of risk to reap more innovation and reward.
What emerged: What’s not working so well?

A number of key concerns were identified:

- Applications lack alignment with the public engagement strategy and as a result funds cannot be fully allocated.
- Criteria is intentionally broad which results in large numbers of applications and high turn down rates.
- The decision to stop pre-application support may have deterred less experienced applicants.
- A lack of scheme promotion or targeting of the Fund to specific under-served groups may impact on the diversity of applicants.
- A high proportion of successful applicants already have connections to Wellcome and have been previously funded.
- Limited evaluation on individual projects and aggregate value is poorly understood.
Our response to the findings (1/2)

Our analysis of the data and interviews held with staff led us to consider what changes were needed in fund design, structure and application process to better meet the outcomes of the public engagement strategy.

Questions we asked included:

• Is it possible to address the key concerns identified whilst retaining a response mode funding model?
• Will narrowing or further targeting of the Fund better support the implementation of the public engagement strategy?
• Are there other funding mechanisms which would allow the Fund to retain a broad brief but address the emerging concerns?

In response, we co-developed with Wellcome a matrix which identified the different types of work that Wellcome wishes to support to meet the outcomes of the public engagement strategy and possible funding mechanisms for each area.
Our response to the findings (2/2)

- Segmenting the Fund along a spectrum from ‘disruptive innovator’ through ‘establishing proof of concept’ to ‘scaling up’, helped to identify the strategic intent of the range of work Wellcome wished to support. This process brings greater clarity to the focus of the Fund, from which we can build scheme definition.

- We also identified a set of characteristics we would expect to see in applications along the spectrum, and likely level of maturity of the organisations applying. The Fund would no longer adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to its application or assessment process.
Benefits of a matrix approach

A matrix approach could:

- Allow applicants to demonstrate their abilities and track record and be judged by their maturity and project ambition.
- Allow the Trust to define the shape of the portfolio for the PEF and the level of risk it wishes to carry within it.
- Enable a more accurate assessment of risk vs reward to support better decision making.
- Provide targets for funding in the various quartiles to ensure that different types of organisations and projects are funded, including less mature groups with a strong focus on innovation.
- Help improve communication around eligibility and expectations for applicants.

The model is not static. There is potential for mobility between the different elements as organisations develop and mature – by supporting experimentation, the Fund could help its grantees to mature from innovation to scaling up and therefore build capacity in public engagement.
## A proposed matrix for the Public Engagement Fund

<table>
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<tr>
<th>WHY</th>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>HOW</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic intent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Applicant characteristics</strong></td>
<td><strong>Type of project</strong></td>
<td><strong>Funding mechanism</strong></td>
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<td>To generate <em>proof of concept</em>, to transfer learning from one field and test elsewhere</td>
<td>Some experience of public engagement, maturity of ideas, making the case</td>
<td>Building evidence, developing capability</td>
<td>In-house assessment and decision making</td>
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| To scale up ‘what works’ | Strong track record in public engagement; high level of maturity | • Scale successful practice  
• Respond to selected health related challenges | • Challenge funding  
• Possible thematic approaches  
• Close relationships with grantees |
Aligning the Public Engagement Fund with the theory of change and strategic objectives

In adopting this approach, the Trust will need to clarify three key questions for each aspect of the funding model:

• **Strategy**: How does the work help implement the outcomes of the public engagement strategy?

• **Applicants**: How does Wellcome reach the target applicant audience?

• **Process**: What grant-making mechanisms might best suit each area of funding?
Wellcome’s response

• This process has stimulated bigger questions within Wellcome about how it uses its resources most effectively to deliver its public engagement strategy.

• Wellcome has now taken a step back to review its funding approach to support the public engagement strategy. It has made a decision to close the Public Engagement Fund and its last deadline for applications is 9 July 2019.

• In future, Wellcome may develop a range of targeted funding approaches each supported by appropriate funding mechanisms. With a clear narrative about why and how it approaches its funding, future applications should be better aligned to Wellcome’s public engagement strategy and produce a more diverse applicant base and grants portfolio.