ARTING HEALTH
FOR IMPACT

BEST Practices for Communication & Engagement in Cross-Border Health/Art Collaborations

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Introduction to Science-Art Collaborations

As science and technology continue to develop at a rapid pace, altering the landscape of human experience, it has become more important than ever for the public to participate and contribute to science development, but it takes understanding of the subject for participation to occur.

In order to make educated decisions about every aspect of our lives, we rely on information. General information is presented, through various media, in palatable formats that are relatively easy for the public to understand. When it comes to scientific information, however, things are less simple. Most non-scientists access science-related information through mainstream media channels that cover a broad range of topics. However, journalists are not always experts at science reporting. It's not uncommon to find science-related articles jumping to conclusions and synthesizing complex data into catchy and inaccurate headlines.

"Science is by its nature an incremental process; it's incredibly rare for sudden groundbreaking research to change the way we see the Universe. Generally, small steps are taken, usually not all in the same direction, until eventually (and hopefully) a bigger picture builds up. But that's not how media work. More and more they demand big, splashy results." - Phil Plait
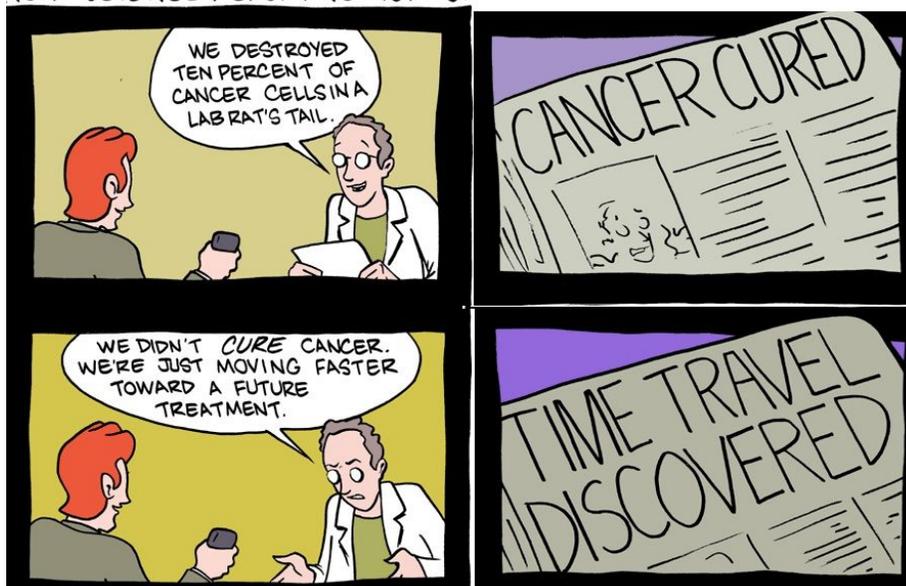
Excerpt of a cartoon from Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal, by Zach Weinersmith

The competitive nature of academic research also plays a role, with a strong focus on highlighting successes and hiding failure. Journalists can base entire articles on press releases from

highly-respected institutions. Dr Jamie Wells' 2017 piece on the [American Council on Science and Health's website](#) tackled the media's lack of understanding of how scientific research works. Citing a Harvard study that supposedly proved the health benefits of chocolate, he stated: "Consider the ramifications of a diabetic believing extra chocolate could stave off arrhythmias while actually adding sugar."

Cartoon from [Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal](#), by Zach Weinersmith

Science Communication and Engagement

Science communication can be defined as: *the use of appropriate skills, media, activities, and dialogue to produce one or more of the following personal responses to science (the AEIOU vowel analogy): Awareness, Enjoyment, Interest, Opinion-forming, and Understanding.* (Burns, T. W., O'Connor, D. J., Stocklmayer, S. M. Science Communication: A Contemporary Definition Public Understanding of Science 2003, retrieved from [African Science Heroes](#).)

Science communication and engagement is about communicating scientific information in a way that lay people can understand and appreciate, while also ensuring that they are equipped with the facts, can ask the right questions and are able to make informed decisions.

Science communication and engagement is NOT public relations or marketing. Rather, it cultivates interest in science and encourages input from the public, promotes critical thinking and debate around scientific advances and holds scientists accountable. It is interaction, dialogue and participation between scientists and the public, rather than a one way flow of information, ensuring that the public have the opportunity to influence policy decisions and scientific developments.

There are two main aims in science communication and engagement:

- To counter misinformation and prevent misconceptions around science
- To ensure that people understand the implications of scientific developments, so that they can use such developments to improve their lives and make informed decisions

There are many ways to approach science communication and engagement, but our focus is on the use of the arts as a bridge between public health researchers and practitioners and the public. The combination of art and science might not seem an obvious one to us, but there are examples of such collaborations throughout history.

The arts are a wonderful vessel for making science accessible, inspiring, entertaining and engaging for the general public. This can be achieved through projects that spark the imagination of the public, especially youth, allowing them to see science in a new light. Because both science and art are creative disciplines, there is great potential in collaboration.

Often the aim of such collaborations is to shift perceptions, attitudes, education and policy towards including the creative arts as a fundamental element of research and development, or simply to allow both the artists and the scientists to approach their work from different perspectives. Science-art collaborations also provide an opportunity for interdisciplinary action that benefits society.

"Scientists and artists are pretty trained at looking for the unexpected. And I think that's a unique shared skill each brings to the problem-solving experience." - Lisa Hoffman

Street Art and Murals for Public Engagement

Art has always been used to hold a mirror up to society, express ideas, impart knowledge and challenge the status quo. For a long time graffiti was not considered an art form at all, but rather a crime, something that defaced architecture and should be painted over at the earliest opportunity. In many places, graffiti is still classified as vandalism and many of the artists prefer to remain anonymous. The tide is turning, however, with the advent of a new perspective and a new language for non-traditional public art.

The terms we use now - street art, urban art - evoke images of socially conscious muralists working in front of an audience rather than hooded figures tagging train stations under the cover of darkness. The intent of the art and its nature, in many cases, is the same. However, the public perception has changed, allowing artists to take their activism, self-expression and commentary to the streets, where they can be seen and appreciated by everyone. An art form that was once reviled is becoming a vital force for empowerment, dialogue and social change.
Street art is created and experienced outside the confines of the traditional art establishment and venues such as galleries and museums. It is found in public spaces and displayed to the public without charge. It is often a form of rebellion or protest, a reflection of society or a comment on some aspect of society.

The Tate Museum in London, UK, defines street art as art that "is related to graffiti art in that it is created in public locations and is usually unsanctioned, but it covers a wider range of media and is more connected with graphic design." (Art Terms)

Street artists often begin their work because they are driven by causes they believe in. There are also movements that unite several street artists under one umbrella. Education is Not a Crime is a movement started in Harlem, USA, to raise awareness on behalf of the Baha'i minority in Iran, who are deprived of higher education because of their religious beliefs, as well as other groups suffering a similar fate. The artworks, positioned in different places across the city and the world, reflect the theme of education and the fight against injustice.

Now street art has champions of its own, people who promote the work of street artists, support their causes and also help them when it comes to traditional art venues. Street Art Anarchy connects street artists with curators who would like to commission or exhibit their work.

Street art is immediate and accessible to everyone, regardless of social or economic standing. It can take any concept, from complex political dynamics to a philosophical debate, and distill it into something people can easily understand and appreciate. Street art turns information into experience.

Project Guidelines

Managing an interdisciplinary project across borders (and/or oceans) certainly has its challenges. Apart from project implementation itself, the two most important factors are managing relationships or networks and monitoring and evaluation.

Managing Networks

Before a project begins, it is vital to build constructive and sustainable relationships within the team as well as with project partners. This element of project management can be underestimated, leading to conflict later on that could have been foreseen and avoided or managed more effectively.

Team Building

Team building begins immediately, with the hiring process. Projects tend to work on an outsource basis in which people are brought together for a specific time and then go their separate ways, moving on to the next project. Selecting a team that shares a common vision and goals is as important[1] as finding people who possess the requisite skills. It's also necessary to determine whether something is worth doing before deciding how to go about it.

Developing the vision is a collaborative process that can lead to difficult conversations, but these conversations are necessary if the team is to effectively implement the project strategy. A team must be able to communicate openly and honestly.[2]

One way to encourage a constructive working environment is to focus on team members' strengths and what positive elements they bring to the table, rather than enumerating mistakes and dwelling on weaknesses. Everyone has something to offer on each project. In his book *The Answer to How is Yes: Acting on what matters* (2003)[3], Peter Block states that a focus on getting others to change and other practicalities misses the point. The focus should be on personal responsibility and commitment, rather than the input and performance (or lack thereof) of others.

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[1] Lizzadro, A.M.; Szczech, M.; Cain, S. LCSW, Buividas, T. Building Effective Communities: Defining Community and How to Build It Within Your Organization. Corporate Learning Institute, p10
[2] Lizzadro et al. p10
[3] Block, P. (2003) The Answer to How is Yes: Acting on what matters. Berrett-Koehler Publishers; 1 edition

"Individuals with a strong sense of community are likely to work and communicate in a collaborative manner, which helps to create a learning organization" - Lizzadro A.M..[4]

Partner Consolidation

Forming partnerships - be it with scientists, artists or community representatives - requires first of all a clear understanding of the objective of the project and the stakeholders with a relevant role to play in achieving this objective. Building partnerships takes time, especially when dealing with institutional structures where bureaucracy can be a significant obstacle.

When looking for partners, as when looking for team members, it is necessary to find those who are already interested or engaged in the project's area of focus. As much as possible, partners should be committed to and passionate about the subject or cause and share the vision of the team. In order to better promote sustainability it may be necessary to work with institutions that are mandated to deal with the project's area of focus, for instance government departments, regardless of their level of interest in the specific project.

It is always advisable to weigh the cost of partnerships against the outcome. Does the project need this partnership? How will the project objectives benefit, and is it worth the trouble of pursuing and maintaining this relationship? What does the partner want? Does their agenda conflict with the agenda of the project team?

"There should perhaps be a "rule" that states that we engage governments in implementation processes only where we believe there is a direct influence on policy. Let us be very aware of the trade-off between time / effort and the quality of outcomes."- Judy Walker

Barriers to effective partnerships include:

- Unequal balance of power and control between stakeholders or partners
- A lack of consensus regarding the overall vision or approach to the project
- Lack of support and participation from relevant organizations with decision-making power
- Differences in philosophies or work styles
- Inadequate understanding of roles and responsibilities
- A lack of adequate communication between stakeholders
- Lack of evaluation or monitoring systems
- Financial and time commitments outweigh potential benefits

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[4] Lizzadro et al, p3

Managing these relationships may be complex, but the process is a learning experience that will benefit the whole team going forward.

Mental Health

There is more focus than ever on mental health, especially in the workplace. While maintaining a work-life balance is the personal responsibility of each individual on the team, it is important for the team as a whole to be aware of mental health concerns and avoid creating an environment that might lead to burnout or conditions such as depression and anxiety.

Regular debriefing sessions help by providing an opportunity for team members to check in with each other and address issues before they escalate. Making mental health resources available to the team is a proactive step to protect the mental health of everyone involved. This is especially necessary if the team will be working with vulnerable groups, such as hospital patients, victims of trauma or participants in medical trials.

Effective Science-Art Public Engagement Collaborations

The aim of collaborations is to shift perceptions, attitudes, education and policy. Like any partnership, these collaborations are most effective if each side is willing to challenge their own way of thinking, understand and learn from the other discipline, and share their knowledge. A successful collaboration will create something new and unique out of an immersive and educational experience. In any collaboration it is vital that the partners respect each other's work and appreciate the fact that they are dealing with skilled individuals. While there's no harm in offering suggestions and trading ideas, all final artistic decisions should be up to the artists.

Participatory Practices

Participatory methods in project management are more inclusive and help to hold institutions (state and otherwise) accountable to the public they serve. This includes participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E). PM&E allows for greater clarity in terms of the situation on the ground and empowers stakeholders by giving them a voice and also helping them develop skills[5] that will stand them in good stead going forward.

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[5] IDS Policy Briefing, Issue 12, November 1998

To quote Atkinson (2015), "Your work as an enabler is not about you. If you are seeking respect and recognition you will be seen as not working in the best interests of the whole system. It will also lead you towards specific approaches that may deliver more immediate impact, where at times part of the art is to slow down, hold the ambiguity and allow events to take their course."[6]

Advice for Scientists

Scientific research can be sensitive and scientists must make careful decisions about how they allow their research to be presented. That said, it is unrealistic to expect a non-scientist to truly understand the work without seeing the working environment (e.g. the lab), engaging in discussions about the research and being exposed to supplementary material (videos, preliminary research papers, journals, etc.).

To ensure successful science communication through art, scientists must be prepared to:

- Share their work with artists and community members and ensure that they have a solid grasp of the information.
- Accord the artistic discipline the same respect they would accord any other discipline and allow artists the freedom to express the information in a way that reflects their style and technique.
- Listen to community members and learn about their lives and concerns to find out how to make research more relevant to them.
- Be prepared for the fact that the artwork might be nothing like what they envisioned or expected. Art is rarely literal in its interpretation of ideas or events and each artist has a style and technique that determines the appearance of their work.
- Be willing to make themselves available to the community, answer questions and interact with people in a way that ensures everyone feels included and respected.
- Remember that artists and the public might know nothing about a particular research field or they might know quite a bit. Scientists should make an effort to answer all questions, even if they seem naive or absurd, and try to be available to answer follow-up questions. The kind of questions asked can be indicative of the way an artist's creative process works, which will also provide insight into the way they are likely to interpret the information. They can also show how community members relate to science.
- The following aspects of the scientist's work need to be made very clear:
    - Why the activity is being undertaken and what problems it hopes to address
    - The severity and impact of those problems
    - How the activity addresses those problems

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[6] Atkinson, J.; Loftus, E. and Jarvis, J. (editors). (2015). The Art of Change Making Curated and produced on behalf of the Systems Leadership Steering Group, The Leadership Centre

- The obstacles and challenges involved
- How society will benefit from it
- How society can contribute to further development

"Not knowing is the best way to build trust. Don't get seduced by people's dependency on you as an expert." - Peter Block

Advice for Artists

The artist's primary role in the collaboration is to facilitate the interpretation of scientific information for the public, and the interpretation of public concerns for scientists. This means serving as a translator of sorts - gathering as much information as possible about a particular field, discovery, project, etc. and turning that information into an artwork that reflects the essence and spirit of the scientific work and its relevance to the community.

Art adds an emotional aspect to what might otherwise be dry data that people struggle to relate to. The finished artwork should be a bridge that connects the public to the scientific work. The aim is to inspire interest, evoke emotion, provoke thought and promote dialogue. To ensure successful science communication through art, it is vital that artists are prepared to:

- Share their creative process with scientists and the community and ensure that they have a solid understanding of how the artist works.
- Accord the scientific discipline the same respect they would accord any other discipline.
- Appreciate the fact that scientific research is a work in progress, and be cautious about drawing unfounded conclusions.
- Be willing to make themselves available to the community, answer questions and interact with people in a way that ensures everyone feels included and respected.
- Listen to the scientist's concerns and suggestions. They might be able to offer valuable insights and keep the artist from misunderstanding the implications of the research. Even if the artist disagrees, it's important to encourage open dialogue and a greater understanding of how the other works.
- Engage with the community to find out how they feel about the subject matter or research and how it affects them. Listen to their concerns and input and reflect it in the artwork.
- Dress appropriately when visiting science institutions. Many laboratories require people to wear protective gear such as closed shoes, a lab coat, gloves, etc.
- Comply with all the rules and regulations of the scientific working environment, but not be afraid to ask questions and challenge the researchers.
- Be willing to make themselves available for questions, discussion and interactions with the scientists.

Advice for Community Representatives

The community is the main beneficiary of scientific research and should have significant input. Art is also created for public benefit, but there are many aspects to the creation of art that non-artists may not be able to appreciate. Stereotypical ideas about the behaviour of artists (that they are temperamental, anti-establishment, erratic, etc) should be put aside. The best way to approach a partnership with artists (or with anyone) is with as few preconceived notions as possible.

In this collaboration, communities play a vital role and must be prepared to:

- Ask questions and challenge both scientists and artists to make their work relevant and relatable. Be very straightforward about what is clear and useful and what they feel is irrelevant or harmful to the community.
- Listen to scientists and artists and make an effort to understand how their worlds work and how to best combine the two in a way that can have the most impact on the community.
- Think deeply about the issues that affect them and how they are connected to the research, so that they can make suggestions and provide insight that will help scientists and artists serve them better.
- Appreciate that art is subjective and won't always please everyone. The aim is to get people thinking and talking. While there's no harm in offering suggestions and trading ideas, all final artistic decisions should be up to the artists.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Because of the highly subjective nature of the creative industries, monitoring and evaluation on an art-related project can be a challenge. However, it makes it easier to keep two things in mind: 1) All projects require the same level of commitment to documentation and 2) It's not always about numbers.

Documentation

Concise and meticulous documentation throughout the project process is not only important for M&E and financial auditing, but also for sustaining partnerships. Meeting minutes, day-to-day correspondence and regular reports allow the team to track the project from beginning to end, and update partners effectively. An efficient, closely managed data management system should be in place for even the smallest project.

One of the reasons that projects fail in terms of sustainability is a lack of communication with stakeholders. This includes making follow-ups once a stakeholder or partner's role in the project has come to an end. Providing feedback on how the project went, results of the project, a review of activities and objectives and any plans for further engagement must be communicated in a timely fashion so that stakeholders continue to feel included and represented, and so that the relationships that were built for the project can be sustained long-term. These are the sort of networks that may be required on future projects.

Measuring Impact

Measuring impact on an art project is less a numbers game and more of a game of feedback. Block suggests that modern society is obsessed with measuring impact, to our own detriment. It is more constructive to determine what measurement would be significant[7] in terms of the specific project, its vision and its objectives.

It is difficult to determine how many people see a street artwork, for instance, and how each person is individually affected by the piece. That said, developing relevant indicators is essential. What is measurable - and debatably more relevant - is the overall response to the artwork. Did it generate a buzz? Are people talking about it? For the most part, what are they saying?
In the Arting Health for Impact project, the aim was to generate dialogue, so what was being said was not as important as the fact that the art got people talking. This translated into clear

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[7] Block, Peter. (2003) The Answer to How is Yes: Acting on what matters. Berrett-Koehler Publishers

indicators, i.e. the more views and comments on social media, the greater the impact of the artwork.

In Block's view, measurement should be a strategy that supports learning, rather than a device that supervises the project. Participatory M&E is one way to ensure that the process is a learning tool for all stakeholders.

Another way of evaluating the impact of a project is by looking at the partnerships that were built for the project and sustained after the project ended, as well as new partnerships that came about as a result of the project. Sustaining partnerships can be a challenge in a project scenario, where often the trend is to form different partnerships for each project.

Wagner's (2012) suggestions for sustaining partnerships over time are:
1. Putting strategy first and ensuring that the partnership will serve your overall objectives;
2. Aligning partner interests so that the relationship is mutually beneficial;
3. Creating a partner vision that encapsulates plans for the growth of both parties;
4. Taking a stake in each other's successes by embarking on joint ventures that allow each party to be the best they can be; and
5. Following a Win/Win pattern that ensures the relationship never becomes uneven and both parties are satisfied.

Conclusion

"We are at a time where the entire collective knowledge of our species is available with a stab of a fingertip. It becomes possible, necessary even, to leap across disciplines to generate new ideas." - [Craig Stevens and Gabby O'Connor](#)

Arting Health for Impact: Botswana, India and South Africa showed that there is a real need for further collaboration in the arenas of art and public health. It is no longer enough for us to rely on our own disciplines.

As the world moves towards a proliferation of Science-Art collaborations, it pays to remember the ultimate aim of these partnerships - to use the skills of the scientist and the skills of the artist to find new ways to tackle issues that affect everyone.

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