

# What if everyone is included in science research?



What role does a science centre and its audiences have in creating knowledge?

Open City Research is about giving everyone the opportunity to be part of science research. We create ways for the public to contribute to all stages of the research process, with the aim to make sure that research being carried out in our city represents our communities.

As a science centre we must recognise the biases in the way we approach and present science. We've been asking ourselves: what is research, and who gets to define what research looks like? What role can a science centre, and its audiences have in creating new knowledge?

We aim to support research that reflects the diversity of knowledge and experiences of our partners, visitors and communities. This means recognising and valuing different ways of creating knowledge. This report highlights what we have learned from working with community researchers, school children, academic researchers and visitors to We The Curious, and how we explore and celebrate the value of our shared knowledge.

- Helen Della Nave,  
Head of Open City Research

If you're new to Open City Research and want to find out all about our work, visit -

[wethecurious.org/  
about/our-manifesto/  
open-city-research](https://wethecurious.org/about/our-manifesto/open-city-research)



Open City Research in action

**Pages 4-5**  
Public contributions to research we've gathered since reopening in summer 2024, whilst partnering with 4 academic research teams

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Participants we've worked with whilst funding and supporting 2 community researchers in the development of new knowledge

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Primary school children we've worked with to find out about seagulls

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Researchers interviewed to find out how including the public in the research process has changed their practice

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Exciting opportunities Team Open City Research that shared our practice through

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Ethical principles published

July 2024 - April 2025

13,000

100

250

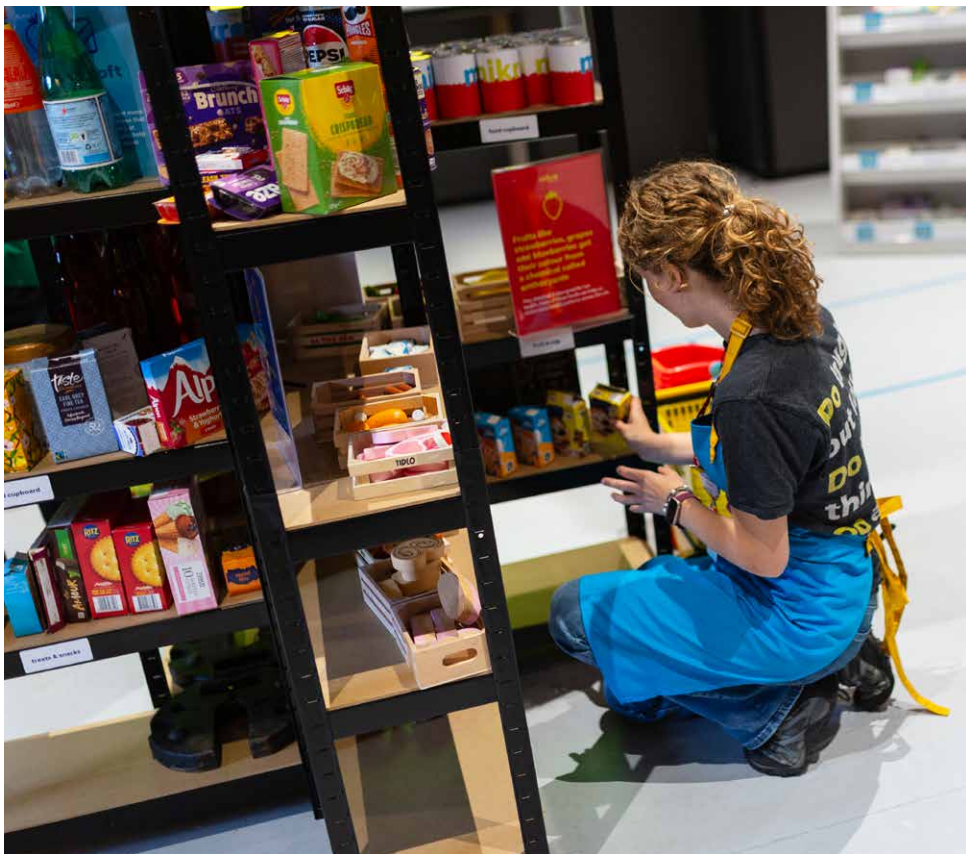
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Can public audiences improve the quality of research?



© Lisa Whiting

# Shopping Trolley Secrets

In partnership with University of Bristol’s Digital Footprints Lab

Shopping data is something most of us generate daily without even realising. Many of us agree to its usage by retailers without thinking twice, but what do you think about a researcher using your shopping history? Shopping data was used to better understand early symptoms of ovarian cancer, predict the spread of COVID-19 and has many potential applications across medical and social science.

We partnered with Dr Anya Skatova’s team at University of Bristol’s Digital Footprints lab to find out how our visitors feel about the use of shopping data in research, and more importantly, why they feel that way. First piloted during our closure period 2022-2024, Shopping Trolley Secrets came to life in our reopening programme in July 2024.

Visitor contributions gathered in Open City Lab by our Live Science team have already been used to shape new areas of research including using shopping data as an indicator of diet.

We responded to visitor contributions during the programme and shifted the focus towards linking shopping data with other forms of personal data, further supporting ongoing research.

“

**It was hugely beneficial experience for me as a researcher and for the whole lab. Public engagement and involvement is embedded in our work, and it was great to learn from the Open City Research team how to develop these projects on much more professional level then I ever would be able to do myself.”**

- Dr. Anya Skatova, Director, Digital Footprints Lab

**“Asking people to willingly donate their data for research is always difficult, my experience with Open City Research provides a solid foundation on how to describe our research in practice and explain to the public about the importance of data collection, as well as how to communicate secure data storage and handling to them.”**

- Dr. Neo Poon, Researcher, Digital Footprints Lab

**“I was surprised about how easy it was to translate the ideas within our work—with the help of Joe—to a level that could be understood and discussed by young people through activities like the baskets by the front door or the string board.”**

- Dr. Romana Burgess, Researcher, Digital Footprints Lab

**“The Open City Research programme gives us the chance to expand peoples minds and give them a voice in issues they don’t think they have a say on. It’s great to be able to adapt the activities with each visitor to get the most out of every conversation.”**

- Hazel, Live Science Team Member

Between July 2024 - January 2025

**34,552**

people were welcomed to Open City Lab

**12,000**

contributions

**500**

direct messages to researchers

Contributions included responses to digital surveys, sharing opinions via a data visualisation board and talking directly to the Digital Footprints Lab team at special events.



How can public audiences shape the direction of research?



We worked with Prof. Nathalia Gjersoe previously on the Robot Revolution activity, visit -

[wethecurious.org/](https://wethecurious.org/)  
[opencityresearch](https://opencityresearch.org/)

Plates for the Planet

In partnership with Prof. Nathalia Gjersoe and Dr. Katharine Lee, University of Bath

In February 2025, our Open City Lab launched Plates For The Planet, a new programme from psychologists Nathalia Gjersoe and Katharine Lee from University of Bath to understand how children and young people navigate decisions around sustainability. As an organisation committed to creating a sustainable future and to decarbonise by 2030, we were thrilled to partner on this research.

Plates for the Planet explores how people feel about possible policies that could affect the foods people eat to encourage more sustainable choices. A series of activities explore how these different policies could change the way our schools, cafes, shops and homes could look in the future and asks visitors to share their reflections on these interventions. Visitor contributions will be used to shape Prof. Nathalia Gjersoe and Dr. Katharine Lee's future research in this area.

© Woven Films

Can we diversify representation by taking our programmes online?

While we were closed for repairs 2022-2024, we explored the potential of using digital platforms for our projects. This has historically been successful for Citizen Science projects, but represented new territory for how we used our digital platforms in this area.

We ran two digital pilots – one with University of Bristol's Prof. Chrissy Hammond on circadian rhythms, and one with University of Nottingham's Dr. Lizzie Dolan on shopping data and health. Videos were created to explore the themes of the research and published online, with visitor contributions being collected via online surveys and social media comments.

While we have a loyal online audience, they're not familiar with us using our online platforms to contribute to research, so it's an area for us to work on and develop if we want to capture contributions from our wider audiences. When running these projects we had the added barrier of the fire closure leading to fewer visits to our website.

Following our venue reopening, we've decided to continue to focus on the unique way that we as a science centre are able to engage with the public face to face – providing tactile, interactive ways to shape the direction of research that can't be achieved online at this time.



© Graham Johnson



How do research methods develop when they're led by communities?

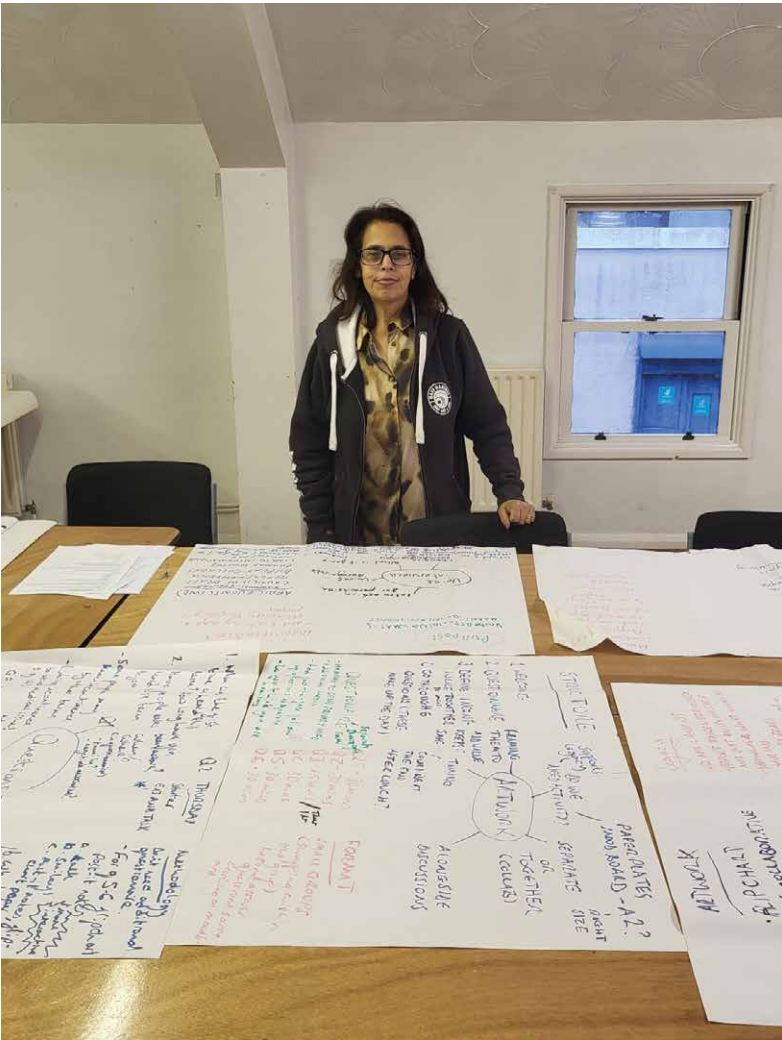
Research Collective is the community led strand of Open City Research that works alongside our Include Everyone pledge. It's where we take a step back and use our means to support community leaders from Bristol to shape research from start to finish. We aim to use our resources to show the value in new knowledge created by communities underrepresented within academic science research, leading to social impact and meaningful change.

The programme grew out of Hidden Health, a University of Bristol supported project where three young researchers in 6th form were assisted in developing research skills to explore their health questions. The findings became a successful exhibition in our Box gallery space.

Following consultation into what support community researchers would value from we invested directly into two community research projects led by Bristol residents. We offered further in-kind support to ensure the researchers could do their best work, ranging from facilitation assistance to equipment loans and more.

Research Collective in action: incontinence in older women from the global majority

Research Collective



© Hannah Lawrence

“I have to be honest and say that the thing that I felt was odd - Reflective Sessions - when I started my research has become the best thing and I really appreciate how helpful it has been. These sessions have really made me think through the key questions of who, what, when, where, why, and how in terms of successful delivering my research”

- Lily Khandker

We've been working with our partners to explore how community-led research methods differ from those in academic settings. Together with community researchers, we codeveloped new ways to address ethical considerations based on their understanding of

the communities impacted by their projects. The involvement of translators and other community collaborators in interpreting, facilitating, and participating in discussions has also challenged the traditional roles of 'researcher' and 'participant.'



© Ramona Eve, photography Paul Blakemore

Research Collective in action: belonging for queer people at events

“The Open City Research team have been really supportive and happy to listen to me trying to work things out. They're happy to work in a way that suits me. I've been surprised by how much they've trusted me with the project, I've worked with people in the past who are very protective of the work they've planned, and already have an idea of where projects should go but in this case I feel like it's my project with their full support”

- Alex James



What can we learn when codeveloping science research with children?

# Curious Partner Schools

When teachers and students at Hannah More Primary School in central Bristol became interested in the seagulls that were nesting on the roof of their building, we offered to support the students to deep dive into the world of seagulls and explore the relationship between the gulls and young people coexisting in the playground.

Supported by artists, academics and our team, the students created a wide range of outcomes, including drone footage of the school, a vibrant mural in the school itself, and two exhibits displayed in our venue.

This partnership led us to reflect on how developing and delivering research questions gives children involved more agency in a creative science journey.

The seagulls project reinforced our commitment to focusing on children’s role in the research process and their freedom to explore their own questions. With funding from Edina Trust, we were able to consult with the school parliament on what the children would like to investigate next.



© Julian Welsh

Together the young people co-designed a research question – ‘What is air quality like inside and outside school?’ and installed sensors to collect air quality data. This project is now in the final stages, disseminating our findings and recommendations to the school community and beyond.

“  
**Our children have loved learning all about seagulls with the brilliant We The Curious team – the way the children have been able to co-create the project has been fantastic for their confidence and creativity and it’s not the sort of thing that we would be able to do within the day-to-day curriculum.”**

- Kevin Hawkins, Hannah More Primary School Headteacher

What if we think about ‘what audiences contribute’ when they visit We the Curious, rather than ‘what they take away’?

Traditionally, public engagement has focused on measuring impact on our audiences. But in Open City Research we decided to measure the impact our audiences were having on our science partners and their research process.

We’ve been working with Dr. David Judge and the team at University of the West of England (UWE) Science Communication Unit since 2022 to develop new methods of measuring visitor impact on researchers. We’ve designed these methods to work both in our venue and as academic tools and have used them in 8 pilot research interviews to date.

This key partnership is shaping our practice and was made possible with funding from UWE Science Communication Unit Seed Funding 2022-2024.

“  
**I absolutely love working with the Open City Research team because all of their work is driven by their values, which they are very committed to in everything that they do. It’s quite rare to work with an organisation or team that really puts their money where their mouth is and are committed to not just good practice, but best practice. I find the deep level of reflection on practice which the team uses to inform their approach so enriching and inspiring for my own work.”**

- Dr David Judge, UWE Science Communication Unit



© Joe Daly



How have we learned from others and shared our experience?

Here's a snapshot of the programs and partnerships that have inspired our work over the past year:

**Science centre sector**

- Hosted panel at Association of Science and Discovery Centres (ASDC) conference 2024
- Contributed to National Science Centre Theory of Change
- Contributed to National Science Centre Inclusion Theory of Change.
- Science Communication Unit at UWE
  - Contributed to Science Communication South West conference 2024
  - Contributed to UWE Science Communication Masterclass
  - Hosted an MSc student placement
  - Contributed to UWE research project INSIGHT: *Ethical best practice in science communication and engagement.*
- Contributed to University of Bristol's *Embedding Ethics In Engaged Research*
- Contributed to University of Bath's *Relational Practice In Research*

**Local Community**

- Participated in British Science Association peer learning pilot exploring community research

**Science Policy**

- Contributed to People's Vision for R&D – CaSE

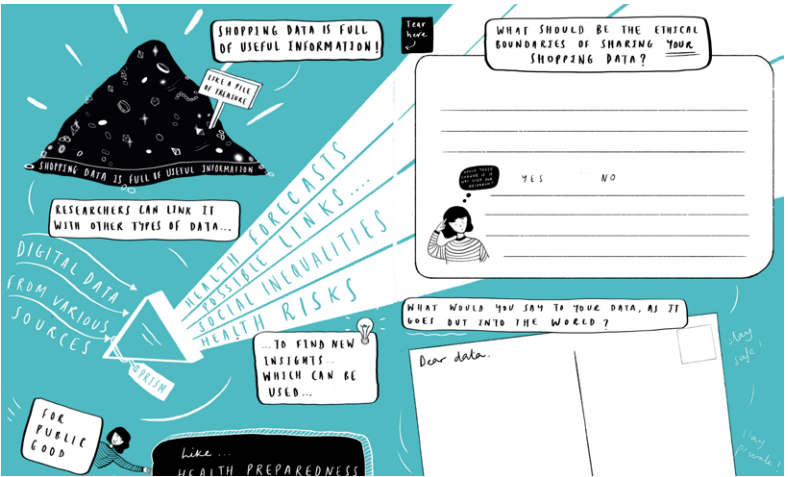
As a science centre focused on public engagement with active research, we're inspired by the various sectors and networks we connect with. Through collaborations, we learn from and share our growing expertise across these sectors.



© Graham Johnson

“**This placement offered me the chance to create something tangible in the context of a live exhibition, and apply insights from my research in the process. This got me thinking about how visual storytelling can help create a sandbox for play and conversation, and need not necessarily be a finished product. This approach will stay with me and I’m looking forward to exploring this in my future work.”**

- Sneha Uplekar, MSc Science Communication



© Sneha Uplekar

What are the Ethical Principles that guide our Practice?

For nearly 25 years, we've welcomed visitors to our science centre. Since 2017, we've involved public audiences in active research projects through our Open City Research work, collaborating with our research partners and visitors to ensure a diverse range of contributions and experiences. This meant we needed to find some new ways of working, so we developed a set of ethical principles to help shape our practice.

These ethical principles have been shaped by the contributions of academic and industry partners, and their willingness to take risks and learn alongside us.



© Illustrated Live

What's the role of a science centre in creating new knowledge?

Everyone we ask defines research in a different way. Our younger participants think of research as a Google search, while our academic partners have a specific peer reviewed process in mind. As a team, we've sometimes felt responsible for meeting other people's expectations of science research, but to do so reinforces the barriers to inclusion that many of our partners and visitors face when engaging in traditional research.

We're challenging these established ways of working and starting to free ourselves from these preconceptions as we ask the difficult question of 'what does research mean in a science centre context?' and how can we redefine research in a way that supports inclusion, and values knowledge, from of all our communities and visitors.

We'll be working on evaluating our role as a science centre as our relationship to science knowledge moves more and more from sharing to creating that knowledge. We want to know what our visitors, staff and partners think. We don't know what we'll find out yet, but we know that we need to be flexible and responsive to what we discover as we continue this work.



Get involved with Open City Research

Thank you to everyone that has already contributed to Open City Research projects, including our visitors, volunteers, staff and researchers.

To our brilliant cross-departmental working group, our Live Science Team and to all the funders and partners whose generous support makes Open City Research possible.



Open City Research team



Helen Della Nave,  
Head of Open City Research

- Strategy
- Approach
- New partnerships



Graham Johnson,  
Open City Research Manager

- Project management
- Ongoing partnerships



Joe Daly,  
Open City Research Programme Developer

- Open City Lab programme
- Academic research collaborations



Hannah Lawrence,  
Open City Research Community Developer

- Research Collective
- Community led research

If you'd like to support the future work of Open City Research, here's how you can get involved:

Partner with us on research projects. If you're open to new ways of working and embracing the unexpected ways the public can shape your work, we'd love to hear from you.

Fund our work, particularly with our community research partners.

Profile our work using your platforms - we would love to share our practice more widely.

Participate in our programmes – come to Open City Lab in We The Curious and contribute directly to research.

You can contact the team at [opencityresearch@wethecurious.org](mailto:opencityresearch@wethecurious.org)





**Photo and art credits:**

Paul Blakemore, Joe Daly, Ramona Eve, Illustrated Live,  
Graham Johnson, Hannah Lawrence, Freia Turland,  
Sneha Uplekar, Julian Welsh, Lisa Whiting  
and Woven Films

Supported by: