



Research Collective



Research Collective aims to challenge who can be a researcher, how research is done and whose knowledge is important.

Developed by We The Curious, this innovative methodology empowers communities to design, develop, and lead their own research projects, fostering knowledge creation around issues they identify as important. The approach is iterative and has been co-developed in partnership with community stakeholders, ensuring that the research process is collaborative, inclusive, and responsive to evolving community needs.



Core principles

- As a Science Centre we have expertise to support community led research while remaining independent from academic institutions. Ensuring that community partners needs are driving the research agenda.
- This work is a key part of our '*Include Everyone Strategy*', which seeks to improve access to and representation within creative STEM fields. We co-design collaborative programs that enable individuals and communities to drive positive social change locally and nationally.
- Emphasising community-led knowledge development, ensuring that research agendas reflect the priorities and expertise of diverse communities.
- Addressing the underrepresentation of marginalised groups in research and policy development processes, actively incorporating their voices and contributions.
- Focusing on achieving tangible social impact for participating communities through research-informed action.
- Employing creative engagement methods to involve participants throughout the research process and to facilitate accessible communication of findings.

This methodology could be applied to policy development where community interests align with those of commissioning bodies.





Step by step

- 1. Recruitment:**

Community leaders are encouraged to apply to lead scoping or research projects. Opportunities are promoted through targeted outreach within community-engaged networks and local hubs to ensure inclusive participation.
- 2. Defining the Research Question:**

Community research partners receive funding to conduct a small-scale scoping phase. During this phase, they co-design their research question and develop a plan for investigating it in collaboration with other community members.
- 3. Exploring the Research Question:**

A proportion of these community researchers receive additional funding to further explore their research question. They engage community members through workshops, surveys, in-depth interviews, or other methodologies that they select and develop. We The Curious provides tailored in-kind support, including workshops exploring ethical research practices and access to our spaces and public platforms.
- 4. Connecting to Policy and Services:**

We facilitate connections between community researchers and local policymakers or relevant service providers to support meaningful change aligned with their areas of inquiry.
- 5. Reflection and Evaluation:**

Our approach to supporting community-led research evolves annually, guided by iterative evaluation involving community researchers, collaborators and participants. Half-day reflective sessions with partners shape future support and program development. For example, insights from these evaluations have guided the development of a second pilot year focused more explicitly on health and wellbeing, increased inclusion of communities from the global majority, and a stronger emphasis on the 'finding the research question' process.
- 6. Impact and Dissemination:**

A core element of the project is sharing research findings through public-facing outputs. These include creative works developed during the research, as well as celebratory events such as exhibitions, parties, or conferences. We The Curious leverages its role as a public science centre to platform community voices and support the project's legacy by showcasing outputs in our venue and through digital content streams.

Beyond immediate social impacts — such as providing safe spaces for sharing lived experiences of stigmatised health issues — researchers and We The Curious collaborate to foster long-term social change. This includes influencing decision-making by organisations with the capacity to effect meaningful improvements, such as healthcare providers and local councils.



Examples of Community-Led Research Initiatives

Over the past eight years, We The Curious has built substantial expertise in empowering underrepresented voices to actively shape and lead research. Our approach centres on fostering inclusive participation and co-creating knowledge that reflects diverse lived experiences. Key examples include:

- Community Sleep Research Collaboration (2019 - 2020): Working alongside community members as co-researchers to investigate their own sleep patterns, in partnership with the University of Bristol's Digital Health Team. This initiative highlights community expertise combined with academic support to explore a common health issue.
- Hidden Health Programme (2021): Supported three young people from underrepresented Bristol communities to select and investigate health-related questions meaningful to them, including:
 1. Strategies for young, global majority women to advocate for themselves in healthcare settings where their pain is often dismissed.
 2. Intergenerational support on growing up for young women from the global majority.
 3. Creating safe spaces to share mental health advice among queer youth.
- Research Collective Cohort 1 (2024) : Enabled community leaders to design and lead research projects on topics they identify as significant. For example, Community Researcher Alex James explored, "How can inclusive events create a sense of belonging for queer people in Bristol?" with the aim of producing practical recommendations for event organizers to foster queer inclusion and belonging.

These examples illustrate how community-led research could uncover nuanced insights in from marginalised communities to inform and democratise policy development processes.



Case Study: Incontinence Research Project

Led by Lily Khandker, CEO and founder of Voice4Her, supported by We The Curious

This project exemplifies how community-led research can address critical health disparities by placing underrepresented voices at its core — in this case, women from the global majority over 45, focusing on experiences of incontinence and access to continence care.



Project Development and Support:

Before launching the project, We The Curious worked closely with Lily through three preparatory workshops designed to:

- Inspire by sharing models of community-led research and highlighting topics prioritised by other communities.
- Explore aspirations for the research's potential impact on women affected by incontinence.
- Co-develop the research approach tailored to community context and needs.

Community-Led Research in Action:

Lily led a collaborative workshop with key community leaders and experts to finalise research questions and design the project plan. Ethical research practices were developed with We The Curious' support to ensure participant agency, inclusion, and benefit.



Engagement and Data Collection:

The project included five workshops with approximately 150 women from diverse Bristol communities, including Somali, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Afro-Caribbean groups. Workshops were facilitated with translators and offered multiple participation options — group discussions, creative responses (collage-making), anonymous voting, and surveys — creating an inclusive, stigma-safe environment. Participants were compensated and provided with culturally appropriate meals, recognising their valuable contributions.

Dissemination and Impact:

Lily presented her findings in a detailed report launched at an International Women's Day 2025 conference, which gathered 50 community members, healthcare professionals, and academics to discuss outcomes and next steps. The project's impact extends beyond the event: creative outputs are being prepared for exhibition at We The Curious, and Lily's insights will be shared through digital platforms to amplify community voices.

Ongoing Support and Learning:

Throughout, We The Curious provided bespoke support — ethics guidance, workshop facilitation, data analysis, graphic design, and reflective practice sessions — to maximize the project's quality and sustainability. Lily also engaged in regular reflective sessions to help refine this community-led research methodology, contributing to the evolution of future projects.

Why This Matters for Public Science Policy Funders:

- **Equity and Inclusion:** This project demonstrates how funding community-led research can surface insights from underrepresented populations often excluded from traditional research and policy discussions.
- **Co-Designed Research:** The iterative, partnership-based approach ensures relevance and responsiveness to community priorities.
- **Social and Policy Impact:** The project not only created a safe space to discuss stigmatised health issues but also fostered dialogue with healthcare providers and policymakers, laying groundwork for systemic change.
- **Sustainable Legacy:** Beyond immediate findings, the project fosters ongoing community engagement and capacity-building, amplifying voices and driving long-term social benefit.

This case highlights the transformative potential of investing in community-led research models that align with science policy goals to democratize knowledge production and promote health equity.

“Reflective Sessions have become the best thing in the project, 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 was.

Though I have done research in the past, it's been a while and I had forgotten how much I enjoyed it and how much research can make a difference. The fact that I was allowed to choose my research topic as also made a huge difference. I'm actually thinking of doing a PhD due to doing this piece of research”

Lily Khandker, CEO of Voice4Her and community researcher