The Wellcome Trust and public engagement with bioscience

Wellcome Trust/BBC Open House debates.

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The Wellcome Trust

• An endowed charitable foundation, established 1936

• To foster and improve research with the aim of improving human and animal health

• ~ £500m annual spend
The Wellcome Trust
Aims

- Knowledge base
- Resources
- Translation
- Public engagement
Medicine, Society and History

- Consultation and Education
- History of medicine
- Library
- Bioethics
- Exhibitions
- Publishing (Tropical Medicine Resource)
Public impact on research policy

Dialogue Information

Provide information

Stimulate thinking

Understand thinking

Consultation

Representation

Information

Dialogue
Blame it on your genes?

Aim: to explore new approaches to dialogue.
Linked elements

- BBC TV programmes
- BBC Web site
- Open House debates
- Follow-up radio discussions
- Science centre activities
Our approach to dialogue

- Integrate diverse lay, policy & expert testimonies
- Not ‘educational’
- Explore grey areas: personal responsibility for health
- Move away from traditional lecture format
Our approach to dialogue...

- Schedule audience discussion
- Coin flip games/role play
- Video clips
- Various perspectives: patient, ethics, carer, geneticist, twins, parachutists, policy
Public impact on research policy

Provide information
Stimulate thinking
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Consultation
Representation
Dialogue
Information
Evaluation

- BBC audience data radio and TV
- BBC web site data
- Events - independent evaluation
Who came?

- Age range and ethnic mix reflected UK population demographics
- Still strong representation of ‘converted’
- 51% working full or part time, 15% studying, 26% retired
- Also .... invited policy makers e.g Human genetics commission
Was it really dialogue?

- We approached it
- We hugely extended audience reach for discussion of biomedical issues
- Hybrid approach very useful one: web, tv, radio, debates, activities
Public impact on research policy

Provide information

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716 at events

850k radio discussions

37 m viewers
Was it really dialogue...

- Who really listened to what the public said? Policy makers came. Public better equipped to be heard in future?
- Address direct policy questions?
- We learned about compromise, and how to do dialogue better!