

The Sciencewise innovation testbed

Since 2004 Sciencewise has supported government bodies to run public dialogues on contentious issues in science and technology. Over its history of 100 public dialogues to date, it has pushed practice in the UK government's approach, giving greater power and agency to public voice to inform key policy decisions; making policy more socially informed and publicly acceptable. Increasingly we find we are working with government bodies who are socialised to novel participatory methodology and the values underlying public dialogue processes. Every public dialogue is designed bespoke for the context and issue at hand, but underpinned by key quality practice principles.

Over the past three years we have asked contractors to focus on more creative approaches and they have responded; rising to the needs of the policy area and pushing practice. As a programme, we recognise the role we play in shaping opportunities for innovation in the UK public dialogue landscape, and for embedding knowledge of new approaches in practice across government. We are piloting an innovation testbed space for public dialogue projects where there is a need and the commissioning body agrees.

Dialogues in this space will explicitly state if they are an innovation testbed in the tender documents, and will specify the types of innovation we are looking for. Dialogues within the innovation testbed will have a few differences to other dialogues we support in that they will:

- Evaluate as a major component for the innovation features asked for considering both the impacts on methodology and against the Sciencewise Quality Framework (essentially building learning on the impact of the innovation)
- Ensure contractors describe their methodology clearly - either as part of the report, in an appendix or in a separate report
- Ensure the video and/or creative outputs also capture a layer of the innovative methodology

Innovative methodology will be asked to be specific around the needs of the policy dynamics, such as:

- How can there be greater equity in public dialogue, to bring forward views of those where there may be higher levels of mistrust?
- How can participants scrutinise implementation and impact?
- How can public dialogue scale to involve more people?
- How can public dialogue be more responsive to fast moving policy areas, or those with less resources?
- How can participants help shape a dialogue approach and scope?
- How can futuring methodologies be used in public dialogue?

This is not an exhaustive list and will be decided in conjunction with the commissioning body and based on the context of the dialogue project.