



national  
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## Segmenting Publics Executive Summary

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## Segmenting publics

This research synthesis was commissioned by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to examine audience segmentation methods and tools in the area of public engagement. It provides resources for assessing the ways in which segmentation tools might be used to enhance the various activities through which models of public engagement in higher education are implemented. Understanding the opinions, values, and motivations of members of the public is a crucial feature of successful engagement. Segmentation methods can offer potential resources to help understand the complex set of interests and attitudes that the public have towards higher education.

### Key findings

There exist a number of existing segmentations which address many of the areas of activity found in Universities and HEIs. These include segmentations which inform strategic planning of communications; segmentations which inform the design of collaborative engagement activities by museums, galleries, and libraries; and segmentations that are used to identify under-represented users and consumers.

Segmentation is, on its own, only a tool, used in different ways in different contexts. The broader strategic rationale shaping the application and design of segmentation methods is a crucial factor in determining the utility of segmentation tools.

Four issues emerged of particular importance:

1. Segmentation exercises are costly and technically complex. Undertaking segmentations therefore requires significant commitment of financial and professional resources by HEIs; the appropriate interpretation, analysis, and application of segmentation exercises also require high levels of professional capacity and expertise
2. Undertaking a segmentation exercise has implications for the internal organisational operations of HEIs, not only for how they engage with external publics and stakeholders
3. Segmentation tools are adopted to inform interventions of various sorts, and superficially to differentiate and sometime discriminate between how groups of people are addressed and engaged.
4. For HEIs, the ethical issues and reputational risks which have been identified in this Research Synthesis as endemic to the application of segmentation methods for public purposes are particularly relevant.

### Moving forward

The review highlighted the following potential research areas into segmentation in public engagement:

- How and why segmentation methods are translated across policy areas and professional fields
- Research into the practices of 'doing segmentation' in public engagement contexts (equivalent to leading-edge research on the practice of segmentation in commercial settings undertaken in management studies and marketing theory.)
- Research, assessment, and evaluation of the extent of the use of segmentation in HEIs.
- Research and evaluation into the conceptual and methodological issues involved in using segmentation tools in public engagement activities, including research on the use and analysis of different forms of data and the implications of digitalization for the generation of sophisticated segmentations of motivations and values.
- Research into how the applications of segmentations in public engagement activities are evaluated in practice.

## **National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement**

The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement's vision of a higher education sector making a vital, strategic and valued contribution to 21st-century society through its public engagement activity. We are working to help support universities to improve, value and increase the quantity and quality of their public engagement and embed it into their core practice.

The NCCPE is part of the National Beacons for Public Engagement initiative, funded by the UK Higher Education Councils, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust.

The six Beacons are university-based collaborative centres that help support, recognise, reward and build capacity for public engagement work, based in: Newcastle and Durham, Manchester, CUE East UEA, UCL, Wales and Edinburgh.