

AccessLab: New workshops to broaden access to scientific research

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The trust scale at an AccessLab workshop -- how much do you trust the sources of information that you use? Credit: Amber G.F. Griffiths, amber@fo.am

A team from the transdisciplinary laboratory FoAM Kernow and the British Science Association detail how to run an innovative approach to

understanding evidence called AccessLab in a paper published on May 28 in the open-access journal *PLOS Biology*. The AccessLab project enables a broader range of people to access and use scientific research in their work and everyday lives.

Five trial AccessLabs have taken place for [policy makers](#), media and journalists, marine sector participants, [community groups](#), and artists. Through direct citizen-scientist pairings, AccessLab encourages people to come with their own science-related questions and work one-to-one with a science researcher to find and access trustworthy information together. Among the many who've benefited from AccessLabs' approach include a town councillor researching the impacts of building developments on the environment, a GP researching nutrition for advising patients with specific diseases, and a dancer and choreographer researching physiology and injuries.

The act of pairing science academics with local community members from other backgrounds helps build understanding and trust between groups, at a time where this relationship is under increasing threat from different political and economic currents in society. This process also exposes science researchers to the difficulties accessing their work and the importance of publishing research findings in a way that is more inclusive.

"AccessLab is a powerful example of researchers using their expertise to unlock skills in their local communities," the authors say in the paper.

"The workshops focus on transferring research skills rather than subject-specific knowledge, highlighting that not having a [science](#) background doesn't need to be a barrier to understanding and using scientific knowledge."

More information: Griffiths AGF, Modinou I, Heslop C, Brand C, Weatherill A, Baker K, et al. (2019) AccessLab: Workshops to broaden

access to scientific research. *PLoS Biol* 17(5): e3000258.
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