

BLUEMISSION AA

Building a coordination hub to support the Mission implementation in the *Atlantic and Arctic Basin*

Citizen Engagement Guidelines

From ideas to action: empowering every citizen to make a difference for our seas.





Directed by SPI - Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação

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01 Introduction

About BlueMissionAA

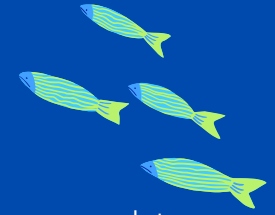
The BlueMissionAA project is a European initiative that supports the implementation of the EU Mission ‘Restore Our Ocean and Waters by 2030’ in the Atlantic and Arctic basins, acting as a coordination hub. It connects research, industry, and communities to advance ecological restoration, increase climate resilience, and foster a sustainable blue economy.

The project’s goal is to restore ecosystems, eliminate pollution, and develop a carbon-neutral, circular blue economy. It brings together diverse stakeholders and builds governance frameworks designed to support ongoing monitoring and innovation activities, ensuring that approaches are aligned with national, regional and EU policies.

Through broad community engagement, BlueMissionAA coordinates and supports effective approaches for ecological restoration, selecting six “lighthouse” case studies that help demonstrate and scale successful solutions. As a pan-European effort, it empowers local communities and networks to contribute actively to protecting and restoring waters in the Atlantic and Arctic.



Why citizen engagement?



Citizen engagement is at the heart of the European approach to ocean restoration. The European Commission’s targets set a clear ambition: by 2030, every citizen should have the chance to take part in preserving and restoring our oceans and waters, whether through citizen science, volunteering, or social innovation. This vision makes citizen participation not just desirable, but essential—ensuring that the management of our natural resources is both fair and transparent, and that the hopes and needs of local communities are truly heard and onboarded.

Meaningful engagement means reaching out to people from all parts of society, encouraging everyone’s perspective into the conversation, and taking care to include those who are often left out, so that solutions are shaped together and reflect its diversity. When citizens are involved in environmental action and decision-making, both people and governments benefit: trust is built, skills are shared, and policy becomes more effective and legitimate.



Citizen engagement comes with challenges, especially in technical areas where specialised knowledge is needed or when the process feels slow or complex. But with the right outreach, education and collaboration, these obstacles can be overcome. Every local community, organisation and individual has a role to play.



Valerie de Liedekerke,
BlueMissionAA Coordinator (AIR Centre)

How to use this guide

This guidebook is designed as a practical resource for **policymakers, scientists, and educators** who want to foster meaningful citizen engagement in the restoration and protection of our oceans and waters. It is divided into five sections, each built to accompany you step by step, whether you are new to engagement or seeking new ideas to strengthen your work.

Start with the introduction and background to **understand the vision of BlueMissionAA** and why citizen involvement is vital.



The "Foundations of engagement" chapter clarifies the **principles of participation** and the **specific methods** developed within BlueMissionAA for supporting local action.

The main part of the guide—**"Engagement methods and tools"**—offers a **hands-on toolkit**, structured to help you navigate every stage of participation: from raising awareness and sparking creativity to working together, taking action, and ensuring long-term impact. Methods are presented in an accessible, adaptable format, suitable for a range of communities and resource settings.



Each tool and approach comes with **tips, examples, and suggestions** for making engagement relevant for your audience, and the monitoring section provides clear advice on how to evaluate your activities. Use these materials flexibly—**adapt, combine, or expand them** as needed to suit your local context or policy agenda.



Finally, the lessons, recommendations, and way forward sections offer insights from recent experiences, highlighting challenges as well as emerging solutions and next steps. Throughout the guide, you'll find a focus on co-creation, inclusivity, and building stronger, more resilient participation ecosystems.

If you are a policymaker...

Stakeholder engagement helps turn policies into practice and provides feedback which improves policymaking. The core challenges are laid out in the lessons-learned section (p. 24–25), with policy-specific recommendations consolidated on p. 26.

If you are a scientist...

Pages 11–20 outline concrete ways scientists can generate real value through participation, from citizen-science approaches to reverse science cafés and youth workshops. Guidance on how to evaluate these engagement efforts sits on p. 22, with science-specific recommendations on p. 27.

If you are an educator...

This guidebook outlines the participatory methods you can use to design effective awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, with stage-specific formats detailed throughout. Key lessons sit on p. 24, sector-specific recommendations on p. 26, and cross-sector guidance on p. 27.

Use this guide as a reference, a workshop starter, or a blueprint for your next community engagement initiative—tailoring it to your needs to help turn citizen participation into lasting stewardship for healthier oceans and societies.



02 Foundations of engagement

What citizen engagement is (and isn't)

Citizen engagement in BlueMissionAA moves beyond awareness-raising and consultation. It is a process of **co-creation and shared stewardship**, where citizens contribute to knowledge, solutions and collective action.

Citizen engagement can connect citizens, communities and stakeholders across policy, science and education—building shared understanding and collective responsibility for our common waters. By linking emotion with evidence, it turns local experiences into meaningful action.

Yet engagement can lose its power when treated as a formality. **Discontinuity**—when participation happens only once—breaks trust and prevents learning. **Non-transparent use of input**—when feedback is gathered but never acknowledged—undermines motivation. **And performative inclusion**, where citizens are asked to endorse pre-set decisions, reduces collaboration to communication. These pitfalls turn what should be a shared process into a symbolic gesture.

BlueMissionAA counters this by treating engagement as a living collaboration with measurable outcomes. Citizens are not just consulted but invited to shape agendas, contribute ideas and act upon them. This approach makes participation purposeful, contextual and capable of driving both local and systemic change.

Engagement in the Mission follows a three-stage logic: **awareness → co-creation → stewardship**. It begins by fostering care for local waters, moves through collaborative experimentation, and leads to long-term stewardship where citizens keep learning, monitoring and sustaining local initiatives.

BlueMissionAA's participation rests on five guiding principles that keep this process inclusive, creative and continuous:

- **Inclusivity** – all citizens, communities and knowledge systems matter.
- **Accessibility** – engagement formats are open, multilingual and easy to join.
- **Creativity** – culture, storytelling and design connect people emotionally and intellectually.
- **Adaptability** – engagement responds to real-world conditions.
- **Reflective learning** – rapid observations, partner insights and on-the-ground signals help adjust activities, refine messages and strengthen future formats.

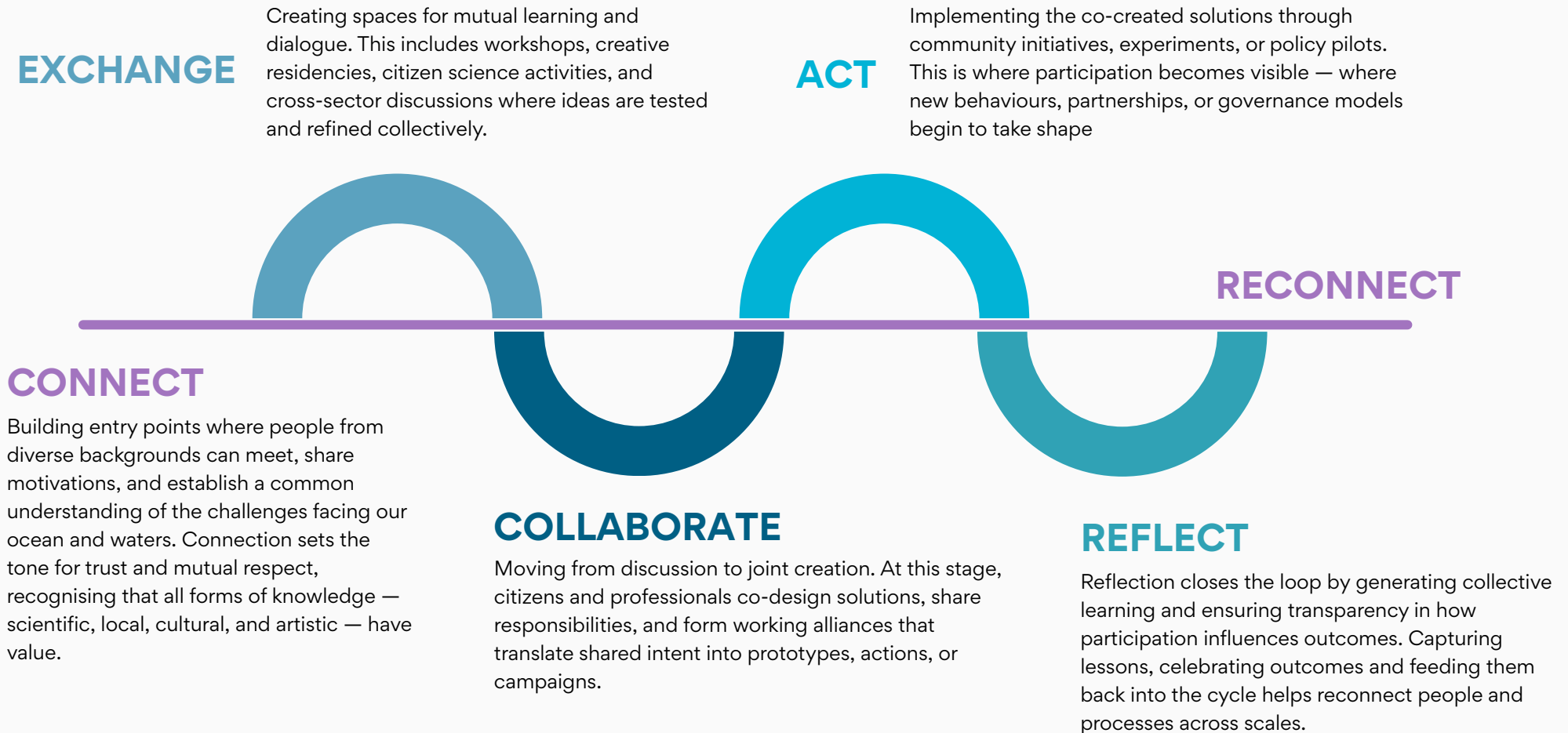


The BlueMissionAA participation cycle

The BlueMissionAA Systemic Participation Cycle builds on a shift from hierarchical models of participation (Arnstein, 1969) toward iterative and systemic frameworks that integrate learning, collaboration and reflection.

Rooted in systems thinking (Meadows, 2008; Capra & Luisi, 2014) and participatory design theory (Sanders & Stappers, 2008; Manzini, 2015), the cycle views engagement not as a ladder to climb but as a living process of connection, co-creation, action and learning. This mirrors approaches in sustainability transitions and transdisciplinary research (Loorbach et al., 2017), where participation evolves through feedback loops linking individual experiences to systemic transformation.

The BlueMissionAA cycle therefore redefines participation as ecosystemic stewardship, as an adaptive, continuous process that thrives through interaction between science, policy, education and civic life.



How we create value in local participation

Value in participation arises when local actions inform and are informed by policy, science and education. BlueMissionAA uses engagement as a bridge, translating citizen insights into data, dialogue and decision-making that strengthen the Mission's capacity to deliver real change.

By connecting people's lived experiences with institutional and scientific processes, the project ensures that participation is not symbolic but strategic, adding tangible value to both community initiatives and the Mission framework. Yet this value is most meaningful when it happens locally. When citizens engage in protecting and restoring their immediate surroundings, they not only improve their communities but also cultivate a culture of care that travels with them. A person who learns to respect the ocean at home is more likely to act responsibly as a visitor or tourist elsewhere, reinforcing a shared ethic of preservation rather than consumption.

In policy, local engagement gives authorities the insight and legitimacy to design measures that reflect community priorities. Participatory methods turn governance from a top-down process into a dialogue between institutions and citizens, making decisions fairer and more effective. Local governments can amplify this effect by collaborating with universities and NGOs, supporting campaigns, and forming citizen advisory groups or volunteer committees to co-create and test solutions linked to Mission Ocean.

In science, citizen observations and co-created experiments expand and diversify datasets, bringing local knowledge and sensory experience into the evidence base. This collaboration enhances data quality, supports environmental monitoring and deepens public understanding of scientific processes. As citizens learn by doing, they develop ocean literacy and a stronger connection to place, creating feedback loops between knowledge creation and behaviour.

In education, BlueMissionAA's creative formats extend learning beyond classrooms. Workshops, participatory exhibitions and citizen science activities transform participation into shared learning that nurtures curiosity, intergenerational exchange and civic pride. Simple actions such as leaving no trace at the beach, reducing waste or protecting shallow-water habitats become visible forms of stewardship that strengthen local identity and biodiversity alike.

The **following section explores methods and tools** that can make this engagement tangible, highlighting their relevance for policy, science and education.





03 Engagement methods and tools

CONNECT PHASE

How to raise awareness and build common grounds

Social engagement for change **begins by awakening curiosity and inspiring care**. It means shifting the focus from blame and guilt to action and possibility. Building this shared mindset is the first step toward collective responsibility and lasting transformation.

Lasting change begins when people recognise that their individual actions, however small, contribute to collective impact. Fostering **daily habits** and **shared values** that protect and restore the ocean builds belonging and responsibility. What matters most is not perfection, but participation: **encouraging people to act, to question and to care**. Care grows strongest through emotion, evidence and experience of wonder, understanding why it matters, and seeing thoughtful actions make a difference.

Different groups connect in different ways depending on their age, background or even proximity to the sea. Coastal communities bring lived knowledge and cultural memory; tourists and visitors can learn respect through mindful behaviours and local initiatives; and urban citizens connect through creativity, education and digital participation. **Awareness tools can adapt to these realities.** *Local campaigns and information days* translate Mission goals into relatable action; *citizen science and reverse science cafés* build trust between communities and researchers; and creative formats turn learning into care and care into collective action.

Citizen science webinars

EDUCATION SCIENCE

A citizen science webinar invites citizens to collaborate with researchers, turning observation and data collection into hands-on learning and shared action for ocean restoration.

In BlueMissionAA, a citizen science webinar was organised in Cascais during the **Citizen Science Campaign (December 2023)**, where citizens and organisations like SeaForester, Sustainable Ocean Alliance and Sciaena collaborated with researchers to discuss and showcase hands-on ocean restoration practices across the Atlantic basins.



Other useful examples and resources

- European Citizen Science Platform – citizenscience.eu
- European Citizen Science Association (ECSA)
- EU-Citizen.Science Training Resources

Reverse science cafés

EDUCATION SCIENCE

A reverse science café flips the traditional expert–audience model by inviting citizens to speak first, share their experiences and questions, while scientists listen, learn and respond in dialogue.

In BlueMissionAA, this format was used during the **Environmental Advocacy and Justice Workshop (Amsterdam, November 2024)**, where young participants, such as university students in marine science, discussed environmental challenges and co-created advocacy messages with researchers and facilitators.



Other useful examples and resources

- Post truth vs Science Engagement: a Reversed Science Cafe

Children & youth workshops

EDUCATION SCIENCE

Children and youth workshops provide creative, participatory spaces for youngsters to explore ocean issues, experiment with ideas, and take ownership of solutions.



In BlueMissionAA, workshops were held in Porto (2025) combined learning, play and reflection to explore marine restoration and sustainability. Youth aged 11–17 designed ideas using marine materials like algae and shells for food, energy and bioplastics. Children under 10 learned ocean literacy through storytelling and colouring activities.

Other useful examples and resources

- 🔗 Ocean Decade Youth Advisory Council
- 🔗 Young Reporters for the Environment
- 🔗 Mr.Goodfish's Tales of the Blue - Children awareness sessions

Local campaigns and info days

POLICY SCIENCE

Local campaigns and information days connect policy goals with everyday action, helping communities understand, discuss, and support ocean restoration efforts.



In BlueMissionAA, local campaigns were launched during the Inaugural Citizen Campaign (2023), where partners hosted public talks and community activities introducing Mission Ocean across the Atlantic and Arctic basins. These campaigns helped local stakeholders translate Mission goals into everyday action, fostering visibility at community level.

Other useful examples and resources

- 🔗 EU Mission Ocean Communication Toolkit
- 🔗 PREP4BLUE Communication Toolkit

Community murals & arts

EDUCATION

Community murals and art installations transform local spaces into shared messages of care, using creativity to connect people emotionally with ocean and water issues.



In BlueMissionAA, the “Waves of Change – Into the Reef” mural (Cork Harbour Festival, 2025) invited citizens to co-create an artwork on ocean restoration and write personal pledges on the panels. The mural became both a public artwork and a participatory process, transforming creative expression into a collective act of environmental commitment.

Other useful examples and resources

- 🔗 Culture Action Europe – Art for Environmental Change
- 🔗 Ocean Culture Life – Art and Ocean Connection

Ocean literacy booklets

POLICY SCIENCE

Ocean literacy booklets translate complex marine science into accessible learning materials that inspire care and understanding of ocean ecosystems.



In BlueMissionAA, the Ocean Literacy Booklet was co-developed and launched during World Ocean Day 2024. It comprises key facts and illustrations that help readers understand how ocean health connects to daily life, encouraging reducing waste and avoiding pollution, eating seafood responsibly, and protecting marine habitats.

Other useful examples and resources

- 🔗 UNESCO Ocean Literacy Portal
- 🔗 EMSEA – European Marine Science Educators Association
- 🔗 EU4Ocean Coalition – Ocean Literacy

How to share vision through creativity

After awareness and connection are built, the **next step is to share visions** by bringing together diverse perspectives to imagine the future collectively. **Creativity helps express what people see, feel and hope for**, bridging gaps that words or data alone cannot fill.

Through creative exchange, participants begin to align their understanding of challenges and opportunities, forming a **common picture of what change could look like**.

This phase is about active listening, interpreting and envisioning together. Scientists, policymakers, educators and citizens **share insights from their fields while learning to communicate across different languages**, i.e. academic, professional, artistic and emotional.

Creativity bridges these differences, turning **knowledge into shared imagination**. *Storytelling, podcasts, webinars, online assemblies and educational games* reach out to wider audiences, encouraging playfulness while still fostering focus, trust and meaningful dialogue. Although **creative and playful approaches may feel unfamiliar or even uncomfortable for some**, they open cognitive and emotional space for empathy and reflection. When combined with critical thinking, they help participants **connect on a human level, to argument imagined solutions based on informed decision-making and grounded** in shared understanding.

★ Podcasts

EDUCATION

SCIENCE

Podcasts use personal and creative narratives to translate scientific or policy topics into relatable, human experiences.



In BlueMissionAA, during the Cork Harbour Festival (2025) and the inauguration of the “Into the Reef” mural, a live podcast brought together artists, scientists and educators to share diverse perspectives on restoring our oceans. First things first, how to let people know and encourage them to take part.

Other useful examples and resources

- 🔗 UNESCO – Ten Blue Stories
- 🔗 Ocean Culture Life

★ Webinars

EDUCATION

SCIENCE

POLICY

Webinars are effective formats for establishing dialogue between citizens, scientists and policymakers. They make it possible to share knowledge and discuss priorities.



In BlueMissionAA, the Recovery and Restoration – Policy Needs from Science webinar (April 2025), co-organised with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), brought together scientists, policymakers and practitioners to discuss how marine research can better inform restoration policy.

Other useful examples and resources

- 🔗 PREP4BLUE Webinar Series on Planning for Citizen Participation in Mission Ocean & Waters
- 🔗 UNOC3 Virtual Side Event | Mr.Goodfish3.0 & VERIFISH | Can we still eat seafood?

★ Weekly Hours sessions

EDUCATION SCIENCE

Series of online sessions create informal yet structured spaces for citizens, experts, and organisations to meet regularly, exchange updates and discuss emerging priorities.



In BlueMissionAA, the Weekly Hours series offered short, recurring online gatherings that connected Mission partners, local actors and interested citizens. Each session focused on a specific theme, from restoration and education to innovation and community engagement, helping participants align efforts and maintain communication.

Other useful examples and resources

- 🔗 ECNL's Guide on digitally-mediated assemblies and how to monitor them
- 🔗 Living-in.EU Digital Assembly 2025

★ Gamification

EDUCATION SCIENCE

Gamification techniques turn sustainability and ocean-care topics into interactive decisions, helping people learn through action and play.



In BlueMissionAA, the “Good and Bad Practices Card Game” was developed for Macaronight 2024 in Gran Canaria, engaging children and families in identifying sustainable and harmful marine practices. The gamified approach encouraged dialogue between generations and turned learning into a shared, playful experience.

Other useful examples and resources

- 🔗 Pillars of the Sea - Mr.Goodfish Board Game
- 🔗 Mission Ocean by Adventerra Games

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When citizens are encouraged to move, draw, play, decide, vote, or build, they feel ownership over the learning process and become more open to dialogue. Inclusivity grows naturally when participation is embedded in the activity. It is also important to create spaces where different ages and backgrounds can engage together. Activities that are simple enough for children but meaningful enough for adults help families and mixed groups participate as equals. Finally, connecting complex scientific themes to local realities makes the content more accessible. People are more motivated when they recognise their own environment, daily challenges, or cultural context in the activity.



Taynara Louzada,
Regional Fund for Science and Technology



How to imagine desirable futures through co-creation

Co-creation **transforms dialogue into design**. It allows citizens and other stakeholders to **imagine desirable futures together** and prototype solutions that bridge vision and reality.

Once mutual understanding is built through discoveries of shared experiences, collaboration begins through structured co-creation. This phase connects creativity with strategy, where imagination meets decision-making. Participants move from exchanging ideas to designing with intent: **defining shared goals, aligning expectations and developing pathways for change** that are both visionary and feasible. The process moves from abstract ideas into concrete and desirable outcomes such as prototypes, pilot initiatives or community projects. In BlueMissionAA, this process took shape through storytelling sessions and stakeholder mapping, which helped participants identify who to involve, what futures to prepare for and how local innovations could respond to global challenges. Local innovation sessions and participatory exhibitions translated these discussions into visible results, showing how collaborative design can connect local knowledge with systemic transformation.

Co-creation is demanding and it requires openness to uncertainty, time to build trust, and the humility to learn from others' expertise.

Yet it is also where participation becomes truly generative. By designing together, people move beyond consultation toward shared ownership, creating solutions that are contextually relevant, socially legitimate and resilient over time.

Stakeholder analysis

EDUCATION

SCIENCE

POLICY

Stakeholder analysis identifies the individuals and organisations that influence or are affected by a specific challenge. It helps visualise their interest and power levels in addressing challenges.



In BlueMissionAA, stakeholder mapping and analysis was used during workshops and planning activities to connect actors across education, policy and science sectors by helping teams understand how to better involve local communities, NGOs and experts in preservation and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems in Atlantic and Arctic basins.

Other useful examples and resources

- [European Commission - Stakeholder Analysis](#)
- [CLIMAREST D2.1 Initial Stakeholder Analysis](#)



Local innovation labs

EDUCATION SCIENCE POLICY

Local innovation labs turn co-created ideas into small-scale experiments that test feasibility and local relevance. They combine systems thinking with peer learning and practical prototyping.



BlueMissionAA identified this approach as a transferable model for fostering local innovation ecosystems. Such labs can build on Mission Ocean’s engagement networks to test pilot ideas, strengthen local ownership, and accelerate replication across regions.

Other useful examples and resources

- European Network of Living Labs
- Design Council - Systemic Design Framework

Scenario planning

EDUCATION SCIENCE POLICY

Scenario planning explores possible future scenarios and their implications. They help participants imagine alternative futures and assess strategies under changing conditions.



While not directly implemented in BlueMissionAA, scenario planning is identified as a promising method for future Mission activities. It can support multi-actor collaboration by helping participants explore alternative futures and align around those that are both feasible and desirable.

Other useful examples and resources

- OECD Strategic Foresight Toolkit
- UNDP Foresight Manual

Ocean storytelling

EDUCATION SCIENCE POLICY

Ocean storytelling sessions enable storytellers and participants to discuss from their first-hand experiences about challenges affecting coastal communities.



In BlueMissionAA, an ocean storytelling session with fisherfolk was held in May 2025 in Cork, gathering a former navy captain, fishermen and fisherwomen to exchange experiences of the sea. The conversation encouraged reflection on how the ocean shapes communities and what traditional knowledge can teach us about changing marine environments.

Other useful examples and resources

- EU Policy Lab – Co-Creation for Policy
- Sanders & Stappers (2008) – Co-Creation and the New Landscapes of Design

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The experience of the event - “Ocean Storytelling: stories of the Sea” - during the European Maritime Day (Cork, Ireland) gave us a lot of beautiful insights from people who interact with the ocean and waters daily – and this interaction was explained by the people themselves, through their own stories. Such sharing can be possible if done in a local place – outside the academic walls and thus provides a space for a different type of exchange. Through this type of approach new insights may be shared and discussed further



Baiba Prūse
University College Cork, MaREI

How to make collective action work

Action gives participation momentum and visibility while it **tests the strength of collaboration by revealing what truly works** when ideas meet real-world conditions.

This phase is about implementation, when co-created ideas evolve into community projects, campaigns or pilot actions. Citizens, researchers, artists and local authorities act together to test solutions and demonstrate how collaboration creates value. Collective action can take many forms, from short-term pilots that explore feasibility and spark interest, to long-term community initiatives that embed new behaviours or governance models. In both cases, leadership is shared: institutions may provide frameworks and resources, while citizens and local groups co-lead activities, ensuring that action stays relevant to local realities. **Learning-by-doing becomes a central principle, and implementation itself becomes a source of knowledge that refines the next cycle of design.**

Beyond implementation, this phase is also about **stewardship**—the ongoing care and responsibility that communities take for the outcomes they help create. BlueMissionAA implemented collective action through *field actions, advocacy campaigns and community art initiatives*. When people can see and feel the results of their collaboration, motivation deepens and participation continues beyond single events, creating momentum that sustains the Mission's long-term goals.



Pilot and demo projects

EDUCATION

SCIENCE

POLICY

Pilot or demo projects are small-scale actions that test co-created ideas in real conditions before they are scaled up. They help assess feasibility, impact and societal readiness for longer-term use.



BlueMissionAA identified pilot and demo projects as transferable formats. Experimentation and demonstration make it easier to see which approaches are realistic and suitable for the local context, saving time and resources. Pilots can also take the form of co-creation journeys co-governed by local organisations.

Other useful examples and resources

- [SISCODE Co-creation Labs](#)
- [BlueConnect Demo Sites](#)



Local community initiatives

EDUCATION

SCIENCE

Local community initiatives are small projects initiated by local people or organisations such as NGOs. They rely on commitment and cooperation to address any challenge shared by the community.



These initiatives often begin with shared local concerns such as pollution, waste, or the condition of nearby waters. People come together to share ideas, use their skills and find practical ways to improve their surroundings. Over time, these efforts can make noticeable improvements and encourage others to get involved.

Other useful examples and resources

- [WWF Coastal Communities Initiatives](#)
- [Ocean Alive - Keepers of the Sea](#)



Local policy labs

POLICY SCIENCE

Policy labs are small-scale trials of new rules, programmes, or planning measures developed with community input. They allow local authorities to test ideas in practice before wider adoption.



BlueMissionAA identified this labs as an important transferable model because they can turn participation into real governance outcomes. They help test wether new measures are workable, locally relevant, and informed by real experience.

Other useful examples and resources

- Local Policy Lab
- Lab-X Lisbon
- Neutralpath Labs - Governance Models



Participatory Budgeting

EDUCATION POLICY

Participatory budgeting enable citizens to propose initiatives to receive funding and prioritise funding allocations. They ensure that implementation is transparent, equitable and locally relevant.



As a transferable model, these policy participation tools are promising ways to involve communities in Mission Ocean decision-making. They strengthen trust between institutions and citizens by sharing responsibility for action and resource use.

Other useful examples and resources

- Save the Harbour
- Participatory Budgeting - Go Vocal



REFLECT PHASE

How to replicate and continue waves

Reflection is valuable only if it leads to continuity. Once lessons are captured, the next step is to translate them into **models, partnerships or practices that others can adapt.**

Replication does not mean repeating an activity identically, yet it means reapplying what worked in new contexts, guided by the same principles but responsive to local realities. In the Mission logic, **replication is how small-scale actions create large-scale impact.** When a community mural inspires another city to start its own, when a citizen science method becomes part of a school curriculum, or when a policy dialogue is reused in a new region, the wave continues. Each new iteration carries both experience and innovation, strengthening the overall system of participation. Therefore, **continuing the waves also means building mechanisms for transfer and memory** such as open-access resources, toolkits, digital repositories, peer exchanges or mentorship between pilot teams. These mechanisms ensure that learning remains alive and accessible beyond project cycles.

BlueMissionAA supports this by **promoting cross-regional learning, where insights from one lighthouse or community inform another.** Ultimately, each reflection becomes a starting point for a new wave that is wider, wiser and more connected than before.

Feedback sessions & surveys

EDUCATION

SCIENCE

POLICY

Feedback sessions and surveys collect direct input from participants after events. They provide organisers with qualitative and quantitative data to improve future actions.



In BlueMissionAA, participant feedback was gathered following workshops and campaigns to collect evidence, measure satisfaction, learning outcomes and inclusivity.

Other useful examples and resources

[European Commission - Evaluation handbook](#)

Digital storytelling

EDUCATION

SCIENCE

Digital storytelling uses photos, videos or short narratives to capture what participants learned and felt. Documentation transforms these stories into knowledge that others can reuse or build upon.



In BlueMissionAA, digital storytelling formats such as podcasts and social media posts helped communicate outcomes and experiences from citizen engagement to wider audiences.

Other useful examples and resources

[DigiBlue: Co-Creating Stories for Blue Citizenship](#)

Knowledge transfer sessions

- EDUCATION
- SCIENCE
- POLICY

Knowledge transfer sessions bring together organisers and stakeholders to discuss what can be applied elsewhere, what should change, and what should stop.



As a transferable practice, BlueMissionAA identified these sessions as a key format for extending learning beyond single projects, supporting peer exchange between Mission partners and new communities. They are crucial for scaling lessons and avoiding repetition of challenges.

Other useful examples and resources

- PREP4BLUE Knowledge Transfer Modules
- ICLEI - How can your city become future-proof?

Assessment frameworks

- EDUCATION
- SCIENCE
- POLICY

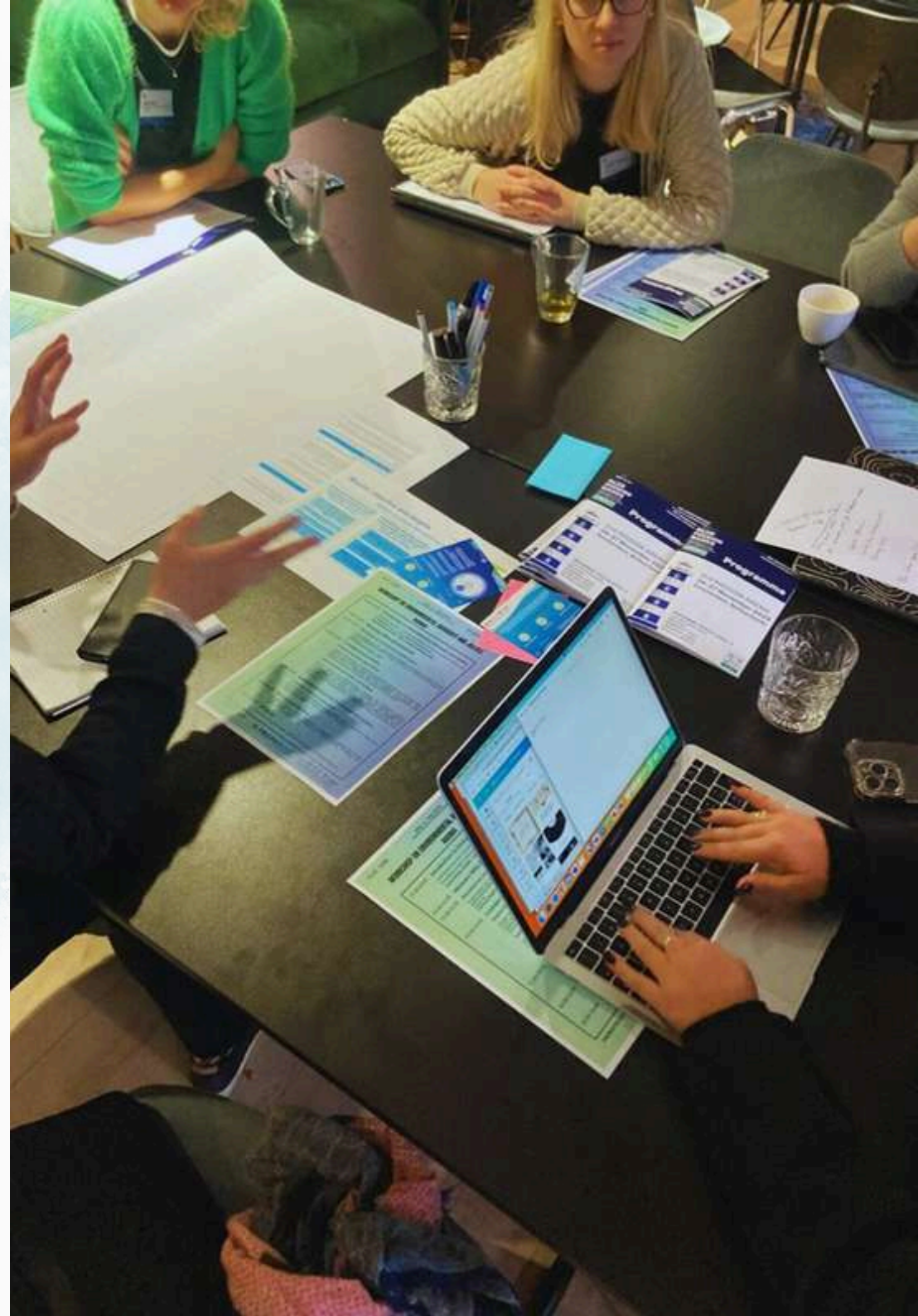
Assessment frameworks help organisers assess activities, identify what worked, and understand why. They consist of checklists and guided questions used before, during and after engagement.



In BlueMissionAA, assessment framework was elaborated in the Holistic RRI, SDG, Open Science and Social Impact evaluation framework, used to assess inclusivity and collaboration quality across engagement events.

Other useful examples and resources

- SISCOE Assessment Framework



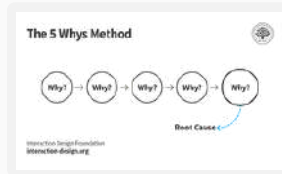
Overview of the design tools across phases



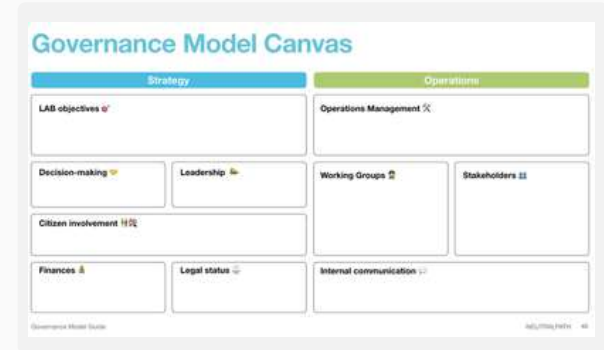
Problem Definition (p25)



Stakeholder Engagement & Dissemination Plan (p21)



5 WHYS



Governance Model Canvas

EXCHANGE

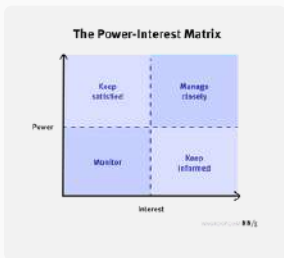
ACT

RECONNECT

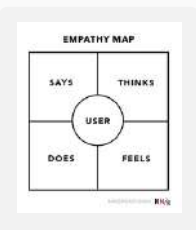
CONNECT

COLLABORATE

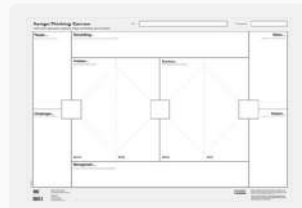
REFLECT



Stakeholder Analysis



Empathy Mapping



Design Thinking Canvas



Stakeholder Journey (p41)



Reflection Canvas

How to monitor and evaluate engagement

Monitoring and evaluation matter because they show **what participation achieves, who it reaches, and how it grows**. Evidence builds trust and helps improve future engagement.

Across 2022–2025, BlueMissionAA engaged over 6,000 citizens through almost 40 activities. Monitoring combined quantitative and qualitative data to assess inclusivity, relevance and collaboration quality. This evidence helped partners adjust activities, share lessons and inform policy.



Before engagement

- Clarify objectives and focus, i.e. awareness, collaboration, behavioural change or policy influence.
- Define indicators and combine quantitative data (number of participants, geographic reach, gender balance) with qualitative insights (satisfaction, perceived impact, new collaborations).
- Establish baselines by collecting initial data or perceptions before activities start.
- Assign a team member who is responsible for collecting, analysing and reporting results.

During engagement

- Monitor participation in real time and track attendance, diversity and interaction quality. Use quick tools such as polls, reflection cards, or feedback forms.
- Capture stories and visuals by documenting emerging insights through quotes, photos and testimonial.
- Stay flexible and if you notice gaps (e.g., underrepresented groups, limited engagement), adapt your approach mid-course.

After engagement

- Evaluate outcomes and learning. Compare results with your initial objectives and baselines. Assess what changed for individuals, organisations and communities.
- Communicate results back to participants and partners to maintain transparency and trust.
- Transform data into insight and lessons for future projects.

Replicating and continuing the waves

- Short guides, visuals, or templates make your process easy for others to adopt.
- Encourage others to use your approach as inspiration, not as a fixed model.
- Link with other communities, schools, or municipalities to exchange what you've learned.
- Publicly acknowledge contributions and show how feedback shaped the next steps.

Common pitfalls and risks

- Collecting too much data without analysis or follow-up.
- Focusing on numbers rather than learning.
- Ignoring inclusivity indicators.
- Treating monitoring and evaluation as a final report instead of a continuous process.



04 **Lessons and recommendations**

What we learned 2022-2025

Even if the oceans don't need our attention, we need them, and the quality of our collective action determines the quality of their future. Projects that address water ecosystems demand a level of respect and responsibility that goes far beyond conventional outreach.

One of the clearest lessons is that abstract issues, i.e. biodiversity loss, ecosystem dynamics, ocean degradation remain distant until people are given the chance to do something. Participation accelerates through action, not explanation. When citizens could play, draw, vote, build, or paint, engagement shifted from passive openness to active contribution. Tactile, creative and interactive formats lowered barriers across ages and abilities and allowed people to step into the topic instead of standing beside it. Emotional and imaginative entry points proved equally powerful. Art, storytelling, and other creative practices helped people slow down, notice, and relate to the ocean in ways that scientific information alone cannot achieve. These forms of expression grounded the topic in lived experience and made stewardship feel personal rather than abstract.

A second pattern was unmistakable: people connect most deeply when the issue is local. As seen in the Azores (Macaronight 2023-2025, Ponta Delgada), students only understood the urgency of ocean challenges when activities referenced their own island and daily surroundings. Local framing transformed sustainability from a distant global narrative into purposeful participation for an immediate local impact.

Another learning outcome was that blending scientific, creative, and dialogue-based approaches broadens participation and reaches a wider diversity of stakeholders. Combining educational content with hands-on activities and artistic elements made engagement more accessible across cultures, languages, and ages, and allowed different types of knowledge to coexist without hierarchy. Accessibility and inclusion emerged as structural enablers. Gamified tools, multilingual materials, and sensory-friendly formats allowed people with disabilities, mixed-age families, and people from varied backgrounds to participate as equals. This not only increased involvement but also created a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility.

Finally, once people enter the process in ways that matter to them most, they carry that energy forward. They invite others, make suggestions, critique decisions, and begin to see ocean care as part of everyday life rather than an optional extra. In a world of limited time and constant competing demands, the shift from "one more task" to "part of how we live" is essential for long-term stewardship.

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Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of communication we use – a way for us to connect to each other and to the natural world around us. Art connects us across languages and culture, and when combined, these two methods remind us that we are a part of nature and not apart from it. As BlueMissionAA has shown, art and storytelling methods can effectively be incorporated into a Mission Ocean projects as poignant and relatable ways to communicate and engage with citizens.



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Common challenges

Across the different basins, several challenges appeared consistently and shaped how participation unfolded in practice. Highlighting them here helps clarify what future Mission projects may want to approach differently and where early attention can make the difference.

Working across three years and learning alongside other Mission Ocean projects such as [PREP4BLUE](#) and [BlueMissionBANOS](#), several challenges remained persistent enough to merit explicit attention in this guidebook. These are not minor operational issues but structural risks that any new Mission-aligned project will need to confront early, or risk repeating the same patterns.

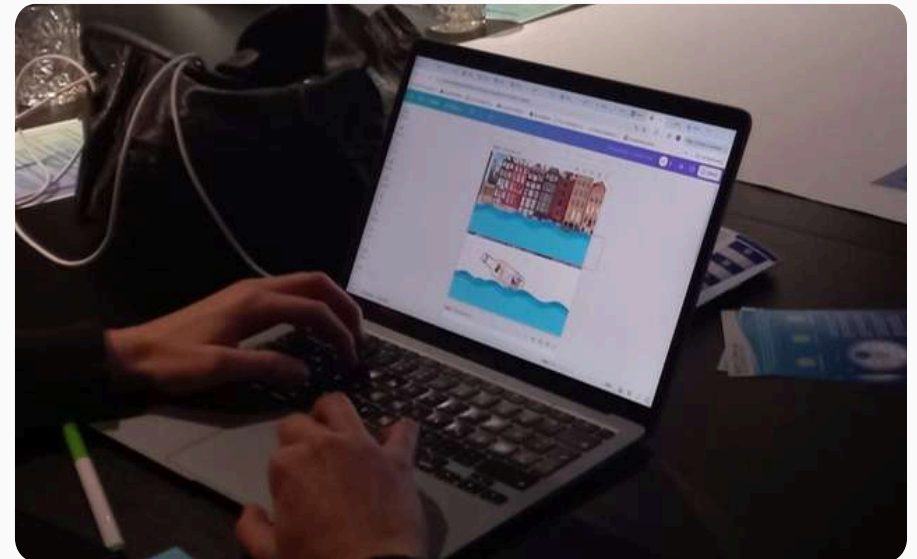
The most visible trap is the tendency for engagement to collapse into an event-management cycle: festivals, workshops, and one-off activities produce strong moments of participation, but without a continuity mechanism they rarely translate into ongoing stewardship.

A second, equally entrenched challenge is the uneven capacity for localisation. Engagement consistently worked best when partners could reshape materials to their own cultures, languages, and contexts, yet this ability is not evenly distributed; some partners struggled to adapt tools or make them digestible for local audiences. This matters because citizens only connect deeply when issues are grounded in their own environments.

Creative practices introduce another challenge: they are powerful but fragile. Art, storytelling and participatory creativity demand time, trust and space, and their impact weakens when rushed or constrained, as with the limited mural development time.

Finally, a critical gap persists between citizen insight and policy uptake. Partners repeatedly stressed that participation becomes meaningful only when citizen contributions feed back into governance, yet this connection remains inconsistent and largely dependent on individual actors rather than system design.

In a wider context where the blue innovation ecosystem is expanding, from platforms like [WaveLinks](#) that map solutions to governance reforms and community-level financing models, these challenges highlight a simple truth: without continuity, localisation capacity, protected creative space and structured policy feedback loops, even the strongest tools and ecosystems struggle to translate engagement into long-term stewardship.



Recommendations 1/2

Across basins and activities, it became clear that some improvements depend on the specific role an actor plays such as policymaking, science or education, while others require everyone to move in the same direction. For this reason, the recommendations are organised in two layers: sectoral recommendations, tailored to the needs and responsibilities of each community, and cross-sectoral recommendations, which apply to all actors working within the Mission logic. Separating them helps clarify who must do what and where shared effort is essential for real impact.

If you are **a policymaker...**

Build mechanisms that turn local insights into policy signals

Create clear, lightweight channels so municipalities, schools, NGOs and research teams can feed observations and needs into your decision-making. This can be as simple as a structured intake form, a yearly consultation cycle, or a basin-level learning report.

Close the loop: show how engagement influenced decisions

When people contribute insights, share openly how their input shaped priorities, plans, or next steps, or why it couldn't. This single action multiplies trust, continuity and legitimacy.

Invest in capacity, not just activities

Provide micro-grants, training, templates and facilitation support so municipalities, educators and communities can adapt tools and sustain engagement.

Treat stakeholder engagement as part of governance, not communication

Build simple, predictable structures where citizen inputs, local observations and community insights feed into actual decisions. Publish short "what we heard / what we changed" summaries so the process is transparent and credible.

If you are **an educator...**

Use multi-sensory, multilingual, hands-on activities

Families, mixed-age groups and diverse learners engage better when activities invite drawing, mapping, building, moving, playing and not just listening.

Act as community connectors

Bring in local scientists, NGOs, fishers, policymakers or cultural actors. This creates real-world relevance and shows students different pathways to stewardship.

Integrate ocean literacy into regular teaching, not just special events

Embed ocean topics across subjects such as science, geography, citizenship, culture, arts so learning becomes routine rather than occasional.

Encourage students to move from learning → proposing → acting

Create small-scale projects where learners can suggest improvements, design micro-solutions or share observations with community actors. This builds agency early.

Recommendations 2/2

If you are **a scientist...**

Translate science into tactile, visual and experiential formats

Use simple analogies, hands-on activities, games and creative collaborations to turn abstract ocean concepts into something people can feel and see.

Contextualise scientific insights locally

Always link research to the local environment: nearby species, local risks, coastal changes, community stories. Local framing is what creates meaning.

Use responsible research reflection tools

Integrate ethical, social and environmental reflection practices to ensure research outputs are accessible, fair and relevant for diverse publics.

Work in cross-disciplinary teams

Pair with facilitators, designers, storytellers and communicators who can help translate complex knowledge into public-friendly narratives and experiences.

and working **across sectors...**

Make localisation standard practice

Everyone — policymakers, scientists, educators — must anchor activities in local realities and ecosystems. It's the main lever for meaning.

Make feedback visible

Citizens need to see what changed because of their input and this requires policy actors, scientific teams, and educators to close the loop together.

Build continuity beyond events engagement

Sustained stewardship requires coordination between policy structures, scientific actors, and educational systems.

Prioritise inclusion and accessibility

Create small-scale projects where learners can suggest improvements, design micro-solutions or share observations with community actors. This builds agency early.

Protect space for creative and emotional engagement

Creative methods only work when all actors value them, support them, and avoid rushing them.



05
**The way
forward**

From engagement to stewardship

The next chapter of the Mission will not be written by tools, reports or campaigns, but by the capacity we build in people, institutions and places to keep showing up for their waters long after individual projects end.

Stewardship is not a programme outcome but it is a social habit, and it grows when communities experience themselves as agents, not audiences. If the last three years taught us anything, it is that people are willing to act when the system makes room for them, listens to them, and reflects their reality back with respect.

The future of the Atlantic and Arctic basins depends on this shift. Not on more engagement activities, but on deeper ones. Not on broader communication, but on more honest connection between knowledge, policy and lived experience. Not on expecting citizens to fit into institutional processes, but on redesigning those processes so they recognise the intelligence, creativity and care already present in communities.

What comes next is a different kind of work:
building continuity where there were events,
building capacity where there were gaps,
and building shared responsibility where there were silos.

It means treating participation as part of governance, science as a public practice, and education as a bridge between generations and ecosystems.

And it means accepting that ocean stewardship is not something we deliver to people, yet it is something we build with them, in ways that are local, repeatable and real.

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BlueMissionAA showed that meaningful participation is strengthened when engagement combines education, creativity, and local involvement, turning awareness into action and empowering communities, especially youth, to shape a sustainable future for our oceans. The true success of Mission Ocean will be measured not by how many people we reach, but by how many remain involved when no one is inviting them.



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This guidebook is not a blueprint, and it is not meant to be followed step by step. It is a collection of approaches, insights and real examples that can spark curiosity, sharpen critical thinking and encourage others to co-design their own pathways. The practices shared here show what is possible, not what is fixed. They offer starting points such as ways of engaging, adapting, questioning and experimenting so that any team can build on.

If this guidebook succeeds in anything, it should be in giving readers the confidence to try, to adjust, and to push their own contexts further than the project itself could reach.

Keep in touch



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