

# R&D in Greater Manchester

## Participants

- Bruntwood SciTech
- Greater Manchester Combined Authority
- Health Innovation Manchester
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Rochdale Development Agency, Rochdale Borough Council
- Science and Industry Museum, Manchester
- Siemens

## Introduction

CaSE's Discovery Decade project aims to create a more outward-facing vision for R&D in the UK. By helping R&D organisations and advocates to connect with a broader base of public supporters, we can ensure that R&D investment remains a political priority.

We're working closely with organisations across the R&D sector, including through a series of targeted workshops, to collate and share what's already known about reaching public audiences.

## Workshop aim

To understand the role that R&D can play in the future of the Greater Manchester city region, and how that vision can be shared with the public.

## What's working?

Devolution has allowed Greater Manchester to adopt longer-term strategic thinking and forge trusting relationships between local partners. The city region's universities produce skilled graduates and local diversity brings inherent strengths – such as multilingualism – that attract innovative businesses.

Skills and education were a common connection point with the public, as many R&D organisations rely on a strong talent pipeline. **Siemens** runs a UK-wide engagement programme, the Curiosity Project, that aims to inspire young people through activities in museums, festivals, schools, and at home. **Rochdale Development Agency** noted its ambitions to build local skills for the Atom Valley Project, which aims to bring innovative industry to Rochdale, Bury and Oldham, and create 20,000 new jobs.

Successful engagement rests on effective storytelling and understanding audiences. **The Science and Industry Museum** segments its audience and provides activities to suit; for instance offering something more experiential for younger audiences seeking unusual activities. Tangible, relevant examples are reliably effective, and those advocating for R&D should lean into quirky stories that capture imaginations.

**“A story about graphene-infused concrete used in a Manchester venue resonated with the public because it was being used as a roller disco.”**

**Health Innovation Manchester** stressed the need to connect with people where they are and value the time they spare to engage with advocates. Providing lunch at an event in a lower-income community proved effective in bringing people to what may have seemed like a dry, if important, discussion about health data use. Equally important is not underestimating people's capacity to grasp complex subjects.

### What's challenging?

A shared concern was balancing messaging about R&D's immediate and legacy benefits. Advocates need to find language and stories that demonstrate R&D's relevance to the problems facing people now, without undermining the need for long-term support.

The need to earn and maintain the public's trust was also front of mind. Participants reflected on the wariness of some public groups about the role of businesses in R&D; **Bruntwood SciTech** suggested that companies could help to foster trust by demonstrating more clearly that they are delivering on the benefits they promise.

**"We need to show that investing in R&D today will bring cheaper energy bills in 10 years. Or that if we'd invested a decade ago, this cost of living crunch might not have happened."**

Greater transparency with the public, and renewed efforts to humanise and demystify research were also discussed, with **Manchester Metropolitan University** emphasising the authenticity that individual researchers can have when going out into communities.

For city regions such as Greater Manchester there can be inherent tensions between and even within regions. While highlighting comparative strengths can be helpful, there are benefits from turning regional competitors into partners and learning from the paths other regions have taken to growth.

### What's next?

- **R&D advocates should connect research to local issues and priorities.** City regions are uniquely well placed to do this, benefitting from strong and familiar regional leadership, and research organisations that have built trusted relationships with the community. For Greater Manchester, high potential priorities include health inequalities and Net Zero.
- **Creating R&D messages with local relevance means understanding local audiences.** City regions should map the issues which resonate with different residents, and also understand the level of 'place' that groups most strongly associate with – be that regional, borough or community-level.
- **Major regional developments offer an opportunity to engage the public, ideally from the outset.** Prime examples are the Greater Manchester Innovation Accelerator announced in the Levelling Up White Paper and the Atom Valley development. Building these initiatives around a shared, public vision for R&D within the city region will help secure success and longevity.
- **City regions should involve residents when championing their contribution to the future of UK R&D.** Our workshop demonstrated the benefits of working as a city region to build public and political support for R&D. Greater Manchester can show its stability and capacity for long-term planning, and take advantage of strong regional relationships and the levelling up agenda.