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Using travelling exhibitions to reach national audiences

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We know that nothing beats a visit to a Large Scale Facility to generate lasting interest in science, especially among young people who are our future researchers, technicians and skilled staff. But LSFs are not theme parks, and we must of necessity limit the number of visitors for capacity, safety and operational reasons. In practice, this also limits visits only to those able to easily travel to our locations, which raises equity and diversity concerns. STFC faces these challenges daily at our national laboratories, and through our management of UK involvement in CERN, ESO, ILL, ESRF and others. Our solution was to bring the facilities to the public! From our start in 2011 we are now approaching one million visitors to our series of major national roadshows: firstly in particle physics, then astronomy, crystallography and most recently lasers. Each was based on a travelling large scale exhibit: a life size replica of the Large Hadron Collider tunnel; a 1/4 scale Very Large Telescope facility, and most recently a life-size model of the Vulcan very high powered laser facility. In this session we will explain how we developed the roadshows to fit the wider UK public engagement strategy, how we engaged our researcher communities, the lessons learnt including what didn't work as well as we'd planned, and give thoughts on how other LSFs may be able to adapt the model for their purposes.

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