

SURVEY: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY: Public communication and engagement in palaeontology: an international mixed-methods study embedded in IPC7 – A study linked to the 7th International Palaeontological Congress (IPC7), Cape Town, 30 November – 3 December 2026 (Funded by the Palaeontological Scientific Trust (PAST) and the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI)).

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Prof Marina Joubert, Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST), Stellenbosch University and Prof Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Cape Town

1. INTRODUCTION

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Please take some time to read the information below, which will explain the details of this research study

2. WHO IS CONDUCTING THIS STUDY?

This research study is conducted by the principal investigators listed above. Marina Joubert is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, while Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan is a Professor at the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

3. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to decline to participate. Saying no will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part initially. Please feel free to contact the researchers about any part of this study that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are completely satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you could be involved.

4. WHY DO WE INVITE YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

We invite you, as a palaeontologist or a communicator in the field, to participate in this survey to help us gather insights into palaeontologists' and communicators' views, attitudes, and practices regarding their involvement in public communication and societal engagement. A better understanding of the factors that motivate or constrain researchers' and communicators' involvement in public-facing roles could help research managers, funders and policymakers to improve their support for these activities.

5. WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH STUDY ABOUT?

This study explores how and why palaeontologists and palaeontology communicators worldwide engage with diverse public audiences, and the incentives, motivations, challenges, and barriers that shape their involvement in these activities.

6. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to fill out an online questionnaire that will take about 15 – 20 minutes to complete. It will include questions about your professional context (for example, the type of institution you are affiliated with and your field of specialisation), as well as your personal experiences and opinions on public communication and societal engagement. We also ask for information on your age and gender to situate our findings within the broader body of knowledge on factors influencing scientists' engagement with society. Please note that all responses will be collected anonymously (unless you opt to be identified) and used solely for research purposes. You are free to skip any questions you are uncomfortable answering. The researchers will keep the completed questionnaires in a secure location to ensure that only people working on the study have access to them.

7. ARE THERE ANY RISKS IN MY TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

There are no foreseeable risks from participating in this survey. However, you are free to stop completing the questionnaire at any time.

8. CONFIDENTIALITY

Since the survey defaults to anonymous submission, no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your responses will be assigned a unique identification code, and we will refer to your data only by this code in any publication, report, or other research output. If you choose to identify yourself before submitting the survey (an option given in the last question), we may use this information to get in touch with you for follow-up research, but not to link your identity to any of the input you have provided in response to the questionnaire.

All data collected from this survey will be treated as confidential. Results will be published in research journals or presented at conferences in a manner that does not allow individual participants to be identified. The data from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for ensuring that research is conducted properly. All these individuals are required to maintain your confidentiality (in case you have taken the option to identify yourself). All survey data will be kept in a password-protected electronic format on secure servers via SU OneDrive at Stellenbosch University for a minimum of five years, and only the research team will have access to this information.

9. WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

There are no direct, tangible benefits from taking part in this research, other than being able to contribute to meaningful and relevant research that could be of benefit to your field of research, the profession of palaeontology, and society at large.

10. WILL I BE PAID TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY AND ARE THERE ANY COSTS INVOLVED?

There is no payment or other form of compensation for taking part in this study, and there are also no costs involved.

11. WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO MY INFORMATION?

Any information you share during this study that could possibly identify you as a participant will be protected. All survey data will be stored on password-protected institutional servers accessible only to the research team. Survey data will be retained for a minimum of five years in accordance with Stellenbosch University's data retention policy. Only the members of the research team (two principal investigators and one research assistant) will have access to the data, and only for research purposes. The data will not be released or shared with anyone else and will be used only for research directly relevant to the current project. No respondents will be identifiable in any of the research outputs.

12. HOW DO I CONTACT THE RESEARCHERS?

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact the researcher, Marina Joubert, at marinajoubert@sun.ac.za.

13. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

In accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), you have the right to be informed about the collection and use of your personal information. This includes the right to access the information you have provided and to request corrections if any of it is inaccurate or incomplete.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints regarding your rights as a research participant, or if you wish to exercise your rights under the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), please contact the Research Ethics Committee at [applyethics@sun.ac.za; +2721-808-9183].

14. RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research at Stellenbosch University with the reference number 36063