The Practicalities of Crowdsourcing: Lessons from the Tea Bag Index - UK

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The Tea Bag Index –UK is a collaborative project between the University of Reading and the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), working with members of the gardening community as citizen scientists. This project aims to quantify how decomposition varies across the country, and whether decomposition is influenced by how gardeners manage their soil, particularly with respect to the application of compost.

Launched in 2015 as part of a PhD project, the Tea Bag Index- UK project asks willing volunteers to bury tea bags in their gardens, as part of a large scale, litter bag style decomposition rate study. Over 450 sets of tea bags have been dispatched to participants, across the length and breadth of the UK. The group was largely recruited via social media, magazine articles and public engagement events and active discourse was undertaken with these citizen scientists using Facebook, Twitter and regular email communication.

In order to run a successful crowdsourcing citizen science project there are number of stages that need to be considered including (but not limited to): planning; launch and recruitment; communications; and feedback. Throughout a project of this nature an understanding of the motivations of your volunteers is vital. Reflecting on these motivations while publicising the project, and communicating regularly with its participants is incredibly important for a successful project.