



Contribution ID: 81

Type: Talk

Beyond the Fence: Engaging visitors with neutron science at the ILL

Thursday 19 March 2026 15:45 (20 minutes)

The Institut Laue-Langevin (ILL) in Grenoble, France, is a world-leading research facility in neutron science and technology. Every year, around 1500 international researchers come to the ILL to perform over 1000 cutting-edge research in both fundamental science and societal challenges such as health, energy, the environment, and quantum materials.

Under the tagline “Neutrons for Society”, the ILL has recently developed a new communication strategy to engage a wide range of audiences with its mission and impact. The variety of research topics and fields and the evident societal impact of many of them are strong allies in this endeavour. The same cannot be said about the neutron source at the heart of ILL: the high-flux research reactor, which falls under strict nuclear safety and national security regulations.

While ILL has traditionally welcomed the public through site visits, open days, and other activities, global security concerns and French national regulations on nuclear facilities led to developments in security policy that imposed significant new constraints. In response to that, the ILL’s core infrastructure now lies within a Restricted Access Zone (ZAC). Access requires advance screening, and individuals under 18 are no longer permitted onsite. This poses major challenges for science outreach, particularly with the local community, schools and youth audiences in general.

This presentation explores how a major scientific facility is adapting its public engagement strategies in the face of increased security constraints, without losing sight of its mission to make science accessible to all—especially the next generation and local communities. Central among these is a virtual visit of the full laboratory, accessible both online and on-site through a large interactive display.

A more recent development is a permanent exhibition in the new reception building, which serves as a threshold between the secured and public areas. Designed to respect the minimalist, modern architecture of the space—and mindful that it remains a functional zone—exhibition takes a “less is more” approach. A recent open staff family day was an important “stress test” of the system.

Together, and combined with several other initiatives, these efforts aim to rebuild physical and emotional connection with the local community and interested visitors from all over the world, rethinking how a high-security research facility can remain open, inviting, and relevant to the public.

Workshops only: Duration

Workshops only: participants

Workshops only: Equipment

Author: ESPIRITO SANTO, Catarina (ILL)

Presenter: ESPIRITO SANTO, Catarina (ILL)

Session Classification: Parallel session

Track Classification: Pushing Boundaries: Creative and Experimental Approaches to Public Engagement