

Online PalaeOpen WG4 meeting: setting the stage for a new era of palaeoscience outreach.

On 12th of January 2026, Working Group 4 (WG4: Outreach, Education, and Engagement) held its first large online meeting of the year. Building on the momentum of last year's Prague gathering, more than 30 participants from across Europe and beyond came together to refine priorities, align strategies, and co-design the Action's outreach pathway for 2026.

WG4 plays a central role in PalaeOpen's mission to bridge palaeoscience with society, empowering educators, policymakers, practitioners, and the wider public with accessible, meaningful, and engaging science. This first meeting of 2026 focused on **shaping a coordinated plan for the coming months, identifying tangible outputs, and organising teams around four strategic thematic axes**.

A vision for 2026: making palaeoscience accessible and impactful

The session opened with a reminder of why WG4 matters:

- to strengthen the connection between science and society,
- to support evidence-based decision-making,
- to promote inclusivity, interdisciplinarity, and creativity, and
- to empower communities and practitioners with long-term perspectives derived from palaeoecological data.

Participants reviewed the WG4 priority plan for 2026, which is structured around four thematic axes. Each axis reflects a different dimension of outreach and engagement:

1. **Palaeoscience for policy and practice,**
2. **Education and literacy in palaeoecology,**
3. **Popular science resources and activities,**
4. **Capacity building for scientific communication**

These axes formed the basis for four breakout groups (pics), each tasked with identifying audiences, concrete activities for 2026, and potential collaboration needs.



Breakout highlights

1. Palaeoscience for policy and practice

Chair: Celia Martin-Puertas

This group focused on how palaeoecological knowledge can more effectively inform conservation, restoration, and long-term environmental planning.

Key planned outputs for 2026:

- A review paper evaluating how palaeo information is currently incorporated into policy across European countries.
- A coordinated effort to strengthen the presence of palaeoscience in future EU funding calls.
- Stakeholder interviews and surveys with farmers, woodland managers, conservation practitioners, and local authorities.

The group agreed that the necessary expertise already exists within the network, though expanding to cover all EU countries may require additional collaborators.

2. Education and literacy in palaeoecology

Chair: Michela Mariani

This group aims to enhance palaeoscience education among teachers, students, and families.

Key activities discussed:

- Teacher-training workshops held across multiple countries.
- A short training curriculum (~6 hours) accompanied by a toolkit of adaptable classroom activities.
- Development of citizen science modules linked to vegetation surveys, lake-level observation, or biodiversity indicators.
- Consolidation of existing educational resources produced by network members.

The group emphasised reusing and adapting existing materials, ensuring the activities are accessible and language-light.

3. Popular science resources and activities

Chair: Graciela Gil-Romera

This creative group gathered ideas to bring palaeoscience into the public sphere through engaging, accessible formats.

Ideas and upcoming tasks:

- A series of very short expert interviews, each highlighting a single proxy in palaeoenvironmental research.
- Spatial Narratives combining GIS data and visual storytelling (GIS support offered from Zaragoza).
- Photo-based “palaeo-conservation capsules” explaining how past ecological information informs restoration.
- A potential travelling exhibition for museums, translated into multiple European languages.
- Aspirational proposals such as a short documentary led by a proxy as the “main character,” or a children’s booklet series where each proxy becomes a story character.

The group concluded that the skills needed—GIS, writing, education, photography—already exist across WG4.

4. Capacity building for palaeoscience communication

Chair: Ben Siggy

This group addressed the internal needs of the palaeoscience community: communication skills, data visualization, and best practices.

Planned initiatives:

- A workshop on outreach-oriented data visualisation, including vocabulary standardisation and multi-language considerations.
- Creation of a shared image repository (icons, photos, templates) to support outreach across PalaeOpen.
- Exploration of advanced visualisation possibilities inspired by projects such as He reo nō te puehu and 3D pollen modelling initiatives.
- Short lab-practice videos (e.g., coring, microscopy, sediment logging).
- Skill-sharing across WG4’s subgroups and possibly the wider Action.

The group noted a strong willingness within the network to collaborate and pool expertise.

Timeline: what happens next? (Jan–Oct 2026)

We have planned a bit of a timeline (ambitious but encouraging!)

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form teams • Refine scope • Gather pre-existing materials
									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start writing the review paper • Begin teacher-training kit design • Record expert interviews • Plan the communication workshop
									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot the teacher workshop • Conduct stakeholder interviews • Start building StoryMaps • Begin compiling the visual-asset repository
									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Editing and analysis phases • StoryMap drafts • Interview editing • Survey data organisation
									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beta-testing of materials
									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver final outputs • Prepare presentations for the Action's annual meeting

The tasks identified are ambitious but achievable, drawing on the distributed expertise and passion across PalaeOpen. We hope that the first major WG4 meeting of 2026 laid a solid foundation for a highly productive year.

Stay tuned: the first outputs and calls for collaboration will be released very soon!