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Consultation Toolkit

A Guide To Carrying Out Effective Consultation

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Introduction

Consultation is a vital part of a modern, representative democracy.

Consultation refers to the process of actively seeking information or advice prior to making a decision.

Consultation is used to describe processes by which people can get involved to influence policies and services that affect them. Public services that are based on an understanding of citizens' needs are crucial and consultation is one way of delivering this.

Consultation should be a dialogue of an ongoing exchange of views and Councils, the Police and Health authorities already have statutory duties to consult the public on a range of issues. However, we should not consult just because we have to; effective consultation can inform decision-making in the Council and ensure we are meeting the needs of our citizens.

This toolkit is designed to help us deliver the most effective consultation that we can across the organisation.



Key Principles of Consultation

- 1 **Inclusiveness:** the involvement of all people who are interested or would be affected by a decision. It is important to include groups that are often difficult to engage in consultation such as young people, black and minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities.
- 2 **Transparency:** ensuring that all stakeholders are given all the information they need to make an informed decision.
- 3 **Commitment:** providing the appropriate priority and resources.
- 4 **Accessibility:** providing a range of ways for people to be engaged and ensuring that people are not excluded through barriers of language, culture or opportunity.
- 5 **Accountability:** ensuring participants receive regular updates of how their contributions are being used.
- 6 **Responsiveness:** ensuring we remain open to new ideas and are willing to change existing ideas if necessary.
- 7 **Respect:** ensuring the views of participants are respected and people taking part in consultations are treated with respect.
- 8 **Openness:** demonstrate an open mind and a willingness to change where appropriate.



The Consultation Process

The challenge here is to decide what method, or combination of methods, will enable the people you want to involve to generate the information you require within the time and budget available.

All the time that you are thinking about the process, there are a number of things that you should consider:

- Which consultation method(s) will you be using?
- What method(s) will help communicate or generate information?
- What is your budget? This will determine the methods you use
- What is your timescale?
- What are your deadlines?
- Are there any holidays that you need to avoid consulting in?
- Are there any other events that will affect when your consultation can occur?
- What other events or processes could influence the timing of the process?
- What can be done to ensure interested parties are able to engage in consultation?
- Who should be consulted?

It is very important to manage people's expectations when carrying out consultation. Do not talk vaguely about 'consulting' if all you have time for is a couple of focus groups because it may lead people to expect something much more elaborate. Be specific about what you can do and what it will achieve.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders are by definition people who have a 'stake' in a situation. Identifying your stakeholders is key to carrying out any consultation exercise successfully. The main groups usually consist of:

- **The whole community:** If you are talking about engaging 'the public' then you are probably thinking in terms of seeking public opinion about something, so you will want to run a process that involves a representative cross-section of your target population.
- **A representative cross-section of the community:** It may not be the public in general you want to involve, but people from a certain community, or even from a particular street.
- **Specific groups in the community:** These may be people of a particular ethnic community, people with special needs, or people with a common interest in a shared concern. Many people are only interested in participating in engagement processes when the subject matter is something that concerns them personally, so you may get a better response by running several separate engagement processes with a tighter local focus than a single one that is more general.
- **Professionals, experts, and the organisations that have a statutory right to be involved:** These are people and organisations who have to be involved in engagement and consultation either by law (hence 'statutory') or by virtue of the positions they hold, for example organisations such as the Environment Agency and local councils, and individuals such as Members of Parliament.



Identifying Stakeholders

Who should be involved and how do I reach them?

- 1 The purpose of your engagement process should determine who you involve.
- 2 If you are engaging stakeholders rather than just the public at large, it is better to involve too many than to miss out some who are crucial.
- 3 Beware of 'consultation fatigue' caused by engaging the same people too often. There is a limit to the number of times that most people will respond to random enquiries. If you want to engage the same people repeatedly you would be well advised to ask them to join some sort of panel or group that meets regularly.
- 4 Equally, beware of engaging the 'wrong' people. For example, some 'community leaders' are self-appointed or so designated by the media, but in reality have no mandate to speak on behalf of the local community. Ensure you do not solely rely on such people for your engagement process.
- 5 Who is or will be affected, positively or negatively, by what you are doing or proposing to do? For example, communities, employees, customers, contractors, suppliers, partners, trade unions and shareholders.
- 6 Who holds official positions relevant to what you are doing?
- 7 Who runs organisations with relevant interests?
- 8 Who has been involved in any similar issues in the past? For example, regulators, Government agencies and politicians at regional or national levels, non-Government organisations and other national interest groups.



Key Considerations when Selecting Your Consultation Audience

Representativeness

Representative audiences are important in consultation.

A representative sample is of crucial importance when you need to gather the views of the public at large, e.g. when a new development has been proposed. However, it is less important if you are carrying out consultation relevant to a particular group, e.g. wheelchair users.

Sampling

If your consultation method does need to be representative, then it would be useful to understand a bit about sampling. Sampling involves engaging a small number of people and, provided that the sample is representative, you can extrapolate the results and work out what a much larger number think about a certain issue. The larger your sample, the more accurate your results will be.

There are three basic methods you need to know about: 'random sampling', 'stratified sampling' and 'quota sampling'.

Random sampling: To do this you need a list of the people you need to sample, then you simply pick say, 10% of them by choosing every tenth name.

Stratified sampling: This involves a bit more work, but the results will be more accurate. You begin by dividing the target population into sub-categories – say, single women, or people living in a certain area. Then you pick a random selection of that group, and combine all the random selections so that eventually your random selection reflects the composition of the total population.

Quota sampling: This involves finding a quota of people representing certain sub-categories of the target population – so you might ask an interviewer to stop and talk to 150 men under the age of 25, or 100 people over 60 and so forth.

Inclusiveness

It is vital that your consultation avoids the 'usual suspects' and reaches the 'hard to reach'

The 'usual suspects'

People should not be excluded because they regularly attend meetings and get involved. However, we should also ensure we do not rely on them as our sole audience for consultation. Often useful ideas and observations on an issue come from those who are less familiar with the issues as they can bring different perspectives.

Therefore it is worth making efforts to go beyond the 'usual suspects' and thinking of people whose contribution could be valuable because of their viewpoint or expertise, or who could be excluded unless special efforts are made to include them (e.g. minority black and ethnic groups, special needs groups).

The 'hard to reach'

The flip side of the 'usual suspects' point is that you have to make special efforts to ensure that certain sections of the population are included in any engagement exercise. These are often designated as the 'hard to reach'. These groups include minority ethnic groups, the disabled and young people. But also consider other groups such as commuters, young professionals and parents with young children.

Matching methods to people

Think, early on, about the engagement methods that you can use in relation to certain types of stakeholder. For example, if you are speaking to people with low levels of literacy a questionnaire may not be a good idea and there is no point in having a public meeting designed to attract parents with children of school age during the school holidays.

Common Questions to Consider Ahead of Consulting

- What is the purpose of the consultation?
- Why would you like to carry out the consultation?
- Who is going to carry out the consultation?
- What has happened in the past around this situation?
- What is important to different people?
- What has been stated publicly about the situation?
- What are people's assumptions on the issues?
- What are different stakeholders' concerns?



Consultation Methods

Finding new and interesting ways to engage people is essential but can also be challenging. To find the best method for you it would be worthwhile bearing the following questions in mind before embarking on a consultation exercise.

- What is the purpose of the engagement process?
- What would you like to have at the end of the process?
- Which particular stakeholder groups would you like to involve and what special needs do they have, if any?
- How interactive would you like your process to be?



Area Committees

Area Committees drive local projects and make decisions about local issues alongside key local partners, such as residents, the Police and NHS representatives.

They are also a forum for residents and local partners to have their say about local issues.

There are six Area Committees in Oxford:

- Central, South and West
- East
- North East
- Cowley
- North
- South East

What are Area Committees responsible for?

The Area Committees are responsible for the following services in their areas:

- Parks, play areas and countryside
- Off street car parking
- Public toilets
- Street cleaning and monitoring of street scene performance
- Dog wardens
- Abandoned vehicles
- Community centres
- Planning applications

In addition, Area Committees play an active role in carrying out consultations to continually shape our services

Who makes up the memberships of an Area Committee?

Each Area Committee is divided into wards which each have two elected councillors that represent them. Other public service representatives are linked with the Area Committees; including the Police and NHS. Each Area Committee appoints its own Chair and Vice-Chair and has a dedicated Area Coordinator to ensure decisions and projects are put into action. Area Coordinators also help to inform key local partnerships.

Comparison of Consultation Methods

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Survey (face-to-face)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful for benchmarking against previous findings. • Statistically sound, you can ensure it is representative of the population. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondents cannot talk freely if the structure of the survey is too rigid. • There is little time for respondents to think about their answers. • Time consuming.
Survey (website)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheap. • Allows consultation with a large number of people. • Can be used to access views from people that don't take part in traditional consultation methods such as attending public meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will miss those that do not use our website. • Can be unrepresentative unless you include a monitoring form. • No control over who completes the survey.
Survey (postal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can access a large number of people. • Good when dealing with a sensitive subject. • Can target groups which are often excluded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tightly structured surveys can constrain responses. • Can have a poor response rate. • No control over who completes the survey.
Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables participants to discuss topics in detail. • In groups participants can use each other to springboard ideas off one another. • Not prescriptive. • Can be useful for complex issues. • Can help to include people that are sometimes 'hard to reach'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not statistically reliable as the numbers involved in a group are quite small. • Some members of the group may be more vocal than others and try to take over the group.
Leaflets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good method when you want to inform people about a particular issue. • Relatively inexpensive to produce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not be read by all that receive it. • Not suitable for those who cannot read or have visual impairments.

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Citizens' Jury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables participants to make an informed judgement. • Encourages active citizenship. • Empowers participants by encouraging them to make decisions based on the information that has been presented to them. • A small number of citizens are involved, usually 12. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants' views may become unrepresentative of the community as a result of being more informed than others that have not been part of the Jury.
Citizens' Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A cost-effective resource for all types of consultation. • A good way of building relationships with members of the community. • Encourages active citizenship. • Regular refreshment of the Panel can keep it representative of the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large amount of maintenance and administration involved. • If the Panel is not refreshed regularly it could become unrepresentative of the community.
Public Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All citizens are welcome to attend. • Provides a forum for officers to present topics to residents. • Opportunity for members of the public to have their say. • Can generate new ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May only attract those who are affected by what is being discussed. • Often a low turnout. • It requires strong chairing skills to prevent a particular 'vocal' individual(s) from taking over the meeting.
Exhibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays can be clearly set out. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People that are unable to attend will be excluded.
Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press release • Radio • Television • Website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful when you need to give information to a large number of people. • Quick way to get out information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only goes to people that read certain newspapers, or listen/watch particular radio and TV stations. • Media can put their own slant on a story.
Conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Captive audience. • Reaches specific interest groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only get the views of people that attend the conference.

Questionnaires and Surveys

Questionnaires and surveys are one of the most popular consultation methods. They can be used to gather public views to proposals or find out what people think of certain services.

It is always a good idea to run a few pilot interviews to test how the questions work in practice and to ensure the questions you are asking will produce the information you want.

They can be used when consulting with a large number of people and are an excellent way of collecting quantitative data. They are also useful for benchmarking, if you would like to compare results over time. Also, the fact that there are several potential delivery methods make surveys a flexible way to get responses.

However, it is harder than it looks to write a good questionnaire and a poor format can lead to misleading results.

Method

- ① Decide which type of questionnaire or survey you want to use:
 - Deliberative: gives people information before asking their opinion
 - Qualitative: asks people to respond in their own words
 - Quantitative: asks people to react to various propositions by ticking boxes or marking answers against a scale.
- ② Decide the delivery method:
 - Telephone: people are telephoned at home and the interviewer completes the form
 - Interview on the street: interviewer with a clipboard approaches people and asks questions
 - Interview at home: interviewer arranges to visit
 - Postal: form completed by householder and returned
 - Online: form completed online.
- ③ Decide how you will manage, collate, analyse and use the responses.
- ④ Draft the survey or questionnaire taking your answers to the above into account.
- ⑤ Ask at least five people to complete it. Consider whether your questions have provoked the type of responses that you want.
- ⑥ Issue the questionnaire.

- 7 Receive responses and thank respondents (if you asked for contact details).
- 8 Collate, analyse and publish the results, and tell people how you will use them.

Hints for drafting questions for surveys and questionnaires

- Try to keep questions as short as possible. A few carefully focused questions usually produce more useful responses than a larger number of general ones
- Use simple words: people will not answer questions they don't immediately understand
- Start by asking relatively straightforward questions and then those requiring more complex answers
- Group together questions investigating similar themes
- If you are using tick boxes, vary the question format so that people have to think about each response rather than just ticking the same box throughout. You should also alert people to the fact that the format changes
- If you give people a number of alternatives, ensure you give them enough choice to ensure they think about the answer
- If you give people a scale on which to score something, tell them which end is high and which low
- Guard against phrasing questions in such a way that they reflect your own presuppositions or biases
- Be careful not to lead people in particular directions either through the wording of the question or through any examples you use
- Avoid composite questions such as "What are the advantages and disadvantages of public transport?" Separate them
- Where possible avoid questions including words that need defining, such as 'regularly'
- Avoid questions that are likely to have predictable answers. For example, "Is a safer neighbourhood important to you?"
- Always put a closing date on questionnaires.

Newsletters

Newsletters provide the opportunity to set out plans or options and give feedback to stakeholders on the progress of a project. They are often used when an on-going process requires regular updating and they are one of the cheapest and most effective methods of keeping people informed. Newsletters are most useful when they are used in addition to other forms of consultation activities and are a good way to give people regular updates on a project's progression.

They should consist of key findings, be of a high quality and kept brief and to the point. It is also useful to include other local information in the newsletter that the recipient may find interesting.

It is a relatively cheap way of reaching a large number of people and is an excellent way to benchmark changes over time. It also allows you to control the flow of information that stakeholders will receive.

The drawbacks are that newsletters can be seen as impersonal and so will be discarded by some as soon as they receive them.

Method

Variable depending on the numbers of newsletters to be produced and the quality used. If professionally written and produced they can become expensive.

Using this method:

- ① Call a meeting to decide the purpose of the newsletter and who it is aimed at.
- ② Research methods and costs of production and distribution.
- ③ Produce a 'dummy' to give you a clearer idea of the work involved and the practicalities.
- ④ Draw up a realistic schedule for producing and distributing it, and a list of the topics the first few issues should cover.
- ⑤ Call another meeting with the results of the above to decide whether to go ahead.
- ⑥ Produce and distribute your first newsletter.
- ⑦ Evaluate reactions and tweak the next one accordingly.

Using the Media

The media – press, radio, television and internet – is an important channel for disseminating information to the community at large or to target audiences.

Television and radio in particular offer a means to communicate with groups of people who might not otherwise seek information or who have difficulties with written material. The media can target information at transport users; for example, the radio can be used to reach commuters travelling by car.

The use of the media is useful when public awareness about a proposal or issue needs to be raised and local debate promoted. The media is also an excellent way to promote dates of roadshows/exhibitions/public meetings or telephone numbers.

The media can be used alongside other public involvement methods to raise awareness of events or services. Staff should receive training before dealing with the media. Any communication with the press must go via the Press Office. You should not make any direct contact with the press without agreement from the Press Office.

Method

- 1 Contact the Press Office to decide on the most appropriate form of media – if it requires an interview and explanation then a radio interview may be best. If it's to let people know of dates and venues of an event then a press article may be better.
- 2 If you plan to feature in a local newspaper, draft a press release about your consultation event and submit it to the press office. For advice on how to write a press release contact the press officer.
- 3 If you plan to feature on the radio ensure you have received media training and are prepared for the interview. Contact the Press Office if you require media training.



Citizens' Jury

A Citizens' Jury is essentially a sophisticated focus group. A group of 12 people are selected to act as the 'Jury'. They listen to the conflicting arguments and evidence around an issue before finally making a decision.

Due to the small number of people involved this should only be used in addition to other consultation methods and not instead of. It is also a time-consuming exercise and requires a lot of planning.

Citizens' Juries are a good method to use when you would like to give people time to think about and explore subjects in depth.

Jurors can be selected to be representative of a particular group or the population as a whole. They allow people the time to understand issues in detail and can ask detailed questions of the witnesses.

Method

- 1 Before you do anything else draw up a realistic budget because Citizens' Jury processes are relatively expensive.
- 2 Identify the parameters of the task to be given to the Jury, a specific question or questions for them to answer and/or a number of options on which they should be asked to pass judgment.
- 3 Find a suitably qualified and independent moderator or facilitator to brief the Jury and oversee the process.
- 4 Recruit the Jury. It needs to be a broadly representative group of approximately 8–12 people.
- 5 Identify suitable expert witnesses who can explain the issues and be questioned by the Jury.
- 6 Explain to jurors how the method works, the information and witnesses available to them, and allow them between two and five days to reach their conclusions.
- 7 At the end of the process the Jury can present its conclusions and recommendations in writing and/or through presentation, which can then be published.
- 8 Finally, it is good practice to publish the consequences of the process: whether the Jury's recommendations are followed and, if not, why not.

Citizens Panel

A Citizens' Panel uses a representative sample of the public to obtain their views in order to ascertain what the community, as a whole, thinks about a particular issue. To ensure Panels do not become the same people giving us their views over time, it is important to refresh the Panel on a regular basis.

Panels provide an immediately available means to assess opinion on specific issues. They overcome the problem of having to recruit for each separate exercise. The response rate from Panels is usually much higher than from the population as a whole as Panel members have expressed an interest in getting involved in consultation exercises, so tend to respond when they are asked.

The Panels can then be used in a variety of ways, from questionnaires sent to all members when a sense of local opinion is required, to small numbers being recruited to attend a focus group meeting. Questionnaires can be sent electronically as well as via the post, a variety of delivery methods increases the chances of receiving a high response rate. Panels are an excellent way to ensure there is a regular means of communication with a cross-section of opinion.

Results can deliver valuable trend information based on the survey being repeated over time which makes them an excellent benchmarking tool.

To maintain citizens' interest in the process it is important to give them feedback. Newsletters can be used for this. In addition it is possible to use samples from the Panel for Citizens' Juries or other forms of discussion groups.

Method

- 1 Decide why and how you would use a Citizens' Panel, and whether you have the resources to recruit, maintain and use it.
- 2 Identify the specific human and technical resources required to run the Panel effectively.
- 3 Design the process for using the Panel, including who would devise questions, how they would be asked, and how responses would be collated, reported back and communicated.
- 4 Identify and recruit demographically representative members.
- 5 Run a pilot process to test the workings of the Panel.

Mystery Shopping

There are many organisations that offer mystery shoppers to organisations to 'test' their services. The general format of the exercise is someone who is unknown to the Council would try out a service and they report back on their experience as a way of testing service quality. If the 'shopper' is properly briefed they can test, for instance, whether correct advice and information is being given out or whether standards or service provision have been adequately met.

Before embarking on this method it is important to ensure that the right questions are being asked and that shoppers are familiar with services and understand the responses they might receive. The use of trained mystery shoppers can provide precise and detailed feedback.

This is a useful method to use when you are testing the clarity of signing and directional advice, when different aspects of service quality are to be measured and compared or when services involve a strong person to person (or subjective) aspect such as issues of courtesy, knowledge, assistance etc.

Method

- 1 Decide on the service that you would like to be mystery shopped.
- 2 Design a brief that you would like the mystery shopper to test, e.g. housing advice service or making an enquiry at a leisure centre.
- 3 Appoint the mystery shopper.
- 4 Design the questions/scenario you would like the mystery shopper to test.
- 5 Organise a date/time to carry out the mystery shopper test.
- 6 Once the test has been carried out evaluate the results.
- 7 Feed back the results to the service that has been evaluated.

Exhibitions and Roadshows

Exhibitions are used to take the message about plans and schemes of work to dispersed audiences. Apart from the desire to reflect the interests of different geographical areas, another reason for travelling around with the exhibition material is that it increases the number of different people that get to see it. They can be taken out to where people are, such as schools, shopping centres and housing estates, rather than having to attract people to them, and they can appeal to groups, such as young people, who may not respond to document or meetings-based methods.

Care must be taken to ensure that the exhibition material is readable, interesting and easy to understand. Visual displays are particularly useful when you are consulting on proposed design or planning issues. These displays help give people a clear sense of what is involved and show how schemes would look and function.



Exhibitions can also be used to gather immediate reactions from those who see them. They are also good when access to local knowledge or concerns is required.

Exhibitions involve a significant amount of research around venues and the best times to hold the exhibition. To ensure maximum attendance they must be held in the right places at the right times. They are particularly useful when the audience would be more responsive to a visual image rather than written material, for example young children, older persons and those whose first language is not English.

Roadshows and exhibitions are time-consuming for staff that are attending and there must be a sufficient number of staff that are fully briefed for the exhibition/roadshow to be effective.

Exhibitions also allow you to get feedback from those attending, although you must treat this with caution as the people attending may not be fully representative of their community.

Method

- ① Decide if an exhibition or roadshow is a good way to explain your project, e.g. is it something that can be best explained visually?
- ② If it is, establish the availability and suitability of venues, how long it will take to produce materials, and when staff will be available.
- ③ As soon as the materials are available, gather as many people as possible and ask them to study all the materials. Then go over each item in depth asking if the meaning is clear, if it explains issues at the right level of detail, and if the materials are visually attractive.
- ④ Edit and test the materials again.
- ⑤ Pick the staff who will attend and brief them on the questions they may be asked and how to answer them.
- ⑥ Arrive at the venues in good time to set up the exhibition and test equipment.
- ⑦ Welcome visitors and try to be as open as possible about all aspects of the project. If a question is asked that cannot be answered immediately, take the person's contact details and respond to them as soon as you can.
- ⑧ If you are running a sequence of exhibitions, hold a de-brief session at the close of each to record questions asked and answers given to establish some consistency of responses.



Public Meetings and Workshops

Public meetings are normally large meetings where information about plans, decisions taken and options available are presented to the public. They are a conventional way of involving the public in discussions about schemes of work and projects.

To make the meeting more interactive a meeting can, after the initial presentation, be split into smaller discussion groups. The groups can then report back their discussion to the meeting. This encourages those that are not confident speaking in public to still get involved.



Good design and preparation, an experienced facilitator, and a suitable venue at a suitable time, can all help to make a successful public meeting.

A good public meeting enables all participants to say what they want to without feeling intimidated or inhibited. It also leaves people knowing what will happen as a result of it and how the results will be used.

Workshops are similar to public meetings in that they involve members of the public with the main difference being they are usually invited to attend

the meeting and are usually asked to carry out some actions during the meeting. The method that applies to public meetings can also be used when holding workshops.

Method

- ① Decide what you want your public meeting to achieve, and therefore who should come to it.
- ② Identify a series of steps from beginning to end that will achieve these purposes.
- ③ Ask yourself what the participants will want from the meeting, and whether your steps will meet their needs as well as yours.
- ④ Book a suitable venue, estimating the likely number of participants. Check heating, lighting, ventilation, electrical equipment, coffee/lunch break arrangements and house rules, e.g. emergency exits.
- ⑤ Identify a chair or facilitator and speakers.
- ⑥ Send out invitations and/or advertise the meeting.
- ⑦ Prepare background materials.
- ⑧ Hold the meeting, record key points visibly during it and provide participants with comment sheets so that those who are unable or too inhibited to speak can still make their points.
- ⑨ After the meeting report the results to participants and thank them for attending.
- ⑩ De-brief and evaluate.



Conferences and Seminars

Conferences and seminars differ from both public meetings and workshops. While public meetings are primarily information-oriented, and workshops action-oriented, the primary purposes of most conferences and seminars are analysis and discussion.

The format of such events tends to be presentations followed by discussion, sometimes with specialist breakout sessions (which may be referred to as 'workshops') for informal discussion.

This method tends to appeal more to professionals and experts as opposed to 'ordinary' people. Therefore it might be useful if you are trying to consult with a group of professionals but not if you would like a representative sample of people from the local community. It's a good forum for bringing a range of experts together to discuss issues in detail.



Method

- 1 If you are intent upon using this method as part of an engagement strategy, decide what it is going to achieve, who will participate and how it contributes to your other engagement objectives.
- 2 If you are sure that it is the right thing to do, draft invitations and an outline programme that will achieve your objectives.
- 3 Issue a call for papers and abstracts (usually in parallel with invitations to attend).
- 4 Book an appropriate venue.
- 5 Assess abstracts, identify speakers and invite them.
- 6 Draft publicity material and mail-shot possible participants.
- 7 Invite someone to chair the event, or facilitate if it is relatively informal.
- 8 Produce a report of the event, including all the papers delivered, and distribute among participants.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are groups of 6–12 people carefully selected to be representative of a designated part of the population. They are used primarily for intensive research designed to tease out the depths, subtleties and nuances of opinion. They need to be carefully facilitated.

Focus groups can explain what lies behind an opinion, or how people approach an issue. But they should not be used as a substitute for engaging directly with actual stakeholders in situations where merely knowing who thinks what is not enough.

A warning: the term 'focus group' is coming to be used to describe any small meeting of people, regardless of whether they are representative and of the purpose for which the group has been convened.



Interaction between participants, enabled by the small size of the group and the skill of the facilitator, can be very productive. Members can be carefully recruited to fit specific profiles. Focus groups enable a facilitator to design a very precise process that will examine the issues in the way required. The smallness of the group allows the facilitator to get to the heart of difficult issues. Focus groups can obtain opinions from people who would not respond to other methods because they are not comfortable with writing or because of other constraints.

Some people have more confidence to participate in groups than others. This may result in an imbalance in discussion. Variations of ability and articulacy within the group may inhibit some members.

Method

- 1 Decide exactly how a focus group process will contribute to your overall engagement process and what specifically you want the use of them to achieve.
- 2 Identify groups of 8–12 people to form focus groups, ensuring they are representative of either the whole community or of the particular groups with whom you want to engage (or hire a market research company to do the work for you).
- 3 You will probably have to offer an incentive to attend. It needs to be enough to be attractive but be careful it does not tend to distort the representativeness of participation.
- 4 Engage a skilled facilitator to run the groups and work with him/her to devise questions and prompts, ground rules and briefing materials if required, and a co-facilitator to be responsible for recording the process.
- 5 Book venue(s), catering and childcare arrangements if necessary.
- 6 Produce a report of the process and the results, ensuring participants receive copies.



Open Days and Drop-In Sessions

Open days and drop-in sessions offer opportunities for people to talk to staff, seek information, discuss local issues or proposals, or simply chat about the things that concern them. The essence of this approach is that it is informal.

From the organisation's point of view it provides an opportunity to give information, show an interest in people's concerns, answer questions, and generally show people what goes on behind the public face of the organisation. It's a good way of reaching out to the community and seeking informal contact and it can fit into people's personal timetables.

Staff need to be briefed and some sort of introductory exhibition is usually a good idea. It is also a good idea to collect as many names and contact details as possible: the people who come may well be prepared to respond positively to other opportunities for engagement.

Open days can be quite time intensive so you need to ensure staff have sufficient time to allocate to them. It is also difficult to predict attendance so you should market and promote the days to ensure as many people as possible are aware of them.



Method

- ① Decide how holding an open day or drop-in session will contribute to your overall engagement activities.
- ② Identify whether there are particular sections of the community who might welcome this opportunity, or who would respond to this method of engagement. Think about what this might mean in terms of which of your staff should be involved.
- ③ Identify general staffing requirements, where visitors will be welcomed, and assess impact on other duties.
- ④ Decide what information should be available to visitors, and in what languages to produce it.
- ⑤ Decide what you will seek in return and draft questionnaires or feedback sheets accordingly.
- ⑥ Publicise dates, times, purposes and attractions.
- ⑦ Organise refreshments and/or childcare.
- ⑧ Brief staff.
- ⑨ Meet and greet visitors.
- ⑩ De-brief, evaluate and decide how to follow up.



Using the Internet and Our Website

Consultation via the internet is now possible via our website. We have a eConsult system that allows all consultations to be stored in one area of our website at www.oxford.gov.uk/consultation.

Web based consultations offer a number of advantages: people can participate without having to travel to meetings, they save paper, they enable people to focus on the issues that particularly interest them and they work well for people who feel worried by speaking in public or for those that find writing English is easier than speaking it.



In order to run successful online consultations It is important that our website is easily navigable, the information is understandable and of relevance to users.

It is also vital that the needs of particular groups (e.g. visually impaired, black and minority ethnic groups) are considered and addressed. When there are particular needs to be addressed, e.g. visual impairments, facilities such as Text to Speech on our website, which reads web pages aloud, can address this.

Our eConsult system lets us present issues to stakeholders and the public easily and clearly, encouraging high levels of participation and response. It also lets us manage all our consultation needs through a single, flexible system.

On our website we can create and carry out large or small, private or public consultation exercises easily and quickly. The online consultation system is designed to offer a wide range of feedback mechanisms, including interactive questionnaires, online discussions and

commenting on consultation document sections.

It also lets us convert documents, questionnaires, communications and processes into hard copy form, to ensure that offline consultation can be managed in tandem.

Through our online consultation system we can:

- improve coordination of all our consultation activities, avoid unnecessary duplication and maintain an electronic record of all consultation activity
- provide a framework for best practice and consistency across our organisation
- enhance communications with participants, before, during and after each consultation activity
- build up a self-maintaining stakeholder database that can be used to profile and target interested parties
- save time in assembling evidence on which to base a decision
- automatically analyse feedback and increase efficiency in data processing
- quickly and efficiently publish summaries, formal responses and individual responses as required
- decrease errors and costs normally associated with data take-on and validation
- dramatically reduce costs on print production and posting, and improve your sustainability rating

Social Media

Essentially, social media incorporates the online technology and methods through which people can share content, personal opinions and swap different perspectives.

Social media website content can come in many shapes and forms:

- Text - text is often used to put across opinions or write blog posts.
- Images - images and photos can be used to convey information in illustrative form.
- Audio - social media lets you create podcasts (Podcasts are audio files that are automatically delivered directly to your desktop computer, and can be transferred to your iPod or other MP3 player) for users to download. Podcasting has now become popular as an alternative way of providing 'radio' type content that can be listened to whenever, wherever and as many times as the listener wants.
- Video - video sites mean that you'll be able to record a video and then then allow people all over the world to see it.

The most popular types of social media websites are huge at the moment. A few examples of these social media websites are:

- Social networking - websites that allows you to create a personal profile about yourself then chat, discuss and share information

with others such as friends and family. Prime examples of social networking sites are MySpace, Bebo and Facebook.

- Wikis - wikis are websites that allow you to create, edit and share information about a subject or topic. Wikipedia, for instance, is one of the world's most popular wikis.
- Video sharing - video-sharing sites allow you to upload and share your personal videos with the rest of the web community. A perfect example of a video sharing website is YouTube.
- Photo sharing - photo-sharing websites allow users to upload pictures and images to a personal account which can then be viewed by web users the world over. Flickr acts as a great example of a successful photo-sharing site.
- News aggregation - news aggregators provide a list of the latest news stories published by users from a range of different websites. Digg, for instance, is one of the web's largest news aggregators with one of the most dedicated communities.
- Social bookmarking - social bookmarking sites allow users to publicly bookmark web pages they find valuable in order to share them with other internet users.
- Microblogging - these websites allow you to post micro blog-like posts to announce what you are currently doing. Twitter is a good example of a presence app.

This list is by no means exhaustive and there are many more types of social media sites available on the internet. The social media front is moving very fast and new and more innovative social media sites are springing up all the time.

What to do if you want to use Social Media

If you would like to use a form of social media such as set up a Facebook or Twitter account, you should contact the Website and Consultation Teams in the Policy, Culture and Communications department to discuss your request.

Before you request access to use any social media you must ensure you have adequate resources to manage the process. This includes regularly monitoring the content of all messages that you receive in response to your consultation, managing the expectations of those participating, responding to messages where required and recording all consultation information on the City Council website.

Any messages from participants that contain offensive language, incorrect information or are vexatious must be removed. Social media sites must be regularly monitored in order to prevent this from happening wherever possible.

Online methods are a cost-effective way of hearing people's views on issues and they are also useful as they allow people to say what they want on a subject at any time of the day or night. They are good when it is important that participants have access to information on a regular basis to ensure effective participation. They are also a good way of potentially involving large numbers of people.

However, online methods should be used in addition to other methods rather than instead of otherwise you would exclude people who don't have access to the internet from your consultation. Participation can also be confined to the very dedicated and may therefore be unrepresentative. This should also not be a substitute for actually meeting and talking to people.

Pilot

What is a Pilot?

A Pilot is a way to test your consultation method to make sure it works before you carry it out for real. It is also a good way to measure what works and doesn't work with your consultation method so that you can make any changes necessary to it to ensure it works well.

A Pilot usually involves getting a small group of people to test your consultation under the same conditions in which the real consultation will take place.

The group are then asked for their feedback and the consultation method is revised accordingly.

Why is it important to Pilot?

By carrying out a Pilot you will limit your chances of missing something key in your consultation. A Pilot will throw up any issues with the consultation such as poor wording of questions, spelling errors or unclear instructions.

When is the best time to carry out a Pilot?

The best time to carry out a Pilot is as soon as your consultation method is ready to test. By carrying out your Pilot as early as possible you will be leaving enough time to make any necessary changes should the Pilot identify problems with your consultation method.

Following up Consultation Exercises

A vital part of the consultation process is to provide a summary of the responses and state how these responses will be used. One of the aspects of consultation that frustrates participants is the lack of feedback. So care and attention needs to be paid to the processes of analysing, interpreting and feeding back the results. A consultation exercise can only be counted a success if the people involved feel that their time was well spent – and that means them being able to see where their responses have gone and how they have been used.

Analysing quantitative data can be as simple as reading a few tables or complicated enough to need knowledge and experience of research methodologies and statistical analysis. Analysing qualitative data is usually easier, though some ability to read between the lines and appreciate the influence of factors such as context, family, education, ethnicity and social class is also useful.

Responding to Consultation Exercises

Once you have analysed and interpreted the results you then need to tell stakeholders what they have said and what you are going to do about it.

- It is good practice to produce a final report after any consultation exercise, that sets out how participants' views have been used and what their input has been. Where possible you should aim to show the full extent of opinion so that people appreciate the entire range of views on the issue.
- If you are reporting details of all responses as they were received, you should also check whether participants want their input attributed, and how they want to be described.
- Send 'thank you' letters and copies of any final report to all participants, and tell them about the next steps in any decision-making process.
- Responding to participants about the results of community consultation exercises may be less formal. The results may be summarised or published in a newsletter or through other means of regular contact with the community. Equally, the need to feed back results may be a reason for calling a discussion meeting and provide further opportunities for informal contacts and relationship-building.

Evaluating Consultation Exercises

At the end of each consultation exercise it is important to evaluate what worked and didn't work in the course of the exercise.

The evaluation should occur from both the organiser's and the participants' point of view.

To gain the participants' perspective it's useful to ask questions around:

- Did they understand the purpose of the exercise?
- Did they find it easy or difficult to participate?
- Did they feel confident that their views would be used to make policy and/or service changes?
- How confident did they feel that their contributions would be appreciated and used?

These questions enable the organiser to find out how satisfied participants were with the methods used and whether they felt the process genuinely gave them an opportunity to contribute to the topic being consulted on.

From the organiser's perspective the questions need to be a little different:

- How effective were the methods that you used to gather feedback from participants?
- How useful were the responses that you received?
- What was the level and type of participation achieved?
- Did the exercise provide value for money?
- What did you learn to improve consultation in the future?

After all, there is no point in employing even the most sophisticated engagement method if the process gets in the way of participants giving their views or produces responses that cannot be used.

Key Questions to Ask

The following table provides a set of questions for evaluating engagement processes. These simple questions are intended to provide a basic framework and to stimulate your thinking.

Purposes

- What were the purposes?
- Were they achieved?
- If not, why not?

Methods

- What methods were used?

- Did they achieve the desired results in terms of levels of participation and type of response?
- Which methods worked best for which types of people?
- Did the process go according to the intended timetable?

Participation

- How many people participated?
- Did all key stakeholders participate?
- If participation was intended to be representative, was this achieved?
- If it was intended to reach several different groups, was this achieved?
- What efforts were made to reach commonly under-represented groups?
- What methods were used to encourage participation?
- Did they work?

Results

- Were the results – in terms of enough people responding usefully – satisfactory?
- How easy were they to analyse and interpret?
- What form did any final report of the results take?
- How were results communicated to participants?

Outcomes

- What were the results of the exercise?
- What has changed or will be changed as a result of the exercise?

Participant comments

- What comments were made by participants about the engagement process?

Cost

- What did the process cost?
- Were the results worth the money?

Learning points for the future

- What should be done differently next time?

Doing an evaluation is only the first step. The next is to take account of the feedback and make sure the next engagement process uses everything you have learned from the previous one. The aim should be to create a culture of incremental improvement so that every process is better than the last one.

Incentive Guidelines

Introduction

These guidelines have been put together to ensure consistency across the organisation in the incentives we offer residents when participating in consultation. The document also outlines some conditions under which free prize draws must be operated at Oxford City Council.

Free prize draws

There is no specific legislation governing free prize draws but there are common law principles such as:

- Transparency
- Equity
- Fairness

All these must clearly be incorporated into the administration of free prize draws by those researchers who organise them as an incentive for survey participation.

Respondents should not be required to do anything other than agree to participate in a consultation exercise or return a questionnaire to be eligible for entry in to a free prize draw.

No incentive should be offered that requires respondents to spend any money.

Respondents should not be offered price discounts as incentives because claiming the incentive would involve the respondents paying the balance after the discount.

The offer of monetary vouchers is permissible because this does not necessitate expenditure on the part of the respondents.

The use of incentives to stimulate response must not be used as a means of collecting respondents' personal details. These should be kept separate from the completed questionnaires or response forms.

Permission to use a respondent's details must be specifically sought and must not be linked or be a condition of entry to a free prize draw.

Failure to fully complete a free interview or questionnaire should not disqualify a respondent from entry to a free prize draw. Respondents should be clearly informed before participating of the following facts:

- The closing date for receipt of entry.
- The nature of the prizes.
- If a cash alternative can be substituted for any prize.
- How and when winners will be notified of results.
- How and when winners will be announced.

Unless otherwise stated in advance, prize winners should receive their prizes within six weeks after the draw has been held.

Winners in a free prize draw should be selected in a manner that ensures fair application of the laws of chance. The process by which winners will be selected must involve a clear audit trail and an independent draw. This process will not be made public but can be explained to individual respondents when specifically requested.

A poor response or an inferior quality of entries is not an acceptable basis for extending the duration of a free prize draw or withholding prizes unless the draw organisers have announced their intention to do so at the outset.

Incentives

As above for free prize draws:

- No incentive should be offered that requires the respondent to spend any money.
- Respondents should not be offered price discounts as incentives because claiming the incentive would involve the respondents paying the balance after the discount.
- The offer of monetary vouchers is permissible because this does not necessitate expenditure on the part of the respondents.

Suggested guidelines

Some research has been done which looks at the impact of incentives and whether it improves response rate. The following points are worth considering when deciding on whether to use an incentive or not.

- ① Think carefully before offering an incentive. We are a public sector organisation and there are discussions going on about the appropriateness of offering incentives to take part in consultation.
- ② It is recommended that those who attend a focus group are offered an incentive. You can offer the incentive after the event as this allows those who do not wish to have one to opt out. It is also an opportunity to send it with feedback from the session.

- 3 Offering an incentive, e.g. entering a prize draw for completing a survey is becoming more and more popular. However, there is debate as to how much of an impact this has on the response rate. It is recommended to always enclose a prepaid addressed envelope and if the survey is long (15–20+ questions) to offer something. For smaller surveys it is less important and perhaps offer something which is related to the survey, e.g. for a fitness survey – a free exercise class.
- 4 Where possible try and offer an incentive from a service we provide, e.g. a Slice card.

Table 1: Some examples of the type of incentive you might offer

Consultation Method	Example of an incentive (if needed/required)
1–2 hour focus group/workshop using Citizens' Panel	£10–20 high street vouchers
1–2 hour focus group/workshop using residents	£15–20 high street vouchers
2 hour+ workshop	£25+ high street vouchers
Questionnaire prize draws	Related to survey, e.g. free Slice card, game of tennis, free exercise class, a water butt etc. Or £25+ high street vouchers
Consulting with young children	Stickers/Balloons

What not to do

Support individual retail outlets.

Offer food. There are always concerns over allergies, healthy eating policies, supporting fair trade etc.

Transport costs

It is advised that as an organiser of a consultation event, e.g. a focus group, you need to offer to cover travel expenses.

Useful tips

Enclose a free stamped addressed envelope.

Venues for Consultation Events

Here is a list of venues that can be booked to host consultation events.

NAME OF VENUE	PHONE / EMAIL / WEBSITE	CONTACT / BOOKINGS / ACCESS
Oxford Asian Cultural Association, Asian Cultural Centre, Manzil Way, Oxford OX4 1GH	01865 425000 (Office) jmalik@oxford.gov.uk	Jawaid Malik (Manager) M. Ashraf (Caretaker) 01865 776371
Barton Community Association, Barton Neighbourhood Centre, Underhill Circus, Headington, Oxford OX3 9LS	01865 761987 (Office) pmjones@oxford.gov.uk Sue Holden BartonNHC@aol.com	Phil Jones (Manager) 01865 433052 or 07712 22091 Sue Holden 07866 460446
Blackbird Leys Youth & Community Association, Blackbird Leys Community Centre, Blackbird Leys Road, Oxford OX4 6HW	01865 435954 (Office) pisaacs@oxford.gov.uk	Paul Isaacs (Manager) 01865 401098 07810 856384 Val Bazykiewicz (Office Admin)
Bullington Community Association, Bullington Community Centre, Peat Moors, Headington, Oxford OX3 7HS	01865 741285 (Centre) richardb.bryant@ntlworld.com	Richard Bryant (Chair) 01865 769263 Chris Perks (Bookings) 01865 764818 Pat White (Caretaker) 01865 761833
Cheney Community Hall, Cheney School, Cheney Lane, Oxford OX3 7QH	01865 765725 ext 207 abd@cheney.oxon.sch.uk	Alan Band c/o Cheney School
Cotteslowe and District Community Association, Wren Road, Cotteslowe, Oxford OX2 7SX	01865 311172 (Office) liz.edwards@cotteslowe.co.uk anna.thornhill@cotteslowe.co.uk	Olive Lay (Bookings) 01865 558180 Liz Edwards Anna Thornhill (Community Development Workers)
Donnington Community Association, Donnington Community Centre, Freelands Road, Iffley, Oxford OX4 4BB	01865 246144 (Bar) wj.baker@btinternet.com	Vicky Baker (Bookings) 01865 721185
East Oxford Community Association, East Oxford Community Centre, Princes Street, Oxford OX4 1HU	01865 792168 (Office) Fax: 01865 724317 east_oxford_cc@yahoo.co.uk 01865 248765 (Bar)	Claire Ford (Bookings) 01865 792168

NAME OF VENUE	PHONE / EMAIL / WEBSITE	CONTACT / BOOKINGS / ACCESS
Florence Park Community Association, Florence Park Community Centre, Cornwallis Road, Cowley, Oxford OX4 3NH	01865 434342 (Centre)	Jean Hain (Secretary) 07984 569645
Headington Community Association, Gladstone Road, Headington, Oxford OX3 8LL	tanyafield@supanet.com	01865 765557 07929 868284 Pauline Hedger (Caretaker) 01865 766799
Jericho St Barnabas Community Association, St Barnabas Institute, Canal Street, Jericho, Oxford OX2 6BQ	01865 557902 (Office) admin@jerichocentre.org.uk www.jerichocentre.org.uk	Sue Pead (Administrator) 01865 557902 10am–12 noon
Jubilee 77 Association, Jubilee 77 Community Centre, Sorrel Road, Blackbird Leys, Oxford OX4 6SH	01865 717758 (Centre) pisaacs@oxford.gov.uk	Paul Isaacs 01865401098 or 07810 856384 Dave Stonehill 01865 777074 (Access)
Littlemore Community Association, Littlemore Community Centre, Giles Road, Littlemore, Oxford OX4 4NC	01865 771764 (Office) nick.parsons@btopenworld.com	Solange Dale 07779 873731 Ann Mogridge 01865 778459 07785 574226
Mortimer Hall, Oxford Road, Old Marston, Oxford OX3 0PH	grants@oxfordshire.org	Wally Cox (Chair) 01865 245154 Chris Crane (Bookings) 01865 727995
North Oxford Association, Ferry Centre, Diamond Place, Summertown, Oxford OX2 7PD	01865 552295 (Centre) www.northoxfordassociation.org.uk info@northoxfordassociation.org.uk	David Potts (Chair) Monica Webster (Bookings) 01865 552295

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL – COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS

NAME OF VENUE	PHONE / EMAIL / WEBSITE	CONTACT / BOOKINGS / ACCESS
Northway Community Centre, Maltfield Road, Headington, Oxford OX3 9RG	Lisa Palfreeman Northwaycc@btconnect.com	Graham Bellinger 07836 332255
Regal Community Centre, Ridgefield Road, Cowley, Oxford OX4 3BY	01865 450292 (Centre) Mannan54@aol.com	Abdul Mannan Michael Muya 01865 450292
Risinghurst Community Centre, Kiln Lane, Risinghurst, Headington, Oxford OX3 8ER	howard.taylor@virgin.net	Liz Taylor (Bookings) 01865 751261 or 07913 438503
Rose Hill Community Centre, The Oval, Rose Hill, Oxford OX4 4UY	01865 777542 Office (mornings) rosehill.comm@yahoo.co.uk	Brian Simpson 07786 657244 Alison Berry (Office Secretary) 01865 777542
South Oxford Community Centre, Lake Street, Oxford OX1 4RP	01865 242666 (Office) enquiries@southoxford.org www.southoxford.org	Debby Smith c/o South Oxford Community Centre
West Oxford Community Centre, Botley Road, Oxford OX2 0BT	01865 245761 (Office) woxford@oxford.gov.uk www.woca.org.uk	Richard Grant (Manager) Shah Nawaz Kahn 07790 466373 Geoff Franklin 01865 723992 Lynn Carter (Café) 07812 463517
Wood Farm Community Centre, Titup Hall Drive, Wood Farm, Headington, Oxford OX3 8QQ	01865 751142 (Centre) ray.clare@ntlworld.com	

References and Further Reading

Extracts from Dialogue By Design have been used in this toolkit. For more information see *A Handbook of Public and Stakeholder Engagement, 2007*.

Code of Practice on Consultation

The Government has a Code of Practice on Consultation. This Code sets out what people can expect from the Government when it runs formal, written consultation exercises on matters of policy or policy implementation. This can be found on the Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform website at:

www.berr.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf

To support implementation of the Government's Code of Practice, the Better Regulation Executive provides guidance to officials who are planning to run a formal, written consultation exercise. This guidance can also be found on the web address above.

Consultation Institute

The Institute regularly runs events to encourage better consultation practices and networking of those engaged in the field. Alongside its highly regarded training courses the Institute also runs events dealing with matters of topical interest to those in the field.

www.consultationinstitute.org/

Communities in control: real people, real power

Communities in control tells the story of power, influence and control and how people can use existing and new tools to access it. The White Paper looks at who has power, on whose behalf it is exercised, how it is held to account, and how it can be accessed by everyone in local communities.

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitiesincontrol

Consulting and engaging with older people

This quick-reference guide compiled directly from the comments, views and experiences sent in to Help the Aged by older people should prove a useful tool to those seeking to engage the participation of all older citizens.

www.helptheaged.org.uk/en-gb/WhatWeDo/Publications/wd_publicat_280206_8.htm

Office of Disability Issues

The ODI work across Government to promote a joined up approach to the way policy is made, seeking the involvement of disabled people, promoting human rights and communicating the Government programme on disability.

www.officefordisability.gov.uk/default.asp

Participation Works

Participation Works is a collaboration of agencies committed to children and young people's participation in decision making.

www.participationworks.org.uk/

People and Participation

This is a website that provides a summary of participatory methods, building on work published by Involve in 2005. It is funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (Community Empowerment Division), the Ministry of Justice (Democratic Engagement Branch) and the Sustainable Development Commission.

www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Involve/Home

National Framework for Greater Citizen Engagement

This is a discussion paper published in July 2008 setting out the Government's commitment to explore new methods of involving the public in debates and decision-making on national issues.

www.justice.gov.uk/publications/citizen-engagement.htm



Appendix A: Data Protection

The Data Protection Act 1998 came into force on 1 March 2000. Most organisations have someone who is specifically responsible for ensuring data protection issues are managed in accordance with the Act, and it is essential to contact them and make sure you understand the Act's requirements from the outset of any consultation process.

The main thrust of the Act is that when you collect personal data about people you must process it fairly and safeguard it properly. You must also tell people what you are going to do with it and also, if they ask, give them access to what you have collected.

The Act makes no distinction between data stored electronically or by more traditional means, and it applies to all living individuals, children as well as adults.

The Act applies whenever data capable of identifying an individual is collected: name, address, telephone number, National Insurance number, driving licence number, benefits reference numbers etc – anything which means the individual concerned can be identified.

There are also circumstances that allow people to be identified without reference to a name or number. For example, if you conduct an interview with the only female employee in a certain place it is easy enough for others to work out whom the information concerns.

Tips

- Do not collect personal details such as name, address or date of birth unless it is absolutely necessary. It is perfectly possible to create the profile of a person without such information: age range and gender for example are often enough. If the person wants to stay in touch then you can record more details – but it still does not have to be coupled with the information gathered. If you do collect personal information do it accurately and keep it up to date.
- Once you have people's personal information make sure you safeguard it. In particular emphasise to anyone who sees it his or her responsibility for keeping it secure.
- Note that you have no right to pass on the personal information you collect. (Any other information you can of course share because it is not covered by the Act.)
- If you do want to pass on personal information you need the consent of the individual concerned.

- You should keep personal information only for as long as you really need it.
- People have the right to see personal information that is held about them. This means that people can ask for a copy of the information you gather for as long as it contains information that enables them to be identified.

Appendix B: Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 is intended to promote a culture of openness and accountability amongst public authorities by providing people with rights of access to the information held by them. It is expected that these rights will facilitate better public understanding of how public authorities carry out their duties, why they make the decisions they do and how they spend public money. The Act creates two principal obligations for public authorities, from which other obligations stem:

- Each public authority must adopt and maintain a publication scheme setting out details of information it will routinely make available, how the information can be obtained and whether there is any charge for it. The date by which public authorities are required to have their schemes in place varies. Public authorities should consult the timetable in approval process to confirm the submission and scheme active dates that will apply to them.
- From 1 January 2005 each public authority must comply with requests for the information that it holds unless an exemption from disclosure applies. Public authorities will normally have a maximum of twenty working days to respond to the request; however, there are circumstances when this time limit can be extended.

Appendix C: Jargon Directory

When a consultation is carried out, it can involve the use of some jargon. You may or may not already know many of the meanings but hopefully some, if not all, of the descriptions below will help to explain anything you are unclear about.

Census

A census is a survey of a whole population rather than a sample of some people within the population.

Citizens' Jury

A Citizens' Jury is made up of people called together to make a judgement on complex issues. Their decision will be based on the evidence they hear.

Citizens' Panel

A Citizens' Panel is a representative sample of the public who make up a core group of people that an organisation uses for consultation. As the group is representative they will be consulted on a wide variety of topics.

Closed Questions

These are questions where the answer you can give is limited to one option, such as choosing yes or no.

Data

Data is all information collected during a consultation, such as how many people took part, how many answered yes to a question, how many answered no or how many were satisfied and how many were dissatisfied.

Deliberated Poll

This is when people are asked the same questions twice to see whether their opinion has changed. The second poll is done after they have been given information relevant to the topic to see if this information has changed the opinions they held when first questioned.

Demographics

This is information collected about the people who have taken part in a consultation – including age, sex and ethnicity.

Depth Interviews

These are usually face-to-face interviews with individuals, although they are sometimes done over the telephone.

E-Consultation

E-consultation, is consultation carried out using technology alternatives to the more traditional techniques such as paper questionnaires. This includes utilising e-mail, online internet forums and discussions and text messaging.

Facilitators

Facilitators are the people who run consultations, including chairing of focus groups and running workshops.

Focus Group

These are groups of no more than ten people brought together for open-ended discussion to gain a deeper understanding of people's attitudes, ideas and opinions.

Forum

Forums are an arena for the discussion of issues surrounding a particular service. It is made up of people who have a direct interest in the service. There are forums on many issues and services, including youth forums, travellers' forums and local community forums. These forums explore the issues and examine ways of addressing problems and making changes.

Methodology

This is the method used to carry out a consultation. This includes focus groups, questionnaires, interviews and roadshows/exhibitions.

Mystery Shopping

This is where someone tries out a service and then reports back to the organisation on their experience as a way of testing the service quality.

Neighbourhood Forum

This is any kind of structured, regular local meetings for local people to consult about issues of local importance.

Online Form

This is a form that can be completed electronically and is usually found on a website but can also be sent as an e-mail.

Open Question

This means questions where you can express your own views and opinions rather than picking your answer from a list of options.

Pilot

A Pilot is a test or practice, where a small version of a consultation is carried out before the full version to see how well it works and to identify any weaknesses.

Polling

This simply means asking people's opinions on a particular issue or set of issues. They usually consist of being asked yes or no answers.

Population

This is the group of people from which a sample will be taken. This could be based on things such as location, gender, sex or it could mean everyone such as with the census.

Qualitative

This refers to methods of consultation that collect people's opinions so that an understanding of what people really think and believe can be gathered. The benefit of this type of consultation is that it not only identifies what people think but also, why they think it. This includes focus groups and one-to-one interviews.

Quantitative

This refers to methods of consultation that collect statistical information. Quantitative consultation is about finding out how many people hold a particular view, but doesn't explain why. Methods that produce these types of result include questionnaires and polls.

Quotas

These specify the number of respondents that fall into the categories required (e.g. so many women, so many men etc.). Interviewers are given quota sheets to show them how many of each type of person are to be interviewed. The sample quota profile is a profile of all the individuals that will be interviewed.

Referenda

These are formal polls that are held on a single issue.

Representative Sample

This is a sample of people taken from the population which, as closely as possible, matches the character of that population. This can include age groups, ethnicity and location.

Respondent

This is the person who takes part in a consultation by answering questions or expressing their views and ideas at a given time.

Response Rate

This is the percentage of the people who were asked to respond to a consultation who actually did respond. A good response rate is more likely to produce results that reflect what the population think than a poor one.

Roadshow

Roadshows are used to take the message about plans and schemes of work to dispersed audiences. Roadshows give people an opportunity to see exhibits, speak to experts, ask questions and make comment.

Sample

This is the group of people identified within a population who will be asked to take part in a consultation.

Stakeholders

These are people/organisations that have an interest in a particular area or service. This can include the users of a service and bodies that work alongside the service provider.

Surveys

Surveys are used to ask people – who have been judged as representative of a chosen population – a set of pre-determined questions

User Groups

User groups are made up of a small group of people who are selected because they use a particular service. These people then meet up every so often and discuss how a service is doing and exploring ideas of how it can be improved.

Workshop

Workshops are meetings where those attending are usually asked to carry out some actions during the meeting.