Consultation Toolkit

A Guide to Effective Consultation

Oxford City Council

Updated: June 2014

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction to consultation

Oxford City Council is committed to building a world-class city for all its citizens. Working with local communities and stakeholders to build channels for dialogue and engagement is a key part of the Council's plan to enhance the relationship between citizens, their local communities and those who they elect to represent them. Public services that are based on an understanding of citizens' needs are crucial and consultation is one way of achieving this.

Consultation is a vital part of a modern, representative democracy. It is about ensuring that elected councillors are aware of and engaged with the views of individuals, community groups, and other stakeholders. It is not intended to enable minority interests to overrule the best interests of the wider community and the city as a whole. Consultation supports, informs and improves decision-making by elected councillors, but it does not replace it; the responsibility for the final decision on any issue that involves the Council's resources rests with the city's elected councillors.

Consultation is the process of actively seeking information or advice prior to making a decision. It is the way in which residents can influence the delivery of services and the development of policies; it applies to both routine functions, as well as significant one-off decisions.

Consultation should be a dialogue - an on-going exchange of views - and councils, the police and health authorities have statutory duties to consult the public on a range of issues. However, we do not engage just because we have to…effective consultation can inform decision-making in the Council and ensures that we are meeting the needs of our citizens.

1.2 Purpose

This toolkit is intended to help officers across Oxford City Council to deliver effective consultation. Please contact the consultation team if you have any suggested improvements or questions.

1.3 Here to help

For advice and guidance on consultation projects, please contact the consultation officers:

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(Hamera is on maternity leave until January 2015)

2 The Principles of Consultation

2.1 Context

With the adoption of the Community Engagement Policy Statement 2014 – 17, Oxford City Council agreed to a revised set of principles that apply to all forms of community engagement including consultation.

These principles of consultation have been adapted from ideas from the Consultation Institute, the Cabinet Office, and are informed by the feedback from residents provided by the December 2013 – March 2014 consultation activities.

2.2 Principles

1. **Flexibility:** Successful engagement requires a range of mechanisms to build and sustain a conversation with the community, with a broad or narrow audience as the issue requires. Broad principles and general ideas could be consulted on across a wide audience while the details of implementation might require input from a much smaller group. Flexibility requires that a range of engagement methods should be considered, including consultation, area forums, neighbourhood forums, community partnerships or through the work of the Communities and Neighbourhoods team.

2. **Proportionality:** Oxford City Council applies the principle of proportionality when deciding which method of community engagement to use in any particular situation. This means that the type and scale of involvement will be proportional to the potential impact of the proposal or decision being taken.

3. **Transparency and clarity**: is applied to the consultation processes. This means that the objectives must be clear since they vary according to type of issue and the stage in the decision-making or policy development process that has been reached.

   It must be clear what is being consulted upon, and where decisions have already been made. To avoid creating unrealistic expectations, stakeholders and citizens must be told what they can or cannot influence by responding to consultation, and what the next steps will be.

   Sufficient information should be available to enable stakeholders and residents to provide informed feedback. This will be provided both on a case-by-case basis through the provision of information related to specific consultations and engagement events and activities, and as part of Oxford City Council's on-going commitment to provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist the understanding of issues.

4. **Timeliness:** consultation should begin early in the policy development or decision-making process when views can genuinely be taken into account. Every effort will be made to make available the information an early stage to enable contestability and challenge.

   Timeframes for consultation should allow stakeholders sufficient time to provide a considered response. When the consultation spans all or part of a holiday

period policy makers should consider what if any impact there may be and take appropriate mitigating action.
The amount of time required will depend on the nature and impact of the proposal (for example, the diversity of interested parties or the complexity of the issue, or even external events), and might typically vary between two and 12 weeks.

5. **Feedback:** policy and decision-makers must publish a summary of the responses to consultation that have been received and how they have been used; ensure that participants receive feedback about how their contributions have informed the outcome; ensure that information and viewpoints have been collated and objectively assessed; and ensure that there is a fair interpretation of the results.

   Policy-makers must be prepared to change their plans as a result of consultation. Citizens who participate in any form of community engagement must believe that their voice will be taken seriously, and that things can be changed if there is support for change

6. **Inclusiveness and accessibility:** all stakeholders and citizens who have an interest in, or who would be affected by, a specific decision must have the opportunity to participate in consultation activities. This includes groups that are sometimes more challenging to engage such as younger people, older people, minority groups, and people with disabilities.

   It means that information should be easy to comprehend, and consideration should be given to appropriate forms of consultation by providing different ways for people to be engaged, and ensuring that people are not excluded through barriers of language, culture or opportunity.

3 Overview of the Consultation Process

There is a defined process to follow for carrying out public involvement projects across the Council. The table below summarises the process these projects should follow.

			✓
PLAN	1	Discuss your need for public involvement with the consultation officers. Determine whether there is a need for project brief.	
	2	Complete the Project Brief and send it to the consultation officers. The brief will then be reviewed at the Public Involvement Board.	
	3	Once you have been notified that your public involvement activity has been approved you should inform the councillors whose wards will be involved and wider groups of councillors if appropriate.	
IMPLEMENT	4	Record the project on the City Council's consultation portal (eConsult) at www.oxford.gov.uk/consultation. If you require training on how to use the portal please contact the consultation officers. NB this is a requirement whether or not it involves an online survey.	
	5	Develop your survey with the support of the consultation officers	
	6	Pilot the questions you are proposing to ask.	
	7	Revise your questions if necessary following the pilot.	
	8	Run your public involvement exercise	
REPORT	9	Collate and analyse the results	

	10	Produce a report including: • The response rates • The groups that responded • The main findings • How you intend to use the results	
	11	Produce a newsletter summarising the main results. This should be sent to everybody who took part in your engagement project and also made available to the wider public on the portal at www.oxford.gov.uk/consultation. You must state how you intend to report all the findings back to those that participated in your consultation. The newsletter should also state how you intend to use the results.	
REVIEW	12	Carry out an evaluation. The completed evaluation form should then be sent to the Consultation Officers no later than 6 weeks after the closing date.	

4 Planning your consultation

4.1 Public Involvement Project Brief Template

The project brief document, as highlighted in step 2 of the process, must be completed before any work on your public involvement project begins. All public involvement activities must follow the processes outlined below:

1. A project brief must be completed for all public involvement exercises. See below for the template that must be filled in, as well as guidance about public involvement. The template can also be found on the Intranet, under 'Processes and Procedures' and 'Consultation Process.'

   Public Involvement Project Brief Template

2. The completed project brief must then be approved by the Public Involvement Board. The board meets monthly and is chaired by Tim Sadler and includes Angela Cristofoli, Jeremy Thomas, Peter McQuitty, Hamera Plume and Sadie Paige. See http://occweb/intranet/consultation-toolkit.cfm for dates

3. Internal staff surveys do not normally need to be approved by the Public Involvement Board and a lighter version of the project brief template is available.

   Project Brief Light Template

The full process must be completed before any consultation or public involvement project can begin. The only exemptions from this requirement are individual development control and licensing consultations.

4.2 Questions to consider ahead of consultation

- 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?

4.3 What do we mean by stakeholders?

For all consultation projects, it is important to consider who your stakeholders are and how you intend to involve them. Stakeholders are by definition people who have a 'stake' in a situation. Identifying your stakeholders is key to a successful engagement exercise. 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.

- 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.

4.4 Identifying Stakeholders – who to involve, how to reach them?

- The purpose of your consultation will help to determine who you involve.

- 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.

- 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 consultations. 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.

- Equally, beware of engaging the 'wrong' people. For example, some 'community leaders' are self-appointed or designated as leaders by the media. In reality they may have no mandate to speak on behalf of the local community; ensure you do not solely rely on such people for your engagement process.

- 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.

- Who holds official positions relevant to what you are doing?
- Who runs organisations with relevant interests?
- 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.

4.5 Key considerations when selecting your target 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, for example when a new development has been proposed. However, it is less important if you are carrying out engagement relevant to a particular group, e.g. wheelchair users.

Sampling

Sampling involves engaging a small number of people and, provided that the sample is representative, extrapolating the results to work out what a much larger number thinks about a certain issue. The larger your sample, the more accurate your results will be. There are three basic sampling methods:

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 representative. 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 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.

To ensure consultations are inclusive we must ensure the following conditions are met:

- There is accessible and targeted information about the community engagement.
- There is assistance with transport to the meeting where needed.
- There is an accessible building with accessible lavatory facilities.
- There is communication support; e.g. induction loop, interpreters.
- There is accommodation for personal assistants/helpers.
- There is supporting documentation in accessible formats.

We must also:

- Check access needs at the start.
- Ask the right questions, i.e. about barriers faced rather than about impairments.
- Ensure people speak one at a time at a pace to suit other participants and interpreters.
- Allow additional time for communicating with people who have sensory or learning impairments.
- Use appropriate and respectful language.
- Allow enough time for breaks.

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.

5 Consultation Methods

Finding new and interesting ways to engage people is essential but can also be challenging. To find the best method for you bear 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?

Comparison of Consultation Methods

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages	Cost
Survey (face-to-face)	• Useful for benchmarking against previous findings. • Statistically sound, you can ensure it is representative of the population.	• 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 (on-line)	• 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.	• 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)	• Can access a large number of people. • Good when dealing with a sensitive subject. • Can target groups which are often excluded.	• Tightly structured surveys can constrain responses. • Can have a poor response rate. • No control over who completes the survey.	££
Focus Groups	• 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.	• 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.	££

	• Can help to include people that are sometimes ‘hard to reach’		
Leaflets	• A good method when you want to inform people about a particular issue. • Relatively inexpensive to produce	• May not be read by all that receive it. • Not suitable for those who cannot read or have visual impairments	£
Citizens’ Jury	• 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.	• 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	• 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.	• Large amount of maintenance and administration involved. • If the panel is not refreshed regularly it could become unrepresentative of the community	££
Public Meeting	• Can engage with a large group of people in one setting	• Low turnout can lead to poor results	££
Exhibition	• Displays can be clearly set out.	• People that are unable to attend will be excluded.	££
Media / Press release/ Radio/ Television/ Website	• Useful when you need to give information to a large number of people. • Quick way to get out information.	• Only goes to people that read certain newspapers, or listen/watch particular radio and TV stations. • Media can put their own	Varies

		slant on a story.	

5.1 Surveys

Surveys (and questionnaires) 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 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

1. 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

2. Use simple words: people will not answer questions they don't immediately understand

3. Start by asking relatively straightforward questions and then those requiring more complex answers

4. Group together questions investigating similar themes

5. 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

6. If you give people a number of alternatives, ensure you give them enough choice to ensure they think about the answer

7. If you give people a scale on which to score something, tell them which end is high and which low

8. Guard against phrasing questions in such a way that they reflect your own presuppositions or biases

9. Be careful not to lead people in particular directions either through the wording of the question or through any examples you use

10. Avoid composite questions such as “What are the advantages and disadvantages of public transport?” Separate them

11. Where possible avoid questions including words that need defining, such as 'regularly'

12. Avoid questions that are likely to have predictable answers. For example, “Is a safer neighbourhood important to you?”

13. Always put a closing date on questionnaires.

5.2 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.

5.3 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.

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5.4 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.

'Talkback' is our Citizens Panel in Oxford. It is made up of 1,000 residents over the age of 16 that are representative of the city's population. The panel are sent 2 surveys per year on a range of topics in either postal or online format. If you would like to submit a topic to a Talkback survey you should contact the Consultation Officers.

Talkback provides an immediately available means to assess opinion on specific issues. It overcomes the problem of having to recruit for each separate exercise. The response rate from Talkback 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.

Talkback can 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 are 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 are used for this. In addition it is possible to use samples from the Panel for Citizens' Juries or other forms of discussion groups. Also at the end of each year, an annual newsletter is produced which highlights all the changes that have been made as a result of the Talkback surveys during that particular year.

Method

1. Contact the Consultation Officers if you would like to submit a topic to a Talkback Survey or if you would like to use members of the panel for a focus group.
2. The Consultation Officers will work with you to develop your questions for the Talkback survey.
3. Once the questions have been developed, a Pilot will take place to test your questions.
4. Any necessary changes will be made to the Talkback survey questions as a result of the pilot.
5. The Consultation Officers will run the Talkback survey.
6. The survey results will be analysed.
7. A Talkback report will be produced and circulated to the relevant Service Areas

5.5 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 involved 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 thr 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.

5.6 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 debrief session at the close of each to record questions asked and answers given to establish some consistency of responses.

5.5 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.

5.6 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. Feedback the results to the service that has been evaluated.

5.7 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.

5.8 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

5.9 Using the Internet and Our Website

Community engagement is possible via our website. We have an online consultation system, eConsult, 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 public engagement exercises easily and quickly. The eConsult system is designed to offer a wide range of feedback mechanisms, including interactive questionnaires, online discussions and commenting on specific sections in consultation documents.

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

5.10 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 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 Facebook and Twitter.
- 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 page or Twitter account, you should contact the Website Manager (Chris Lee, clee@oxford.gov.uk) 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 risk excluding 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 meeting and talking to people face to face.

6 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:

- 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

- 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.

- 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.

- 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

Engagement Method	Example of an incentive (if needed/required)
1–2 hour focus group/workshop	£10–20 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 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.

7 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 engagement 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 engagement under the same conditions in which the real consultation will take place.
The group are then asked for their feedback and the engagement 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?
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 engagement method.

8 Evaluation

All public engagement projects should be evaluated after they have closed.

At the end of each public involvement exercise we should evaluate how things have gone. The evaluation criteria below, provides a set of questions that you should use. It is useful to think about these evaluation questions before you develop your project plan.

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 underrepresented 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?

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