An introduction to…

Consultation methods

4

Public Consultation and Involvement has a range of purposes including:

- **informing** the public about services and what you plan to do,
- **seeking views** on your policies and services, and more active
- **participation and partnership** where issues and needs are jointly discussed and assessed.

Working in partnership will mean each of the partners taking on responsibility for decisions and actions.

The following table indicates which methods can be used to meet these purposes - the more solid white dots, the more closely the method meets the purpose. It should be emphasised that it is only an indication - the appropriateness of the method depends on the size, nature and objective of the particular exercise.

	Number	Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
Campaigns	1	●●●	●○○	○○○
Exhibitions	2	●●●	●○○	○○○
Local press	3	●●●	●○○	○○○
Leaflets & Newsletters	4	●●●	●●○	○○○
Circulating Documents	5	●●●	●●○	○○○
Customer Comment Cards	6	○○○	●●○	○○○
Surveys	7	○○○	●●●	○○○
Public meetings	8	●●●	●●○	●○○
Conferences	9	●●●	●●○	●○○
Select Committees	10	●●○	●●○	●○○
Deliberative opinion polls	11	●○○	●●●	●○○
Citizens' panels	12	●○○	●●●	●○○
Workshops	13	●●○	●●●	●●○
Focus groups	14	●○○	●●●	●●○
Open Space	15	○○○	●●●	●●○
Community Visioning	16	●○○	●●●	●●○
User panels	17	●○○	●●●	●●○
Citizens' juries	18	●●○	●●●	●●○
Partnership approaches	19	●○○	●●●	●●●

Campaigns

Method 1

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
●●●	●○○	○○○

A campaign makes use of a variety of techniques to inform the public of a particular issue, or to publicise a service or service changes. It is usually a high profile affair, using the local media - newspapers and radio - together with posters and leaflets, exhibition materials etc. - to engage a large section of the community. A campaign can be run over a set period of time (e.g. a "Use It Don't Lose It" voting campaign), or at a particular time of the year (e.g. a "Winter Warmth" campaign). It can target the general population or a particular section of the population.

Advantages

- Creative - can reach a range of people through a variety of media
- Familiar, easy to understand
- Reaches a large number of people
- High profile - can promote your agency, raise the public's awareness or enlist their support
- Good way to put out a clear, agreed message
- Good for promoting a service and service uptake

Disadvantages

- Difficult to be sure you're reaching your target group
- Difficult to measure outcomes
- Non-English speakers and blind or partially sighted people could be excluded
- Can lead to public criticism about wasting money
- It can neglect small but important issues by focusing on the big issues
- No/ limited feedback from target group

Checklist for an effective campaign…

Item	Guidance
Target audience	Be clear about your target audience and plan the most effective ways to reach them.
Variety	Think laterally, try something new or different, and use a variety of methods to reach people.
Media relations	If necessary seek special advice about media releases and use of the media.
Distribution	When distributing posters and fliers or setting up a display, remember you can use a variety of venues - e.g. doctors' surgeries, churches, supermarkets, village shops and schools.

Case Study...

School Meals Campaign...

Background

A sharp fall in the numbers of pupils taking school meals led to the development of a campaign aimed at increasing the take up. The campaign is on-going.

Target Group

The target group is all school pupils in the area.

Format

User groups of school pupils were consulted over several weeks to ask what they liked / disliked about school meals and this information was used to shape the campaign.

Posters promoting school meals are displayed within schools and leaflets have been circulated to school pupils. The campaign has also made use of incentives, such as the chance to win prizes and theme days.

Outcomes

Regular monitoring provides feedback on the success of the campaign - so far, take-up numbers of pupils choosing school meals has increased significantly.

Cost

The budget for this campaign was £10,000, which went mostly on printing (posters, cards, stamps). Other costs were the launch, attended by a sports personality, and the presentation of prizes. The cost of most of the prizes was covered by sponsorships - approximately £80,000 was raised in cash or kind.

Tip

- *Involve your target group in shaping the campaign e.g. pupils helped decide on the image for the campaign.*

Exibitions

Method
2

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
●●●	●○○	○○○

An exhibition is a visual presentation of information e.g. photographs, charts, maps, video, interactive technology. Exhibitions can be portable and moved to various appropriate venues, or can be static and remain at one site for a long time. The choice of portable or static is determined by your target audience and by your objectives for the exhibition. The information can be presented in a number of complementary formats. Having a staff member on hand provides an opportunity for informal contact and feedback from the public.

Advantages

- Creative - can present information in a variety of user friendly formats
- Can be done quite cheaply
- Can help to get agencies working together
- Promotes your organisation
- Can reach a wide audience or those who may not otherwise be involved in consultation
- Can target a particular audience by careful siting of your exhibition
- Allows informal contact with the public if the exhibition is staffed
- Allows some public feedback through informal contact with staff / comment cards
- Good for presenting 2 or 3 options

Disadvantages

- Difficult to be sure you're reaching your target group
- Can take quite a lot of staff time
- Can be difficult to reach large numbers of people
- Difficult to measure the success or value of this method

Checklist for an effective exhibition…

Item	Guidance
Target audience	Decide who your target audience is and how best to reach them - think about places that they already use e.g. lunch clubs to target older people.
Presentation	A variety of media is interesting, although too much can be overwhelming. If there is new technology at the exhibition, it is best to have a member of staff to help people use it. Keep written text to a minimum, use graphics / photographs and use plain language.
Leaflets	Information in leaflet form allows people to take something away to read later.
Feedback	A short questionnaire or comment cards displayed prominently can provide some feedback. Supply pens.
Staff	Having a member of staff on hand allows informal discussion, explanation and feedback. If no staff member can attend, display a contact name and number for further information.

Case Study...

Awareness Raising for Deaf Rights

Background

As part of a take up campaign by the local Rights Forum and in partnership with staff and users from the local Deaf Communication Service, it was decided to organise a public event based around an exhibition to raise awareness for deaf rights. The aim was to bring together deaf and hard of hearing people with statutory service providers to enable discussion and consultation. The event was organised around a panel question and answer session with a variety of stalls providing information and contacts.

Target Group

The core target group was people who are deaf and hard of hearing and over 150 of the core group attended. A secondary target was to increase awareness across the group of service providers about each others role as well a raising the profile of deaf rights among the general public.

Format

The various groups provided over 40 stalls placed around a large hall. To facilitate the involvement of deaf people there were 2 BSL (British Sign Language) interpreters and a number of BSL trained assistants, 1 lip reader and 2 loop systems. An on site crèche was also provided. The main event of the afternoon was a panel discussion with each of the speakers giving a two minute introduction followed by open discussion.

Outcomes

The event achieved its aim of raising awareness among deaf and hard of hearing people about the services available. The event also widened knowledge among service providers about the needs of deaf people. The event allowed deaf and hard of hearing people to feed into the service development and offer suggestions for improvements to the Occupational Therapy systems.

Costs

Hall Hire	£900	Buffet	£450
Creche	£100	Interpreting	£350

Tips

Involve Deaf/Hard of Hearing People in the Organising group.
Give Interpreters and technology providers lots of notice.

Local Media

Method 3

Informing ●●● | Seeking Views ●○○ | Participation & Partnership ○○○

Local media can be used to advertise a consultation exercise or to raise awareness of an issue. This can be done by placing an advert or public notice, by issuing a media release, or by contacting the newspaper and discussing their possible interest in running an article. Bear in mind that if you choose to issue a press release rather than an advert then the newspaper itself will decide how to convey that news - you will have little control over wording or content - and they may choose not to use it at all. Generally, however, the local press will quite often make direct use of articles submitted in a Press Release format.

Newspapers are often particularly interested in something that is accompanied by good photographic opportunities. The subject matter will determine which approach is best. There is no charge for articles but if you want to guarantee details of a meeting you may have to place an advert and there will be a charge.

Local radio can also be used in a similar way to the newspapers. Media releases can be sent directly to them. In addition they may be interested in specific features.

Advantages

- Can be done quite cheaply
- Quick
- Familiar to most people
- Easy to organise
- Reaches a large number of people
- Can be high profile
- Good way to publicise events

Disadvantages

- Very difficult to be sure you're reaching your target group
- Non-English speakers and blind or partially sighted people excluded
- Difficult to measure the success or value of this method
- Difficult to explore an issue in-depth
- No/very limited feedback

Leaflets & Newsletters

Method 4

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
●●●	●●○	○○○

Leaflets are an effective, accessible way of informing the public of an issue or of changes to a service. They can be the only method you use, or you can use them in conjunction with another e.g. as part of an exhibition or campaign.

Newsletters are used to provide more detailed information or for providing regular updates in a lengthy consultation exercise. They can also be used to summarise and explain long or complex documents e.g. a consultation document produced by the government.

By incorporating a tear-off slip or telephone response line leaflets can also be used for receiving limited feedback on an issue.

You can compile newsletters for a specific purpose. Alternatively, you can arrange to have an article or page in a newsletter produced by another organisation that is read by your target audience.

The distribution of a leaflet or newsletter determines who reads it. You need to think about the best way to reach your target audience. Some possibilities are: through every letterbox in an area; posted to named individuals or groups; left in bundles on counters or display units at appropriate sites, e.g. shops, community centres, libraries, pubs.

Advantages

- Can be creative in design
- Familiar - easy to understand
- Can target specific groups
- Can help build a long term relationship with a community
- Can explore issues in a fair amount of depth
- Can reach a wide audience or blanket cover of a geographic area
- Can provide regular updates on an issue
- Tear-off slips can be incorporated for feedback

Disadvantages

- Time consuming
- Requires a lot of patience
- Non-English speakers and blind or partially sighted people could be excluded
- Usually requires a long-term commitment
- Limited feedback
- Outcome difficult to measure

Checklist for good leaflets and newsletters…

Item	Guidance
Layout	A leaflet or newsletter needs to be appealing to the eye, with a good balance of text, pictures and space. There are desktop publishing packages available to help you with this, or this can involve a specialist design agency.
Text	Use plain language.
Contact name	Have a contact name and phone number for further information.

Circulating Documents

Method 5

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
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We often wish to receive feedback on documents or reports, whether produced by ourselves, other agencies or central government. Or we may wish to circulate reports or documents for public information. You are likely to have your own contacts and networks for doing this. It is worth reviewing these at least once a year to ensure you are including everyone you should be.

When you send out a document for consultation, you will want to enclose a letter that gives the date by which you will need to receive comments, and that explains the different ways that comments can be made, such as by telephone, letter, meetings, on tape. If you draw up a pro-forma for people to complete with their comments, it will make it easier for you to analyse them. A pro-forma should not, however, be too narrow. A catch-all section at the end, such as "Any other feedback or comments", may be needed. However, your letter or pro-forma should also make clear any limits there are on what can be influenced through the consultation.

Advantages

- Relatively easy to organise
- Uses existing groups
- Gives people time to think about their response
- May help to develop a culture of citizenship
- Allows an issue to be explored in-depth
- Respondents can become well informed about the issue
- Can draw on local knowledge
- Can target specific groups

Disadvantages

- Can be time-consuming
- Must take particular care to use plain English
- Non-English speakers and blind or partially sighted people could be excluded
- Can be inflexible - reflects the agenda of those producing the document
- Sample used may be too small or biased to obtain reliable results
- Outcome may be inconclusive
- Requires a strong commitment from participants to read and respond

Checklist for circulating documents…

Item	Guidance
Distribution	Check any legal or policy requirements on who should receive the document. If there are none, list who it will or may affect and send it to them. Don't send it people who have no interest in the matter.
Summaries	When you consider that the document in its original form is too long or detailed for those you are sending it to, you should write and distribute a summary leaflet that says how to get a copy of the full document. It may be appropriate to provide this in different languages, large print, Braille or tape.
Feedback	State in a prominent place where and how comments should be made and by what date. Give sufficient time for responses – probably at least six weeks.

Case Study...

Consultation on Structure Plan

Background

A local council's Planning & Building Control Service wished to consult other statutory organisations and local residents concerning the policies and proposals within their strategic plan for land use and development.

Target group

Other statutory organisations (various public/private sector organisations), community groups, community councils, interest groups, tenants and resident associations, secondary schools, individuals, consultants, developers and businesses.

Format

A copy of the plan (including monitoring form) was mailed out to consultees, libraries, local offices and schools. In order to encourage a good response to the consultation all respondents were automatically entered into a "prize draw". Local and national companies based in the area donated prizes.

The report was advertised to local residents and organisations through an article in the local newspaper, press releases, posters in local supermarkets and council offices.

Copies of the report were made available in large print, tape and Braille.

Outcomes

Over 530 responses were received regarding the consultation. Responses informed the finalised Structure Plan which was submitted to the Scottish Executive.

Cost

Adverts and publicity	£3400
Documents	£5600
Prize draw	mostly staff costs

Tips

- Ensure consultation documents are widely available if your adverts say they are
- Approach local companies for prize donations
- Encourage local press to cover the event

Customer Comment Cards / Suggestion Schemes

Method 6

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
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Customer comment cards are simple cards or slips that allow members of the public to comment on a particular service or issue. They are left at an obvious place, perhaps on the reception desk of a building or left with the customer if the service is provided at their home.

The design of the card is important. Something friendly and eye-catching will encourage people to use them.

The cards sometimes ask for basic information about the comment, such as sex and age group, in order to help identify any trends. You may or may not feel this is necessary.

Advantages

- Cheap
- Quick and simple to complete
- Familiar to people
- The respondents raise the issues
- Can allow one-to-one feedback to the participants
- Draws on local knowledge and experience
- Can allow smaller issues to be raised as well as the bigger ones
- Allows you to check the public's responses to changes in the service
- Encourages a culture which has a positive approach to feedback

Disadvantages

- May result in unrealistic suggestions
- Response rate could be low
- Non-English speakers and blind or partially sighted people could be excluded
- A self selected sample is not representative

Checklist for good customer comment cards / suggestion schemes…

Item	Guidance
Wording	Any text should be short and friendly. State clearly the service or issue on which you are inviting comments. Use plain language.
Style	Bold black print on a white card is easiest to read. Provide sufficient space for comments. A space for the customer's name, address and telephone number gives you the opportunity to thank them and tell them how you have progressed the issue they raised.
Position	Cards should be displayed attractively and in an obvious place. Near a reception desk is good.
Returning the cards	Either have a freepost address on the back, or supply a small posting box for completed cards.
Responding	Give serious consideration to all suggestions. If an address or telephone number is given, contact the person and tell them how you will implement their suggestion, or why you cannot.
Monitoring	Set up a system of logging the comments and your responses to them. Analysis of responses can provide useful information for monitoring reports for committee and management purposes. Make sure any complaints are logged and processed through your complaints procedures.
Informal Suggestions	Suggestions or comments received informally e.g. during a telephone conversation with a customer can also provide useful information and should be considered in the same way as a written comment.

Case Study...

Sports and Leisure Centre...

Background

One leisure centre has been using customer comment cards for a number of years to allow members of the public to comment on facilities and service.

Target Group

Centre users.

Format

The comment cards are situated at several locations throughout the building with a small posting box for replies. One side of the card asks for personal details such as name and address. The other side is left blank for comments.

Outcomes

The box is emptied daily and on average the centre receives`` 6-10 comments per week. Replies range from "We had a really enjoyable day" to "I found the showers too cold". All participants receive a written reply from one of the centre managers in response to their comment. A monitoring log is kept of comments for management information and monitoring purposes.

Costs

The only costs are producing cards, some staff time and postage. At a rough estimate, this is around £2 per comment received, or £600 a year.

Tips

- *Situate the cards in more than one area of the building*
- *Supply posting boxes next to the cards*

Surveys

Method 7

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
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Surveys are used to gather the views of a sample of people to act as an indication of the views of the whole target population. Surveys can be carried out in a variety of ways:

- by post
- by telephone
- face-to-face - on the street
- face-to-face - at home
- face-to-face - another place (e.g. local office)
- self-response - e.g. handed out in an office

The resources available and the depth of information required will determine which method you choose. Respondents' answers are gathered on a questionnaire - a list of carefully worded questions. Statistical methods are then used to analyse the answers.

Undertaking a survey means clarity about your objectives and careful planning of the questions. You will have to decide whether to undertake the survey using internal resources or whether to appoint external consultants to undertake the work on your behalf. This will depend upon the scale of the exercise, the experience and skills available to you, the budget you have and the degree of independence required. Regardless of whether you undertake the survey yourself, it is essential that you are involved in its management.

The Sections on Resources and Contacts, Further Reading and Employing Consultants should be helpful. If you are doing your own survey, the checklist below suggests some of the main points to remember. The guidance on sampling should also help.

Advantages

- Familiar to most people
- Can give people time to think about their response
- Can reach a large number of people
- Can target specific groups
- Can apply "scientific methods" – systematic research on a representative sample gives insight into the opinions and views of the whole community

Disadvantages

- Can be expensive
- Time consuming to organise
- Inflexible – the agenda is set by the "researcher"
- Non-English speakers and blind or partially sighted people could be excluded if the survey is self-completing
- High level of knowledge needed to use this method properly
- Sample may be too small or biased and might not provide reliable results
- Cannot explore an issue in-depth
- Response rates can be low

Checklist for an effective survey

Item	Comment
Check the information you need	Is a survey the best way to obtain the information you need? Would another technique be more useful or be required to supplement the information from a survey?
Clarify the aim of the survey	Begin by agreeing a statement about the aim of the survey, what it will tell you, and what you will use the results for. Refer back to this statement regularly to keep you focused.
Budget	Identify your budget for the survey and the options and obstacles that this presents.
Decide on your sample size and sampling method	See section on sampling for guidance.
Decide on the survey method	Surveys carried out by post, telephone or on the street should take no more than 10 minutes of the interviewee's time. It may be reasonable to expect interviewees to give up a little more time if 'at home'. Be aware that there is a danger of respondents becoming weary or less interested towards the end of longer questionnaires and how that might impact on the quality of the information provided.
Piloting	You should pilot your survey to ensure that the questions are understandable and are going to give you the information you require. The questionnaire may need to be altered following the pilot.
Write a project timetable for the survey	This should include deadlines for: • wording of the questions / design of questionnaire • piloting of the questionnaire • final draft of the questionnaire • printing • distribution (if postal) or administering the questionnaire (if face to face or telephone) • closing date for returns (if postal) • data input • analysis of the findings • writing the report / presenting findings
Design the questions carefully	Prepare 'closed' questions which can be answered by ticking boxes. For each question, ask yourself why you need this information, and what you will do with the answers. It is not enough for the answers to be 'interesting'. Think, instead, about what action the answer will lead you to take. You may need to include some open questions, but remember that they are more difficult to record and analyse, so keep them to a minimum. It is important that the questionnaire is well structured and flows properly. There may be questions which respondents do not need to answer because of previous answers given. Ensure that any 'routing', i.e, skipping of questions, is well directed. See also, below, "Designing Effective Questions".

Item	Comment
Plan your analysis	At the same time as you design the questionnaire, plan how you will analyse the results you get. Design a summary sheet for recording the answers from all the questionnaires returned.
Letting others know	Think about who else needs to know where, when and why you are undertaking this survey.

Designing effective questions

No particular question is "right" for all situations, however there are some general rules to follow.

1. If possible, use questions that have been tried and tested in previous surveys and shown to have provided useful results. You will need to check with the author of the survey that they don't mind. They may ask you to acknowledge them on your questionnaire or in your report.
2. Keep questions short and simple. Compound sentences assume that all respondents will understand and remember complex information. Multiple questions are also confusing and will not provide useful results. An example of a multiple question might be, "How would you rate the quality and amount of care you received?"
3. Instead, break a topic down into distinct elements with a question on each. For example, you could ask people to rate how satisfied they were with: time taken, helpfulness of staff, quality of care. This way your results will lead more clearly to specific recommendations.
4. Use plain language, and avoid jargon.
5. Be aware of possible misinterpretation. (If a question can be misinterpreted, it will be.) Where necessary, define what you mean.
6. Avoid leading questions. Don't ask questions that seem to have a "right" answer. For example, "Do you agree that exercise is good for you?" These questions influence the results and reduce the value of the survey.
7. Avoid subjective questions such as "do you use this centre frequently?" Be specific. Try: "never", "less than once a week", "once or twice a week", "three or more times a week".
8. Be aware of sensitive issues. Extra thought needs to go into certain questions, such as those asking about drug or alcohol consumption, or financial issues. You may need to explain why you are gathering the information, or give assurances that the survey is anonymous (providing, of course, that it is!)
9. Provide any necessary background information the respondent will need. (The exception to this is when you are measuring public awareness of a topic). It can be useful to break a question down into two parts: a background question and then a question investigating the respondent's attitude. For example, "Recently, we implemented a new, centralised distribution system. Did you know this?" (Yes/No) followed by, "Have you noticed any benefits resulting from this change?". This provides you with clearer information than: "How effective has our new distribution programme been?"

Analysing the results of a survey

It is best to consult some of the books on surveys to guide you through the steps of design and analysis (see Further Reading). For every survey, you need to plan how you will do the analysis at the same time as you design the questionnaire. To do this, you prepare a summary sheet to record the answers you get. It should have a column for each question. Each completed questionnaire will provide one row of data on the summary sheet. Give each questionnaire an individual number, and make this number the first entry on your summary sheet.

For a large survey, you will need to use a computer package to analyse your results. Consider if you will need help with data input, i.e. feeding the survey answers into the computer. There are a number of specific statistical packages (e.g. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) or specialist-survey analysis packages (e.g. Snap!) which you can use. Alternatively you may find it sufficient to use a standard spreadsheet package (e.g. Microsoft Excel). You should also consider how you might want to present the information in making your choice of analysis package e.g. do you require charts, tables etc.

You will also need to think about some of the statistics that you want to generate from your data. The process of data analysis can range from the display of descriptive statistics, perhaps accompanied by some graphs or charts, too more advanced procedures. For the majority of survey work it is unlikely that you will need any more than the simple descriptive statistics which are described below:

Frequencies This is just a count of the number of times a value appears. If, for example, you had asked 100 people a question to which they could only reply yes, no or don't know a frequency table might show that 20 people said don't know, 30 said no, and 50 said yes. (It is also a useful statistics for checking that data is entered correctly. If the total was 102 or 97 - instead of 100 - then you would know that some error had been made).

Percentages This simply represents frequencies in percentage terms. Using the example above then, 50% of the people said yes. Percentages allow for better comparisons between different groups or answers.

Crosstabulations This is a way of finding out how some data is related to other data. For example, a questionnaire might ask respondents which age brackets they fall into and may also ask about whether they use a particular service, say Libraries, and how frequently they do so. Crosstabulations could be run which compare usage of libraries across the age groups and indicate which age groups use the service most or least frequently.

For a smaller survey (e.g. up to 20 closed questions and up to 50 respondents), you can analyse the results without a computer. This will limit the statistics you can use (e.g. to frequencies and percentages but not cross-tabulations etc.)

Open questions will provide a different kind of data, often very useful, but which will take longer to analyse. There are some software packages to help you do this. Even without the software, it is easiest if you have all the answers typed into a word processing package. All the answers to each question should be kept together. For each question, do the following:

- organise the answers by grouping similar ones together
- look for themes or headings for each group
- count the number of comments in each theme
- select the answers which are most representative to quote in your report

Case Study...

Improving Local Environments

Method

Telephone survey

Background

This survey was undertaken as part of a Local Authority's Best Value Review on Improving Local Environments. The questionnaire was designed in-house and the telephone calls were conducted by an external agency.

Target group

All residents aged over 18.

Format

The survey was carried out by telephone over a one-week period in October and obtained responses from 1,000 residents randomly selected from the phone book.

The questionnaire asked for views on a number of local environment-related services ranging from looking after playing fields to gritting and clearing snow from the roads. Respondents were given a five-point satisfaction scale to rate their views on the performance of the Council in each of the service areas.

Outcomes

Results fed into the review.

Costs

Internal staff time plus £1,915 for using an external call centre to conduct the calls and to construct and provide a Microsoft Access database in which all the responses were stored.

Tips

We chose to use a five point rating scale so that if the survey is repeated after time, we should be able to measure improvements (or otherwise).

Analysing the results and writing the report was easily done by working between Microsoft Access, Excel and Word.

Case Study...

Local Office Network Survey...

Background

A survey of one Council's Local Offices was carried out during May and June. The purpose of the survey was to collect information on the use of local offices, satisfaction levels with the services received, and to obtain a profile of the types of people who use the offices.

Target Group

Users of Council Local Offices.

Format

A Local Offices working group designed the questionnaire in February. A pilot study was carried out in 6 offices in March and the questionnaire was revised. 1500 revised questionnaires were given to each of the three Areas, with each office being given a number based on the size of the local population.

The survey period was 2 weeks in May. Each morning and afternoon during that period, a bundle of questionnaires was counted and left on each counter. Every customer was asked to complete one. 2073 questionnaires were completed and returned.

Outcomes

The results of the survey have provided a baseline measurement of satisfaction levels in local offices for customer care purposes and have resulted in some service improvements. The survey will be repeated, perhaps annually, to monitor those levels and, hopefully, to show continuous improvement.

Cost

Excluding staff time, the survey cost approximately £750, mostly for printing.

Tips

- *Draw up a project timetable at the start and allow enough time for each stage of the work*
- *Do a pilot of the questionnaire and analyse the results you get from the pilot before doing the proper survey*

Case Study...

User Experience of the Home Care Services...

Background

A Council's Social Work Service funded a local Forum on Disability to commission a survey on the views of the users of the Council's, Home Care Service. The purpose was to establish a broad picture of the operation of the service and its impact on users.

Target Group

A wide sample of those individuals who use the Home Care Service, whether directly or as carers.

Format

The surveys were carried out by a firm of evaluation and research consultants. The survey methods were by mass questionnaires, individual interviews with home care managers and other staff and discussion groups comprised of interested service users.

This involved postal work and encouragement by staff to complete and return the questionnaires.

Outcomes

All three surveys have now been completed with a number of common features being identified across the three areas. The large number of respondents, up to 50% of questionnaires returned, gives a strong sense of the value of this exercise.

Costs

Consultancy fee : approx. £10,000
Staff and user time

Tips

- *Ensure that a clear remit for the study is agreed between the funding body and the researchers.*
- *Try to identify specific areas where improvements in service may be measured and established.*
- *Active involvement of staff on the ground is likely to improve number of responses and ownership of the process. (increased returns of 100%)*

Public Meetings

Method 8

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
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A public meeting provides people with information on a subject and can allow discussion and feedback.

Traditionally, a public meeting consisted of a group of officers sitting at a top table presenting information via a flip chart and a lengthy speech. The audience, seated in rows, was then invited to endorse the proposals just presented to them. Now, however, there are many good examples of public meetings being organised in a more innovative and interactive way, which provide an effective means of receiving views.

Attendance at a public meeting will be dependent on a number of factors including the subject matter, the location, advertising and other preparatory work. You can often boost attendance by putting extra effort into publicity. This can include: producing and displayingposters, contacting local newspapers and radio, and making personal contact with local groups that may be interested in the subject of the meeting.

Advantages

- Can be relatively cheap
- Familiar to people
- Relatively straightforward to organise
- Much of the cost can be absorbed
- With the use of interpreters, more people can participate
- Helps develop a culture of participation
- If well structured, can help to identify solutions to problems
- High profile
- Allows some discussion and dialogue with the community on an issue - the extent of which will be dependent on the format used

Disadvantages

- Turnout could be low
- A self-selected group of people are not representative
- Difficult to measure the success or value of this method
- Outcome may be inconclusive
- A small number of people may dominate the group if not properly managed
- It can neglect small but important issues by focusing on the big issues (or vice versa)

Checklist for planning an effective public meeting…

Item	Guidance
Set the agenda for the meeting and organise a chairperson	Consider how local community goups with an interest in the issue would like to be involved. They may want to help set the agenda, or choose a chairperson and speakers. The person chairing the meeting need not be an expert on the topic, but should have some knowledge of it. It is best practice for the chair to be seen to be independent, perhaps a well-respected member of the local community, with good communication skills.

Item	Guidance
Choose a convenient date and time for the meeting	Consider who your target audience is and what other things they have to do. Bear in mind other events which could clash with the meeting (e.g. football matches, "Coronation Street").
Select the best venue	Choose a venue local to your target group, which meets any special needs of that group (see below). Other things to consider are: • room for a creche • heating • lighting • power points • catering facilities
Think about specific needs people might have	All venues should be fully accessible to disabled people - including toilet facilities. Offering a creche can encourage some people to attend. Perhaps a signer should be available and / or a hearing loop installed. It may be appropriate to involve an interpreter.
Plan the room layout	Remove any physical barriers between the audience and speakers. Consider using a circular seating arrangement as this can encourage participation. Ensure visual aids can be seen from all seats.
Equipment	Check that all equipment is working and that you have spares e.g. bulbs, extension cables. Be aware of any potential distractions e.g. loud heating and ventilation systems.
Plan hospitality	Refreshments can be offered either at the start of the meeting, or can provide a break half way through, and can be used as an opportunity for informal discussion. Think about catering
Prepare any information people will need for the meeting	Where possible, choose visual formats to present information. You can also provide handouts for people to take away. Allow time before the meeting starts or afterwards for people to look at handouts or displays connected with the meeting. This will also allow for informal contact between workers and people attending.
Publicity	Publicise the meetings well using a variety of methods e.g. local media, leaflets, posters, word of mouth etc... it may be appropriate to make the publicity material available on Braille, tape, or in different languages.
Brief the chairperson of the meeting	The chairperson must demonstrate that he or she is neutral. At the beginning of the meeting, the chairperson should clearly state: • their name and job or position • the purpose and format of the meeting • what will happen after the meeting, and how the views expressed at the meeting will be used • how those attending the meeting will be informed of the decisions taken

Case Study...

Developing a Local Plan...

Background

One council organised a series of 11 public meetings over a three month period within a rural area in order to consult the public on planning issues. Several weeks of preparation were required in order to arrange suitable venues and enlist the support of all relevant agencies. A postal survey of 11,000 residents was also carried out.

Target Group

All residents in the area.

Format

A representative of the Planning Service provided an introduction. The meetings then incorporated participative consultation. This involved providing a detailed map of each settlement and encouraging the members of the public to place cards on the map showing their planning preferences. For example, participants decided where they felt new housing developments should go, where open spaces should be, where traffic calming measures should be positioned. There was also an open discussion on planning for the area.

Outcomes

The information gathered from the meetings was used to help prepare the Local Plan.

Costs

The cost of the whole exercise (excluding staff costs and mileage claims) was £3,500. £1,200 related to the printing and distribution of the questionnaire, £723 to the public meetings (hire of venues, catering, and support materials), and £1,500 to publicity notices in newspapers.

Tips

- *Widely publicise meetings to promote attendance*
- *If appropriate, try to obtain short and long term action points from the meeting which are achievable*
- *Inform those attending what will happen to the comments they have given and where, when and how the final decisions on the issue will be taken*

Conferences

Method 9

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
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Conferences are extended meetings which give interested people the opportunity to discuss a number of related issues and, perhaps, to reach a consensus on how to progress the topic. A common format is to have at least two plenary sessions with the whole group together (usually the first and last ones), and smaller workshops in between. Often, one or two speakers "set the scene" and aim to motivate discussion in the workshops. Conferences can be held over a number of days and involve a large number of people.

Conferences provide an opportunity for people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences to deliberate on an issue on an equal footing, using workshops or discussion groups to examine issues in-depth or share ideas. Background or detailed information can be conveyed via a range of presentations or exhibitions, and perhaps specially invited guest speakers.

Advantages

- Can be creative and flexible in the format used
- Can help to get various groups working together (services, staff, community and interest groups), sharing information and ideas
- Could be spin-off benefits from networking
- With the use of interpreters, more people can participate
- Can help to identify solutions to problems or at least a way forward
- (Usually!) enjoyable for participants
- Allows an issue to be explored in-depth
- Can target specific groups
- Allows a debate of differing views and concerns

Disadvantages

- Can be expensive
- Time consuming to organise
- Could raise false expectations
- Unscientific
- In a small, self-selected group, some viewpoints will be missing
- Can lead to public criticism about wasting money
- Outcome may be inconclusive
- A small group of people may dominate if not properly managed and facilitated

An event reminder checklist is available in appendix 1.

Checklist for planning an effective conference…

Item	Guidance
Organise a steering group	A small team of perhaps two or three will make organising the conference an easier task. Include someone with administrative skills.
Be clear about the aim of the conference	Spend some time identifying the aim of the conference and what outcomes it should achieve. Make sure you tell all speakers and workshop leaders what these outcomes are.

Item	Guidance
Decide on the workshop topics	Every topic must be relevant to the aim of the conference. Workshops should be a manageable size - no more than 15 people.The workshops should also have clear objectives with achievements. (See section on workshops).
Choose the most suitable venue	Consider: the number of people attending public transport routes parking disabled access a room for a creche catering number of rooms / workshop spaces required comfort other space requirements e.g. displays, reception / registration
Plan the format of the conference	It is suggested that speakers are restricted to a maximum of 20 minutes, and build in a break at least every 2 hours, otherwise participants will tire. Between one and two hours is recommended for a workshop.
Plan hospitality	Provide soft drinks, tea and coffee at breaks. If the conference is to last all day, you will need to arrange for lunch. Are there enough cafés nearby? Or could you provide a lunch? Check with the venue about this.
Confirm the speakers and workshop leaders	Arrange relevant guest speakers and workshop leaders well in advance. Check their requirements; e.g. room size, overhead projector, T.V. and video. Agree a brief with each speaker, and let them all know what the others will cover. Discuss expectations with the workshop leaders. For example, are they required to come up with recommendations or suggestions? How will this be fed into the larger group? Will they need to agree upon a spokesperson and note-taker for the group? (See section on workshops).
Application form	Target your publicity or invitations. Set a cut off date by which people must apply. The application form should include tick boxes for workshop preferences and for specific needs, e.g. dietary, créche or care costs. On receipt of applications, write back to confirm the person's place. Enclose a map of how to reach the venue and possibly information about guest speakers, topic of discussion etc.
Organising the venue	Signpost the rooms and toilets etc. well. Provide sufficient space for reception and informal contact.
Trouble-shooting on the day	One or two people should be assigned as trouble-shooters. They should get there at least an hour before proceedings start to check room layouts and equipment in advance.

Case Study...

User Experience of the Home Care Services...

Background

Over a number of years recently, there has been a growing movement to involve service users and their carers, as well as other relevant stakeholders in the debate about developing services in and around community care. One Council commissioned work, in partnership with the Health Board, to explore the development of advocacy in support of engaging service users and their carers in discussion about the development of services more generally. As part of this commissioned activity, a Search Conference was held.

Target Group

The Search Conference was targeted on all stakeholders involved in community care. That is, key Council Services including Social Work, Housing & Community Services, Elected Members, Health Board, Primary Care Trust & Acute Trust Services, service users, community and voluntary organisations, representatives from advocacy organisations and the advocacy movement, the Benefits Agency, Police and other relevant stakeholders.

Format

The aim of the Search Conference was to pull together all relevant stakeholders engaged in community care in a two-day debate on the future shape of services. The format of the Search Conference involved all the stakeholders developing a shared view of their experiences to events that have shaped the current situation in relation to Community Care Services. Stakeholders were then involved in an exercise which identified both the strengths and weaknesses of the current position, as well as some of the opportunities and threats facing community care for the future. A number of creative exercises were carried out throughout the initial day to enable participants to explore these particular themes. The second day focused on developing both the vision which people wished to see in place in relation to Community Care Services, and some of the small scale specific steps which could be taken jointly by relevant stakeholders in reaching that vision. Again, specific exercises were carried out to formulate the vision in mixed groups of stakeholders and subsequently related groups of stakeholders were tasked with identifying specific steps which could be taken to work towards achieving the vision.

Case Study continued...

User Experience of the Home Care Services...

Outcomes

The results of the event resulted in some specific targets being established to improve the way Community Care Services are run. During the course of the event, several hundred stakeholders took part in the highly structured debate on the future of Community Care Services from every aspect of community care.

The Search Conference also galvanised high levels of energy from stakeholders and established a series of small working groups to tackle specific pieces of work.

The final stage of the Search Conference and advocacy consultancy work will result in the development of a specific strategy for promoting advocacy.

Tips

- *Search Conferences are complex events to run therefore acquiring knowledge and expertise on running Search Conferences is a prerequisite*
- *Engage support from a variety of stakeholders*
- *Ensure the active participation of service users, carers and any advocacy movement*
- *Give the event a high profile amongst staff and managers*

Case Study...

Community Council Conference...

Background

A one-day conference for community councils was held in order to develop and strengthen the relationship between community councils and the local Council. Eighty-seven representatives from 47 community councils attended the conference along with 11 councillors.

Target Group

Community Council representatives.

Format

The conference began with a welcome by the chairperson of the Council's Citizenship Committee and then moved on to a keynote speech from a member of the Community Government Exchange.

The conference delegates then split up into groups for workshop sessions. There were six workshop topics (ranging from 'dealing with planning applications' to 'funding') and each delegate could participate in three one-hour workshops. Each of the workshops had a facilitator and a notetaker.

After the workshops, the delegates were brought back together as a whole group and a question and answer session was held. Finally, the conference ended with a summary address by the Chief Executive.

Outcomes

The workshop sessions came up with a number of suggestions to be addressed by the local Council and community councils. The outcomes were used to develop a 'scheme' for community councils, funding criteria and good practice agreement.

Cost

Approx £1500 for lunch, refreshments and printing. Considerable staff time in organisation and planning and running workshops.

Tips

- *Check out with a pilot group of potential participants that the subject matter is of relevance and will meet their needs, and for suggestions on content.*

Select Committees

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
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Select committees are a tool which can be used to carry out a wide-ranging review of any issue. They are based to some extent on the parliamentary model, and involve the public, service users, staff, interest groups and experts in submitting evidence and views. They are mostly used by Councils and are made up of Councillors, reflecting the political make-up of the Council, plus co-opted members as needed.

The select committee investigates or monitors an issue by listening to a wide range of views from interested parties both inside and outside the Council. The committee members then draw conclusions from the evidence presented, and make recommendations on the issue.

Select committees can be set up as standing committees of the Council, or can have a limited life span. They can:

- invite any member of staff or Councillor to present information
- ask for reports to be prepared
- co-opt external expertise or representation
- invite or commission evidence from outside the Council

At Council level, select committees are used sparingly. They need policy, research and administrative support, usually involving staff from the relevant service. They can also have a high public profile. The Policy and Resources Committee's approval may be needed before establishing a select committee of the Council.The select committee format could be adopted on a smaller scale within a service or used in other settings.

Advantages

- Good for issues that cut across service boundaries
- Can help to get services working together
- Can use existing groups
- A respected method
- Allows the respondents to raise issues
- Can help to identify solutions to problems
- Allows issues to be examined in-depth
- Respondents are well informed about the issue
- Can target specific groups and individuals

Disadvantages

- Time consuming
- Can be overly formal
- Intensive staff support needed to service and facilitate

Case Study…

Housing Select Committee…

Background

One local Council set up a time-limited Housing Select Committee in the summer. It was an investigative committee with the remit to review the Council's strategic direction with regard to housing. It identified issues, investigated them, and proposed ways forward. The Committee's final report was approved in the autumn.

Target Group

Private, public and voluntary sector agencies concerned with housing issues.

Format

The Committee was made up of Councillors, and met five times as a committee. Law and Administration serviced it, as any other Council committee. An independent advisor from the housing field attended meetings, wrote briefing papers and commented on the final report. The Committee wrote to all housing and community care related voluntary organisations and quangos asking them to identify the most important issues. These were formed into an agenda for five hearings, which focused on subjects like homelessness, housing investment, and housing need.

The hearings were advertised in the press, and each covered two or three major issues. Various groups and agencies gave presentations. These were followed by discussion with questions from the Committee and from the public. All hearings were recorded.

Outcomes

Tenants groups and community councils responded well to the opportunity to present evidence to the hearings. The committee made over 30 recommendations, most of which have been taken forward by Services.

Tips

- *an independent advisor is useful, particularly if there is any possibility of differing opinions between services or agencies.*
- *having transcripts of the hearings was useful, but it took a lot of time to transcribe and proof read them.*

Deliberative Opinion Polls

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
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These involve selecting a representative sample of the target population, giving them information on the issue you require feedback on, inviting them to participate in a meeting and/or discussion group on this issue, then taking a poll of their views at the end of the discussion. A poll can also be taken beforehand allowing Deliberative Opinion Polls enable participants to develop some knowledge of the issue prior to giving their views. Whilst an ordinary poll may represent what the target population think on the basis of their prior knowledge and opinions, the deliberative opinion poll models what the target population would be likely to think if it had an opportunity to consider the questions in some depth.

Deliberative Opinion Polls have been used mainly in the USA to test the public's response to a proposed campaign - usually a political one. The number of participants is usually between 100-300. The event can vary in length. Participants usually receive a small fee.

Advantages

- Gives people some time to consider relevant information before stating their views
- Provides a survey of 'informed' views
- Useful for testing the public's likely response to a proposed campaign rather than launching straight into it

Disadvantages

- Unfamiliar to most people
- Non-English speakers could be excluded
- Does not look at people's own suggestions or ideas, rather people just state their responses to the information they are given

Checklist for an effective Deliberate Opinion Poll…

Item	Guidance
Randomly select respondents	Decide how you will ensure that your respondents are representative of your target group.
Clarify what you are testing	Decide what information you are going to give respondents.
Structure the meeting	Carefully plan the format of the meeting, including speakers, equipment, room layout, small group leaders, etc.
Plan how you will analyse the results	Depending on the size of your sample, you may need help with data input. What, if any, computer software will you use to analyse your results? How will you present the results? What will they tell you?
Test the questionnaire	Do a pilot study to finalise the questions you ask and to check that the answers will tell you what you need to know.

Citizens' Panel

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
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A Citizens' Panel is a group of people, representative of the population, who have agreed to be consulted periodically for their views. This allows regular, large-scale surveys to be made at a lower cost than if done separately. It also achieves a higher response rate than other surveys. In addition the panel members can be targeted for other forms of consultation such as focus groups.

The number of people on the panel can vary from 750 to 2,000. A larger number allows sub groups to be identified e.g. young people, elderly, geographical location. The panel can be surveyed by written questionnaire or by telephone polling as frequently as once a month. The membership of the panel is changed regularly to allow for people dropping out, and to ensure it remains representative. This is done systematically; for example one third replaced each year.

Advantages

- Can be used by a partnership of agencies
- Participants can be asked several times, allowing any changes over time to be apparent
- A proven and reliable method
- Inexpensive to undertake consultation after the panel is established
- Minimal bias
- Reaches a large number of people
- Response rates can be high
- Participants feel valued
- Can target specific groups
- An umbrella consultation method which creates a pool of people willing to be consulted in various other ways, e.g. focus groups, face to face interviews, deliberative opinion polls
- Allows surveys or other research to be done at short notice (once the panel is established)

Disadvantages

- Initial cost to establish the panel
- Needs considerable staff support to establish and maintain
- Non-English speakers could be excluded
- Reflects your agenda rather than the community's
- Requires particular skills to analyse the data
- Requires commitment from participants

Checklist for citizens' panels…

Item	Guidance
Recruiting panel members	Scientific methods must be used to recruit panel members to ensure that the members are representative of the population as a whole. All applicants complete a recruitment form giving demographic details which can be compared to the Census.
Panel size	A large panel of over 1,000 will allow sub groups of panel members to be identified who can then be surveyed about something specific to their needs or interests.
Keeping up interest	Providing feedback on survey results or the outcome of consultation can minimise the drop-out rate of panel members. Often a newsletter for panel members is produced.
Regular renewal	Regular, systematic renewal of panel members is needed to ensure they are still representative of the population and not an elite group of "experts". There are on-going tasks to keep the panel database up to date (e.g. changes of address, deaths).

Workshops

Method 13

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
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Workshops bring together a group of individuals to examine and discuss an issue in some depth. The discussion is focused but not too formal, the aim being that everyone feels able to participate. A workshop is best facilitated by someone skilled in group-work, who can help the quieter members of the group to be heard and who will use a number of techniques to create a constructive, problem-solving atmosphere. Workshops allow individuals to network and exchange ideas and to develop an action plan, recommendations or proposals. Bringing together people with a range of experiences on a relatively equal footing can help to create shared ideas from different starting points.

Workshops can stand alone, or can form part of a public meeting or conference that has gathered together a large number of people.

Advantages

- Cheap
- Relatively easy to organise
- Flexible
- Could be spin-off benefits from networking
- With the use of interpreters, more people can participate
- Can help to identify solutions to problems
- (Usually!) enjoyable for participants
- Allows an issue to be explored in-depth
- Can target specific groups
- Usually informal atmosphere which makes it easier to participate

Disadvantages

- Unscientific
- Outcome may be inconclusive
- A small number of people may dominate if not properly facilitated
- Cost if employing consultants to facilitate
- In a small, self-selected group, some viewpoints will be missing

Checklist for an effective workshop…

Item	Guidance
Set the topic	Check that the topic is precise enough and will be meaningful to participants. Send out important background information before the day of the workshop, e.g. an outline of the subject, the expected outcomes from the workshop.
Decide on the size of the group	Between eight and fifteen participants allows optimum participation in a discussion.
Choose the venue	Make sure the room is an appropriate size and will accommodate the group comfortably, that the heating is suitable and that any participants with a disability will have full access.
Arrange for a facilitator and notetaker	An experienced, skilled facilitator will make all the difference to the quality of the workshop. A skilled facilitator will be someone who is skilled in groupwork, has good communication skills, can encourage discussion, be unobtrusive and neutral, and can control dominant group members. It is a good idea to appoint a notetaker who can summarise the points made in the workshop for written and / or verbal feedback.
Clarify the outcomes of the workshop	Ensure that the facilitator and the participants are clear of the purpose and expected outcomes of the workshop.
Prepare equipment	Make sure the group facilitator has all the equipment required, e.g. overhead projector, flip chart, paper and pens for participants. Check that all participants can see any visuals.
Decide on the best format	Consider a short presentation on the subject matter to raise awareness and encourage discussion.

Length of meeting	Between one and two hours is suggested for each group meeting. This should be agreed with participants beforehand.
Refreshments	Tea, coffee, soft drinks, biscuits and sweets help keep participants attentive.
Facilitator	The facilitator should be experienced and neutral.
Payment	Expenses should be paid and, if thought appropriate, a small token payment, e.g. £10, could be offered to the participants.
Analysis of results	Transcriptions from the discussions need to be analysed for emerging themes.

Case Study...

Employee Handbook...

Background

One Council held a series of focus group meetings to consult Council staff on:

- whether the Council should develop an Employee Handbook
- what information should be included in such a handbook
- what the format of the handbook should be

Target Group

Council staff below Team Leader level.

Format

Human Resources staff contacted all Services to request they nominate staff to participate in the focus groups. Services were asked to nominate an employee who would be able to contribute to the discussions within the focus groups. Nominations had to be below Team Leader level. Letters were then sent to all nominees, plus a memo to their manager, explaining the purpose of the focus groups and the time required to attend meetings.

ix focus groups were then drawn up, each with 6 people from a cross-section of Services, grades and manual/non-manual occupations. Each group met for between 1 hour and 1 hour 15 minutes and followed a pre-arranged format:

- introductions
- background to the development of the Handbook
- why focus groups?
- To be or not to be?
- suggested contents
- content from service perspective
- packaging - samples available, decision by participants
- what next?
- thanks
- any further comments

Case Study continued...

One employee from Human Resources and one from the Communications Unit facilitated the discussion. A note-taker attended every meeting to take notes of the views expressed.

Following the discussions, a draft of the handbook was drawn up taking account of views expressed. A further four meetings were held, each with seven or eight of the same participants, to check that the draft was on the right lines.

Outcomes

The groups came up with very good ideas and concepts, which resulted in a Handbook that is innovative and very different from the standard local authority Employee Handbook. It is hoped that by asking staff what information they wanted included in the Handbook, that it will be a valuable source of information and reference to them.

Costs

Staff time to organise, facilitate and participate.

Tips

- *asking the staff to consult with their colleagues prior to attending the focus group increases the level of consultation*
- *8 - 10 is a good number for a participative discussion*
- *make sure that the group membership reflects your target group*
- *the location is important and will affect the discussion - avoid a setting that is too formal*

Focus Groups

Method 14

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
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Focus groups are becoming an increasingly popular research method to explore questions like 'how' and 'why'. They consist of around 8 or 10 people who are selected to discuss an issue or series of issues in depth and hence stimulate ideas that might not otherwise be obtained. An experienced facilitator leads the meeting(s), keeping the discussion within an agreed structure. The discussion can be taped or notes taken then analysed. The participants should be representative of the target group. The number of groups you have and how often they will meet will be dependent upon the topic of discussion, your objectives etc.

This is a more structured method than a workshop, with a greater emphasis on a thorough analysis of what is said. The facilitator needs to work hard to ensure that the necessary topics are covered.

Advantages

- Could be spin-off benefits results from the networking experience
- Participants can be asked several times
- Flexible - allows participants to raise issues
- Can help to identify solutions to problems
- Allows issues that are open to new ideas to be explored in-depth
- Participants feel valued
- Draws on local knowledge
- Can target specific groups

Disadvantages

- Non-English speakers could be excluded
- Sample may be too small or biased to provide reliable results
- Requires skills to ensure everyone participates equally
- The output is not quantitative, which may be important in some cases

Checklist for effective focus groups…

Item	Guidance
The brief	Develop a series of questions to guide the discussion.
How many groups?	Depending on the topic and the target grouping, it may be best to have separate groups for different age groups, sexes, ethnic groups or working status. This helps to ensure that everyone's views are expressed. Depending on the topic, each group may meet more than once.
Fair recruitment	Scientific sampling methods should be used to invite applicants and recruit focus group members.
Venue	The venue should be relaxed and quiet, in a room free from interruptions.
Recording what's said	The discussion should be taped and transcribed, or very experienced note-takers should be used whose only role is to record proceddings.

Open Space

Method 15

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
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Open Space creates a democratic framework from which participants create their own programme of discussions around a central theme. It is a flexible method, and can cope with very large numbers of people - even 1,000! The organisers' main role is to create the time and space for the event to take place, and to arrange a facilitator with a "hands off" approach. What occurs on the day is in the hands of the participants.

Events usually last between one and three days. The organisers prepare a large, blank timetable of times and spaces where workshops can be held. This timetable is stuck up on a wall. The event begins with participants (seated in a circle to help communication and avoid hierarchy) identifying those issues around the central theme that they feel passionate about and are willing to take responsibility for. They write each of their issues on a sheet of paper, sign their name, and stick it on a slot on the timetable. When all the topics have been announced, everyone gathers around the wall to sign up for whichever topics they wish to discuss.

Someone in each workshop session records the outcomes and their report is photocopied and made available to all participants. There is a final plenary, also in a circle. In events that last more than one day, the whole group gets together at the start and close of each day, creating a sense of community and providing a forum for announcements.

The philosophy underlying Open Space is "passion bounded by responsibility". It has a number of fundamental principles, which are explained to participants:

- Whoever comes are the right people
- Be relaxed about time: whenever it starts is the right time
- If there is no more to say, move on - when it's over, it's over
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could happen - let go of expectations
- "The Law of Two Feet": If you are in a situation where you are neither learning nor contributing, it is your responsibility to go elsewhere

Advantages

- Allows very large and diverse groups of people to be involved
- Allows complex and potentially conflicting issues to be worked on in a positive and constructive way
- Encourages participation and ownership
- A very positive approach to problem-solving

Disadvantages

- Depends upon the commitment, and confidence, of participants
- This method is new to most people and could be confusing or intimidating, at least at first

Checklist for Open Space…

Item	Guidance
Get the organisers together	The organisers create the space and invite participation. This will involve booking accessible rooms, arranging publicity, taking numbers, and arranging refreshments.
Set the theme	Choose words that make the theme meaningful and exciting to participants.
Choose the venue	A venue with one large room and several smaller ones is ideal. Heating must be suitable and participants with a disability must have full access.
Publicise	Everyone with an interest in the theme needs to know the event is being held.
Agree a facilitator	One facilitator is all that is needed, and he or she needs to believe in the hands-off approach. The facilitator guides the opening and closing sessions, explaining the procedure and principles, and then stands back as far as possible.
Write up the blank timetable	Workshops usually last between one and a half and two hours. Build in breaks for refreshments and food.
Prepare equipment	At the opening plenary, people will need A4 paper, marker pens and masking tape. Each workshop should have a flip chart, paper and pens. A photocopier is needed to copy workshop reports for all participants.

Community Visioning

Method 16

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
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A community vision is simply a shared vision of a desirable future. Community Visioning techniques creates the opportunity for one or more diverse groups of people to meet together in a positive atmosphere and develop a vision of what they want in relation to a particular area. The area is usually a neighbourhood or town, but it could be a service. The group will then go on to consider the actions needed to bring that vision about. It is all about focusing on the future rather than dwelling on the past and present. A number of formats can be used, such as conferences, focus groups and workshops. There can be one big event, or a number of smaller ones. The important thing is to make it possible for a wide range of different views and ideas to contribute to one big picture.

Advantages

- A high profile approach that raises people's awareness and enlists their support
- Can help in drawing up a long term plan for an area or service
- Encourages participation and ownership
- A very positive approach to problem-solving

Disadvantages

- Requires real commitment, in money and resources, to seeing the vision through to fruition
- Unless there is real commitment from management to implementing change, people who participated can become cynical

Checklist for effective community visioning…

Item	Guidance
Set the topic	Choose words that make the topic meaningful and exciting to participants.
Arrange for a facilitator and notetaker	An experienced, skilled facilitator is crucial to this method. It is a good idea to appoint a notetaker who can summarise the points made for written and / or verbal feedback.
How many meetings?	Decide how many meetings you will need to hold to ensure maximum participation.
Choose the venues	Make sure the rooms you book are an appropriate size and will accommodate people comfortably, that the heating is suitable and that any participants with a disability will have full access.
Publicity	Publicise all meetings as widely as possible; in particular, target those groups who could otherwise be excluded. Visit groups to encourage their members to come along.
Prepare equipment	Make sure the group facilitator has all the equipment required, e.g. flip chart, paper and pens for participants. Check that all participants can see any visuals.

User Panels

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
●○○	●●●	●●○

User Panels are regular meetings of service users that invite feedback on the quality of a service, or other related topics. It is best if they form a representative group of users of the service. The format of meetings may vary but would generally be similar to that of a workshop.

They are particularly useful for feedback on quite personal services where sensitivity to individual need is important. They help to identify the concerns and priorities of the experts - those who use the service - and to identify any problems and get ideas for improvements.

Advantages

- Could be spin-off benefits from networking
- The same participants used several times can help in evaluating changes
- Allows respondents to raise the issues most important to them
- With the use of interpreters, most people can participate
- Helps identify solutions to problems
- Allows issues to be explored in depth
- Allows feedback to participants about the issues they raise
- Respondents are well informed about the issues
- Can help to build trust
- Can target specific groups

Disadvantages

- Time consuming
- Requires commitment from organisers and participants
- A self-selected sample may not be representative
- A small number of people may dominate the group
- In a small, self-selected group, some viewpoints may be missing

Checklist for effective user panels…

Item	Guidance
Is it needed?	Before setting up a User Panel, check for existing groups that you could consult instead.
Define the purpose	Set down terms of reference for the panel. Be clear about who will consider the outcomes of the discussions and where final decisions will be made.
Recruit the panel	The panel should consist of between eight to ten people. Panel members can be recruited in a variety of ways e.g. existing known service users, press adverts, representative bodies.
Payment	Panel members should receive at least their out of pocket expenses. It may be appropriate to offer transport.
Facilitation	The group should be facilitated in a neutral way to allow open discussion.
Reporting back	It is important that the panel receives updates on how their suggestions are being progressed.

Case Study...

Fife Frail Elderly User Panels...

Background

Age Concern Scotland started the Fife User Panels Project in 1992. It's aim was to develop panels of frail older people, mainly users of various community care services, who have difficulty getting out and about without assistance. The first three years evaluated this way of working by measuring its benefit to Panel members, whether it was possible to establish Panels and sustain them and whether they achieved change in service provision. These three areas had positive results and attracted some funding from Fife Council. Seven Panels are now well established in Fife with Panel members identified by Home Carers; District Nurses; Health Visitors; GP Surgery Practice Managers; those working in the voluntary sector with older vulnerable people etc. As older people's everyday experiences are discussed many issues are raised including health and social Care, but also housing; transport; information; social activities etc.

Target Group

Frail,older people aged 70+ who are usually living alone and cannot leave their homes without assistance.

Format

The participants control the agenda with an independent facilitator (Age Concern Scotland employee) checking with panel members that issues emanating from panels are accurately reflected. Service providers and planners from Fife Council, Fife Health Board and Trusts are invited by panel members on a regular basis to discuss issues they are concerned about on a local and Fife-wide basis and regularly invited back for updates on progress of issues raised. Care is taken to ensure that the meetings are relaxed and as informal as possible and to encourage 'ownership' by Panel members, of their own group. A co-worker attends Panel meetings to scribe and assists in the collation of issues for Panel members' meetings and those identified by panel members to pursue with service planners/providers.

Case Study...

Outcomes

Frail older people are being given the opportunity to directly influence the planning and shaping of future service provision e.g. -

14 Point Good Hospital Discharge Checklist resulted in Pilot Discharge Scheme at Victoria Hospital and Sub-Group of Older People's Strategy Group looking at way forward for convalescence in Fife.

Building on contact with Home Care Service Team Leaders and Service Manager at Panel meetings has influenced development of User Satisfaction monitoring questionnaire to enable users to identify good and poor practice within Home Care. Panel members have recently had input to Home Care Service measurements of standards and what older people feel these should be.

Discussion on housework tasks which frail older people feel they need help with, and think should be a priority, especially as a measure of preventing the need for more intense and personal care and providing a minimum standard quality of life. This resulted in the suggestion of a specially insured and trained team of Home Carers to carry out these tasks. This is now being looked at by Fife Council and the voluntary sector.

Costs

Approximately £43,000 per annum (Fife Council contribute £10,000 of this).

Tips

- *This way of working has proved successful with frail older people and may be transferable to work with people who are not usually heard e.g. learning disabilities, children's groups etc.*
- *Important to ensure service providers and planners support the work and give feedback to Panels on a regular basis of the progress of issues they have raised*
- *Important to provide transport to the venue and ensure that the venue is accessible to all attending*
- *Effective way of developing meaningful participation of users - from users perspective*

Citizens' Juries

Method 18

Informing	Seeking Views	Participation & Partnership
● ● ○	● ● ●	● ● ○

A Citizens' Jury consists of 12-25 people selected to be representative of the general public. The jury is facilitated by a trained facilitator/moderator, and meets over a period of 3 to 5 days to deliberate upon a specific issue of general importance to the public. The jury hears presentations (or "evidence") from a range of experts or those with particular interest in the subject matter. They then have the opportunity to question these "witnesses". Careful, informed deliberation is a key part of the Citizens' Jury process.

Citizens' Juries encourage the public to deliberate on an issue of concern, and offer local people an opportunity to become involved in the decision-making processes on a specific issue. Juries can cost between £5,000 and £25,000 to run. Jurors are normally paid to participate, covering at least their loss of earnings, carer costs and transport costs.

Advantages

- Can help to get services working together
- A proven and respected method, when done properly
- Gives people time to think about their response
- Allows respondents to raise issues
- Helps develop a culture of citizenship
- Can help identify solutions to problems
- High profile
- (Usually) enjoyable for participants
- Allows a complex issue to be explored in-depth by people who are affected by it
- Respondents are well informed about the issue
- Participants feel valued
- Draws on local knowledge

Disadvantages

- Expensive
- Time consuming
- High level of knowledge required to do this properly
- Requires a lot of patience
- Non-English speakers could be excluded
- Sample may be too small to obtain reliable results
- Partially self-selecting sample could be criticised as not representative
- Can lead to public criticism about wasting money
- Needs skill to ensure everyone participates equally
- Requires commitment from participants
- The output is not quantitative

Checklist for effective user panels…

The following list highlights some important principles that you may find helpful. For more detailed instructions, see Useful Contacts/Resources and Further Reading.

Item	Guidance
Fair selection	The selection process should be designed in such a way as to ensure that the jury is representative of the target population.
Topic	The initial brief to the jury should not unduly limit their deliberations.
Contract with the jurors	The decisions or recommendations of a Citizens' Jury are not legally binding. However, it is important that there should be some form of contract or agreement with the jurors that states that the sponsoring agency should include agreeing to give clear reasons if the recommendations are not implemented.
"Evidence"	All background information given to jurors should be descriptive rather than arguing a case. It should be presented in a clear and concise manner.
Neutrality	The "witnesses" and any observers should not mix informally with the jurors, e.g. over lunch.
Deliberation	Time must be built in to the jury timetable for the jury to discuss issues without anyone else present. Jurors need time to reach their own conclusions.
The jury's findings	The final report of the jury's findings is usually written up by the moderator and confirmed by the jurors. The jury's recommendations must be made clear in the report and in all related publicity.

See also 'Further Reading'

Case Study...

Levenmouth Citizens' Jury...

Background

In March 1997 Fife Council held a citizens' jury to examine: "What can public agencies and local communities do to create employment opportunities in Levenmouth?"

Preparation time was around 10 weeks. Two sets of consultants were appointed: Opinion Leader Research helped to recruit the jury and provided independent moderation and the Institute for Public Policy Research helped to plan the agenda and recruit the witnesses.

2000 letters were sent out to randomly selected residents within the area, inviting them to apply to be on the jury. From the 300 respondents, 16 jury members were selected. In selecting jurors, the census was used to set quotas for sex, age, economic activity, housing tenure, and car ownership.

Target Group

Residents of the Levenmouth Area of Fife.

Format

The jury was held over 4 days during which time the jurors heard evidence from a total of 17 witnesses. A report of the jurors' deliberations and recommendations was drawn up and presented to Central Local Services Committee by one of the jurors.

Outcomes

The jury made 50 recommendations, most of which are being actioned by local staff and monitored by Central Local Services Committee.

Tips

- *Budget fully for the exercise. The Levenmouth Jury was funded 50% from Europe and cost £13,500 (mostly consultant fees).*

Partnership Approaches

Beyond Market Research

Partnership approaches go beyond market research and involve the community, often on a long-term basis, in assessing, prioritising and addressing need. They can be issue-specific or geographically based.

Partnership Examples

A Partnership arrangement is likely to be formed with organisation that are independent but addressing similar issues. For example, the local authority Housing Service may have an on-going partnership arrangement with the Tenants and Residents Organisations (TRO), whereby both parties compile the agenda for meetings. TRO can raise issues of concern flagged up by its membership or may make proposals for improvements in service delivery. The Housing Service can work with TRO to develop or adapt existing policies and practice. This would be in addition to undertaking other consultation exercises.

Another example is the co-opting of community or user representatives to working groups, policy development forums or operational task groups. The public is there on an equal basis with staff to discuss an issue.

Geographical Partnerships

Geographical partnerships involve working with a number of organisations or individuals who live or provide services in a particular area and who have a common objective for the area. Together, needs are identified and ways to address these agreed, creating a partnership which includes all those with an interest or stake in an area or neighbourhood. This creates an opportunity to promote a greater shared understanding of the issues and how they can be addressed. It also allows all partners to take action in their own ways and jointly contribute to the shared objectives of the partnership.

Assistance to participate

It is important that communities are supported to work effectively with the agency. Assistance such as training in understanding how the agency works, technical issues related to particular services, negotiation and communication skills are all important. Pre-meetings with an independent advisor or community worker can assist groups to clarify what they want to say. Some groups who have particular needs may require the use of advocates. Some agencies have specialist staff who undertake this kind of work or work with their colleagues to obtain optimum benefit from involving the public.

Partnership Approaches are recommended for:

- Involving communities in decision-making processes
- Involving communities in identifying priorities, considering how local budgets could be best used or formulating policy
- Promoting a shared understanding of an important issue and reaching consensus on how to proceed
- Improving cross agency working towards shared goals
- Improving community cohesion and commitment to resolving an issue

Advantages

- Gets services and agencies working together towards shared goals
- Sharing of resources can lead to savings
- Uses existing groups
- Can help identify solutions to problems
- Allows issues to be explored in depth
- Those involved are knowledgeable about the issues
- Can help to build up trust

Disadvantages

- Time-consuming
- Requires a lot of patience
- Can become side-tracked away from original goal
- A small number of people or agencies may dominate meetings
- Requires long-term commitment from participants

Checklist for an effective partnership approach…

Item	Guidance
Decide who should be involved	A partnership will be more successful if all stakeholders are involved and committed.
Arrange staff support	If the partnership is to be long term, assign a dedicated member of staff to organise and facilitate the working of the partnership.
Set objectives	Have a clear statement of objectives agreed by all partners.
Set the agenda	Involve the community in identifying and agreeing the issues to be tackled by the partnership.

Case Study...

Buckhaven Partnership...

Background

The Buckhaven Partnership was set up in November 1994 to tackle a range of issues affecting the Buckhaven area, having been identified as one of a number of priority areas in Fife.

Partnership members

Fife Enterprise, Fife Council (officers and councillors), Scottish Homes, Fife Healthcare NHS Trust, local businesses, local community groups, local Housing Associations.

Format

The Partnership identified a number of areas for immediate attention and prepared an Action Programme of tasks to address these. Multi-agency sub-groups were established as necessary to progress issues. Key issues were housing, local economy, environment, priority group needs such as young people, and community spirit.

Outcomes

A range of issues has been identified, prioritised and actioned. Individual partners are better able to work together and have increased understanding of local needs as identified by local people. Examples of outcomes include: new housing developments, high street face-lift scheme and traffic calming measures, upgraded play areas and gap sites, regular community events and newsletter, increased local participation through existing and new community groups.

Tips

- *set clear and achievable targets*
- *involve local people at all stages in developments*

Contact

Heather Murray, Fife Council
(01592 417881).

Some guidance on sampling

What is a sample?

If your target group is large and your method does not allow you to invite them all to participate in the consultation, then instead you must select a smaller number who you will invite to take part. This smaller number of people is a sample. You will need to select a sample to undertake:

- A large scale survey
- Focus Groups
- Select Committees
- Citizens' Juries
- Deliberative Opinion Polls
- Citizens' Panels

It is important that you use sampling methods that have been designed to select the sample fairly, i.e. which give everyone in your target group an equal chance of being selected. If you are using consultants, this may be a part of the exercise that you would ask them to do. If you are selecting the sample yourself, it is best to do some further reading first (see Further Reading section). The checklist below suggests some of the main points to remember.

Item	Guidance
Define your target group	It is helpful to distinguish between two types of groups: those defined by their geographical community and those defined by their "community of interest". The former describes a group that shares a geographical boundary. The latter refers to people who share an interest, or who have something in common.
Draw up a sample frame	A sample frame is a list or record of everyone in your target group. It could be the electoral register for a geographical community, group mailing lists for an interest community, or lists of registered childminders. Calculate how many people are in your sample frame.
Decide on your sample size	The larger the size of the sample you select from your sample frame, the greater confidence you have that your results are representative. Your budget or other resources may, however, limit your sample size.
Decide on your sampling method	Random samples and quota samples are described briefly below. See also Section 9, Further Reading.
Describe in your report the sampling method you used	Describe your methods to allow anyone reading your report to assess how representative the views contained in the method you used report might be. If you were unable to include everyone from the target group in your sample frame, you should say so. If the sample chosen was not representative of the target group, you should say in what ways it differed.

Sampling Methods

Random sample

A random sample gives everyone in the sample frame an equal chance of being included in the sample. If you have a sample frame of 10,000 people, you could select a random sample of 1,000 by selecting every 10th name on the list, or select every 8th name for a sample of 1250. You can also use computer software to randomly generate the required amount of numbers. If your target population was users of a local office and your sample frame was everyone who entered the local office between 3rd and 9th May, then you could achieve a random sample by interviewing every 5th person who came in that week.

Quota sample

A 'quota sample' aims to produce a sample which is representative of the target group by selecting certain characteristics and setting quotas for the number of people you will consult with those characteristics. You need to know the characteristics of your target group in order to set quotas. The Census can be used to do this. For example, using the census information, you might set quotas for single parents (8% of your sample), people living in council houses (45%) and people aged over 60 (30%). Some people will fit into more than one of these groups.

How confident can you be that your results are representative?

With any sample survey, you can never be 100% confident that the answers you get are representative of the answers everyone in the target group. Statisticians have calculated the size of sample needed (in relation to sample frame size) to allow very high levels of confidence in the results. There comes to a point where further increases in sample size only marginally increase the confidence level. For example, it is seldom worth surveying more than 1,001 people if you have chosen them randomly from your sample frame. Textbooks on survey methods provide guidance on choosing sample size (see Further Reading).

It is important not to claim your results are statistically valid unless you have followed proven scientific methods. The best thing is to describe your sampling method in the final report, being open about its limitations.