

## Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose of the toolkit

This toolkit has been developed to help users to plan, design and develop effective consultations.

### 1.2 Why consult?

We have an obligation to consult on certain things that we, as a Council, do. Consultation also helps us to understand the needs and demands of our customers, enabling us to tailor our policies and services meet their needs in the most effective way.

### 1.3 The National Standards for Community Engagement

In 2006, the Council signed up to the National Standards for Community Engagement ([http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/lccs\\_008411.pdf](http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/lccs_008411.pdf)).

The National Standards were designed to aid the development of, and to support, better working relationships between agencies that deliver public services and the communities they serve.

The ten standards, which you should bear in mind as you carry out your consultation, are as follows:

1. **Involvement:** we will identify and involve the people and organisations who have an interest in the focus of the engagement
2. **Support:** we will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement
3. **Planning:** we will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken
4. **Methods:** we will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose
5. **Working together:** We will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently
6. **Sharing information:** we will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants

7. **Working with others:** we will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement

8. **Improvement:** we will develop actively the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants

9. **Feedback:** we will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected

10. **Monitoring and evaluation:** we will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes and meets the national standards for community engagement (Communities Scotland).

#### **1.4 The stages of consultation**

Broadly speaking, a consultation can be divided up into five stages. These are summarised below and are dealt with in more detail in the relevant Sections of this Toolkit.

##### **Stage One: Deciding to carry out a consultation and establishing the context for the consultation exercise.**

This stage is where you think, in broad terms, about what you want to consult on.

Just as importantly, you need to think about why you are consulting, and what you are going to do with the results of the consultation, once you have them. This is 'big picture' stuff where you set your aims and objectives.

##### **Stage Two: Identify the specific questions you want the consultation to answer.**

Once you have decided that you do need to carry out a consultation exercise, you will be able to draw up a list of questions that you want the exercise to answer. These questions need to be considered carefully because the methods that you use to carry out your consultation will depend on the types of questions you are asking.

##### **Stage Three: Decide how you are going to go about finding the answers to the questions you have posed.**

This is where you choose the approaches and techniques you are going to use in your consultation.

- How are you going to get the information that you want?
- What techniques are you going to use?

If you have identified the wrong questions in Stage Two, the techniques you chose will not be appropriate to the consultation you wish to carry out. In turn, you will not get answers that you can use.

Time and attention to details in Stage Three will save you a lot of headaches later on. The trick is to make sure that the methods you choose will be the most effective and appropriate possible.

#### **Stage Four: Collect and analyse your data**

In this stage you will collect and analyse data. You should also take time to check whether your consultation is working as it should. If it is not, you will need to think about ways to address the problems you are encountering.

#### **Stage Five: Report back on the results of the consultation and evaluate the consultation exercise**

This stage of the consultation process focuses on what you do with the results of your consultation. Having come up with some answers, you have to:

- Act on the results
- Feed the results back to the people you have consulted with
- Disseminate the results more widely, to other people who might be interested. **The Policy and Strategy team are particularly keen to know about the results of consultations that have been carried out across the Council.**
- Show the people you consulted with how the information you got from them has influenced policy development or service delivery.

As part of this stage you should also think about how the consultation went, and what lessons – good and bad – you have learned from it.

## **Stage One: Decide to carry out a consultation and establish the context for the consultation exercise**

**This stage is where you think, in broad terms, about what you want to consult on.**

**Just as importantly, you need to think about why you are consulting, and what you are going to do with the results of the consultation once you have them. This is 'big picture' stuff, where you set your aims and objectives.**

**There are various reasons for carrying out consultation exercises. These include: statutory obligations, good practice, and a desire to know what people want or think.**

### **2.1 A checklist of questions that you need to answer in Stage One**

The following is a list of questions that you need to think about during this stage of the consultation process. The rest of this section then looks at these in more detail, to help you come up with appropriate answers.

#### **Establishing the context for your consultation**

- **Question 1:** Has anyone already carried out a consultation on your topic?
- **Question 2:** Are there any other consultations going on that you can link to?
- **Question 3:** What do you already know?
- **Question 4:** Is there any guidance specific to your subject area that you should be aware of?

#### **The purpose of your consultation**

- **Question 4:** Are you doing this exercise to consult with people or to simply provide information?

#### **Who do you need to involve in the consultation process?**

- **Question 5:** Who do you need to consult?
- **Question 6:** Are there any individuals or groups who have an interest in the consultation who need to be informed that it is taking place?

#### **The outcomes of your consultation**

- **Question 7:** What will you do with the results once you have them?

#### **And finally...**

- **Question 8:** What is your timescale for carrying out the consultation?
- **Question 9:** What do you have in the way of resources for carrying out your consultation?

## 2.2 Establishing the context for your consultation

As part of painting your big picture, you need to establish the context within which the consultation will take place.

Things you need to find out include:

- What information already exists
- What statutory / good practice guidance already exists. (In addition to the information contained within this toolkit, you should also make yourself aware of any other guidance that exists specific to your area of activity.)

Knowing what background information is available serves two purposes. First, you will not duplicate effort finding out information that is already 'out there', and, second, the background information will help you focus more effectively on getting the information you are after.

If someone else has recently consulted about the topic you are looking at, with the people you want to consult with, you will not need to carry out your consultation.

If a similar consultation has been carried out either in another area or in the same area but some time ago, you may not be able to use the results of the already existing consultation exercise, but you will still be able to use aspects of it. You should think about whether you can:

- copy the methods that were used
- draw on any lessons that were learned from the previous exercise. Can you improve on anything that was done previously to make your consultation more effective?
- adapt the questions that were included in a previous survey to suit your needs, rather than having to develop a new questionnaire from scratch.

If someone else is also planning a consultation exercise in the area you are interested in, you may find that you can combine the two exercises together.

Linking two consultations can make more effective uses of available resources. Also, combining two exercises will make sure that consultees do not get targeted twice in quick succession. You should try to avoid targeting the same people over and over again as this will lead to **consultation fatigue** and lower response rates.

## 2.3 The purpose of your consultation

There are various reasons why you might be carrying out a consultation. These include:

- Statutory obligations
- Good practice in the field that you work in

- A need or desire to know more about what your customers want or need.

However, if the activity you are planning is going to involve a flow of information in one direction only, from you to the people you are dealing with, then you are not planning a true consultation. A consultation requires information flows in two or more directions.

If you suspect that you are not going to be carrying out a proper consultation, you should think about whether you ought to be. If you ought to be, you will need to change your plans to turn your information-giving exercise into a true consultation exercise.

## **2.4 Who do you need to involve in the consultation process?**

The National Standards for Community Engagement stress the need for you to involve all interested individuals and organisations in the consultation process. As a result, you need to give careful thought as to who these people are, and how you can reach them.

In addition, you should think about other people who might be interested in the process and results of the consultation, but who may not be among the target group of consultees.

These 'other people' might include members of the Council's Communication Team, if you are thinking about using press releases to publicise the consultation, members of the Council's Policy and Strategy Team, or other policy makers.

Finally, if you want additional research support or advice, you might want to contact the Council's research and information staff as early as possible during the consultation planning process.

## **2.5 The outcomes of your consultation**

If you can't react to the consultation, don't do it!

Asking questions about how people would like their services to be improved will only lead to frustration when you cannot deliver on any of their wishes.

You should therefore think about whether you have the resources to act on the findings of your consultation. If you know from the outset that you will not be able to act on them, then you need to think about whether you should be more realistic about the outcomes you have set for the consultation.

## **2.6 And finally...**

As you plan your consultation, you need to think about the resources that you will need. Resources include expertise and time, as well as more obvious things like money and facilities.

The amount of time you or your staff can spare for the consultation will also have a bearing on whether you will be able to deliver results within the timescale you want to use.

Once you are clear about what you are doing and why you are doing it, you are ready to move on to **Stage Two** of the consultation process.

## **Stage Two: Identify the specific questions you want the consultation to answer.**

**Once you have decided that you do need to carry out a consultation exercise, you will be able to draw up a list of questions that you want the consultation to answer.**

**You need to think very carefully about these questions because the methods that you use to carry out your consultation will depend on the types of questions you are asking.**

### **3.1 Identifying the questions you want your consultation to answer**

This stage is not about coming up with questions you want to ask other people. The development of those questions will come later.

Rather, this stage in the consultation process is designed to make you think about the questions you want the consultation to answer. You need to give careful thought to these because the kinds of questions you come up with here will influence how you go about consulting with your target groups.

**Once you are happy that you know what questions you want to answer, you are ready to move on to **Stage Three** of the consultation process.**

## **Stage Three: Decide how you are going to go about finding the answers to the questions you have posed**

**This stage focuses on the nuts and bolts of carrying out a consultation. Having already established what it is you want to know, now it is time for you to decide how you are going to find it out.**

**This is where you choose the methods and techniques you are going to use in your consultation.**

- **How are you going to get the information that you want?**
- **What methods are you going to use?**

**If you have identified the wrong questions in **Stage Two**, the methods you chose now will not be appropriate to the consultation you wish to carry out. In turn, you will not get answers that you can easily use.**

**Time and attention to details in Stage Three will save you a lot of headaches later on. The trick is to make sure that the methods you choose will be the most effective and appropriate possible.**

### **4.1 A checklist of questions that you need to answer in Stage Three**

The following is a list of questions that you need to address as part of this stage of the consultation process. The rest of this section provides you with information that will help you come up with answers and directs you towards sources of information and support.

#### **Choosing your techniques**

- **Question one:** What kind of approach are you going to use to carry out your consultation?
- **Question two:** How are you going to get the information you want from your consultees?

#### **Reaching your target groups**

- **Question three:** Who do you need to consult?
- **Question four:** How are you going to reach the people you need to ask?
- **Question five:** Is your sampling strategy appropriate to the approach that you have chosen?
- **Question six:** Have you missed any groups out?

#### **Planning the next steps**

- **Question seven:** How are you going to process the answers you are given?
- **Question eight:** What are you going to do with the results you are given?

#### **A question about resources**

- **Question nine:** Can you do everything you want to do with the resources you have available?

## 4.2 Choosing your techniques

In the earlier stages of the consultation process, you will have identified the overall questions you want to answer.

In turn, the kinds of questions you want answers to will influence how you will go about getting the information you need and the type of approach that will be the most appropriate for you to use during your consultation.

Broadly speaking, approaches can be divided into two categories: **quantitative** and **qualitative**.

Depending on the types of questions you want your consultation to answer, you will use quantitative or qualitative approaches and techniques, or, quite probably, a mixture of both.

### 4.2.2 Quantitative techniques

Quantitative techniques are good for questions that have very clear, specific answers, such as:

- How many?
- What?
- Where?
- Which?
- When?

Outputs are often in the form of numbers or percentages, charts or tables.

Example of techniques that use quantitative methods: questionnaires

As a general rule, quantitative techniques will use very structured questioning strategies. In turn, the most structured questioning strategies use mostly 'closed' questions. Closed questions allow data to be coded and processed more quickly and systematically than is the case with less structured questioning techniques.

### 4.2.3 Qualitative methods

Qualitative techniques are better for exploring people's motivations and for finding out why people do or think certain things. The kinds of questions that qualitative methods answer are:

- Why?
- How?

Outputs are often in the form of text.

Examples: in-depth interviews, focus groups.

Qualitative techniques generally use less structured – ‘open’ – questioning strategies than quantitative techniques. Open questions are good for yielding lots of detailed information. However, the data generated is harder to code and analyse.

### 4.3 Reaching your target groups

This is a more specific question than the one posed in **stage one**. Rather than asking which groups are you going to ask, this is about which members of these groups are you going to contact.

The most appropriate way to select the people you want to consult will depend on the types of questions you came up with in **stage two** of the consultation process and the methods you have decided to use.

As a general rule, quantitative research methods will target larger numbers of people than will qualitative techniques. How you choose the sample of people you want to reach in your consultation will depend on a number of factors.

You should think about the following:

- Do you need the findings of your consultation to be representative of the whole population?
- Do you need your findings to be representative of certain groups within the population (e.g. minority groups; elderly; youth; special interest groups)?
- How accurate do you need your results to be?

In practice, consultation activity – particularly where qualitative techniques are involved – is likely to draw on people who volunteer to take part in the process, either by responding to invitations (e.g. the Citizens’ Panel) or by going along to public events.

You should make sure that the techniques you are using in your consultation are as inclusive as possible, and that members of hard to reach groups will be able to take part if they wish. Thus, for example, if you are holding public events, make sure they are held in accessible venues and are held at times of the day and evening that allow the maximum number of people to visit.

### 4.4 Planning the next steps

At the same time that you plan how you are going to generate the data you want, you should also be planning how you are going to process them. You can save a lot of time by planning ahead of time how you are going to manage the data you create.

You should think about how you are going to record and collate your information. Think also about how you are going to enter data into spreadsheets or other software. The more consistent you are with your data coding, the easier you will find the analysis process to be.

You should also give some thought to the kinds of output and feedback you will generate later on.

#### **4.5 A question about resources**

As a final check in the development of your consultation design, you should ask yourself whether you have the capacity to carry out the consultation as planned.

If the answer is no, you will need to ask whether:

- you can modify the design so that you can carry out the consultation
- you can pull in the extra resources so that you can carry out the consultation as planned
- you can have the consultation carried out by an external company.

**If you have answered all the questions in the checklist to your satisfaction, then you are ready to move on to **Stage Four** of the consultation process.**

The remainder of this section focuses on a couple of extra ideas for gathering information and suggestions for where you can go for additional information and support.

#### **4.6 Extra ideas for gathering information**

If you want to get information from people, the obvious way to get it is to ask for it. But how are you going to encourage people to answer your questions?

You can ask people via a questionnaire, or face-to-face in an interview situation. However, you might think about using other techniques. A couple of examples are given below. These can be used on their own, or as part of wider consultation activities.

##### **A wall mural to help with project development**

This mural, used at an event to launch the Campbeltown Area Renewal Scheme in September 2006, was based on an idea from the Lighthouse (Glasgow).

The mural provided people attending the event with a series of prompts, to make them think about a new project, which was still in the process of development.

People were invited to write their thoughts onto post-it notes, then stick the notes above the relevant part of the mural.

The prompts on the mural were:

- Aspirations
- Barriers
- Other problems

- Concerns
- Solutions

The advantage of this kind of engagement activity is that it encourages the less vocal members of the community to contribute their views in a 'safe' environment.

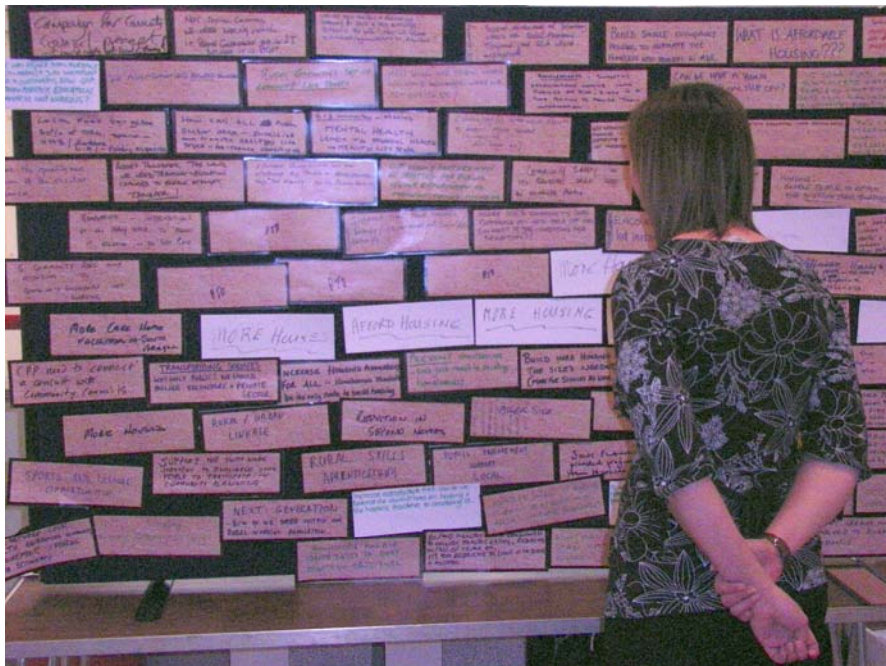
After the event, the post-it notes can be gathered up, sorted, and the comments made can be analysed.



(If you would like to use the images for your own consultation, get in touch with Research and Information, on 01546 604260.)

### Brickwork

A similar kind of information gathering activity was used at the Community Planning Conference, in June 2007. Attendees at the conference were invited to write down their aspirations for Argyll and Bute on 'bricks'. These bricks were then put together to form a wall of comments.



**If you have used any other techniques successfully, the research and information team would be delighted to hear from you.**

#### **4.5 Where to go for more information**

The Research and Information Unit has produced a series of guidance notes to give more information about the following:

- Types of data and data sources
- Quantitative and qualitative research
- Surveys and questionnaires
- How to ask questions
- Interviewing

If these guidance notes do not provide you with the information you are looking for, and you would like to discuss research options, you may get in touch with the Council's research staff on 01546 604260. We will be happy to talk with you.

## **Stage Four: Collect and analyse data.**

**In this stage you will collect and analyse data.**

**You should also take time to check whether your consultation is working as it should. If it is not, you will need to think about ways to address the problems you are encountering.**

### **5.1 Is your consultation working as it should?**

If you have prepared carefully, this should be the most straightforward part of the consultation process. However, you cannot assume that, just because you are now putting all your carefully constructed plans into practice, everything will go smoothly.

As you collect and analyse your data, you should monitor the progress of the consultation carefully. Specifically, you should think about whether:

- you are reaching all the groups you have planned to reach
- you are achieving the response rates you need
- the questions you are asking are being understood in the way you intended, and whether they are generating the information that you need
- the data you are generating are meaningful.

If everything is going well, congratulations!

If there are problems, the sooner you notice them, the sooner you can put things right. Do not leave checking on the process of the consultation until it is too late to do anything to retrieve the situation.

In the unlikely event that you cannot retrieve the consultation, you should make a note of what went wrong. Other people will be better able to avoid similar difficulties in the future if you pass on the lessons you have learned.

**When you have completed the data collection and analysis stage of your consultation, you are ready to go on to **Stage Five** of the consultation process.**

## **Stage Five: Report back on the results of the consultation and evaluate the consultation exercise**

**This stage of the consultation process focuses on what you do with the results of your consultation. Having come up with some answers, you have to:**

- **Act on the results**
- **Feed the results back to the people you have consulted with**
- **Disseminate the results more widely, to other people who might be interested.**
- **Show the people you consulted with how the information you got from them has influenced policy development or service delivery.**

**As part of this stage you should also think about how the consultation went, and what lessons – good and bad – you have learned from it.**

### **6.1 What should you do with the results of your consultation?**

You have gathered the data you wanted, you have completed your analysis, and you have come up with a set of results. Now you need to feed your findings into your policy development or service improvement process, so that your results can be acted on.

You also need to report back to the consultees, explaining how their input has been – or will be – used to influence policy development or the way services are delivered. You need to show what differences their input has made.

Ways you might provide feedback include:

- News releases
- Posters and notices
- Information on the Council's website
- Letters to participants
- Reports to other people within the Council
- Reports to people or organisations outside the Council

Finally, the Policy and Strategy unit would like to be kept informed about any key issues and findings highlighted by your consultation. Keeping Policy and Strategy officers informed will enable more strategic thinking across the Council.

### **6.2 How well did your consultation work?**

Just because you have disseminated the results of your consultation, this does not mean that the consultation process is over. Even if you do not have to write a formal evaluation of the consultation, you should still think about how well the consultation process itself worked.

- What lessons have you learned from the process?
- What would you do differently if you had your time over again?
- What advice would you give someone about to start their own consultation exercise?

## Other guidance

You should be aware that, in addition to this toolkit, there might be consultation guidance available that applies more specifically to your area of interest. For example:

For housing: Scottish Executive and Communities Scotland (Jan 2006) **How to gather views on service quality: guidance for social landlords**, Communities Scotland

For transport: Scottish Executive (Sept 2003) **Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG)**. Available at: <http://www.scot-tag.org.uk/stag/pdf.htm> (Accessed 10 April 2006). (See esp Chapter 13.)

For reaching Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered groups: Stonewall Scotland and NHS Scotland (nd) **Getting It Right: LGBT Research Guidelines**

For town planning: Scottish Executive (March 2007) **PAN 81: Community Engagement: Planning with People, Scottish Executive**. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/09095010/14>

(If you know of any others, please tell us, so that we can include them in this list.)

You also need to be aware of the **National Standards for Community Engagement**, to which the Council has signed up. You must take these into account when carrying out any consultation:

Communities Scotland (2006) **National Standards For Community Engagement**. Available at: [http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/cs\\_010771.hcsp](http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/cs_010771.hcsp) (Accessed 6 June 2006).

## Feedback

We hope that you have found the information contained within this toolkit useful.

If you have any comments or suggestions for improvements or additional material that you would like to see included, either within the toolkit itself, or in a separate guidance note, please contact:

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