3.3 Exercises for gathering information

a. Clustering

Purpose: When you’re working with a group, individuals can get lost in the general discussion for a number of reasons including:
- They’re not comfortable speaking out in a group
- They don’t think their opinions will bring anything useful to the discussion
- They are intimidated by another group member who has strong opinions
- There are just too many people

It is useful, therefore to get people working individually as well as in a group setting.

Resources: Pens, post-its, flipchart paper

Allocated Time: 20 minutes

Method: Decide what it is you want to know and pose the question(s).
Give group members a number of post-its and ask them to write down what they think e.g. what the issues are, what solutions they would suggest, etc. Then, ask them, in groups, to place their post-its on the flipchart paper you have provided (if you are asking for contributions on one or two questions or topics, make sure you have a separate sheet of flipchart paper for each one). Next, ask them to cluster the post-its that have similar views/suggestions etc., and give them a heading. This helps to narrow them down into common themes which can be explored further.

b. H Diagram

Purpose: To enable people to explore an identified issue, and develop actions to be taken to address it.

Resources: Flipchart paper, pens, post-its

Allocated time: 30 minutes

Method: Draw a large “H” on a sheet of flipchart paper with a happy face at one side and a sad face at the other. Then write the question you want them to answer at the top of the “H” e.g.

What do you think of facilities for young people in the area?
Ask participants to put a cross on the middle line of the “H” which represents what they think of facilities for young people in the area. Then ask them to put their reasons why on post-it notes under the appropriate face.

Next, as a group, discuss what actions could be taken to move the points under the unhappy face to the happy one - this then starts the group on a planning process which you can start to flesh out by setting targets, people, resources etc., to complete the actions.

(This exercise can also be used for evaluation, see Section 4.4)

c. Mapping the Area

Purpose: To encourage people to identify issues around a geographical area

Resources: Large map of the area e.g. A1 size street map - this can be simply used as is, or decorated (good way to involve a school or youth club). If using Google image extracts or ordnance survey maps, it is important to be aware of copyright issues or source copyright free images.

Method: If there are specific areas you wish people to consider, you might want to circle them on the map and draw them out more on the surrounding display e.g.
If you don’t want to lead the discussion, then don’t pull specific areas out, because that’s what people will focus on.

You can leave the whole thing up to people to come up with all the ideas themselves and write them up around the map or you can prompt the feedback with questions e.g.

- What do you like about this area?
- What improvements would you like to see

You can also prepare small cards for them to stick on e.g.

The outcomes of this exercise can then be fed back to people and discussed and action planned further to set targets.

d. “Argyllopoly”

This can be a fun way of laying out consultations where you can base the design and layout on any popular board game that people identify with. It’s eye catching and light-hearted - materials will vary according to your board design but the resources and instructions listed here are based on the popular property board game. In this example the exercise is simply designed to gather people’s views on service priorities.

**Resources:** Large lightweight board (e.g. polystyrene) to mount the game on, printed board game sheet, paper money, tokens or such like, guidance notes. It’s also a good idea to have a sticky wall or flipchart nearby where people can then leave any additional comments they have.

**Allocated time:** It can be set up for the duration of an event with people interacting with it as they please.

**Method:**

1. Sing a basic desktop package you can design your board game and then print out as a banner - this means the board will print out across a number of different pieces of paper which can be joined together. The benefit of this is that you’re not restricted to an A3 size board, if that’s the biggest your printer will take. Alternatively, you can hand draw it and colour it yourself.
2. In the example pictured, the properties have been replaced with services that are important to the people being consulted with - in this example local Argyll landmarks are also included as fillers e.g. Inveraray jail.

3. Give people a set amount of tokens which relate to the number of priorities you want them to identify e.g. In this example participants were given 10 “Argyll pounds” to place on ten priorities around the board.

4. It can be useful to put a glossary of terms down the side to help people identify what the various services are.

5. It is important to regularly collate the feedback and remove the tokens as you do this, to prevent the board becoming too clogged. A small version of the board printed on A4 or A3 can be used to record numbers against each priority.

---

e. Suggestion Tree

**Purpose:** This is a good visual way to get people to put their ideas forward at an event.

**Resources:** In advance, prepare a large, coloured tree without leaves (not quite life-sized but pretty big) and a pile of green leaves, big enough for people to write their ideas on. You will also need pens and pins or blue tack to stick the leaves on to the tree.

**Allocated Time:** 10 - 15 mins

**Method:** On the day, attach the tree to the wall. Explain the issue to participants and ask them to write their thoughts on a leaf and attach it to the tree to bring it to life. If they attach the leaves initially with blue tack, you then have the option of clustering them on branches with similar suggestions and ideas. Although using a sheet of flipchart paper and post-its can do the same exercise, this is a much more attractive exercise when included in a feedback display. If gathering views from different communities, a display incorporating several trees looks quite impressive.
A fabric version of the Suggestion Tree (pictured) is available for free loan. Although this has been designed for use in the community engagement tent, it would work well in any location.

**f. Transect**

**Purpose:** Even if we think we know a community, we should never assume we know everything. This exercise involves the local community in mapping out their area and enables the worker to get a sense of the area from the perspective of someone who lives in that specific locality.

**Resources:** Pen, paper to record issues - optional: camera, video, Dictaphone.

**Allocated time:** Allow enough time to stroll around the area, then add on an allocation to allow for stopping at several points and discussing specific points further.

**Method:** enlist the assistance of local community member(s) to walk and talk you round the area. As they point out places and buildings and talk about how they are used, you can record this in a variety of ways including:

- With pen on a map of the area
- Sing a video recorder
- Recording what they say with a Dictaphone
- Taking pictures with a digital camera as well as recording what’s said

What often also comes out in this kind of exercise is a history of the area as well - if the community member has lived there a while, they will often tell you how spaces and buildings used to be used and you can record this as additional useful information to look at the changes that have taken place.

This can be undertaken generally or with a specific focus e.g. places and facilities young people use.

**g. Windows of Opportunity**

**Purpose:** Use of a ‘window’ can be a useful visual technique to gather views on how people see their community at present or would like to see it in the future.

**Resources:** Large sheets of paper, e.g. flipchart paper or white sheets on which to draw windows, pens or fabric pens, post-it notes/fabric/paper, pins, if using fabric.

**Method:** Draw windows on paper/fabric/sticky wall. A window of the present, a window of the future, and a window of opportunity.
Ask people to put (on post-it notes or fabric) their ideas, written or as a drawing, of:

(i) how they see their community at present; and  
(ii) how they would like to see their community in future.

Stick or pin the post-its/fabric onto the windows. Ask the group to consider the ‘Window of the Future’ and which ideas can realistically be achieved. Ask the group to list what might be done to improve the community and, in pairs or small groups, to draw the new vision.

For children/young people, or indeed for any group, you can have different shaped windows for different topics, e.g.

- **Round Window**
  - Leisure Opportunities

- **Square Window**
  - Employment Opportunities

- **Hexagon Window**
  - Environment Opportunities
h. Wishing Well

A wishing well is a handy resource to use at events to gather ideas/wishes (especially if exchanged for goodies, such as fruit or sweets). It is a quick way of gathering information from participants which can then inform future planning.

If you want to find out what people’s wishes, aspirations, hopes are for themselves or their community, ask them to complete a short form and put it in the wishing well.

The form can be adapted to suit the event, but might include basic details on age, location, gender and optional contact details.

Young people in particular are attracted to the Wishing Well and fruit can be used to promote a healthy lifestyle.

i. Draw Your Community

This exercise is best carried out with a small group, to people, who all live in the same geographical area. It is a good tool for identifying community issues especially within a rural community. The tool enables differing age groups or social groupings within a community to understand each other’s issues and perspectives on life within the community.

If working with a larger group of participants these could be divided up into an appropriate number of groups, each group working with a different medium.

Resources:

For all groups
- Large sheet of paper to cover table
- Drawing pins (to secure paper onto the table)

Group 1
- Variety of coloured paints
- Paint brushes
- Pots (for water)
- Mixing pots
- Note pad and pencil

Group 2
- Variety of coloured pencils
- Note pad and pencil

Group 3
- Variety of empty boxes and scrap paper
- Glue
- Note pad and pencil

Group
- Variety of coloured Playdough
- Coloured Pencils
- Note pad and pencil
Method:

1. Each group is asked to use the medium provided to construct a group model of their community. Each participant is responsible for demonstrating aspects of the physical community that they interact with e.g. bus stop, community centre, shop etc.

2. Round table discussion takes place about physical aspects of the community e.g. graffiti on a bus shelter, lighting on a path

3. Interactions are recorded on the model e.g. paths to school used by both young people and elderly residents

4. One person in the group is nominated to take notes on any interactions between members of the community e.g. elderly resident frightened of young people outside community centre - young person attending youth club in community centre

5. Issues arising from the interactions are recorded on notepad provided

6. Issues are fed back to the larger group

7. Daddy or hips (page 42) can then be use to shortlist the issues

j. Photography

Purpose: Photography is another useful visual tool to help engage with people, in particular children and young people, elderly and disabled groups, or people with learning difficulties. This can be used to get a group’s views of their community or discussion on how to improve their community.

Resources: Disposable cameras (1 per person or per 2/3 people), Display boards.

Allocated time: Photos should ideally be taken over a one/two week period.

The discussion exercise when the photos are printed and displayed should take 1-2 hours.

Method: Give each member of the group (or one between 2) a disposable camera and ask all to take 10 photos of things they like about their community, and 10 photos of things they most dislike in their community. Alternatively, if counting is a problem, you can ask half the group to take photos of ‘likes’ and the other half of ‘dislikes’.

When cameras are returned and photos printed, you can use these to compare and contrast, and to generate discussion.

- Are the ‘likes’ of anyone the ‘dislikes’ of others? (and vice versa). For example, someone may dislike a ruined building as it looks untidy, but someone else may like the building as it brings back memories of the past.
3.4 Exercises for action planning/prioritising

a. Daddy or Chips? (Pair Wise Ranking)

**Purpose:** This exercise enables the group to prioritise issues without everyone stressing the one issue that’s close to their heart by forcing them to make a series of decisions.

**Resources:** Flipchart paper, pens

**Allocated time:** 20 minutes

**Method:** On a flipchart or PowerPoint, list the issues that have been identified, assigning each of them a letter - make sure you don’t have more than five or six issues if possible because the more you have, the longer it will take.

On the reverse side of the flipchart, so that the group can’t see, draw a grid that maps each of the priorities against the others.

- How many people photographed the same things - likes and dislikes?
- Why do you like all these things? Attractive; things to do; traditional; generates a sense of community/wellbeing; happy people; ....
- Why do you dislike all these things? Tidy; dangerous; bad image of the community; a modern eyesore;.....
- Is there any way these can be improved?

Photos and this kind of exercise can also be used to lobby for change or to evidence need for a funding application.