

A CONSULTATION TOOLKIT FOR THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE PARTNERSHIP

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Introduction

The purpose of this Toolkit is to provide the Northamptonshire Partnership with a reference manual for doing public consultation using surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, public meetings and other methods

The Toolkit is designed for staff in public services and the voluntary and community sectors who are asked to undertake (and comment on) consultations with service users, community groups, and the general public. Some of these consultations will be statutory requirements of the organisation or service provider.

Many public service organisations, and government departments, have produced consultation tool kits in recent years. We have drawn on them and provide links to these sources where necessary.

The Toolkit is a STEP BY STEP guide to consultation, taking the reader from Stage 1 Planning Consultation, through to Choosing a Method, and finally to Stage 10 Feedback and Evaluation.

The guide should be used in conjunction with the web links in the text to further information or examples.

The Benefits of Consultation

Effective consultation is essential for delivering quality services and making sound decisions. Feedback from the users of services and from those affected by public policy decisions improves services and the accountability of service providers and policy makers.

Consultation enables service organisations to access local knowledge and experience; understand behaviour; and measure opinions. It also gives the public an opportunity to get involved and express their views on services and on the decision makers.

There are different levels of consultation ranging from informing people and getting feedback, to involving people in the way decisions are made. The public, and users of services are sometimes sceptical of the value of consultation unless they believe it will make a difference. They may expect full participation and partnership in planning and delivering policy and services.

Key words

Consultation: Finding out in a systematic manner what the public needs, thinks, or how they behave

Participation and Engagement: Involving the public in planning and deciding how services are delivered

Partnership: An agreement between representatives of service users and service deliverers about the joint delivery of services, or shared decision- making over delivery, organisation or policy.

STEP 1 Planning Consultation– Aims and Objectives

Doing effective consultation requires a plan of action that sets out the aims and objectives, the costs and benefits and expected outcomes, and the steps to be followed. The first and most important step of all is to define the purpose of the consultation. What is it for? Is it necessary and why?

Many people complain about “consultation fatigue” – apparently endless surveys but in their view nothing seems to change. Therefore, it is important to consider whether there is a real need for a new consultation exercise. In some cases, the information service providers or users want is already available from community audits or service profiles or opinion surveys, either in published reports from local authorities, health and police authorities, or held by local organisations in unpublished form.

Doing a search on the internet, and talking directly to local sources is the starting point. Sometimes, just contacting local organisations can provide all you need, or adding some questions onto someone else’s survey. This will at least reduce duplication of effort and consultation fatigue.

Having decided there is a need for a consultation exercise, the key questions for the Consultation Plan are:

- How will this information help to improve services or help managers make a better decision, or give local people the evidence to argue for the quality of services they need?
- What is the outcome you are looking for, for example, improved services for a particular group in the population; or to test preferences for different policy proposals; or to measure public opinion about traffic, crime, litter, quality of local shops, quality of youth services.
- Or, if the main purpose is to raise awareness or increase participation in a project by users, or residents, then the consultation exercise might be more open ended, for example, organising a roundtable of users, or doing interviews with a small number of people as a way of getting a discussion going about the service.

It follows that being clear about the purpose of doing consultation directly affects the method of consultation and all the other steps below

STEP 2 Creating the Consultation Team

Consultation requires a range of skills and resources; consultation is a team project. A key part of planning a consultation is identifying your team and the resources you have available.

Some forms of consultation are expensive and labour intensive, such as long questionnaire surveys with many one-to one interviews. The range of skills will depend upon the purpose of the exercise, its scale, and the methods used

What skills are needed?

- Local knowledge/service users knowledge
- Organisational skills
- Survey and questionnaire design skills
- Survey and data analysis
- People skills in listening, dialogue, and convening meetings
- Communication and presentation skills to encourage participation

Some of these skills will be found in the organisation doing the consultation. Others exist in the community, in networks, local authorities, and schools and colleges, or can be bought in from consultation experts.

Very often conducting a consultation exercise will need a partnership between the local organisations, service organisations, agencies and local authorities.

In addition, some degree of *training* of the survey designers, the interviewers, or the data analysts may be needed.

If the aim of the consultation is to engage with the community and increase public awareness, local people, local groups or service users must be part of the consultation planning and delivery team. This will improve the response of the public to the consultation, make the information collected more relevant, and keep the project rooted in the real world.

Follow links to organisations in Northamptonshire that can help, mentor, or train or can do the job for you under your direction

STEP 3 How to ensure consultation is inclusive

Before undertaking any consultation, your target audience should be identified. Deciding on whose views you really want, will depend on the objectives and purpose of your consultation. The target audience for getting a cross section of opinion, for example, might include a wide cross-section of residents; while the audience for opening up dialogue about an issue might consist just of people attending a local centre.

Consultations need to be as inclusive as possible in order to gain the widest range of views. For example, if you are studying a service, you must think about people beyond immediate service-users, such as non-customers, the people who deliver the service, and elected members and partner organisations.

The key to effective and valid consultations is the sampling of the target population. The sample you survey must be representative of the wider community you are focusing on - otherwise your consultation will be worthless. There are numerous ways to construct your sample. For example, a consultation about changes to a local school might want to consult residents in the local area. Random sampling might randomly pick from a list of addresses in one area, systematic sampling would pick every fifth house, or stratified sampling might pick every house with children under aged 18 and so on.

Regardless of the methods of assembling your sample, the sample of people who are consulted should be as representative of the community or population in question as possible. You should be aware that people will identify with different communities according to the issues under discussion in the consultation and the way in which it is conducted. For example, in one consultation someone might identify themselves as being a 'health professional' in one situation, and then may identify themselves as a 'lone parent' in other circumstances.

Hard to Reach communities

Community engagement and consultation should represent the diversity of the community with which you wish to work and engage.

It is widely accepted that there are various communities, and groupings within communities that experience disproportional levels of social exclusion, social invisibility and disempowerment. Their voices are often not heard in surveys of opinion.

These groups might include:

- Asylum seekers and Refugees
- Children and young people
- Black and ethnic minority communities
- Gypsy/ Traveller and Roma people
- Homeless people
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people
- Offenders and ex-offenders
- Older people
- People living in rural areas

- People who suffer from drug abuse
- People with disabilities
- People with learning difficulties
- People with mental health problems
- Migrant workers
- Tourists
- Victims of domestic abuse

Further research has identified several characteristics of hard-to-reach groups, which might include:

- small population size and/or relatively widely dispersed
- high mobility groups
- diffuse or poorly organised internal organisation
- socio-economic deprivation
- social invisibility
- cultural or ideological barriers
- distinctive service needs

There are also other barriers to involvement which you should consider, such as physical inaccessibility (perhaps a disability or distance to travel), language, as well as social and cultural traditions, expectations and perceptions, (such as the views of young people not taken seriously).

It is crucial that when you are planning your consultation that you are as inclusive as possible, otherwise the voices of certain sections of the community will remain unheard.

It is also important to remember that there is a duty on service providers to gather the views of minority groups to ensure not only that they are not discriminating, but that they are also actively promoting race, disability and gender equality. For example, the 2006 Disability Act and the 2006 Equality Act stress the use of the term 'involvement' rather than simply 'consultation'.

STEP 4 Overcoming Barriers to Involvement

As stressed in Step 3, to get the most of your consultation, you need to enable the full, effective involvement of all of your target population. To facilitate this, you can take some measures to remove obstacles to their engagement; some of these can be very simple and inexpensive.

Some practical considerations to engage everyone

Timing

Allow sufficient time for respondents to reply to questionnaires, allowing for translation and those who find written responses a difficulty

Schedule meetings at times convenient to participants, considering working hours, weather conditions, childcare and religious holidays, and sporting events.

Venue and Provisions

You need to think carefully about the venue for the consultation or meeting. If possible, venues should be located near and be familiar to consultation participants.

You should ensure meeting venues are free from steps, that doorways and entrances are wide enough for wheelchairs, and that there is sufficient car-parking and it is accessible by public transport.

You may want to provide refreshments for participants, such as a hot drink or even some food (meeting dietary requirements) if the meeting is held over a meal time.

Information and Communication

Consider whether consultation materials need to be translated or provided in large print or Braille.

Consider whether there needs to be an interpreter present at meetings, and whether you need to provide hearing loops and microphones.

Organisations

You need to tailor your consultation in a way which will allow hard-to-reach groups to fully participate in the process. Below are some ways you can enable this.

In the course of preparing your consultation, you may have come across voluntary and community organisations and specialist agencies who have already worked with the hard-to-reach communities you wish to access. Approach these organisations for advice on ways in which hard-to-reach groups can be engaged in the consultation exercise. .

Look at previous consultation reports on similar target populations, for guidance on effective access and engagement with groups. Contact organisations in your area that specifically work with the groups you are trying to reach, for example, refugee advice centres or young peoples' support networks. Also consider other less formal ways of accessing and publicising your consultation exercise, such as

visiting/talking to social clubs used by members of the particular group you want to contact.

Finally, don't forget to use resources within your organisations. Speak to the Equality and Diversity Officer within your organisation, or utilise those of your working partners, for advice and contacts about engaging with specific communities and groups.

Sub-contracting

You may want to consider whether it would be more effective to employ an outside agency to assist you with contacting and meaningfully engaging hard-to-reach groups. They might have particular expertise in working with certain groups or knowledge of particular localities. Sub-contracting your consultation in this way can prove costly, but it can be beneficial in increasing the objectivity and credibility of your consultation.

Volunteers

You may wish to use volunteers to help you access hard-to-reach communities. They may have specific knowledge about the groups you wish to consult as well as personal contacts, and therefore they may be more effective in contacting and encouraging them to participate in consultation exercises. Volunteers will require CRB/Police checks if consulting vulnerable groups or young people.

STEP 5 Methods

Once you have decided who it is you need to consult, you need to choose the methods of consultation. How will you consult your sample?

You should consider what information you want from your respondents, as this will have some bearing on which method is most effective. You should think about whether you want a quick response, an in-depth one, or perhaps representative of a large section of the population. Consultation can be split into two general groups:

- those which want to **measure**, and your results will most likely be figures and percentages (Quantitative)
- those which want to **explain**, where your results will most likely be words and images (Qualitative)

Overview of some common methods

Method	Considerations	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Citizens Juries Small sample of population (usually paid) who debate an issue in a quasi-judicial setting with witnesses. Aim to obtain informed and considered opinion or verdict on a specific, often controversial issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires skilled moderator • Commissioning body must follow recommendations or explain why • Need to be clear about how to use results • Consensus not required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Develop deep understanding of issue ✓ Can be used to address very complex and controversial issues ✓ Participants can be made fully aware but can still come to a decision from a 'lay' perspective ✓ Public identify with representative citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive • May not be representative • Difficult to include all interest groups • Can be time-consuming and resource intensive • Not suitable for all issues • Extensive preparatory work
<p>Citizens Panels Comprise between 500 and 2,000 citizens who are Demographically representative of the population. Used as a sounding board to test, assess and develop proposals over an extended period of time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel members need to be clear of their roles • Can be conducted in partnership with other organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Demographically representative ✓ Readily available pool of willing respondents ✓ Can yield a good response rate ✓ Relatively cheap once the panel has been set up ✓ Can be targeted ✓ Track views over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot be used for complex issues • Can be expensive and time-consuming to set up • Risk of over-consulting • May not be representative as panel self-selecting and want to be consulted experts and conditioned to providing the right answers • Panel membership needs to be refreshed regularly

<p>Community Audits</p> <p>Framework for detailed overview of small area. Involves a range of stakeholders to determine actions following research on complex issues</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provides very detailed analysis of issues thus ensuring decisions are evidence-based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive and time consuming
<p>Exhibitions and Roadshows</p> <p>Used to provide information and to obtain views on specific projects or services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable venues • Publicise the event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Effective in publicising services / organisations ✓ Give public flexibility to attend ✓ Allow contact with public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups reached dependant on location / timing of roadshow, exhibition etc • Likely to obtain views of a small number of people who are not representative • Feedback may be Limited
<p>Focus Groups</p> <p>Facilitated group discussion to explore issues in depth and seek views of particular interest groups. Can be used to generate ideas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires skilled facilitators • Selection of group of prime importance • May need several groups to gain different perspectives • Generally 8-10 people per group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Allow brainstorming of ideas ✓ Can be designed to involve hard to reach groups ✓ Can explore complex issues ✓ Provides in depth information ✓ Useful for building on survey findings ✓ Allow interaction and spontaneity between participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be costly and time-consuming • Requires specialist expertise to facilitate discussion • Lack of confidentiality • Can only achieve limited representation • Discussions can be difficult to transcribe and analyse
<p>Forums</p> <p>Structured and regular meetings with interest groups. Used to provide information, seek views and develop / endorse local plans and strategies for the community or whole town.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need effective management • Hold at times / locations to suit target communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Regular process of engagement ✓ Useful link between partner agencies and local people ✓ Can be used to seek local committed involvement ✓ Relatively cheap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendees are unlikely to represent all views • Can be dominated by the most vocal • Agenda can be taken Over

<p>Futures / Visioning</p> <p>Considering future scenarios and ways to influence outcomes in uncertain situations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent and skilled facilitator • No pre-set proposals • Seeks consensus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Create a real sense of involvement by using local knowledge and understanding ✓ Can build consensus ✓ Promote community ownership of the results ✓ Allows many viewpoints and exchange of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-consuming • Resource intensive- Can raise unrealistic expectations • Costly-Difficulty in reaching consensus • Can be captured by large interest groups
<p>Planning for Real</p> <p>Structured consultation method that uses a 3D plan of the neighbourhood to ascertain what physical change people want for their local area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding a suitable venue is very important 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Can be available as a tailored package, so easy to set up ✓ Is entertaining and involves those who wouldn't normally participate ✓ Makes it easy to obtain honest and wide-ranging opinions ✓ Can deal with complex issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to ensure representation • Can be a costly exercise • Size of the model limits how many people can be involved • Numerous models may be required
<p>Public Meetings</p> <p>Formal meetings with scheduled agendas. Used to provide information, seek views and develop / endorse local plans and strategies for the community or whole town.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold at times / locations to suit target Communities • Publicity for event • Clearly defined objective • Defined meeting structure • Staffing and facilitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Opportunity to provide information and receive feedback ✓ Builds relationships with local community ✓ Can be used to seek local committed involvement ✓ Relatively cheap ✓ Allows public to let off steam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendees are unlikely to represent all views • Large group may be a Barrier • Can be dominated by the most vocal • Turnout can be poor • Can be difficult to separate individual and general complaints

<p>Surveys - face-to-face: One-to-one interviews with stakeholders. Can be used to gather views and opinions and to measure attitudes, satisfaction and performance. Interviews may be structured, semi-structured or un-structured.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs statistical and research expertise to administer and avoid Bias • How to access hard to reach groups • How to provide feedback to respondents • May need external resources and trained Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Can ensure a good response rate ✓ Easier to engage with hard to reach groups ✓ Can be used to obtain responses from demographically representative sample ✓ Allows issues to be explored in depth ✓ Allows flexible structure of interview ✓ May be used to explore sensitive issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewer cannot respond to any Questions • Not necessarily representative • Can be costly and time Consuming • Personal safety of fieldworkers may be at Risk • Specific skills are required to conduct the Interview • Can be difficult to Analyse
<p>Surveys - self completion Research exercise used to gather quantifiable information on uncomplicated issues. Can be used to gather views and opinions and to measure attitudes, satisfaction and performance. Postal surveys are traditionally used but online surveys are increasingly being used.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need statistical and research expertise to administer and avoid Bias • Most suitable for attitudinal surveys • How to access hard to reach groups • How to provide feedback to respondents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Effective way of quickly gaining information from a lot of people ✓ Analysis relatively straightforward ✓ Data can be compared against local and national benchmarks ✓ Can be used for sensitive issues ✓ Open ended questions can explore issues in-depth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be labour intensive and expensive • Unsuitable for complex Issues • Open-ended questions difficult to analyse • Can yield a low response rate • Difficult to engage with hard to reach groups • Cannot be certain of veracity of responses
<p>Surveys - telephone Telephone interviews with stakeholders. Can be used to gather views and opinions and to measure attitudes, satisfaction and performance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs statistical and research expertise to administer and avoid Bias • How to access hard to reach groups • How to provide feedback to respondents • May need external resources and trained Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Fast results ✓ Can manage the response rate ✓ Easier to engage with hard to reach groups ✓ Can be used to obtain responses from demographically representative sample ✓ Can be easy to analyse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot be used for complex issues • Interviewer cannot respond to any Questions • Can be perceived as Intrusive • Limits participation to people with a Telephone

<p>User Panel</p> <p>A small group of users that meets regularly to provide input on service delivery and development over a long period of time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small size • Have clear objective and Timeframe • Moderation of group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Gives user perspective ✓ Group has knowledge, experience and understanding of the issue / service ✓ Ongoing dialogue ✓ Membership can be rotated to maintain a balance of old and new members ✓ Opportunity for direct liaison and feedback between panel members and service providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited and not Necessarily representative Perspective • Group can grow too close and lose Objectivity • Cannot be used for a wider range of services • Does not address needs of non-service users • May exclude minority groups
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STEP 6 Designing Consultations

Having chosen your method(s) from the table in Step 5, you will need to design the consultation exercise so that it achieves the desired outcomes.

Design is about how participants in the consultation are selected, how many interviews or meetings take place, how information is gathered and analysed, and how the ethical and legal issues are incorporated in the process.

There is an extensive literature on survey and consultation design, covering all of the main methods. Local guides include advice notes produced by Compass, Northamptonshire County Council and other Northamptonshire based organisations. The purpose of this section is to provide the reader with a summary of the key principles of consultation design, and links to detailed guidance.

- **Consultation Events.** Consultation events include Public Meetings, Roadshows, Planning for Real days, and Round Table sessions for stakeholders. If these methods are to be used for awareness raising or gauging initial public responses, there may be no need to design a highly structured approach to planning these events. But if the intention is to obtain representative information or public feedback about a community issue or about service delivery, a more structured design is necessary. This includes systematic publicity about the event, careful planning of the timing and location of the event, expert facilitation of the event itself, analysis of who turns up and a record of who attended and what they said. In the case of events such as a Planning for Real weekend, or a Roundtable meeting of stakeholders for example, an accurate record is particularly important if conclusions are to be reached by the organisers about public preferences, or about the relative importance of proposals from participants. Given the nature of consultation events like these, even if there is careful planning, the response is unlikely to be truly representative, and information must be treated as indicators of opinion rather than scientifically typical of a population. In some cases a combination of consultation methods (for example, a public meeting and a Focus Group or a public meeting and a small survey) may be required to cross-check opinions or expressed preferences. The Thorplands, Northampton example illustrates how different methods are used to compile an accurate picture of opinion.

Link to CDRP Consultation Advisory Service leaflet on Public Meetings

[http://www.northamptonshireobservatory.org.uk/docs/docPublic Meetings Handout\(HC\)090721110355.pdf](http://www.northamptonshireobservatory.org.uk/docs/docPublic Meetings Handout(HC)090721110355.pdf)

The Safer Thorplands Project

This project was created to reduce Acquisitive crime in the Thorplands area and to drive out drugs. Funding of £101, 000 was received and an initial public meeting was held at the outset of the project to assist in determining what the money should be spent on. Residents were invited via a leaflet that was placed through all residents doors.

The meeting was held at Thorplands Primary school held between 6pm and 8pm, with a crèche provided to allow as many people to attend as possible (25 people attended).

The meeting allowed the residents to find out more about the funding and why it had been allocated to Thorplands. They were then asked to provide suggestions on how the money should be spend, along with suggestions that were identified in an Environmental Visual Audit. These were posted around the room and residents voted on their priorities. There was a question and answer session with local representatives from partner agencies at the event to respond to residents' queries.

Other methods of consultation were used throughout this project but a final event was held. Residents who had expressed an interest were invited via leaflet or contacted by phone. A total of 45 residents attended this event, which outlined what the project had achieved. Residents split into four focus groups facilitated by ComPaSS employees.

They were asked how they felt about the activities that had taken place, what agencies they had seen involved, and what else they would like to see happening in their area. The positive response was an indication that the project had successfully engaged with local residents.

- **Focus Groups** are an excellent way of enabling service users or members of the general public to explore issues in depth. The selection of participants, the quality of the facilitator and the record of the Group sessions are critical to judging what conclusions can be drawn. Focus Groups require careful design to select a representative or targeted group, for example, from the Electoral Register or from a register of charities, or voluntary groups. Participants may require financial or other assistance in order to attend, and the discussion must be skilfully facilitated to ensure that everyone has their say and that key issues are fully discussed. It is important to agree with participants the aims and outcomes of the Focus Group before it starts - and to agree the conclusions when it is over.

See CDRP Consultation Advisory Service leaflet on Effective Focus Groups
[http://www.northamptonshireobservatory.co.uk/docs/docsFocusGroupsHandout\(HC\)090721110651.pdf](http://www.northamptonshireobservatory.co.uk/docs/docsFocusGroupsHandout(HC)090721110651.pdf)

Joint Consultation Project on Policing Priorities and the Policing Pledge in Northamptonshire

For this project, focus groups were held with communities who might not be captured in traditional consultation activities such as; older people, disabled people, young people including young offenders, rural communities and new and emerging communities.

Existing infrastructures and sources were utilised to access these communities such as the local primary schools, Primary Care Trusts' Older People's Forums, Active walking groups sourced through South Northamptonshire Council, Young People through Northamptonshire County Council and rural communities through Action with Communities in Rural England. Utilising these contacts made it easier for the Force and Authority to access these communities and also reduced possible duplication of effort which might have resulted from setting up separate forums and groups.

- **Surveys** come in many forms – door to door, telephone, on line or street corner surveys. Some are not intended to be truly representative, such as street corner “vox pop” interviews, while others seek to measure public opinion – and publish the results to influence the public or decision makers. Where the aim is to select a representative sample, random sampling and targeting methods must be employed. For this, you will need advice on sampling a population if you want to generate a scientific response. For example, the larger and more stratified the sample (where more characteristics of age, ethnicity, income or tenure are identified), the more detailed conclusions can be inferred from the responses. A working sample minimum of 25-30 completed survey forms is normally required to properly analyse just one factor or variable, for example, the relationship between income and school achievement, or between age and satisfaction with a particular service. If a low response rate is expected from certain groups in the population, different sampling methods such as quotas can be used, or the responses can be weighted to equalise responses from different social, economic, age, or cultural groups. The better the design, the lower the probability of errors in the conclusions.
- **Questionnaires** like surveys require expert advice if the maximum benefit is to be obtained and if survey results are to be presented as representative of opinion. Equally, there are skills in conducting a questionnaire survey to get a good response, and to ensure that respondents are able to properly consider the questions, and give meaningful answers.

Broadly, there are two different types of questions and data analysis – qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative questions are usually open ended aimed at seeking opinions and views; while quantitative questions seek yes/no answers, or ask respondents to select between categories enabling statistical summaries such as bar charts and percentages to be made.

Special skills are required to plan and conduct interview surveys which are recorded or summarised in note form. It is important to seek advice about appropriate questionnaire design and delivery. Each method of delivery has its costs and limitations: sometimes, more than one method could be used.

Quantitative consultation studies will frequently require *pilot surveys* for testing responses to types of surveys, and questionnaire design. Even small scale pilots will yield important clues to the effectiveness of the survey or interview approach.

See CDRP Guidance Note on Designing Questionnaires

<http://www.northamptonshireobservatory.org.uk/docs/docDesigningQuestionnairesHandout090721110931.pdf>

The Compass report on Quantitative Analysis

[http://www.northamptonshireobservatory.org.uk/docs/docQuantative analysis - amended090721111258.pdf](http://www.northamptonshireobservatory.org.uk/docs/docQuantativeanalysis-amended090721111258.pdf)

STEP 7 How to get the best response

As discussed in Step 1, you need to plan the consultation effectively to get the most out of it. Here are some tips to get the best from your consultation exercise.

Before the Consultation

- Before you begin the meeting of a focus group or discussion, make sure all participants know the plan of the event, how their comments will be recorded (audio recording, note-taking) and how to signal they want to contribute to the discussion, and so on.
- Give clear instructions about the questionnaire, its purpose, and return dates, and consider allowing for late returns for a few days beyond the published deadline.
- You may need to take on extra people to distribute questionnaires, collect and sort responses to allow quicker analysis and feedback to participating communities.

During the Consultation

- During meetings, try to ensure all those who wish to speak are given the opportunity and discussions are not dominated by certain individuals
- Consider allocating time for a breaks; mid-meeting for coffee, and informal discussions if the meeting will take more than an hour

After the Consultation

- Make provisions for circulate the outcome of the consultation to all participants, for example, via a meeting or letter or email

Incentives

- Many consultations now use incentives to encourage participation, such as a small financial reward like a shopping voucher or a prize draw. This can persuade people to participate in surveys and focus groups but can sometimes imbalance the participation levels, as some people might take part in consultations only for the reward. Generally though, incentives do work to increase participation in consultations

STEP 8 Ethical and Legal Considerations

- ***Does the consultation involve ethical issues?***

Every consultation exercise involves some ethical issues, such as how people are selected, how respondents are treated during the interview process, and what happens to the information provided. But this will vary depending upon the purpose of the consultation. The Consultation Plan should make it clear what the ethical issues are and how they are to be addressed.

- ***Who are the subjects or participants? How will they be recruited?***

The Plan should state who the intended participants are and how they will be asked to take part e.g. by random sampling, advertisements, or from voluntary associations. Will any incentives be offered to take part? You may need to ask permission of parents as well as the children.

- ***Where is the consultation being carried out? What are the potential hazards?***

It will be necessary to consider whether there are any health and safety issues such as accessibility for participants, personal safety, and appropriateness of venue which may affect such matters as informed consent and confidentiality. For example, people may not be happy about being interviewed on a busy high street or outside their workplace, or outside the school gates. Under some circumstances, interviewers may not be happy working on their own.

- ***What permissions are required?***

Firstly, the interviewer should have identification. Secondly, if you are going to be involved in research with any vulnerable person child or adult you may be required to obtain a Criminal Records Bureau Clearance in order to carry out the research, for example, within sheltered housing or a school or be constantly supervised by a carer or teacher.

Whenever research involves the NHS ethical clearance from the Local Research Ethics Committee **must** be obtained under the NHS governance. Permissions from organisations and other authorities to conduct interviews must be obtained e.g. Home Office for interviewing offenders. Apparently innocuous questions may cause offence or distress and care needs to be taken when drawing up a questionnaire or interview. Are you appropriately trained for the activity? Do medical practitioners, counsellors or others need to be present?

- ***How will data be collected and recorded?***

The most appropriate method of data collection from the participant's point of view must be used, such as a questionnaire survey, photographs, video or tape recording, or written notes.

Interviewers will need training. First, be sure of having identification and obtaining the participant's consent for the particular format. If interviews are to be

transcribed from audio recordings, are copies of the transcription to be shown to the participant for approval? Are any interviews to be translated if so are translators professionally qualified and compliant with the appropriate code of conduct.

Think about how data can be shared with other organisations. Remember at all times, intellectual property rights of data and data protection guidance should be followed

- ***What information will be provided to enable informed consent and the right to withdraw?***

Even if permission is obtained from an authority to undertake interviews, it is still essential that the consent of each participant is also obtained. Each participant must be given the opportunity to positively decide to be involved. Time must be given to allow a prospective participant to decide whether or not to take part, usually at least 24 hours. There must be no coercion and ample opportunity must be offered to first, decide to take part and secondly, to withdraw at any time.

If the data is to be retained the participant must consent to this. An opportunity must be given to enable a participant to withdraw his or her material from the research.

- ***How will Confidentiality and if appropriate Anonymity be maintained?***

The interviewer needs to be clear whether the participants wish to be identified in the findings of the study. This problem arises in many interview surveys or interviews with a selection “key players”. It is particularly important to ask whether respondents require anonymity and to wait until the research is complete in case a participant wishes to withdraw.

Personal contact details should be destroyed at the end of the study unless permission has been obtained to retain them for further research.

The data protection legislation must be followed.

- ***What arrangements will be made for feedback and to respond to any concerns that the consultation may have raised for the participant?***

Respondents are entitled to see the findings of the consultation study, and to be able to contact the researcher if needed. If the findings involve personal identification or publication of attributed quotes, permission must be sought from the respondent.

STEP 9 Analysing the Data

Simple data analysis such as adding responses or ranking preferences from a survey form does not require specialised research skills and can usually be done in-house. But full statistical analysis, to measure sampling errors and undertake statistical correlations between variables requires skills with survey research packages such as the widely used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). There are many local organisations (colleges, local authorities, voluntary groups, local businesses) that may help with this, and you can also download free survey research analysis packages from the internet.

Very often it is helpful to display the results in a visual way i.e. tables, graphs, pie-charts or on maps. Survey packages can do this for you.

Survey results come with a health warning about interpreting too much into the conclusions. The smaller the sample, the greater the risk of reaching the wrong conclusions; and the more complex the issue e.g. perception of crime, or attachment to neighbourhood, or reasons for school attainment, the more likely the survey will only deal with one aspect of it. Data and analysis from other research or studies should be used to obtain a fuller explanation of what is going on.

On the other hand, your survey might be more of a “data dredging” exercise where the research does not start off with a hypothesis to test, but wants to see what the survey throws up about, for example, about the most important concerns for residents of a particular neighbourhood. These findings can then be used as the basis for designing more specific and targeted surveys or consultations (see literature on “Grounded Theory”, for example, B.Glaser (1992) *Basics of Grounded Theory*, Mill Valley, California, Sociology Press.)

STEP 10 Feedbacks and Evaluation

- Feedback means going back to those that were consulted in the public meeting, focus group or on-line consultation to inform them of the results and the consequences of the consultation. This is not only a courtesy thanking those who helped you, but informs respondents about how their contributions have fed into policy or decision making or made something happen. It will also build trust and encourage further public involvement in the future i.e. to counteract consultation fatigue and cynicism. To ensure this happens, the consultation questionnaire can ask whether respondents want to receive feedback.
- Evaluation assesses the value for money, public benefit, or quality of the final product. Did the consultation exercise achieve what it set out to do and if not why not? How much of the effort was wasted or misdirected? Could the exercise have been done better? What lessons have been learned about design?
- Most important is to make a judgement about whether the information collected has *integrity* i.e. can it be used as a true or reasonable indicator of public opinion.
- The best way to evaluate a survey is to go back to the target population or group of service users for feedback and/or obtain an independent evaluation from a local college or friendly independent expert.
- You could do an equality impact assessment to check whether the information gathered was inclusive.
- At the same time, it important to evaluate the experience of all the stakeholders/partners who played a part in the consultation exercise. How did it work for them?
- Most important of all, was any action taken on the issues raised by the consultation?

Further Information

Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government (IDeA)

<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/70580>

Northamptonshire County Council. Taking Part in Northamptonshire, Consultation Toolkit, revans@northamptonshire.gov.uk

National Standards for Community Engagement

<http://www.scdc.org.uk/national-standards-community-engagement>

Disability Discrimination Act 2006

<http://www.gov.im/lib/docs/infocentre/acts/disability.pdf>

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG_4001069

Equality Act 2006

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/pdf/ukpga_20060003_en.pdf

Market Research Society Code of conduct

<http://www.northamptonshireobservatory.org.uk/docs/docMRS%20code%20of%20conduct%202005090818092030.pdf>

HM Government Code of Practice on Consultation

<http://www.northamptonshireobservatory.org.uk/docs/docHR%20Government%20Code%20of%20Practice090824151822.pdf>

Social Research Association Ethical Guidelines

<http://www.northamptonshireobservatory.org.uk/docs/docSocial%20Research%20Association%20Ethics%2003090824152439.pdf>