

Dialogue by Design

A Handbook of
Public & Stakeholder Engagement

A publication by Dialogue by Design to accompany
- Dialogue Designer –
the online engagement design system

This handbook has been prepared by Andrew Acland and the team at Dialogue by Design. It draws upon previous experiences with conducting public and stakeholder engagement and accompanies the online engagement design system – Dialogue Designer which can be found at <http://designer.dialoguebydesign.net>

Version 3 – May 2012

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Foreword

There are currently numerous guides and handbooks on public and stakeholder engagement. They set out the rationale and benefits for consulting the public about everything from shopping malls to national policy on clean air and wind farms, and they explain the methods of engagement available. You can be briefed on everything from how to set out the tables at a public meeting to the finer points of netiquette for participation in online forums.

We find such guides enormously useful, we regularly recommend them to others, and we had no intention of writing our own when there was so much good work already available.

Then we began to notice that most of these guides and handbooks have two things in common. They don't explain how to design engagement processes – for example, which method to use in different types of situation; and while they tell you how to identify possible participants and how to reach the hard-to-reach, they do not always help you to keep track of them.

The lack of emphasis on design elsewhere remains a curiosity. We think it is because people tend to choose their engagement method first and then fit the process to the method rather than vice-versa, as it should be. We also think it may be because theorists of public engagement focus on purposes and results while practitioners tend to concentrate on methods. Being both, we are inclined to notice gaps and do our best to fill them.

This handbook is one part of our gap-filling strategy. We recommend you use it in conjunction with Dialogue Designer, our online engagement design tool, which you can find at <http://designer.dialoguebydesign.net>, and CitizenBase, our stakeholder tracking system.

We hope you find this handbook and the online system a useful complement to other material in this field.

Dialogue by Design
2010

Introduction

Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works.

Steve Jobs.

Public engagement is all the rage. Every type of organisation – government, local government, companies, international agencies – are stressing the importance of understanding what people think and what they will support.

Perhaps it is surprising, in view of its acknowledged importance, that public engagement is not more glamorous. In fact, it is one of those jobs that tend to get overlooked and then tacked onto someone else's job. "Oh, yes - we'll have to do some public consultation. I know - give it to old Jones. Just send out a few questionnaires during your tea-break..."

The questionnaires go out and a few (probably very few) responses come back and everybody does what they were going to do anyway.... That, at least, is how it always used to be. 'Consultation' is a word with a lot of baggage, which is perhaps why many people now to prefer to use 'engagement' or 'involvement'. (You will find our definitions of these words on the next page; we use 'engagement' throughout as a generic term.)

But times are, as we have already noted, changing fast. People are used to having their preferences and their opinions taken seriously. No successful business, after all, can afford to market a product unless it is pretty sure that people will want to buy it. Likewise people are demanding that their taxes are also used to buy things they actually want: and they notice if engagement is no more than going through the motions and ticking the boxes.

The purpose of this handbook is to help those charged with public and stakeholder engagement to do it better. While it is intended to support the online Dialogue Designer system (<http://designer.dialoguebydesign.net>), it is also a stand-alone guide for those who prefer to do their reading offline. It is written by practitioners for people in the public, private and voluntary sectors who are charged with running anything from a national online policy consultation on the future of nuclear power to facing an irate public on a wet Friday evening in a village hall to discuss parking meters and dog poo.

You will find just enough background to understand the reasoning behind process design, but you won't find any impenetrable management jargon, or too many nit-picking details.

The guide focuses on the **three critical design factors** around every engagement process:

- **Why** you are doing it
- **Who** should be involved and
- **How** to do it.

It then reviews the **main methods** used to engage people, the advantages and disadvantages of each, their resource requirements, and how to initiate and use them.

Throughout the handbook a series of common engagement terms are used. These are defined below.

<i>Engagement</i>	is used as an umbrella term to describe any process that involves contact with the public, from providing information to running formal consultation processes. Where the term <i>community engagement</i> is used, it indicates a process focused on getting people in a particular community to talk about resolving the problems that affect them. Community engagement covers everything from running local meetings to simply talking to people in the street.
<i>Consultation</i>	is used to describe relatively formal and structured processes through which citizens and stakeholders can comment on and contribute to the decisions and policies that affect them.
<i>Participation</i>	usually indicates a process in which stakeholders have some control of the process, the agenda, and the decisions. Participative processes differ from consultation processes in that they involve the participants more deeply, they tend to involve the same people through several stages, and the results are more transparent.
<i>Stakeholder</i>	is used to describe a person or organisation perceiving themselves to have a stake in something. It is mostly used here in reference to organised and representative interest groups.

You will also find other information we ourselves find useful. Some of it comments on aspects of engagement that are interesting; some of it is in the forms of tips and checklists designed for the person in the hot seat with no time to waste.

Whether you are a senior central government policy-maker suddenly faced with professional stakeholding

organisations chained to your railings, a middle-ranking executive told to do something about corporate social responsibility, or a junior officer in local government told to organise a public meeting with minimal notice, no training and every chance of being publicly lynched, this handbook could make your life a lot easier.

PART ONE: DESIGNING ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES

Chapter 1: The Spectrum of Engagement

The message has come down from on high: "Thou shalt consult." Only the word 'consult' may not be used: it may be 'engage', or 'involve' or 'run a participative process' or hold a national debate.

It is quite likely that those using the words have an incomplete understanding of the differences between such terms. This is the point at which you may be tempted to say "Forget the semantics": but you will be well-advised not to because, as in every field that develops its own language and jargon, words and meanings matter.

For those who know - and this has to include you if you are charged with running any form of engagement process - there is an enormous difference between 'consultation' and 'participation'. The words create different expectations among those on the receiving end: if you promise a 'participation' process and then merely deliver a few leaflets you will have some very disappointed people accusing you of only pretending to involve people.

As consultation and engagement have become more popular, people have become more alert to the differences between 'real consultation' and 'sham consultation'.

This difference was highlighted by a High Court judgment in February 2007, when a judge ruled that a government's consultation process (over the building of new nuclear power stations) was "seriously flawed" and "procedurally unfair". The consultation document gave every appearance of being simply an "issues paper". It contained no actual proposals and, even if it had, the information given to consultees was "wholly insufficient for them to make an intelligent response".

This judgment, raised the bar for the standards expected of official engagement processes, and the starting point now for designing any engagement process must be to be absolutely clear what influence the results will have over the process.

The 'Spectrum of Engagement' in the following table sets out the possibilities before examining each in turn. (We tend to use 'engagement' as a generic term.)

This spectrum is an adaptation of one of the best known approaches to engagement – that developed by the American Sherry Arnstein in 1969 and published as "A Ladder of Citizen Participation".

INCREASING INTENSITY OF ENGAGEMENT

1. INFORMATION-GIVING	2. INFORMATION-GATHERING	3. CONSULTATION	4. PARTICIPATION	5. COLLABORATION	6. DELEGATED AUTHORITY
Purpose: To provide people with information to assist their understanding.	Purpose: To collect information about attitudes, opinions and preferences that will assist your understanding and therefore your decision-making.	Purpose: To obtain feedback on specific policies or proposals.	Purpose: To involve people actively at all stages to ensure their concerns are understood and considered, and to give them some influence on and ownership of decisions.	Purpose: To bring people into active partnership and agree sharing of resources and decision-making.	Purpose: To transfer resources and decision-making.
Expectation: That information given will be accurate, balanced and updated as necessary.	Expectation: That information gathered will be treated and used responsibly, and reported honestly.	Expectation: That feedback will be taken seriously, decisions will be influenced, and people will be informed of the influence they have had.	Expectation: That people will be able to shape the process, that it will be transparent throughout, and that they will have some influence over decisions.	Expectation: That decision-making will be shared and some resources will be held in common.	Expectation: That sufficient resources will be transferred to enable decision-making, and that what is decided will be implemented.
Examples: Fact sheets Websites Exhibitions	Examples: Surveys Questionnaires Focus groups	Examples: Consultation papers Public meetings Surgeries	Examples: Deliberative workshops Stakeholder dialogue processes	Examples: Advisory Panels Local Strategic Partnerships	Examples: Ballots Referenda Delegated decision-making

Figure 1: The Spectrum of Engagement

First, some general comments from the design point of view:

1. None of these processes is 'better' or 'worse' than others: they have different purposes and they use different methods.
2. The divisions between them are at best blurred and oftentimes artificial. A 'consultation' process may provide information, as in column 1, and it may also lead to the type of collaboration described in column 5, while in between it gathers information and allows people some active participation.
3. Each involves differing amounts of time, effort, and money.
4. Some of this is contentious. For example, focus groups are often described as an engagement method. In our view they are a research method and of limited use for the more intensive forms of stakeholder engagement.

This said, we can examine each column in turn and what it means in design terms.

1. Information-giving

Information-giving is often one part of many other types of engagement and consultation process; on its own it does not constitute engagement.

Whether the information is given through a leaflet drop, a website or an exhibition matters little: the central idea is that information is provided to people so that they have a clearer understanding of something.

But all information is not equal. Information that promotes a particular point of view is different in kind from information that merely conveys factual information. One may argue that all information is 'spun' to some extent - if only through the facts that are left out - but the fact remains that there is a line between the disinterested and unbiased presentation of information and a public relations campaign.

From the point of view of designing engagement processes, we strongly recommend you not to use public relations techniques: the public has developed a powerful nose for spin and tends not to believe what it is told these days if there is any whiff of it. Plain fact sheets are more likely to be credible than glossy brochures particularly if they are written in plain English and include 'other' or opposing points of view.

2. Information-gathering

Surveys and questionnaires are the most commonly used forms of engagement, often because processes based on them are relatively quick and cheap to run: an afternoon with a clipboard in a shopping centre can provide some useful insights into local opinion; a fully representative survey of opinion can endorse or torpedo the plans of the mighty - if they choose to take account of them.

And there's the rub: a survey is only a survey. The fact that 98% of people disagree with an intention, as in the example quoted above, does not necessarily mean that the intention is wrong. But if you want the right to disregard the findings of your survey, then you need to spell this out in advance.

This is where there is much public misunderstanding of such processes. The purpose of surveys is to discover public opinion - but in a representative

democracy it is still the elected representatives who make the decisions.

This ties into market research, another way of gathering information. The purpose of market research is to discover what people think about an issue, a product or a process. It is widely used by businesses to decide whether to launch a product or service, to decide the form and shape of what they offer, and to decide the most effective means to advertise and promote it.

Market research and consultation may use similar processes (such as questionnaires) but their purposes should not be confused. Market research is essentially about what *people* want and will buy; consultation is about what *citizens* need and have a right to expect from their government in view of the taxes they have paid.

The similarity of some market research and consultation methods can lead public service organisations to confuse the appetites of consumers with the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

This confusion leads to further misunderstandings about the differences of purpose and process between market research and consultation.

Market research provides information that can be used or ignored as the commissioning organisation chooses. Being consulted is a fundamental right of citizens in a democracy, and governments and public services have an absolute duty to listen and respond to what their masters, the citizens, require of them. They can choose to ignore it - our elected councillors and Members of Parliament are *representatives*, not *delegates* - but they do have to listen.

3. Consultation

The same points apply to what are usually called consultation processes. The difference between information-gathering and consultation is that consultation is usually on more specific plans and policies, and it usually involves people responding in their own words either to a document or to more specific questions rather than reacting, as in a survey, to a series of options.

Once again, though, the fact is that consulting does not entail the right of the consultees to shape the

eventual results or decisions. Consultation means the right to be heard; not the right to decide.

4. Participation

This is where the designer has to become much more careful because the word 'participation' now carries some heavy political baggage: in essence, 'participation' does imply some right to take part in decision-making even if the actual decision-taking is ultimately done by others.

Participation also allows the participants to have some influence over the process through shaping the agendas of meetings, for example, or deciding what background information is required before subjects can be sensibly discussed.

Participation processes demand very careful design: the patterns of meeting and involvement often test both the ingenuity and the budget of the organisers.

5. Collaboration

Collaboration is beginning to move beyond engagement because those involved are becoming partners: the power has shifted away purely from those in authority.

Unfortunately many supposedly collaborative processes achieve less than they might, either because the sharing of power means the effective diminution of power of those who would otherwise wield it, or because decision-making is hampered by the need to involve many others.

But properly designed and managed collaborative processes, such as Local Strategic Partnerships and local management groups where the partners are genuinely committed, work together and share their resources, can often achieve more together than they could working on their own.

6. Delegated authority

Delegated authority or 'empowerment', as it is sometimes known, is another step beyond collaboration to the point where power shifts decisively away from those who previously held it. This is not of course engagement as it is traditionally

defined, but it fits on the spectrum because some of the methods used to delegate authority, such as referenda, are methods of engaging people.

For the purposes of these notes we will not spend much time on this final aspect of engagement.

Now, where on the spectrum should the main thrust of your engagement be?

- Is it mainly about disseminating information?
- Or finding out what people think about a limited number of options that can be summarised in a questionnaire?
- Is it collecting more qualitative responses (i.e. responses that people can frame in their own words rather than having framed for them as with a questionnaire) to some document or some proposal that you are going to put out?
- Is it really about something deeper and more complex? Do you want people to take some responsibility for framing the issues and finding solutions? Are you willing to cede some control to achieve this? Are you in a position to cede that control - or does your statutory position make it impossible?
- Are you trying to create a relationship with people that will survive the immediate engagement and enable you to build a working partnership that allows decisions and resources to be shared?
- Do you really want to hand over power to others and help them to make the decisions?

If you are still not sure what you should be doing, or if you think your process needs to involve a combination of these approaches, you need to do some more detailed process planning.

If this is the case, we strongly recommend that you transfer all the information above onto the planning grid we introduce in Chapter 2.

Principles of authentic engagement

The idea of public engagement continues to suffer, as we noted in the Introduction, from how it has been used and abused in the past. Over the past decade or so many people, both in government and practitioners such as ourselves, have been striving to

rescue its reputation by encouraging the adoption of certain principles that will ensure all engagement and consultation is 'authentic'.

These are the principles that we consider deliver this authenticity.

1. **Inclusiveness:** the participation of all stakeholders who have an interest in or who would be affected by a specific decision, including 'hard to reach' groups, such as young people, minorities, and socially mobile professionals.
2. **Transparency, openness and clarity:** ensuring that all stakeholders are given all the information they need, that they are told where information is lacking or things are uncertain, what they can or cannot influence by responding to engagement, and what the next steps will be.
3. **Commitment:** showing respect for both stakeholders and taxpayers by giving engagement the appropriate priority and resources, and demonstrating that it is a genuine attempt to understand and incorporate other opinions even when they conflict with the existing point of view.
4. **Accessibility:** providing different ways for people to be engaged and ensuring that people are not excluded through barriers of language, culture or opportunity.
5. **Accountability:** as soon as possible after the end of the engagement process responding to participants with an unambiguous account of how and why their contributions have – or have not – influenced the outcome, and ensuring that there are routes for follow-up including reporting on final decisions, strategies and/or implementation plans.
6. **Responsiveness:** those doing the consulting must be open to the idea that their existing ideas can be improved (or are wrong), and that they will, if necessary, be amended. Those being consulted must perceive that their voice will be taken seriously, and that things can be changed.
7. **Willingness to learn:** encouraging both the engagers and the engaged to learn from each other, and this means a style of process that is as interactive and as incremental as possible to

build increasing layers of mutual understanding, respect and relationship.

8. **Productivity:** establishing from the outset how the engagement process will make something better.

Chapter 2: The Design Process

At the start of the design process you need to make clear sense of what you need to achieve, who needs to be involved and the methods you will need to use. This will then help to place your process on the Spectrum of Engagement.

This chapter takes you through the process of design using what we think is an indispensable design tool: the Design Bridge. We will look at the two towers and the span in turn.

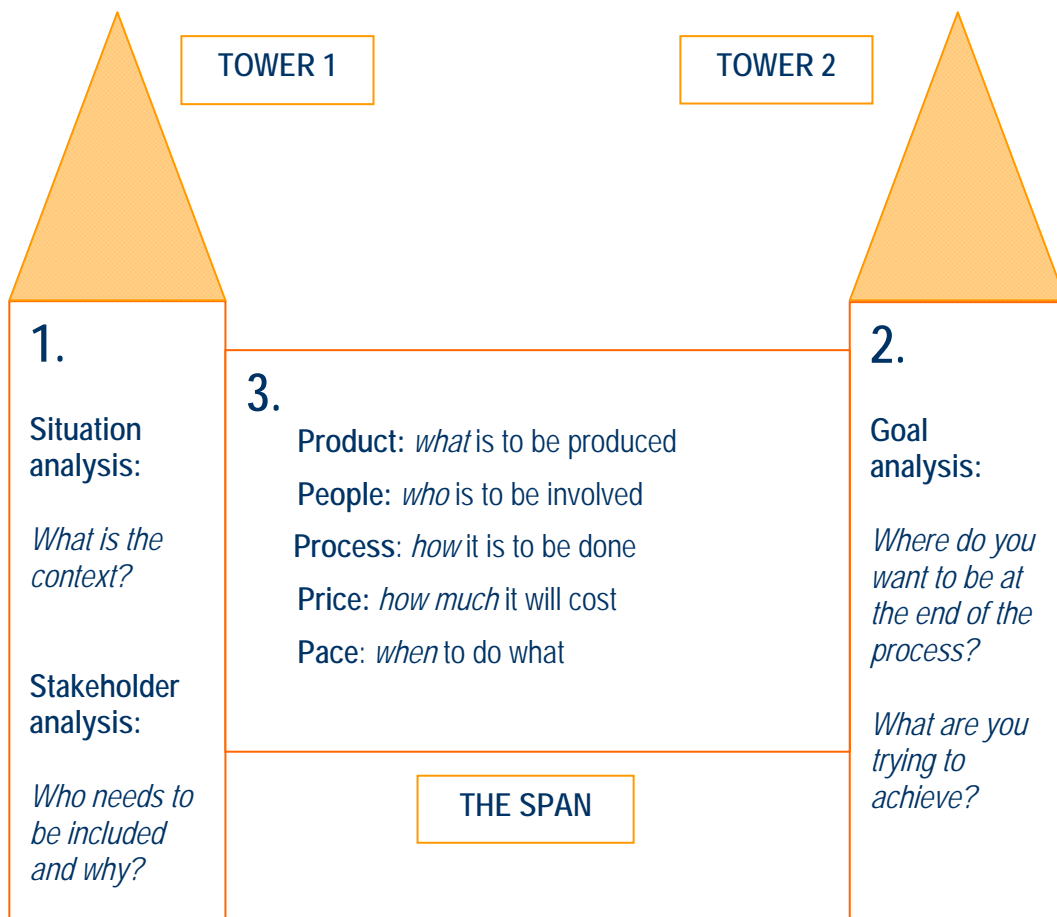


Figure 2: The Design Bridge

Tower 1: Situation analysis

This is about understanding where you are, how you got here, and who else has a stake - as a stakeholder - in the situation as it stands. There are a number of useful questions to ask yourself as part of the design process:

1. What is the context in which engagement is required?

It is useful to have a general sense of what is going on: the politics, the economics, even the personalities.

2. What is the historical background to the situation?

A little bit of history is always useful: for example, how has the current situation been reached? Has there been previous engagement around it and, if so, what happened?

3. What is important to whom?

Here you are looking for the main currents in the situation: who - political parties, particularly

significant stakeholders, pressure groups and so on - who is heading in what direction and why?

4. What has been stated publicly about the situation?

This is partly about the constraints under which you may have to operate: if the Leader of the Council has said publicly "We will create a collaborative partnership around this situation" then you know a few questionnaires are not going to do the job.

1.

Situation analysis:

What is the context?

Stakeholder analysis:

Who needs to be included and why?

5. What are the specific issues around which engagement is required?

The nature of the subject matter can profoundly influence an engagement process. For example, making technically complex decisions about the disposal of hazardous waste is very different from deciding where to place a new bicycle rack.

6. What do people think or assume the issues are?

You need to discover what the rumour mill is saying because if you don't, and it is very active, you may find that your process is

derailed by misunderstanding or disinformation. Most engagement processes require participants to have a degree of accurate information if their contributions are to be useful.

7. What do different stakeholders want?

The purpose of the process may be to discover this, but it does no harm to read the letters pages in the local papers to get a sense of what people are thinking and, likewise...

8. What do different stakeholders fear?

Discovering what people do not want is often as useful as discovering what they do want. To be successful your process must motivate people to participate - and the best way to get people to participate is to do something that touches upon their interests and their concerns.

While asking yourself these questions, gather any background information there is in newsletters, publicity material and press releases from local organisations, and in newspapers. Look also for

more information that may be available from scientific papers, local development plans, statistics, and maps. While you are doing it, keep an eye open at all times for the names of people who may be useful either as participants or as sources of information and ideas.

Use your imagination in this research phase and do not begrudge an afternoon in the library or a telephone call to a local university to see if any students have studied the subject matter.

The reason for doing this preliminary situation and stakeholder analysis at the same time will rapidly become clear. Do the stakeholders define the issues, or do the issues define the stakeholders?

The more you explore this dilemma, the more likely it is that your engagement process will get the right people to address the right issues.

You will find the subject of stakeholders discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Tower 2: Goal analysis

The most important question to ask when you are designing any engagement process is:

Overall, what do you want to have at the end of the process that you don't have now?

This is because when it comes to detailed planning you will repeatedly ask yourself:

Purpose: why we are consulting

This is the time to think about the big picture, the general purpose, the longer-term goals of what you are intending. What do you really want to achieve through your engagement process?

Tick those of the following boxes that apply:

- Better awareness of the issues among stakeholders
- Confirmation that your proposals are on the right lines
- To ensure local policy/ priorities are informed by local stakeholders

2.

Goal analysis:

Where do you want to be at the end of the process?

What are you trying to achieve?

- Help and advice from stakeholders, resulting in a better policy/decision
- Information from the stakeholders on the implications, costs and benefits of different policy options
- To demonstrate and improve reputation for accountability and responsiveness
- Comments and suggestions on alternative proposals/options
- Detailed and carefully considered comments, expert knowledge
- Prevention of problems later
- Better communication among all the stakeholders
- A document, an action plan, a new policy

- To keep local stakeholders engaged and willing to participate in the process
- Greater understanding of the issues among stakeholders
- New relationships and increased trust
- Acceptance of a new policy or proposal
- Beginning of a long-term relationship with stakeholders.

This is a rough and ready analysis - basically the more ticks you have towards the bottom of the list, the further to the right hand end of the spectrum of engagement you need to be focusing.

Then ask yourself:

- What expectations will we have raised and can we fulfill them?
- What happens if it becomes clear that what we really need to do is beyond our powers?
- What might happen that we really don't want to happen?

Engagement is not a risk-free activity. If you cannot deal with the possible consequences you might be better off not starting it in the first place because

there are situations in which engagement in any form may do more harm than good:

- When there is no real commitment to it
- When all the key decisions have already been made and the whole exercise would therefore be a sham
- Where there is no detailed knowledge (e.g. of the areas of conflict on the issues, or of the interests of the stakeholders)
- When there is not enough time, or
- When there are insufficient resources to do the job properly.

The Bridge Span: the heart of process design

You have already done the background work for building some of the Span: you have thought about the overall context, the people and the purpose. You can now start putting this thinking to good use.

3.

Product: *what* is to be produced

People: *who* is to be involved

Pace: *when* to do what

Price: *how much* it will cost

Process: *how* it is to be done

Product: what is to be produced

By 'products' we mean the **physical** results of your engagement process.

Do you want to produce:

- A huge database of responses?
- A set of stakeholders hungry for more engagement and ongoing dialogue with you?
- Visible products? E.g. a document, an action plan, a new policy
- Invisible products? E.g. new relationships or increased trust? Greater awareness or understanding of something? Acceptance of a new policy?

- Communication - between whom and about what?
- Detailed and carefully considered comments, expert knowledge?
- New understandings?
- All of these?

Now think about what you are actually going to do with these products. For example, if you receive 25,000 replies to a questionnaire, how are you going to use them? What are you going to do if they are contradictory? How are you going to report the results?

If you want one of your products to be better relationships between people, how are you going to maintain these relationships?

If you want one of your products to be an action plan, are you sure you will have the resources to put it into effect?

Think through carefully exactly what your process will produce and what you will do with it. If you are not sure what you want to the physical product to be, or you are not sure how you will use it, then think again.

People: who is to be involved

You did the initial stakeholder analysis at Bridge Tower 1 so you have a fair idea of who could potentially be involved. The question now is who specifically: who are the named individuals whose participation you need?

This does not apply, of course, if you are simply doing a leaflet drop. But as soon as you want replies, whether you are sending out thousands of questionnaires or inviting a few experts to a workshop, how the questionnaire or invitation is presented and worded will affect who replies to it, and how.

So this is the moment at which you decide who you are really trying to reach.

Process: how to do it

Finally, we come to the crunch point: how to do it. The design challenge is to decide what method, or combination of methods, will enable the people you

want to involve to generate the products you require within the time and budget available.

This is what all this preliminary work has been leading to: choosing the right method(s). It is also the decision that the rank amateur makes first. It is frightening how many official tenders for engagement processes specify the methods to be used before any thought has been given to all the factors that should be determining the choice of method.

The decision about method(s) can only be taken in parallel with your thinking about all the other elements that make up the span of the Process Bridge. In a moment we'll show you a way to review and organise these to help you make this decision.

All the time that you are thinking about methods, there are a number of things that should be constantly present in your mind:

- What method(s) might exclude some people?
- What method(s) will help to build relationships - if that is important?
- What method(s) will help communicate or generate information?
- What method(s) will discover general attitudes and opinions?
- What method(s) will produce detailed comment?

Price: how much it will cost

Government-run consultations on issues of national significance can cost upwards of £500,000, while a quick conversation with a few key stakeholders can take an hour and save a fortune. In between there is a process and a price to suit every budget - but not every situation.

Look back to the spectrum of engagement. Generally speaking, the further along to the right you go, the more expensive engagement processes become - at least in the short term. In the long term, of course, sharing responsibility through collaboration or ceding it entirely by delegating authority may save money both directly and indirectly through savings of staff time.

The problems arise when all a situation really requires is a resource-intensive dialogue process. You need lots of meetings and workshops:

- Some professionally facilitated, some requiring an investment in preparation,
- The publication of materials,
- The extensive researching and recruitment of stakeholders to become involved,
- Perhaps the payment of expenses to enable participation by some stakeholders.

But your actual budget runs to a leaflet drop, a short questionnaire, and a private hope that not too many people will respond to it and it will not take your part-time assistant more than a day or two to read and summarise the results.

Do you do what you can with the money you have - or do you recognise that botched engagement can be worse than no engagement? And what do you do if your boss or a couple of vocal Councillors are demanding engagement anyway?

If you know your resources, whether of time or money, are short, it becomes very important to manage people's expectations. Do not talk vaguely about 'consulting' if all you have time for is a couple of focus groups because it may lead people to expect something much more elaborate. Be specific about what you can do and what it will achieve: and use a process that can deliver genuinely useful results.

Pace: when to do what

The time available is another decisive element in the design of any engagement process. It is useful to rate the time available as follows:

- 1 month:** very limited time: you could deliver some leaflets and perhaps do a quick survey or run a public meeting providing they did not require much preparation
- 2 months:** enough time to organise a public meeting properly
- 3 months:** the minimum amount of time needed to design, seeking advice from others, a systematic engagement process involving meetings and other methods; also the time that official consultation processes should be open according to Cabinet Office Guidelines

4 months: the minimum amount of time required to plan and conduct a formal consultation process

5 months: the minimum time required for a process involving real public participation at all stages, from process design to collaborative analysis and consideration of the results

6 months+: enough time to design and conduct a process around complex issues, allowing time for people to research and understand the subjects properly and become fully involved in the process

In some situations, and using some methods, engagement can become an open-ended process. Establishing a local liaison panel around a major development, for example, is only the beginning: the panel may be in place for years – so it pays to invest time and effort getting it right from the outset.

Most organisations, most of the time, start their engagement processes too late, spend too little time on design, give people too little time to become fully involved, and do not report sufficiently frequently or transparently.

When you are planning how to use the time available, remember to ask yourself:

- What is the final deadline?
- What holidays need to be avoided?
- What other internal or external events need to be taken into account?
- What other events or processes could influence the timing of the process?

And stick a notice over your desk to remind you that everything takes longer than you think!

Planning an engagement process

The easiest way to do this is to find a good-sized wall and cover it with paper. A 'sticky wall' - material sprayed with a sticking element that allows people to move sheets of paper around on a wall – is even better.

Down the left hand side write these **PPPPP** headings and create a grid around this structure.

Product <i>What you will physically produce</i>					
People <i>Who specifically will be involved</i>					
Process <i>How you will do it - what methods you will use</i>					
Price <i>How much you can spend</i>					
Pace <i>When it will all happen</i>	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May

Figure 3: Engagement Planning Grid

The grid and the timeline will help you see the relationship of each part of work to all the others, and also the relationship to the time frame of the project. Using moveable pieces of paper (Post-It notes are ideal) start itemising what is involved and where it fits.

If, for example, the overall purpose is to improve policy by getting public feedback on a draft policy, write 'improved policy' on a note and put it on the Product line in relation to the timeline. It might be at the end - but maybe there is something else that will follow the improved policy: perhaps you want an ongoing network of relationships to continue beyond the end of engagement about this policy. If so, then that would be on the Product line after 'improved policy'.

Meanwhile 'public feedback' is another product. Clearly it comes before 'improved policy', but what are the products on the way to 'public feedback'? Perhaps it is the questionnaire that elicits the feedback? Would it be useful to get some form of comment on a draft questionnaire before you print and send out thousands? In which case 'draft questionnaire' and 'comment on draft questionnaire' are two more products to go on the Product line.

And who would give you comment on the draft questionnaire? Perhaps a small group of local people? In which case you might call them the

'comment group' and put them on the People line ahead of 'comment on the draft questionnaire'.

Keep on doing this - identifying different elements of what you wish to achieve, who needs to be involved, and the interim steps, until you have a clear sense of what it is going to take to get from where you are to where you want to be - and all of it in relation to the Pace of the project - the vital timeline. If you use the Price line as well it will help you keep an eye on your budget.

Once the Product and People lines are getting clear you can begin to think about the Process line. What methods can you use to ensure the right People come up with the Products you need?

Move your pieces of paper around until each makes sense in relation to both the others and to the timeline. Do not underestimate how long the planning process will take.

Remember to include on the timeline things over which you have no control, such as summer holidays, elections, particular meetings that may influence the project.

The value of the Planning Grid – and in fact of the whole Bridge Process - lies in being forced to think systematically.

Chapter 3: More about stakeholders

In Dialogue Designer, the online design engagement system 'who to engage with' is boiled down to one or more, of four categories:

- The whole community
- A representative cross-section of the community
- Specific groups in the community
- Professionals, experts, and the organisations that have a statutory right to be involved.

Our stakeholder management application, CitizenBase, is designed to help you both identify stakeholders within these categories and to keep track both of what interests them and of how they participate in your engagement process.

Deciding where to start, however, is still a challenge and one of the aspects of public and stakeholder engagement that many people find most difficult. Let's unpack the whole business of who to involve.

Identifying stakeholders

This is the aspect of public engagement that most bothers people new to it; who should be involved and how do I reach them?

There are several general points to make by way of introduction:

1. ***The purpose of your engagement process should determine whom you involve.*** For example, there is a huge difference between engaging people to get a sense of public opinion by using a method such as an opinion poll, and engaging particular stakeholders because you need to know what they think as individuals or you need to build a relationship with them. (See the section on representativeness and sampling). May need to be more specific as to where this section is
2. ***If you are engaging stakeholders rather than just the public at large, it is better to involve too many than to miss out some who are crucial.*** This is particularly true if you are

working in an area or on issues that are sensitive. (See the section on inclusiveness). May need to be more specific as to where this section is

3. ***Beware of the 'stakeholder fatigue' caused by engaging the same people too often.*** There is a limit to the number of times that most people will respond to random enquiries. If you want to engage the same people repeatedly you would be well advised to ask them to join some sort of panel and remove the randomness.
4. ***Equally, beware of engaging the 'wrong' people.*** For example, some 'community leaders' are self-appointed or so designated by the media, but in reality have no mandate to speak on behalf of the local community. If you are seen to be relying on such people your engagement processes will lose much credibility.

Ways to identify stakeholders

1. By type

Statutory stakeholders: These are people and organisations who have to be involved in engagement and consultation either by law (hence 'statutory') or by virtue of the positions they hold, for example organisations such as the Environment Agency and local councils, and individuals such as Members of Parliament. People of seniority in the community may be very influential and should always know about what local engagement is going on and be invited to participate.

Bear in mind that such people are usually over-committed already so do not try to include them unless you really need them; conversely, if the process is important and requires a long-term commitment, these are also the people who are most likely to give it.

Office-holding stakeholders: These are people who are already involved in the community or in local organisations such as community groups, residents' associations and other interest groups. While the positions they hold are voluntary rather than

statutory, they are important because they effectively represent the interests of many others and have some informal mandate to speak on their behalf.

The public: If you are talking about engaging 'the public' then you are probably thinking in terms of seeking public opinion about something, so you will want to run a process that involves a representative cross-section of your target population.

But again, the purpose of your engagement is critical: you may be seeking to build a better relationship with 'the public' - in which case a process that involves lots of personal contact would be more effective.

Sections of the public: It may not be the public in general you want to involve, but people from a certain community, or even from a particular street.

Many people are only interested in participating in engagement processes when the subject matter is something that concerns them personally, so you may get a better response by running several separate engagement processes with a tighter local focus than a single one that is more general.

Special interest groups: These may be people of a particular ethnic community, people with special needs, or people with a common interest in a shared concern - perhaps people concerned about recycling or conservation, or who want a new by-pass - or who are opposed to all road-building.

It is sometimes better to speak to special interest groups on an individual basis because they may fear that their interests will be submerged if they take part in a larger process.

Individuals or organisations with particular expertise: There are also people you may wish to involve because they have special knowledge or a particular expertise that you wish to draw on. They may be academics who have studied a certain culture, shopkeepers who have some insight into a local commercial situation, or conservationists who understand local environmental issues.

These are people you involve as individuals so you need a process that can make use of their individual contributions.

Serving your stakeholders better

How to involve the right people at the right moment is one of the challenges of engagement; another is keeping track of them when they are involved.

You need to know who has come to what meeting; who has had which letter or invitation; what each person is interested in – and how to avoid bothering people with information that will not interest them.

It looks easy, but in reality - when you have hundreds or thousands of people on your database - it can become very time-consuming and it can all go horribly wrong.

This is why Dialogue by Design have created **CitizenBase**. This handbook tries to avoid recommending any particular products, but CitizenBase is an exception because there is not – so far as we know – anything else quite like it.

CitizenBase is a database system carefully designed to help you serve your stakeholders quickly, accurately and efficiently. It has been exhaustively tested on our own projects, with some kind clients acting as guinea pigs and beta testers, to ensure it does what we want it to. CitizenBase is not a conventional customer management system – they tend to be over-complicated – but a system designed specifically to manage stakeholders in relation to consultation and engagement processes.

It enables you to collect, store, up-date and retrieve contact details of individuals and organisations. You can document their interests so that the right people are notified of consultations or sent invitations, newsletters or other information. You can create categories in which to put stakeholders, such as businesses or community organisations, and search for stakeholders who live in particular areas or have specific interests. You can even add information such as someone's dietary requirements – so that when you are organising your event you can alert the caterers if people have any specific allergies!

It makes life easier in other ways too. You can import your existing databases into a single CitizenBase, and you can safeguard your data by restricting people's ability to edit it: so there is no chance of the office junior deleting your entire database by mistake.

For further information about starting your own CitizenBase please contact Dialogue by Design either by email to pippa@dialoguebydesign.com or by calling 020 8683 6602.

2. By awareness of the issues

Another way to ensure you identify all the stakeholders is to think about their relationship to the issues.

Active stakeholders, for example, are those who are or will be involved in a situation by virtue of the positions they hold. They may be establishment or office-holding stakeholders such as statutory consultees, or elected representatives such as local councillors or Members of Parliament, or they may be people who will inevitably be interested because they are campaigners around the issues.

These people should be identified and included from the outset of any engagement process.

You might also want to think in terms of **sleeping stakeholders**, people whose interests are likely to be touched by the situation, and who will therefore become involved as soon as they are aware of the issues. They may be people who live near to a site that is to be developed, for example, or whose lives will be affected by an increase in traffic to the site.

These people should be identified, informed of the situation and encouraged to participate to ensure that the full impact of the issues is fully understood.

Passive stakeholders are people whose interests are unlikely to be directly affected by a situation, and who will therefore only become involved if they are made aware of it by, for example, the news media or the efforts of a campaign group.

This group may be of any number: the entire population, for example, is affected by climate change.

Influential stakeholders are people who are recruited by active or sleeping stakeholders to bolster a cause or rouse passive stakeholders. They may be famous people who live locally to the situation, they may be friends co-opted by active or sleeping stakeholders, or they may be national commentators interested in the issues raised by the situation.

The involvement of influential stakeholders may be transient and shallow, but they can be very significant in swaying opinion and should be treated as active stakeholders as soon as their interest is apparent.

The diagram below complements this way of thinking about stakeholders.

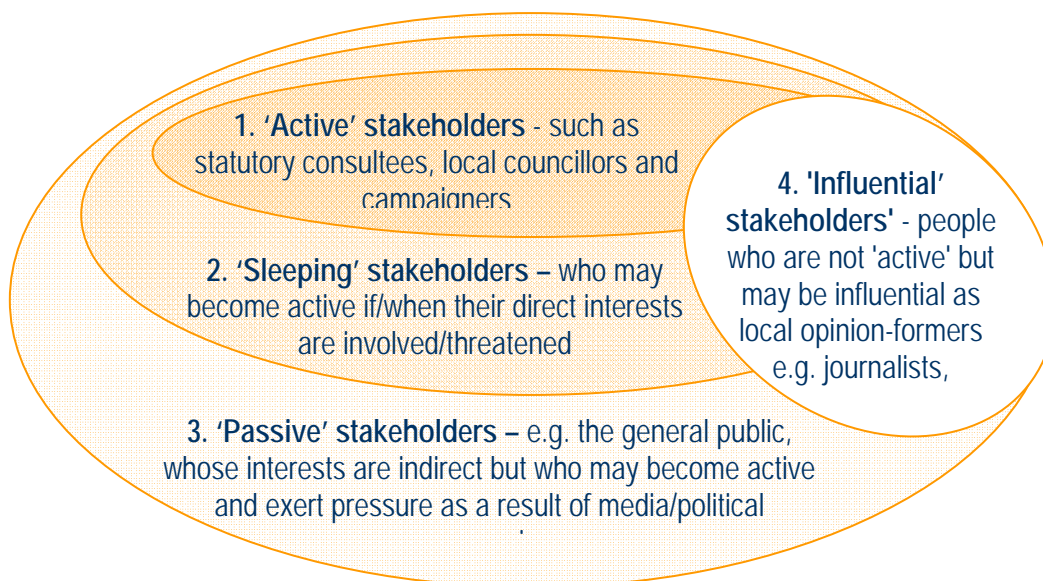


Figure 4: Stakeholders categorized by awareness of the issues

3. By 'stake'

'Stakeholders' are by definition people who have a 'stake' in a situation. A series of questions designed to reveal stakes can also help to identify the right people to involve in any particular situation:

- Who is or will be affected, positively or negatively, by what you are doing or proposing to do? For example, communities, employees, customers, contractors, suppliers, partners, trade unions and shareholders
- Who holds official positions relevant to what you are doing?
- Who is genuinely influential locally on the subject matter?
- Who runs organisations with relevant interests?
- Who has been involved in any similar issues in the past? For example, regulators, government agencies and politicians at regional or national levels, non-government organisations and other national interest groups.
- Whose names come up regularly when you are discussing this subject?

So a first list of stakeholders might include:

- Statutory consultees
- Non-statutory but customary consultees (those who don't legally have to be involved but would normally expect to be)
- The public at large
- A sample of the public
- Particular sections of the public
- Governmental organisations
- Representatives of special interest groups, such as local or national NGOs, or trade unions
- Individuals or organisations with particular technical expertise.

4. Using the issues to identify the stakeholders

Do the people define the issues or do the issues define the people? This chicken-and-egg question is central to all engagement processes and the answer is - both: which is why you can never define one without the other.

In some situations the best way to identify the stakeholders is to identify the issues first - because the issues may well define the stakeholders.

There are three categories of issues to look for:

The *presenting* issues: these are the headline issues that people will readily talk about when you ask them about their concerns;

The *core and current* issues: these are the things that really bother people and which they may therefore be less willing to talk about in public or until they trust you;

The *underlying* issues: these are the longer-term issues that form the context in which you are working - things that are constantly in the background and part of the scenery and because of that never mentioned - but they may be the source of both real and presenting issues.

The implications for engagement

Sooner or later it becomes important to talk about the things that really bother people: if the sensitivity is low and relations are good it will be sooner; if the sensitivity is high and trust is lacking it will be later.

But, whether sooner or later, you will need to use a method that allows people to identify all the issues - the presenting, the real and the underlying - and put them into some kind of structure that they and you find useful.

This structure might be geographical - relating issues to places; or it might be in terms of the time it will take to solve them - short-term, medium-term, long-term; or it might be themes: 'on the streets', 'on the estates', 'in the park', 'night-time' and so on.

Imposing a structure on a list of issues both makes them more manageable and less daunting.

Ask some key contacts and a range of other stakeholders a spread of questions designed to identify who may be interested in the issues, for example:

- What is important to people here?
- What do people want?
- What are they worried about? What do they fear?

- What is the history here? Where do the issues come from?
- What key events have shaped the way people think about the issues?
- Does everyone have the same issues?
- How have these issues been addressed in the past?

Make sure you ask a wide enough range of people to get a genuine sense of common fears and concerns. Using a sequence of questions, such as those

above, will begin to give you a picture of what the issues are and who needs to be engaged.

It can also be useful to use a stakeholders/issues analysis matrix to map what issues are important to which stakeholders, particularly when the community contains many different groups with a whole range of interests.

The easiest way to do this is to draw up a simple matrix with the issues on one axis and the people on the other - organised as individuals, groups or organisations as is most useful.

	Issue A	Issue B	Issue C	Issue D	Issue E	Issue F
Stakeholder 1						
Stakeholder 2						
Stakeholder 3						
Stakeholder 4						
Stakeholder 5						
Stakeholder 6						
Stakeholder 7						
Stakeholder 8						
Stakeholder 9						

Figure 5: Stakeholder/issues analysis matrix

You can then simply complete the table by ticking which issues are of interest to which stakeholder.

The dilemmas of stakeholder identification

All these ways to identify stakeholders can be useful and effective. Each one comes at the situation from a different angle and will produce different answers; the best advice is either to use the one that seems most relevant, or to use all of them and combine the results. As we said earlier, in many situations it is much better to ask too many people to participate than to risk leaving people out.

All these ways of identifying and analysing stakeholders raise, however, some important questions. For a start, what about the general right of people to be consulted about the things that affect them? Who says only 'stakeholders' should be

engaged? What about the 'silent majority' (and yes, if they are silent how do you know they are a majority anyway?)

It also clashes with the approach of those who believe that the role of engagement is to influence opinion, and hence that stakeholders should be categorised and consulted largely according to whether they can be persuaded to support whatever those doing the consulting have decided they want. This is a technique imported from public relations and lobbying and is liable to bring the whole business of engagement into disrepute. And it also immediately raises the question of representativeness.

Representativeness

Mention the idea of public engagement and people often focus on the need for it to be representative - to reflect what the population as a whole thinks.

But whether engagement should be representative is a critical design question, and the answer has to be related to the purpose of the engagement process. If, for example, the purpose is to make contact and build relationships with individuals, then clearly representativeness is less important than if you need input from the population as a whole on whether to build a swimming pool or a boating lake.

Representativeness through accurate sampling is important when:

- You want to know the balance of opinion in the population at large or within a specific group
- You want to use the results of the engagement process as the basis for democratic decision-making
- You want to check how various sections of stakeholder opinion align with public opinion.

Representativeness is less important when:

- You are seeking the views of a particular stakeholder group that you already know not to be representative of the population as a whole (though you may want to check whether the views you get are representative of that group)
- You want to generate ideas and the source of them is not important (though remember this when you want to use these ideas)
- Your primary purpose in engaging is to build relationships with individuals (unless of course you want those individuals to be representative of the population with whom you need to build relationships)
- Your primary purpose is to reach as many people as possible, and you are happy to base any conclusions you draw on what was said by those whom you managed to engage (but you must not then claim that this was a representative process).

Sampling

If your engagement process does need to be representative, then you need to know something about sampling. The idea of sampling is that you engage a small number of people and, provided that the sample is representative, you can extrapolate the results and work out what a much larger number, or even the whole community or nation, think about a

certain issue. It will not be absolutely accurate, but knowing to within a few percentage points is usually accurate enough for most purposes. The more people you sample, the more accurate the result is likely to be.

There are three basic methods you need to know about: 'random sampling', 'stratified sampling' and 'quota sampling'.

Random sampling: To do this you need a complete list of the people you need to sample, then you simply pick say, 10% of them by choosing every tenth name. Remember, though, that most 'complete' lists are nothing of the sort.

Stratified sampling: This involves a bit more work, but the results will be more accurate. You begin by dividing the target population into sub-categories - say, single women, or people living in a certain area. Then you pick a random selection of that group, and combine all the random selections so that eventually your random selection reflects the composition of the total population.

Quota sampling: Quota sampling is not dissimilar in purpose to stratified sampling. It basically means finding a quota of people representing certain sub-categories of the target population - so you might ask an interviewer to stop and talk to 150 men under the age of 25, or 100 people over 60 and so forth.

Another type of quota sampling sometimes used is so-called 'convenience' sampling; you stand on a street corner and interview the first 100 people who are prepared to stop and talk to you. You might narrow it down and specify the first 100 people of a certain age range.

It is obvious that neither of these methods will be as accurate as doing a proper random sample; after all, the people you meet will be the people who happen to be in that place at that time and may well be far from representative of the whole population.

Opinion polling and sampling is used because, even if it is not particularly accurate, it is at least relatively cheap.

The Audit Commission publishes useful tables regarding the number of responses you need to provide a proper sample of opinion and provide you with certain levels of accuracy.

TABLE 1	Estimated "Population"	Required Sample Size	Notes:
Required sample size for 95% confidence that the estimated error will be no more than $\pm 3\%$	500	341	Use the required sample from the population which is next after your own
	600	385	
	700	423	
	800	458	
	900	489	
	1,000	517	
	2,000	697	
	3,000	788	
	4,000	843	
	5,000	880	
	7,500	935	
	10,000	965	
	25,000	1,024	
	50,000	1,045	
	1,000,000	1,066	

Source: Audit Commission: Sampling Guidance for Audit Commission Performance Indicators

TABLE 2	Estimated "Population"	Required Sample Size	Notes:
Required sample size for 90% confidence that the estimated error will be no more than $\pm 3\%$	500	301	Use the required sample from the population which is next after your own
	600	334	
	700	363	
	800	388	
	900	410	
	1,000	430	
	2,000	547	
	3,000	602	
	4,000	633	
	5,000	654	
	7,500	684	
	10,000	700	
	25,000	730	
	50,000	741	
	1,000,000	752	

Source: Audit Commission: Sampling Guidance for Audit Commission Performance Indicators

So what now:

1. Decide whether your process needs to be representative.
2. If it does, decide who will need to be involved and how you can ensure you have a representative sample.
3. If you are not happy that your results are genuinely representative, think about convening a small group that is definitely representative and use it as a control group to compare with other results.

Inclusiveness

There are two common ideas about achieving participation of which anyone involved in engagement processes needs to be wary.

The first is the need to avoid 'the usual suspects' because the very fact that they respond positively and responsibly to engagement exercises means they are unrepresentative.

The second is that special efforts should always be employed for those who are variously described as the 'hard to reach', 'hard to hear', 'seldom heard'. These terms are often used in parallel with others such as 'minorities', 'the marginalised', and 'special needs groups'.

Let's deal with these two points in turn.

The 'usual suspects'

A phrase currently much used in engagement circles is 'the usual suspects' coupled with 'the need to go beyond' them - as if those who customarily respond positively and responsibly to engagement exercises are, by definition, peculiar. (Actually, they probably are: most of us run a mile from an interviewer or to the nearest dustbin when a survey arrives.)

People should not be excluded because they take their civic duties seriously. Equally, we should not rely on them, if only because they are sadly not representative, and because useful ideas and original insights into an issue often come from those who are less familiar with the issues, who don't regularly participate in engagement exercises, who can bring different perspectives.

For this reason it is worth making efforts to go beyond the 'usual suspects' and thinking of people whose contribution could be valuable because of their viewpoint or expertise, or who could be excluded unless special efforts are made to include them (e.g. minority ethnic groups, special needs groups).

The 'hard to reach'

The flip side of the 'usual suspects' point is that you have to make special efforts to ensure that certain sections of the population are included in any engagement exercise. These are often designated as the 'hard to reach' or 'hard to hear'.

The danger of this is that engagement can begin to focus on certain groups at the expense of others. When you see lists of the 'hard to reach', for example, you will usually find asylum seekers, ethnic minorities, the disabled, youth, young mothers with children and so on. And such groups are, indeed, often hard to reach. But so also are young urban professional people without affiliations to schools or communities, and commuters too exhausted by the

daily struggle of work to want to then participate in evening meetings. We have seen lists of stakeholders that concentrated so hard on being inclusive that they had become unwittingly exclusive.

Matching methods to people

Think, early on, about the engagement methods that you can use in relation to certain types of stakeholder. For example, if you want to engage people who have problems with literacy then a questionnaire is not a good idea; if you want to do one-to-one interviews with individuals then a man with a clipboard will have trouble talking to women of certain ethnic minorities, and there is no point in having a public meeting designed to attract mothers with children at school pick-up time, or a meeting to involve disabled people in a building with inadequate disabled access.

Technology can also discriminate people: only making documents available on the Internet, for example, immediately excludes those without access to the technology or without the confidence or expertise to use it.

Likewise, only providing documents or publicity material in English may immediately exclude people with no English or only a limited understanding of it.

Ensuring that an engagement process is inclusive contributes to its value and its legitimacy. The real challenge posed by the need to be inclusive is to avoid involving just the usual suspects and the hard to reach, and leaving everybody else – the apathetic majority – out in the cold.

So, in summary:

1. List all the people you think may take part (the 'usual suspects') and decide whether, for this engagement process, their disproportionate involvement might distort the results.
2. If this is the case, think about what you could do to ensure to prevent this, such as running additional types of process where their influence may be less.
3. List all the people who might be hard to reach and devise a plan to make sure you do reach them.

4. Monitor the results to ensure that you are getting the input that you need. If you are not, think about what you can do to rectify it.

Recruitment of stakeholders

The term 'recruitment' is used to describe the process of inviting people to participate in an engagement process.

One of the regular complaints among those who have to run engagement processes is how hard it is to get people to participate. When you ask what methods they have tried, they will tell you that they have put advertisements in the local paper, or the process is announced on their website, or they have done a leaflet drop.

Ask yourself this: how often do you respond positively to a party invitation that is thrust through your letterbox by a complete stranger? Would you cheerfully donate some of your precious time to someone who announced in the paper that they wanted to speak to you? No, of course you wouldn't.

The best way to achieve high levels of participation is through personal letters or telephone calls, giving the recipient sufficient information to arouse their interest, motivate them, and ensure that they feel the time and energy spent on participating would be valued and would also have value for them. This can be time and resource intensive, but it pays dividends in terms both of the numbers participating and the quality of their involvement.

In framing such an invitation, therefore, it is important to ask:

- What will motivate each group/individual to participate?
- What might prevent them from participating?

Answering these questions may also clarify (if it still needs clarification) what the engagement process is designed to achieve and the main audiences it needs to reach.

An invitation to participate, through whatever medium it is communicated, needs to:

- Explain the purpose of the engagement (e.g. collect comments on a document, establish

policy priorities) and what will be done with the results

- Set out what will be required from those participating, including an estimate of the amount of time expected from them
- Tell participants what they can expect to see by way of results, and when
- Provide a timetable for the process
- Provide contact names and telephone numbers, or website details, from which people can obtain more information.

Involving professionals and experts

As mentioned before, one of the regular complaints among those who have to run engagement processes is how hard it is to get people to participate. This is particularly true when you want experts and professionals to become engaged. These people are usually short of time and if you want their contribution you have to work that much harder to get it.

The best way to get professionals and experts involved is to make the process interesting and useful for them as well as for you, and to use methods that allow them the best opportunity to use their expertise and benefit from that of others.

Here are some suggested steps for involving professionals and experts:

1. Identify the expertise you need
2. Identify the people with that expertise
3. Ask yourself what might motivate each person to participate and what you can offer them in return
4. Make personal contact with them, explain what you are trying to achieve and ask their advice on how best to do it
5. Send them a formal invitation, setting out the advice you have had and what specifically you want from them, and an estimate of the time you think the process will take
6. Offer to pay their expenses and/or an honorarium whenever you can
7. Write to them immediately after they have contributed and tell them how valuable their

contribution has been - because if they have been useful you may want to use them again.

Too many stakeholders

Finally, if it becomes clear that the number of interested stakeholders outstrips the resources available to engage them all to the extent that you would wish (a problem most people in this field long to have) and you want to avoid excluding anyone, there are several options available:

- Increase the resources available
- Use a process that can involve larger numbers at lower costs (e.g. using the internet)
- Take a staged approach and involve different stakeholders at different stages
- Invite everyone on a 'first come, first served' basis
- Explore which individuals' or groups' interests could be effectively represented by others.

What to avoid

Stakeholder analysis is not difficult if its purpose is - as it should be - to identify citizens who can contribute usefully and responsibly to an engagement process.

You will come across people in the world of engagement and consultation, however, who believe that stakeholders should be identified and included according to how important it is that they are encouraged or manipulated into taking a position that serves the organisation doing the consulting.

This may seem pragmatic, but it is ultimately self-destructive because it undermines the credibility and integrity of those doing the consulting.

The purpose of engagement is to develop policies and practices that serve the public, taking into account as far as possible the interests of all stakeholder groups - of which the consulting organisation is one. For one stakeholder to attempt to manipulate others into a particular point of view is foolish and anti-democratic.

Engaging groups

All communities consist of groups that command, to greater or less degrees, the allegiance of their members. The most obvious are families, but in other settings other groups may be as or more important: gangs, faith groups, members of the Rotary or golf club, followers of football teams.

People may also belong to groups determined by the nature of their work, (for example 'manual' or 'professional'), their interests (snooker players), their inclinations (dope smokers) or where they live (the x estate).

There are also groups created by factors over which people have no control, and yet which may determine how they are perceived and treated by others, for example groups characterised by age or ethnicity.

Most people belong to several different groups all of which demand different things of their members: human beings seem naturally tribal. One common source of human conflict is the clash of loyalties to different groups.

Understanding the groups to which members of a community belong is important because it can be such a powerful influence on their lives. If you are going to run an engagement process in, for example, a community with a large Sikh population, then it is essential to understand what Sikhism is and how it shapes the lives of its adherents.

At its very simplest, understanding groups and what is important to them will prevent you embarrassing yourself by trying to hold a meeting for Sikhs on a Sikh holy day.

Mapping and listing the groups in your community is also one of the best ways to ensure that you are reaching all the people you need to reach.

Examples of specific groups

- Faith groups
- Community groups (residence associations, civic societies, social clubs)
- Interest groups (sports clubs, Parent Teacher Associations, conservation groups)

- Work based groups (employees, trade unions)
- Sector based groups (single parent groups, ethnic support groups)
- Age based groups (50+ plus clubs, youth clubs)
- Gender based groups

The first place to start looking for these groups is the internet, and most libraries have extensive listings of local voluntary and community groups.

So, in summary:

1. List all the groups of which you are aware and ask your contacts to suggest others of which you may not be aware
2. For each group, create a list of people who can effectively represent that group
3. When you run any engagement process, use it to check that you are including all the groups that should be included
4. Be careful not to pay too much attention to any one group: if necessary convene a local panel with representatives of each group to discuss the engagement results and ensure you are getting an accurate picture.

Chapter 4: The devil in the detail

That old cliché, ‘the devil is in the detail’, applies to engagement processes as it does to most things. We stress here the importance of taking time to think through the design of engagement processes properly before starting on their implementation, but this does not mean that implementation does not also need plenty of thought. This chapter covers the issues that are most frequently raised by clients and participants in our training courses, starting with how to check that what you are planning makes sense.

Reality-checking

Nobody ever gets a process design right the first time. Take time to check the decisions you have made.

Will your chosen method(s):

- Meet your objectives?
- Engage the right stakeholders?
- Be achieved within the time and budget you have available?
- Produce a response that you have sufficient resources to manage and respond to?

Be ruthless with yourself. It is much easier to re-design the engagement process, if you have to, at this stage before you have to spend a lot of time and money. The following steps are useful for reality-checking.

1. **Use your imagination.** For example, put yourself in the shoes of different stakeholders. If you were them, how would you react to getting an invitation to come to a meeting on this issue? Or how would that stakeholder respond to a consultation document and the questions you have drafted? Would your immediate reaction be to participate – or to bin it?
2. **Remember also at this stage to ask yourself what could be in it for the people you are engaging:** what benefit will they get from spending time and effort responding to you?

How can you add value to the process for them? Too much engagement can mean the resultant ‘stakeholder fatigue’ makes people less willing to participate when it is truly necessary – which in turn adds to the unnecessary cost.

3. **Seeing a process through the eyes of the stakeholders is one of the best ways to check how realistic your plans are.** Give some of them a call: tell them your plans and ask for their reactions. You could also check on the experiences of others who have adopted this type of approach or consulted on this issue before. What worked? What didn’t work? What would they do differently if they had to do it again?
4. **This is also a good moment to give some thought to how the rest of your engagement process will unfold.** For example, think about:
 - How you will respond to participants;
 - how you will analyse the results of your process;
 - whether and how you will publish the results; and
 - How you will evaluate it.

The answers here may make you realise that what you are planning is flawed.

Background materials

The material requirements of engagement can be considerable. The descriptions of different methods provide some sense of their resource requirements, but some require more than others in terms of preparation of background materials.

- For example, if you are consulting on a written document, ensure the language used is neutral, user-friendly and avoids jargon wherever possible, and where necessary (depending of course on who is being consulted) translated into minority languages and Braille.
- If your chosen engagement method is an exhibition you will need to put a lot of thought into exactly what form it should take, how it will

provide information to people, and how they in turn can respond to what they see or hear. If an exhibition is to be staffed, as it should be, then those staffing it will need to be briefed on the subject matter so they are aware of the sort of questions they are likely to be asked and how to answer them.

- If you are planning a public meeting or a workshop you may need to provide background notes for participants.
- Most engagement methods involving a specific invitation (i.e. probably not public meetings and exhibitions) will require a separate covering letter explaining the process and how the results will be fed back to stakeholders.
- If your chosen method is informal, such as conversations on the streets, you may still want to have information to give out or business cards with contact numbers.

Designing surveys and questionnaires

It is always a good idea, but particularly if you are carrying out quantitative research, to run a few pilot interviews to test how the questions work in practice.

This is partly to ensure the questions you are asking will produce the information you want, but also because you need to know how those on the receiving end will experience what you are doing: will they find some questions overly intrusive, for example, or simply incomprehensible.

Questionnaires can also be used to establish benchmarks, or to track a shift in attitude. If, for example, you want to see wider use of a service or building, you might want to ask:

- What percentage of people is aware of the service?
- What percentage of them makes use of it?

At the end of a certain time period you can then ask how many more people are aware of the service, and are using it. From this information you can work out the cost per extra user and whether the effort made has been cost-effective.

Benchmark research, of course, only tells you *after* the event whether your efforts have succeeded. In

longer-term projects it is useful to know *before* it ends how successful a campaign is proving. In that way, data gained from the evaluation process can be used to make adjustments to the campaign as it unfolds.

Drafting questions for surveys and questionnaires

- Try to keep questions as short as possible. A few carefully focused questions usually produce more useful responses than a larger number of general ones
- Tell them how long it should take to answer all the questions
- Use simple words: people will not answer questions they don't immediately understand
- Start by asking relatively straightforward questions and then those requiring more complex answers
- Group together questions investigating similar themes
- If you are using tick boxes, vary the question format so that people have to think about each response rather than just ticking the same box throughout. You should also alert people to the fact that the format changes
- If you give people a number of alternatives, ensure you give them enough choice to ensure they think about the answer
- If you give people a scale on which to score something, tell them which end is high and which low
- Avoid 'closed' questions unless you want yes/no answers
- 'Why?' questions tend to get explanations and justifications; 'what?' questions tend to get information; 'how?' questions tend to be the most demanding and many people answer as if they are 'what?' questions
- Guard against phrasing questions in such a way that they reflect your own presuppositions or biases
- Be careful not to lead people in particular directions either through the wording of the question or through any examples you use

- Avoid composite questions such as “What are the advantages and disadvantages of public transport?” Separate them
- Where possible avoid questions including words that need defining, such as 'regularly'
- Avoid questions that are likely to have predictable answers. For example, “Is a safer neighbourhood important to you?”

A few general points to consider:

- Never forget that people have a choice: they don't have to respond to you and by doing so they are giving you their time and attention - respect it.
- Tell them why you are asking for their help and how it will be used
- Tell them if the results are confidential, if you need their names, if there will be any comeback to them from having taken part.
- Tell them how much of their time you need.
- Tell them if the subject of the interview is sensitive or is likely to intrude on personal issues: and that they have a perfect right to refuse to answer certain questions should they choose to do so.

Publicity and marketing

One of the toughest aspects of any engagement process is getting people, first, to realise that it is happening and, second, getting them to respond. If you are sending invitations to specific individuals to get their input on a document, marketing is less of an issue; if they are motivated they will do it.

But getting people to come to a public meeting or an exhibition, for example, requires a marketing exercise and this should be part of the whole planning process. How you market a particular process will be determined by whom you want to participate, but the methods available are those used for marketing anything:

- Mail shots
- Leaflet drops
- Advertising in local and national newspapers etc.
- Trade press or the newsletters of interest groups/representative bodies/trade associations.

Do not be afraid to try new ideas: the flow of information is now so great that it becomes ever harder to stand out from the crowd. Try different methods, take a few risks, use techniques such as viral marketing, competitions, text alerts: anything to tell people what you are doing and how they can be part of it.

Getting internal support

Ensure internal organisational awareness as well as external (intranet, posters, flyers, etc) - there may be as much internal as external expertise to be drawn upon. In addition, it reflects well on the organisation for as many staff as possible to know what is going on so they can respond fluently to questions from outside.

So also check:

- Internal communication: communicate the agreed process to all relevant colleagues and distribute details of times and places if you want them to come to particular meetings.
- If the engagement process involves a written consultation document you will need to establish the internal approval route and likely timescale for approval and for any final decision-making process.
- Finalise materials: finalise all drafting of documentation, press releases etc and gain relevant approvals. Exhibition panels may also require approval for the same reason, and it may be tactful to ask for comments on a proposed agenda for a public meeting.
- Co-ordination: ensure that all materials include a named point of contact for comments/complaints from stakeholders on how the engagement process has been managed.

Results and responses

If you are running the sort of process that involves receiving comments, don't wait for all the responses to come in before you start your analysis. Keep checking and monitoring that the process is delivering the required outcomes. If it is not, consider what can be done.

Would it be possible, for example, to run a series of workshops or an electronic process (both of which can be organised fairly quickly) to supplement the existing process?

In particular, check the feedback from stakeholders to ensure it includes responses from the hard-to-reach groups identified in your stakeholder analysis and, if necessary, take additional steps to ensure

their participation. Remember: the range of stakeholders that have responded may be one of your success criteria.

Below is a sequence of questions that may be of assistance in monitoring the effectiveness of your methods, every so often (at most a month into a communications campaign).



Figure 6: Sequence for monitoring the effectiveness of your methods

By doing this you will discover that some techniques work well with some target audiences and that others do not.

If, for example, you discover that leafleting does not work with a particular target audience, you have not wasted money; you have learned something that will save money in the future - so make sure what you have learned is passed on.

Another important aspect when receiving results and responses, is to acknowledge feedback and input from stakeholders as soon as possible, certainly within two weeks of receiving their comments or their attendance at a meeting, and

repeat the explanation in the covering letter or the original invitation of how their input will be used and when they can expect to hear the results of the process.

A standard letter or even postcard may be sufficient: just ensure people do not feel they have responded into a black hole.

If the engagement process consists of workshops and meetings then thank you notes to people for coming and participating will be appreciated. If you have run an exhibition and people have provided contact details, then a note to thank them for attending may encourage them to stay involved.

Chapter 5: Designing face-to-face processes

Our final contribution to thinking about the design of engagement processes is around that ancient bugbear: the public meeting. This chapter thinks through public meetings and other face-to-face processes from the design point of view.

Let us begin by thinking through what makes a good public meeting. There are some general standards any public meeting should aspire to meet:

A good public meeting:

- Addresses the issues the participants want addressed
- Enables all participants to say what they want to without feeling intimidated or inhibited
- Leaves people knowing what will happen as a result of it and how the results will be used
- Produces results which feel legitimate to the participants
- Allows opportunities for people to talk face-to-face, creating mutual understanding and respect even where that means an agreement to differ
- Builds relationships where possible
- Is run efficiently and cost-effectively
- Makes participants want to attend the next meeting or participate in other parts of the process.

There will be other things that specific meetings will aspire to achieve - such as sending people away better informed. But in our experience those organising meetings tend to think about them only from their organiser's point of view, and they tend to be defensive: "The more presentations we have the less time there is for people to be disruptive". It doesn't seem to occur that people often become disruptive because they are not allowed to speak.

So in offering some ideas about designing meetings we are trying to come from both the organisers' and the participants' points of view.

Designing your face-to-face process

Here is a step-by-step process to designing a meeting or workshop.

Basics

1. **Decide what results** the event is designed to achieve. The provision of information? The gathering of opinions? New relationships?
2. If the meeting is part of a longer engagement process, **check the overall timetable**. Are the planned results the right ones in the context of the overall process? Should you be holding a short, sharp two-hour meeting for 20 people or a three-day seminar for 150?
3. When you are fixing dates and times remember to take into account the timing that will best suit **the needs of your participants**.

Working out the programme

1. Start with a large sheet of paper and **fill in the practicalities**: start and finish times at the top and bottom, and fixed meal or break times between them. (Be generous with break times: 15 minutes is the minimum. If you want people to meet and talk informally, allow longer.)
2. Then **list things you definitely have to do**, such as introductions at the beginning and evaluations at the end. If you think a presentation followed by a question and answer session is also definite, write it down on a piece of paper such as a Post-It note - but don't write down on your agenda sheet until you are sure where it goes.
3. When you have filled in the fixed points, ask "How do we use the time remaining to get from where we are to where we want to be?" **Identify a series of steps**, probably not more than four or five for a day's meeting, probably only 2 or 3 for a 2-hour evening meeting. It can be easier to do this by working back from your desired results than working forward from the beginning.

Detailed preparation

1. Now you can *design the meeting* in detail. For example, you may want to review a particular issue in sub-groups, or do some creative thinking. If it is the start of a difficult process, an expectations exercise can be a useful way to break the ice...and so on. Remember that energy diminishes towards the end of sessions, and that an active session after lunch keeps people awake.
2. Next, do some *reality-testing*: for example, "How much time are we going to need for the questions-and-answer session?" *Consult colleagues and stakeholders* to ensure you know where timing difficulties are likely to emerge. This is a good time to find out what speakers are intending to say and how long they will need. Discourage any presentation of more than 12 minutes.
3. Choose the simplest meeting techniques that will produce the type of results you want.
4. *Move from planning to detailed preparation*, such as defining tasks. Write out the instructions you intend to give, then repeat them to yourself. If tasks are not immediately clear, they are either too complicated or the instructions are inadequate. Refine your instructions until it is certain that participants will know **what** you want at the end of each task, and **how** they are to achieve it.
5. When you are totally clear about the tasks you will be setting and the techniques to be used, then you can *revisit your proposed timings and check* that they are realistic.

Managing breakout groups

1. If you are going to use sub-groups, *work out how to group people*. Do you want people with similar expertise or points of view to work together, or to be mixed with others with different backgrounds or contrasting opinions? Personal relationships, past antagonisms, and questions of hierarchy and confidentiality can all complicate the question of who should work with whom.
2. With tasks defined, grouping decided and techniques chosen, you are in a position to *decide the layout* of the room(s) and *choose the equipment* you will need. Wherever possible check the room before you start your

meeting design: it can affect everything from the size or number of sub-groups you use to your choice of techniques.

3. Gather your colleagues, *allocate roles*, and go through the programme moment by moment. Do this far enough in advance to redesign from scratch if you need to.

Logistics

1. Arrive at the venue at least an hour before the meeting is due to begin. Then:
 - Check heating, lighting, ventilation
 - Check all electrical equipment
 - Check coffee/lunch break arrangements
 - Check emergency exits and arrangements and house rules
 - Arrange the layout including seating, wall space, tables
 - Set out badges and briefing papers on entrance table
 - Separate sheets of flip chart paper, date and reference them
 - Test pens and discard dry ones
 - Check arrangements for coats and message-taking.
2. Find yourself a quiet corner, conjure up this imminent event as clearly as you can, and imagine yourself doing everything successfully. Then go and welcome your participants.

Chairing and facilitating

There are entire books about chairing and facilitating and the differences between them. In our view, these days the differences are beginning to elide: even the most directive chairs are beginning to operate in a more facilitative mode.

So we prefer to think in terms of the skills that anyone running a meeting needs to use. We strongly advise people who have to run a lot of meetings to get some proper training; in the meantime this is a checklist of the key skills.

Key skills

Listening: listening 'actively', demonstrating attention and sensitivity to what is being said;
Empathising: showing you can see what others see, hear what they hear, and feel what they feel;
Clarifying: making everything as clear as possible;
Questioning: asking the right person the right question in the right way at the right moment;
Affirming: ensuring people and their opinions are valued;
Non-verbal communication : noticing and interpreting non-verbal communications and using your own body to communicate;
Observing: noticing what is going on among stakeholders;
Process management: keeping control of the process and ensuring it achieves its objectives;
Time management: ensuring the time available is used effectively
Adaptability: being able to react quickly and flexibly to changing circumstances and needs of participants.

Design in the use of the language

We assume that anyone taking the trouble to read these notes will run a meeting with some skill and observing the basic courtesies. Continuing the design theme, however, you may not have thought about the language you use in terms of its design.

Here, for example, are some ideas on how to design the language you use to maximise its effect.

Ways to ask questions

1. Say why you are asking a question: single questions can cause defensiveness; a string of questions can feel like an interrogation. Explaining a question can soften its impact.
2. Prepare people to hear the question: a short introduction, such as "I'd just like to ask..." can also soften the impact of a tough question.
3. Acknowledge responses: verbal/non-verbal acknowledgement of responses encourages people to expand on their initial answers.
4. Encourage expansion: use phrases such as "Could you say a bit more about that...?" and "Is there anything else on this point...?"
5. Ask for clarification and specification: encourage people to clarify and specify what they mean

"Could you give us an example?" Don't let people hide behind lazy generalisations.

6. Check for accuracy - especially if writing: repeating and summarising is a way both to clarify, ensure others are listening, and build some trust and momentum with participants.
7. Follow lines of thought: it can take several questions to explore fully a single topic. If something else is raised, note it somewhere separately and return to it later. Also, ask one question at a time and get an answer before you move on.
8. Learn to enjoy thoughtful silences: ask a question, then shut up. Sooner or later someone will respond.
9. Ask problem-solving questions: participants have to be problem-solvers. Encourage this by asking "How might this issue be resolved?", or "How can we ensure this situation is prevented in future?"; "How can we take this forward?" and so on.
10. Ask tentative questions about possible solutions: avoid promoting solutions yourself. If a useful idea emerges, float it so that others can own it or reject it without feeling exposed. "Hmm. What does everyone think of that...?" "Are you suggesting...?"

Choosing techniques to use in face-to-face processes

Choosing techniques to use in meetings and workshops is rather like choosing which engagement methods to use: there are no hard and fast rules because the choice in every situation is influenced by so many variables. Being aware of these variables is the first part of making any choice.

The most significant variables are usually:

- Type of result required
- Purpose of process
- Number of people
- Time available
- Space available
- Level of conflict
- Cultural factors

- Number of facilitators available
- Articulateness/literacy of group
- Time of day

So choosing techniques is another design challenge. This is a design process that can help:

1. Define the purpose of a session and the type of result
2. Decide its importance and the amount of time required
3. Consider whether you want sub-groups to work on this task, or on different parts of it, and whether their results need to be shared with the other groups in the same session
4. Make a preliminary list of possible techniques
5. Now consider which of these possible techniques will not work because of the:
 - Number of people
 - Space required
 - Level of conflict
 - Skill level required
 - Time available
6. Narrow your choice down to the two or three best options.
7. Plump for the technique that seems the most straightforward and least likely to go wrong.

10 Meeting techniques

These notes do not intend to offer a comprehensive guide to techniques to use during meetings, but it is useful for anyone in the chair/facilitator role to have some sense of what it can be useful to do beyond the ubiquitous plenaries, question-and-answer sessions and breakout groups.

The following 10 basic techniques are ones we use regularly in public meetings. While it is always best to be trained in their use or at least to have seen them used by others before trying to use them yourself, they can all potentially be used by anyone with some nous and wit.

1. Expectations

An expectations exercise at the beginning of a meeting can:

- Be an ice-breaking exercise it enables people to get comfortable with the situation and with each other.
- Give participants some indication of whether the meeting is going to meet their needs or, if not, how it needs to be changed.
- Help people to adjust their expectations to what is on offer - better to do it up front than have to handle disappointment at the end.

For an expectations exercise, stick up a sheet of paper and some pens (or alternatively, use Post-Its), with a suitable title such as "What do you want to get out of today?" Make time to de-brief it - immediately after setting the ground rules is sometimes an appropriate moment.

It can be useful to revisit people's expectations half-way through a day and at the end. It lets you know how they feel about what is being achieved.

2. Agenda building

Often a chair creates the agenda, but it can be useful if the participants create at least some of the agenda to make it their meeting. If you want to create an agenda for the meeting with the participants

1. Write all the possible items for the agenda on a flip chart, the first of which must always be 'agree agenda'.
2. Ask participants whether each item is *urgent* (it must be discussed *at this meeting*) or *significant* (which means it *must* be discussed).
3. Using the classification of urgent and significant, create the priorities.
4. Ask when the meeting must end and who will leave the meeting before the end. Take this into account when deciding the order of discussion.
5. Now go through the agenda, asking how much time each item will need.

By doing this, you ensure that the significant and urgent items have the correct priority.

Deal with urgent but less significant items first - applying a strict time limit. Then move onto the significant and urgent items, leaving not urgent items to the end. Beware the urgent driving out the significant.

3. Ground rules

Ground rules can take several forms, from those written down and formally agreed as part of the conditions on which they are invited to a meeting to a quick verbal agreement at the beginning.

In contentious situations, establishing the ground rules can provide a chair or facilitator with some slender authority, and it also provides something for participants to discuss while they are still getting the measure of each other and of the situation.

Here are some common ground rules:

- No smoking
- Communications policy e.g. openness/confidentiality, press relations
- Responsibilities of participants e.g. as representatives
- Roles, e.g. of facilitators, project managers, technical advisers
- Personal behaviour e.g., only one person to speak at a time
- Absenteeism e.g. rules on substitutions
- Casual observers e.g. none allowed
- Language problems, e.g. use of jargon, technical explanations
- Recording e.g. use of flip-charts, photo-reports, distribution
- Decision-making e.g., voting not for decision-making
- Nature of contributions, e.g. no position statements, brevity

Display them prominently and near enough so that if things get out of hand you can point and say "Do you want to add another ground rule about...."

4. Plenaries

Good for starting meetings and essential if everyone is to hear what everyone else thinks of a situation.

Plenaries of more than about 60 people are difficult to make interactive. Make them productive by keeping highly focused on the issues, using visual aids, and finding ways to move people through different phases of plenary. Break large groups down into smaller groups whenever possible.

How do you actually run a plenary discussion, lasting perhaps an hour or more, in a way which keeps the participants engaged and enables them to follow the thread of the discussion?

The challenge in running plenaries successfully is that they have to be both task and people focused. Both require structure and clarity.

To be task-focused: use flip charts to provide a structure of *headings* with *topic areas* under each

To be people-focused: communicate using a structure of *summaries* (where the discussion has been), *way marks* (where it is) and *signposts* (where it is going).

5. Breakout groups

Sub-groups or 'breakout' groups can work in more detail than a plenary group, allow more of the participants to have their say, or enable several subjects to be discussed at once.

Decide in advance whether you are happy for people to create their own small groups, or whether you will direct people to join certain groups.

Give each group a clear task, and tell them what form you want their output to be in: for example, a list of ideas, a precise question, a range of action points, a set of criteria.

Sub-groups within plenary sessions: This technique, known as Nominal Group Technique (NGT), offers the advantages of working in small groups without the disadvantages of people having to move.

It means arranging tables and chairs so that people can work either in plenary or in small groups. It is particularly useful as a way to collect ideas after a conventional sub-group session: collecting a point from each table in turn is much less tedious than simply having each group in turn 'report back'.

6. Ideas generation

The more ideas there are on the table, the easier it is to find one or a combination which everybody likes. The key elements of successful brainstorming are:

- Ask people to create as many ideas as possible in a short time – perhaps five minutes
- Do not allow any criticism or comments until the time is up

- When it is, sort out the ideas and gradually identify the best.

7. Metaplan

'Metaplan' can describe a range of techniques. In its simplest form - as described here - it gives participants the satisfaction of seeing their work and progress immediately. It is used particularly at the beginning of meetings to identify the issues and problems that concern the participants.

1. Hand out Post-Its, or small pieces of paper or card, and ask people to write on each a single word or phrase that expresses their concern or interest in the situation. Emphasise large writing and few words.
2. Collect the cards as they are written and display them.
3. Cluster them according to theme, or ask the participants to come up to the board and help you to group them.
4. Move the cards around until everyone agrees they are clustered in sensible places, with duplications clearly together.
5. Invite clarification questions from the group - while being sensitive to the fact that some may prefer their comments to be anonymous.

This technique highlights areas of shared concern, and also gives a rough indication of where most people are focusing.

8. Prioritising

It can be useful to find out what areas of concern are priorities, or which solutions attract the most favour. This technique offers a rough-and-ready way of discovering, but it is useful to emphasise that it is merely to discover the common ground. The purpose is not to make a decision and issues or ideas not prioritised will not be immediately dropped from further consideration as a result.

1. Ensure the list of items you want to prioritise has spaces beside each item in which participants can place sticky dots or pen marks.
2. Give each person the requisite number of dots, allowing about one dot for every 5 or 6 items.
3. Set the rules for the exercise, telling participants whether they may place only one dot on any single item (which identifies a shortlist of

priorities) or more than one dot (which gives a weighting).

4. Ask participants to consider the list, and then ask them to write the number of each item they intend to choose on their dots. This prevents people hanging back and using their dots to swing the result, or rushing forward hoping to start a trend.
5. Ask people to place their dots. When all have done so it is helpful to write the number of dots by each item, and sometimes to suggest a threshold beyond which the number of dots seems significant.
6. Ask an open question to start discussion of the results.

9. Carousel

The carousel gets many people discussing several different subjects in a limited amount of time. It also brings some energy into a flagging group.

1. Divide the group into three to five sub-groups depending on the number of people and subjects you want them to cover (one subject per group).
2. Each group has a home 'station' with its own flip charts etc., and carries out a defined task, recording the results in one particular colour.
3. At given times each group moves to the 'station' of the neighbouring group, leaving one person behind as 'station representative'.
4. The person left behind explains to the newly arrived group what his or her group has done. The arrivals comment on and add to the work in their own colour.
5. After a given period of time the groups move on to the next station - and so on until they arrive back to their home station.
6. The representative says how the visiting groups have responded to their original efforts, and they say what fun they have had around the room.
7. After review of the results each group draws together its conclusions which are presented in plenary.

10. Action list

The Action List is the last thing to do in every meeting: the agreement about who has to do what. Allow enough time for it.

1. Write up exactly what has to be done;
2. Put someone's name beside each action;
3. Put by when the action must be done.

If you do not do this, you may have wasted the meeting!

People problems

One of the main reasons people dislike public meetings is that they are afraid participants may be disruptive. In fact, this is often cited as a reason for not holding public meetings - which in turn leads to more angry people who cannot confront those they deem responsible for the things that made them angry in the first place.

Our experience is that what seems like irrational or disruptive behaviour often becomes perfectly understandable when you know more about a person or their situation. So learn to pause before you judge – and find out more.

It is also useful to focus on people's positive intent – work out what they are trying to achieve even if the way they are doing it isn't helpful. Ask them to tell you more about their interest and concerns: it is amazing what a little serious listening can do.

There are some other approaches that those who have to run such meetings often find useful:

- Look behind stated positions for the interests and values, needs and fears, that these positions represent. People adopt shorthand and slogans when they get frustrated.
- Ask about specific uncertainties: things that disturb people because they don't know enough about them. A lot of conflict arises out of uncertainty about the future.
- Information is power, therefore secrecy is a way of holding onto power. Generating some openness is a prerequisite for building trust and mutual understanding.
- Perceived power differences inhibit negotiation and generate frustration and a sense of powerlessness. Make sure people feel listened to, pay particular attention to those who feel most powerless.
- All conflict carries echoes of past problems and future possibilities for all involved. Creating opportunities for acknowledgment of past wrongs (but this needs huge care) and opportunities for envisioning the future can both contribute to the process of defusing anger and fostering resolution.

Here are other things that can cause confrontations in meetings:

<i>Common causes of tension</i>	<i>Possible remedies</i>
Differences of culture and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acknowledge and explore ▪ Treat as common problem
Emotional barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prepare stakeholders for expression of deep feelings, then invite them ▪ Ask people to express feelings through image and metaphor
Growing hostility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clarify needs and interests ▪ Describe situation and ask what should happen next
Personality clashes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suggest stakeholders find new representatives ▪ Review ground rules ▪ Meet privately to explore
Representatives perceived to lack legitimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clarify their authority ▪ Seek new representatives ▪ Strengthen links to colleagues or supporters

<i>Common causes of tension</i>	<i>Possible remedies</i>
Unexplained resistance to progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Check for unresolved resentment at past action and /or hidden agenda ▪ Acknowledge impasse and treat as common problem
Issues too difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduce issues to small parts
Too much uncertainty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seek further information or expert/objective advice ▪ Make uncertainty a shared problem ▪ Demonstrate that it can be managed
Disputed information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Examine assumptions underlying information ▪ Work together to find facts
Complex issues requiring joint solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Break into cross-party working groups, identify separate issues and brainstorm possible solutions
Unrealistic expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discover what parties expect and reality-test ▪ Review priorities
Positions hardening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work jointly on long-term vision of possible solutions ▪ Reframe issues ▪ Review effects of not agreeing
Outside interference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Look at impact of possible solutions on outsiders ▪ Invite representatives of people not represented
Loss of momentum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ List agreements to date ▪ Break for evaluation of progress ▪ Review pressures and constraints
One party dominates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review ground rules ▪ Call private meeting with them
All options unacceptable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduce options to small parts ▪ Review best and worst alternatives to agreement ▪ Brainstorm new options and changes to existing ones

Figure 6: Common causes and remedies of confrontation in meetings

Venues for meetings

Different types of meeting require different types of venue. The venue for a public meeting that may attract hundreds of people will be very different from the venue for a workshop for fifty people or a board meeting for a dozen.

The advice here divides in to the general and the specific: things that are important for all meetings and things that help specific types of meeting go well.

General points for consideration

Good venues have:

- Enough space for people to sit comfortably
- Screens large enough for people at the back to see and read presentations

- Good acoustics – or an effective public address system
- A separate area for refreshments
- Clean toilets and enough of them
- Facilities for storing coats and bags
- Natural daylight

Specific points for consideration

For smaller meetings that involve methods other than participants sitting in rows and listening to presentations, venues need some specific characteristics:

- Participants need to be able to see and hear each other easily
- Flexible seating arrangements – for example the ability to seat people in small groups around tables (which is often known as 'cabaret' style)

- Enough space to set up different 'stations' around the room for using workshop techniques such as 'carousel' or 'open space'
- Walls on which it is possible to stick flipchart paper, or at least large boards that can be moved as required
- Breakout rooms available for group work.

Choosing and setting up a venue

The size and nature of the working space available to you can dictate the success or failure of your meeting.

Wherever possible:

- Go for a bigger room than you really need. If you get fewer people than you expect, fill the extra space with tables and chairs – it's better than not having enough room

- Avoid having people facing windows because the glare is tiring
- Tables can make barriers: either dispense with them, or place them so that people are sitting in front of or beside rather than behind them
- If people have a lot of paper, ensure they have tables to work on, but try to avoid having everyone sitting around a large square or rectangular table – they will constantly be craning to see each other.
- In polarised situations, tables can provide a security blanket for some people - but a large boardroom table can exacerbate the situation
- Arrive with plenty of time to experiment with room layouts
- Check catering arrangements and in particular make sure there are enough serving points so people do not have to queue for meals.

Chapter 6: Following-up engagement processes

Engagement is not over when the meeting ends or the questionnaires have been returned. One of the aspects of public engagement that most enrages the public is the lack of response when people have bothered to participate. Too often people complain about being ignored or that their carefully composed comments have disappeared into a black hole. It is even worse when they perceive that those comments have been ignored.

So the processes of analysing, interpreting and presenting back the results also have to be designed in advance. An engagement process that generates 10,000 responses can only be counted a success if those 10,000 people feel that their time was well spent - and that means them being able to see where their responses have gone and how they have been used. They may be upset if ultimately the argument does not go their way - but they will be less upset if they know that what they said was definitely received, read, absorbed and displayed back so that they and others can see it.

This is where electronic methods have a real advantage over traditional methods. Instead of paying some poor clerk to sit in a basement for nine months reading and summarising those 10,000 responses before the summary sees the light of day (by which time everyone will have forgotten what it was all about), the results of electronic processes can be posted on the internet in their entirety within days of the process ending. If some decent data management software is used, these responses can also be collated and presented in a way that makes it easy for people to surf others' ideas or search for particular points of view.

In this chapter we look at what follows an engagement process: analysis, interpretation, presentation and response.

Analysis and interpretation

Analysing quantitative data can be as simple as reading a few tables or complicated enough to need knowledge and experience of research methodologies and statistical analysis. Analysing

qualitative data is usually easier, though some ability to read between the lines and appreciate the influence of factors such as context, family, education, ethnicity and social class is also useful.

Analysis means presenting the results in specific ways to allow people to understand what has been said. It might mean, for example, presenting everything said by everyone over 60, or by everyone in a particular occupation or social group.

If the results do have to be analysed in this way then it is essential that this is allowed for in the original design process. If, for example, you need to analyse the views of everyone over 60, then you need to ensure that every response by someone over 60 is tagged as such - which means that the process has to include asking people's ages.

Think also about who will be reading your analysis. Basic frequencies and percentages may be enough to give some people what they need to know; others will need more cross-references across categories to identify significant trends and patterns.

It is usually wise to be a little bit cautious about drawing conclusions. Put your results into local or national contexts, or draw comparisons with previous and similar results.

Analysing qualitative responses can be much more time-consuming. For a start, someone has to read them all, categorise them, and possibly extract several different thoughts from the same response. The common practice is for the consultants to absorb all the responses and to write a summary, but the results can be viewed with suspicion if there is no way of checking that the summary is fair and balanced.

Fortunately the advent of electronic processes means that there is now no reason why participants should not always have access to the raw data: every single response from every participant displayed on a website. Responses submitted on paper can be scanned and inputted into the same database and similarly displayed.

Interpretation is different again. This means explaining what you think the results actually mean. So, for example, concluding that over 60's prefer small shops to supermarkets; or that car drivers prefer on-street parking to multi-storey car parks.

When interpreting your results be careful to be objective: you may be asked to justify the conclusions you draw and provide supporting evidence. Making intuitive leaps may not be enough to convince anyone in, for example, a sensitive political situation.

So if you want to derive meanings from what you receive, then you need to ask questions that will enable you to do this.

There are two main possibilities for who does the analysing and interpreting:

- Responses are analysed by an individual with expert knowledge of the content, who then makes recommendations on which ideas, arguments or information should be accepted, developed or otherwise pursued, providing reasons;
- A working group performs the same task; such a working group may consist of internal staff, or of independent individuals, or even of a panel of stakeholders convened for the task.

Whichever method is used to analyse and interpret the results of any engagement process, it should be apparent that they have been assessed on their merits and the reasoning behind the conclusions drawn provided for that assessment. This process should be transparent, which means you may have to be prepared to defend the conclusions reached.

In some areas it will be sensible to analyse the results of an engagement also according to race, gender, age or other criteria, depending on the issues and the stakeholders. This can help decision makers to understand the impact their decisions may have on particular stakeholders.

Where the structure of the engagement process (e.g. based around a series of specific questions) has steered or focused responses, this makes the analysis and interpretation process much easier. Independent auditing of the findings can sometimes provide a useful additional measure to reassure respondents that the process is open and objective.

Presentation

Presentation simply means showing people the results of the process; given the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act it has become essential that all engagement results can be presented transparently. As mentioned above, websites are ideal for this: large amounts of information can be presented in forms that allow those interested to surf around the results.

For those who do not have access to the technology, seeing the results in full is always going to be more difficult - so some form of summary, preferably with extensive use of quotations from the original submissions, is an essential alternative.

You will probably have to present your results in a number of formats. The sponsoring organisation will want a formal and detailed report; participants and the public will probably be happy with a summary; and you may also have to summarise the information for presentation on, for example, PowerPoint slides.

Whatever the format, remember that many people find statistics difficult to grasp, so it is important to be crystal clear and avoid jargon or endless tables of figures. Wherever possible use charts, diagrams and pictures: while they may not show all the detail they are more likely to communicate your conclusions in a way that people will understand and remember.

Presenting the results of surveys and questionnaires

In presenting the results of quantitative processes it is very important that the presentation and analysis of the results, and the interpretation of the results, are kept separate.

So you present the results in tables and then explain what they appear to tell you. It is always a good idea, however, to ask others if they share your conclusions. Ask questions such as "What else can we learn from these results?" or "How else can these results be interpreted?"

It is all too easy to leap to the conclusions that you want to leap to - and ignore any other interpretations there might be.

Reporting the results of meeting-based processes

Where an engagement process has consisted largely of meetings and workshops, it is very important that any analysis and interpretation of the results reflects very accurately what happened during the process.

Ideally, the proceedings of meetings should be recorded on flip charts and photographed or transcribed after the meeting. It is essential that facilitators and those recording the meeting use participants' words and are not tempted to paraphrase what is said. In contentious situations, in particular, participants are wary of 'minutes' in the conventional sense because of the perception that anything less than as full a transcript as possible, may be manipulated into a more palatable form. In workshops the practice is to share responsibility for the accuracy of the record with participants.

If the process is participative rather than consultative - in other words if responsibility for implementation of the results of the process is shared with stakeholders - then the proposed actions recorded as part of the meeting effectively form the results of the process.

Responding to engagement processes

Once you have analysed and interpreted the results you then need to tell stakeholders what they have said and what you are going to do about it.

- If you are running a written consultation process, on a policy document for example, it is good practice to keep a full record of all responses so that you can tell participants what points have been accepted or rejected, and why.

- Deciding which responses to accept and which to reject is a matter of judgment, but whatever your final conclusion on a point of view, it must receive full and fair consideration. Keeping detailed records of why certain proposals and comments were accepted, and others not, will help clarify your own decision-making process and creating this sort of audit trail is essential in case there are later legal challenges to the conclusions.
- It is also good practice to produce a final report after any engagement process that sets out how stakeholders' input has been used and what its impact has been. Where possible you should aim to show stakeholders the full extent of opinion so that they appreciate the entire range of views on the issue.
- If you are reporting details of all responses as they were received, you should also check whether participants want their input attributed, and how they want to be described.
- Send 'thank you' letters and copies of any final report to all participants, and tell them about the next steps in any decision-making process. If you received submissions in a minority language, then thank you letters and responses should also ideally be in that language.
- Responding to stakeholders about the results of community engagement processes may be less formal. The results may be summarised or published in a newsletter or through other means of regular contact with the community. Equally, the need to feed back results may be a reason for calling a discussion meeting and provide further opportunities for informal contacts and relationship-building.

Chapter 7: Evaluating engagement processes

One way to reduce cynicism about engagement processes, as well as ensure they are as good as they can be, is to evaluate properly what works and what does not.

Evaluation does not have to be a burden. More than this, thinking about how to evaluate a process at the same time as you design it can actually help the design process by providing another checklist of reminders.

Evaluation from different perspectives

Processes need to be evaluated from two perspectives: the organiser's and the participants'. Both are essential to determining how successful a process was.

To gain the participants' perspective it's useful to ask questions around:

- Their understanding of the exercise's purpose
- How easy or difficult they found it to respond
- Whether they felt the process enabled them to express their own views clearly
- How confident they felt that their contributions would be appreciated and used.

These questions enable the organiser to find out how satisfied participants were with the methods used and whether they felt the process genuinely gave them an opportunity to contribute to the topic being consulted on.

From the organisers perspective the questions need to be a little different:

- How effective the methods were in eliciting the participants' view
- The usefulness of responses received
- The level and type of participation achieved
- Costs and value for money
- Learning points for the next time.

After all, there is no point in employing even the most sophisticated engagement method if the process gets in the way of participants giving their views or produces responses that cannot be used.

Key questions to ask

The following table provides a set of questions for evaluating engagement processes. These simple questions are intended to provide a basic framework and to stimulate your thinking.

	Key questions to ask
Purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What were the purposes? ▪ Were they achieved? ▪ If not, why not?
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What methods were used? ▪ Did they achieve the desired results in terms of levels of participation and type of response? ▪ Which methods worked best for which types of people? ▪ Did the process go according to the intended timetable?
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How many people participated? ▪ Did all key stakeholders participate?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If participation was intended to be representative, was this achieved? ▪ If it was intended to reach several different groups, was this achieved? ▪ What efforts were made to reach commonly under-represented groups? ▪ What methods were used to encourage participation? ▪ Did they work?
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were the results - terms of enough people responding usefully - satisfactory? ▪ How easy were they to analyse and interpret? ▪ What form did any final report of the results take? ▪ How were results communicated to participants?
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What were the results of the exercise? ▪ What has changed or will be changed as a result of the exercise?
Participant comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What comments were made by participants about the engagement process?
Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What did the process cost? ▪ Were the results worth the money?
Learning points for the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What should be done differently next time?

Following up evaluation

Doing an evaluation is only the first step. The next is to take account of the feedback and make sure the next engagement process uses everything you have learned from the previous. The aim should be to create a culture of incremental improvement so that every process is better than the last one.

PART TWO: ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Chapter 8: How to choose the right method

Designing an engagement process is like designing anything else: there are no absolute rules and plenty of room for creativity and imagination in how you do it.

Also, given the amount of engagement done nowadays, and the dangers of 'engagement fatigue', finding novel and different ways to engage people is essential.

It is tempting to classify each type of method using the Spectrum table used at the beginning of these notes but this should be resisted, for two reasons. First, many of these methods could fit under several headings depending on how they are used. Focus groups, for example, although primarily a research method can be used to give and gather information, to provide focused engagement on specific issues, or as part of a community engagement process.

Secondly, such classification is too rigid: it inhibits creativity and imagination – both of which are essential if engagement is to be effective.

Each of the methods described in the following pages has its own pro's and con's, but you cannot consider these in isolation from other issues such as:

- The purpose of the engagement process
- The products you want
- The need to stimulate responses from particular stakeholder groups
- How interactive you need the process to be
- How much 'ownership' of the results you want stakeholders to have.

All these matters will vitally affect your choice of method – which is why these notes constantly emphasise the 'design' element.

There is one more aspect of design and methods that needs to be covered here: the matter of which methods to use in particularly sensitive situations.

Consider appropriate communication techniques

Communication techniques can be divided into the direct and indirect.

The direct means face-to-face or telephone conversations with individuals, and/or perhaps letters in some situations.

Indirect methods mean leafleting, advertising, radio and television programmes, articles in newspapers, press reports. These are indirect because they do not involve any direct contact between the person giving the message and the person receiving it.

The influence of indirect communications is always harder to quantify and may rest as much in a change of general 'atmosphere' as in specific influence on individuals.

Engagement in sensitive situations

The meaning of 'sensitivity' in the context of public and stakeholder engagement is the result of one or more of the following:

- The longer-term history of relations between those doing the consulting and those being consulted
- The recent history and in particular any events within the past 6-12 months that have resulted in tensions among stakeholders or between the authorities and particular groups
- The issue around which engagement is sought: an issue that is sensitive for some may not be others
- Who is being engaged: as above, some people will be more sensitive than others.

Indicators of sensitivity

'Low' sensitivity means that people are fairly relaxed about the issues and happy to discuss them at any

time. 'High', on the other hand, means that people seem wary of what they say, or reluctant to come to meetings.

If you really 'don't know' how to categorise the sensitivity of the issues, then one of your priorities will be to find out more about them.

Until you have done the necessary research it is safer to assume 'high' and be careful than to assume 'low' and start upsetting people with your engagement processes.

The sensitivity of a situation is important because it affects what engagement methods you use.

So what do you need to do?

1. Find out what you don't know.
2. Discuss whether there are certain issues or groups for whom the answer should be 'high' or 'low'.
3. Think about the methods with which you are familiar and are intending to use: does 'low' or 'high' make any of them more or less appropriate?

Dealing with sensitive situations

A situation can be defined as 'sensitive', in terms of conducting an engagement process, when there is a chance that the process of engagement could potentially do harm as well as good.

If, for example, a process focuses on one issue while ignoring another, and the one ignored is perceived by many people to be more important, then the conspiracy theorists may say that the latter issue is being deliberately ignored. Or if it becomes apparent from an engagement process that critical decisions have already been made, then those participating may reasonably conclude that the engagement process is at best a public relations exercise - and decide they want no further relationship with the organisation doing the engaging.

What makes a situation sensitive?

A situation can also be regarded as sensitive when there has been a recent history of unrest or public disaffection: protests, angry scenes at council meetings, or letters to the newspaper. In this case even a process designed to address concerns can

inflare the situation by providing a specific opportunity for venting frustrations.

Sensitivity may not, however, be caused entirely by local events. A situation badly handled elsewhere and reported in the media, for example, may cause certain sections of the community to be alerted to similar possibilities in their neighbourhood.

Sensitivity may even be heightened by factors beyond human control: a prolonged spell of very hot weather, for example, which brings people out on to the streets and encourages late night drinking, can make an otherwise normal situation more sensitive.

Sensitivity is best assessed by keeping in touch with people and being alert to changes in behaviour. The normally friendly contact who suddenly doesn't want to be seen talking to you, for example, may indicate nothing more than a bad mood - or it may indicate some subtle shift in the local atmosphere.

Methods to use in sensitive situations

High sensitivity decreases the choice of engagement methods open to you. Where situations are controversial, engagement processes that allow stakeholders to compare their different approaches and to explore each other's interests and priorities are preferable. You would be unwise, for example, to use questionnaires or face-to-face interview methods, and any meetings you hold will probably need to be independently chaired or facilitated.

This need not invariably mean using a meeting or workshop format. An electronic process, for example, that enables large numbers of stakeholders to compare different viewpoints may well be an effective way to establish areas of common ground and difference as a prelude to formulating proposals, but it is less able to help people build relationships across serious divisions of opinion.

One point that always needs consideration is whether meetings with stakeholders should be 'open' or 'closed'. Open meetings are transparent and sometimes certain stakeholders will only come if a meeting is to be open; on the other hand, an open meeting can encourage grandstanding and 'speaking to the gallery'.

Invitations to closed meetings, meanwhile, are often treated with suspicion, but there are circumstances in which stakeholders may welcome the opportunity to speak off the record and indicate where there may be

room for compromise – something they could not do in public without alienating their supporters.

If the situation is critical, using an independent third party 'honest broker' or professional mediator may be the best way to decide how to advance the situation.

A few helpful tips include:

- Slow down, take one step at a time and test each step as you go
- Seek local advice whenever you are in doubt about what to do
- Try to discover the triggers for particular dissatisfaction
- Convene a panel of local people or experts in the situation to advise you, or
- Involve key stakeholders in decisions about the process.

Dealing with low sensitivity

Low sensitivity increases your choice of engagement methods. You can, for example, use questionnaires rather than face-to-face interviews, and you can hold smaller group meetings with less fear that leaving out someone important will have serious repercussions. It also means that it will be generally easier to discuss the issues.

Using third parties

When there is open conflict around an issue or a fundamental lack of trust between people it can be very difficult to make progress. In such a situation engagement processes can make things worse if they are not carefully handled.

This is the time to consider using a 'third party' who, because he or she is independent and has 'no axe to grind', can be trusted by everyone at least enough to clear the way for direct contact and lay the foundations for the difficult conversations that may need to happen.

What is a 'third party'?

There are a number of words used to describe third parties, such as *facilitator*, *mediator* and *conciliator*. What are the differences between them? In terms of what they actually do - the

approach, skills and techniques - the answer is not very much, but they tend to work in different situations.

Conciliators tend to work within or for service organisations, solving problems associated with the delivery of those services. For example, the National Health Service uses conciliators to deal with complaints against doctors.

Mediators work in a wide range of situations, including international politics, commerce, law, communities and divorce. They help people to negotiate with each other through a process of joint and separate meetings.

Facilitators tend to be used to design and run meetings and help to solve problems in less formal situations than those described above.

None of these should be confused with *arbitrators* who are basically judges - they may be lawyers or other experts - who are hired to listen to evidence and deliver a judgment as in a court of law.

In many areas there are now neighbourhood mediation schemes whose volunteers are trained to act as third parties and to defuse hostility and conflict in communities. In addition, local church ministers and workers can play this role, and sometimes elected representatives can use their position to bring together different groups.

If a situation is very difficult, though, it is better to use someone who has been trained as a mediator rather than just someone whose position might suggest that role.

It is useful to identify people in the community who could act as credible third parties and would be perceived as such, if and when the need arises. It is also useful to make contact with organisations that offer third party intervention. Most organisations will specialise in particular types of conflict.

When to use a third party

There are four types of situation in which you should consider the use of a trained third party:

1. When the situation is so tense that people are unwilling to have any direct contact even if they want to meet. In this situation the third party can

shuttle between them, establishing what would make a meeting possible and if necessary hosting it on neutral ground.

2. When people have become locked into positions from which they believe they cannot escape without making what they see as unacceptable concessions. In this situation, the third party can float ideas backwards and forwards until there is sufficient agreement, or renewed momentum, to give direct contact a chance of being successful.
3. When people need more information in order to make progress, but cannot risk divulging information to the other side. In this situation a trusted third party can hold confidential meetings with each side and explore what information may have to be shared if progress is to be made.
4. The final type of situation in which third parties are useful is when there are many different people to be involved and a normal public meeting is going to be too clumsy to work. This is the situation in which a third party with experience of running multi-party meetings can help ensure the issues are handled both sensitively and systematically.

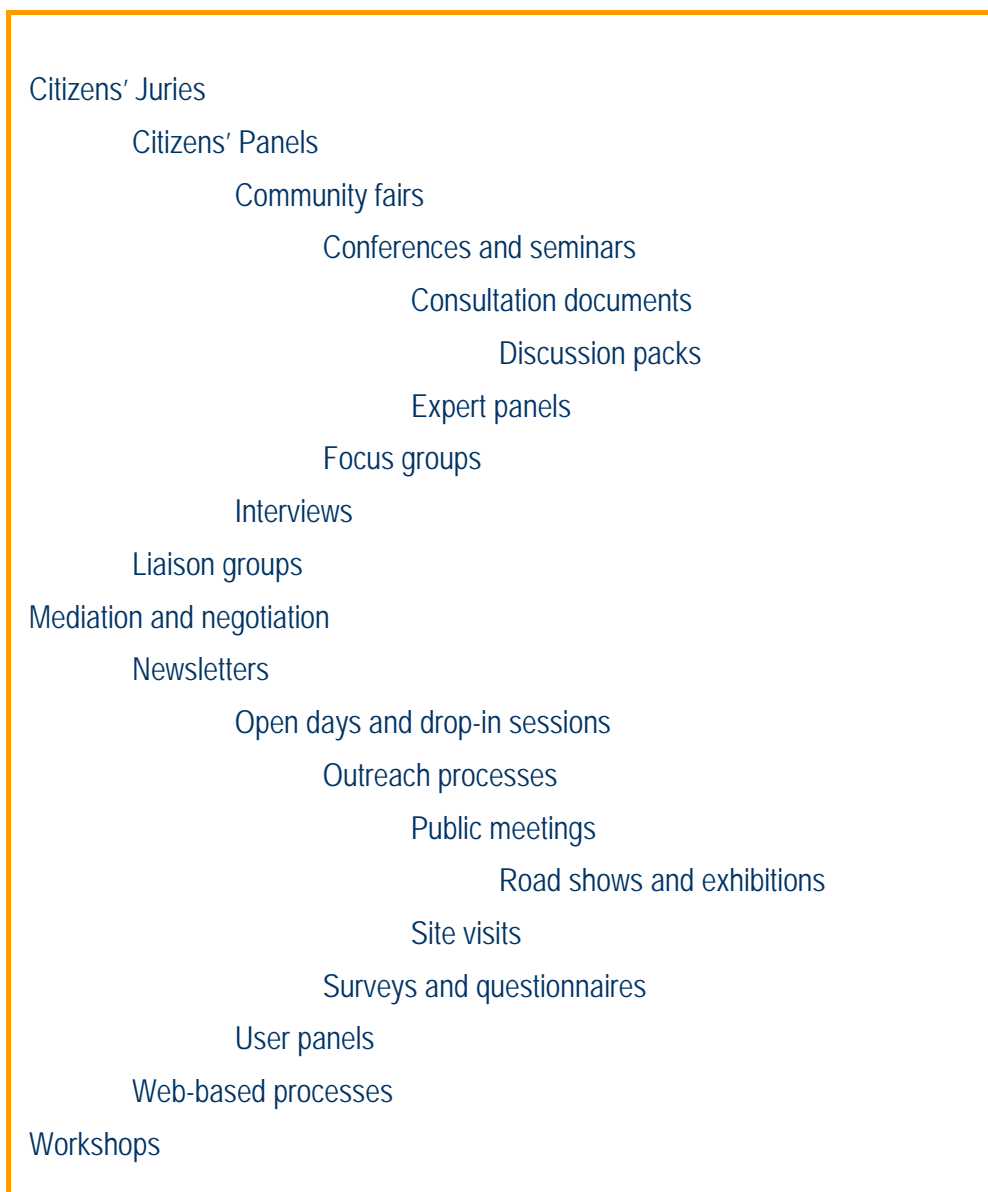
Chapter 9: Methods

This chapter outlines a series of methods that can be used for engagement. The Dialogue Designer online engagement tool (<http://designer.dialoguebydesign.net>) identifies which of these methods could be the most appropriate according to your situation by asking:

1. What you want to achieve
2. Who you want to consult with

3. How sensitive the subject matter or relationship is, and
4. How much time you have to run the engagement process.

Here is an overview of the methods presented in this chapter and also by Dialogue Designer.





Citizens' Juries

Overview

A Citizens' Jury is essentially a sophisticated focus group. A group of 8-20 people are selected to act as the 'jury' and are paid to listen to the conflicting arguments and evidence around an issue for up to a week before finally making a decision. Few issues involve only a dozen stakeholders so this needs to be seen as a research method and not, as it is commonly portrayed, as a participative process.

The two great qualities of Citizens' Juries is that they allow people time to think about and explore subjects deeply and widely, and they are composed of 'ordinary' people who can bring common sense and everyday experience to subjects to which experts may have become too close to be able to be objective.

At their best Citizens' Juries can provide a fascinating insight into how people think about an issue as they become gradually better informed about it, and the results can carry real authority even though the process itself may have no official status

	
Jurors can be selected to be representative of particular groups or of the population as a whole.	Twelve people are insufficient to truly represent many groups let alone the whole population.
The duration and depth of the process can ensure real understanding of the issues.	This is still no guarantee that the jurors will make a rational decision.
The jury can be asked very specific questions.	This does not guarantee specific answers.
Jurors' ability to call witnesses means a wide range of perspectives and arguments can be aired.	The process takes a great deal of planning.
The process allows the jury plenty of time to discuss the issues and arrive at considered views.	The longer it takes, the more it costs.
The jury's eventual decision can be used to inform and justify subsequent decisions. Equally, it can be ignored.	The high cost of the process may make it hard to ignore its conclusions even if they seem flawed.

Resource Requirements

High: the duration, venue, witnesses and jurors can involve considerable direct costs and the indirect costs of planning and administering the process can also escalate.

Using this method

1. Before you do anything else draw up a realistic budget, including all the items in the checklist below, because Citizen Jury processes are relatively expensive.
2. Identify the parameters of the task to be given to the Jury, a specific question or questions for them to answer and/or a number of options on which they should be asked to pass judgment.
3. Find a suitably qualified and independent moderator or facilitator to brief the Jury and oversee the process.
4. Recruit the Jury. It needs to be a broadly representative group of approximately 8-12 people, though up to 20 people is possible.

5. Identify suitable expert witnesses who can explain the issues and be questioned by the Jury.
6. Explain to jurors how the method works, the information and witnesses available to them, and allow them between two and five days to reach their conclusions.
7. At the end of the process the Jury can present its conclusions and recommendations in writing and/or through presentation, which can then be published.
8. Finally, it is good practice to publish the consequences of the process: whether the Jury's recommendations are followed and, if not, why not.

Checklist

- Venue
- Accommodation
- Catering
- Facilitator/moderator

- ❑ Expert witnesses
- ❑ Support staff
- ❑ Prep-prepared materials
- ❑ Audio-visual equipment
- ❑ Stationery

Citizens' Panels



Overview

Panels of local citizens are convened to allow regular testing of their opinion on local issues. Panels can be composed of anything between a dozen or so and a thousand or more, usually selected to reflect as far as possible the make-up of the population whose views they are supposed to represent. The membership of such panels may be 'refreshed' from time to time to make sure they remain representative.

The panels can then be used in a variety of ways, from questionnaires sent to all members to small numbers being recruited to attend a focus group meeting.

Smaller panels may meet on a regular basis; larger ones may be polled electronically or by post when a sense of local opinion is required.

Panels are an excellent way to ensure there is a regular means of communication with a cross-section of opinion. They can only be used for stakeholder engagement, as opposed to public engagement, if they consist of stakeholders.

	
Panels provide an immediately available means to assess opinion on specific issues. They overcome the problem of having to recruit for each separate exercise.	Panels may become the 'usual suspects' if not regularly refreshed through the addition of new members.
The composition of panels can be made representative of the population whose views are required.	Panels can be used for public engagement but not stakeholder engagement without checking that members are stakeholders.
The response rate from panels is usually much higher than from the population as a whole.	A high response rate may exaggerate the significance of the issue to the population as a whole.
Panels can also be used as a means to disseminate information.	The information provided may mean responses are not an accurate reflection of opinion among the less informed.
People enjoy participating.	Their desire to be on a panel may be the result of particular points of view they hold or may influence the responses they offer.

Resources requirements

The relatively high response rates from panels may make the unit costs of responses relatively low. The cost of setting up and maintaining a large panel, however, can be relatively high. This task is often outsourced to companies which provide this service or it is run internally by one or two dedicated members of staff.

Using this method

1. Decide why and how you would use a Citizens' Panel, and whether you have the resources to recruit, maintain and use it.
2. Identify the specific human and technical resources required to run the panel effectively.
3. Design the process for using the panel, including who would devise questions, how they would be asked, and how responses would be collated, reported back and communicated.

4. Identify and recruit demographically representative members.
5. Run a pilot process to test the workings of the Panel.

Checklist:

- Panel members

- A constantly up-dated database
- An electronic and/or paper-based mechanism for seeking members' opinions and a means of collating and reporting them quickly and effectively
- Staff to maintain and run the panel and its processes.

Community fairs

Overview

Community fairs provide a fun occasion, including a range of activities such as barbeques, rides, face-painting and other activities for children that will draw a crowd of all ages and backgrounds.

It then provides various opportunities to inform and engage the participants about local issues. Some can be quite simple, such as people with clipboards

asking questions. Others can be more elaborate, such as exhibitions or discussion groups.

The main value of community fairs, though, is for organisations who want to show a different face to the public, which is why they are popular with organisations such as the police.

Community fairs tend to work best if a number of organisations in the community get together to run one; for example a Local Strategic Partnership can agree that every partner will provide a stall and activities. Such a fair could attract large numbers of people and be run cost effectively.

	
Can help to engage all sorts of people within a community at one event	It may not appeal to the people who most need to be reached
Can create interest from media groups and lead to increased coverage of the issue	Fairs can be expensive to do well and will affect your reputation or image if not done well
Allows for different levels of information sharing	The serious information may get lost amidst the excitement
Builds 'social capital': that is, people who are lead into participating in community decision-making and management	The public must be motivated to attend and the effort and investment may create an illusion of progress
It may be possible to team up with other organisations to increase the range of activities and interest a greater number of people	This may cause confusion among those attending

Resource requirements

Community Fairs can involve an enormous investment of effort and resources to do well. Teaming up with other organisations with similar purposes may be essential.

Using this method

1. Consider how your Community Fair will integrate into any overall engagement process, including the timing and materials.
2. Plan a year ahead. Select the date and venue that will attract the largest number of people.

Check what else may be happening before you go firm on the date.

3. Brainstorm a list of attractions for every age range and draw them onto a plan of the venue. Involve as many partner organisations as you can to generate wide interest, reach as many people as possible and spread the costs.
4. Work out the resource issues, particularly staffing, and how you can involve volunteers to help with preparation and the event itself. Consider hiring a professional events manager.

5. Budget for serious promotion of the event using all available means and advertising free food and events.
 6. Devise plans for traffic, health and safety, first aid, etc. Allow plenty of time for detailed planning and preparation.
 7. Involve as many staff in the event as you can, especially if you want to put forward your 'human face'.
 8. Work out in advance how you can follow up the contacts made and the goodwill generated.
- Marketing and publicity required
 - Venue and catering
 - Staffing
 - Facilitators for workshops or question and answer sessions
 - Photographer
 - First aid tent
 - Audiovisual equipment
 - Printed information and feedback sheets
 - Entertainment and events
 - Insurance

Checklist

- Events organiser

Conferences and seminars

Overview

Conferences and seminars differ from both *public meetings* and *workshops*. While public meetings are primarily information-oriented, and workshops action-oriented, the primary purposes of most conferences and seminars are analysis and discussion.

Like public meetings and workshops, however, conferences and seminars come in all shapes and sizes. There is no reason why members of the public

should not be invited to attend an academic discussion of particular issues, but on the whole the more formal and cerebral the event, the more likely it is to be aimed at other professionals and experts in the field rather than at the person in the street.

The format of such events tends to be relatively sedentary: presentations followed by discussion, sometimes with specialist breakout sessions (which may be referred to as 'workshops' but are usually just smaller versions of the main event) for informal discussion.

	
Tend to appeal more to professionals and experts	Not a good method for engaging 'ordinary' people
Excellent for bringing experts together to discuss issues in depth	Not good for agreeing practical action
Can be used as part of a longer-term engagement strategy involving a range of stakeholders	Can be very boring for participants if poorly designed, badly facilitated, or consisting mainly of people talking from a stage and making presentations.
Special techniques can be used to make best use of expert knowledge	'Ordinary' participants can feel disempowered or patronised

Resource requirements

Seminars and conferences can range from a few people meeting informally for half a day with coffee and biscuits to several hundred gathering for a week-long residential event, and obviously the resource requirements and planning processes differ accordingly. If you call something a conference or

seminar, however, people tend to assume it will be relatively formal and academic in nature.

Using this method

1. If you are intent upon using this method as part of an engagement strategy, decide what it is going to achieve, who will participate and how it

contributes to your other engagement objectives.

2. If you are sure that it is the right thing to do, draft invitations and an outline programme that will achieve your objectives.
3. Issue a call for papers and abstracts (usually in parallel with invitations to attend).
4. Book an appropriate venue.
5. Assess abstracts, identify speakers and invite them.
6. Draft publicity material and mail shot possible participants.
7. Invite someone to chair the event, or facilitate if it is relatively informal.

Produce a report of the event, including all the papers delivered, and distribute among participants.

Checklist:

- Purpose and desired outcomes
- Participants
- Venue and catering etc
- Pre-reading and other materials
- Understanding of process techniques
- Experienced facilitator to use such techniques
- Staffing

Consultation documents

Overview

This is the method most used for formal consultation by government departments and official bodies. Consultation documents are now also commonly posted on websites together with requests for comment.

Consultation documents will probably remain the favoured method for seeking formal responses from statutory consultees, but members of the public increasingly find them indigestible in the age of sound bites and a heavily visual culture.



The best advice to those tasked with doing a document-based consultation process is to offer a parallel web-based process that enables participants to navigate directly to the parts of the document that

concern them and not have to plough through much that is not relevant.

Whether the process is paper- or web-based, copious diagrams and illustrations are preferable to blocks of text.

Every question asked should serve a specific purpose and be rigorously checked for meaning or for possible ambiguities. The number of questions should be kept to a minimum, and every effort should be made to avoid questions likely to result in duplicate answers.

The follow-up process should be designed at the outset; for example, how responses will be collated and presented back to participants needs to be considered to ensure the overall process is manageable.

	
A written document allows the consulters to set out in detail the whole of a situation and ask specific questions	The sheer size and detail in a document, and its formal presentation, may persuade some consultees that they can have little influence on it
A document can also be used to explain complexity and provide background information	People are reluctant to read long documents
Document-based consultation is safe and predictable, and avoids some of the risks of face-to-face processes	It may not reveal issues that the document does not address, or that affect stakeholders who do not respond to consultation documents
Web-based processes allow comments on documents and responses to questions to be displayed in full	A large volume of responses can be extremely labour-intensive to read and collate, and participants may never know whether or how they have had any influence

Resource requirements

While a document-based consultation process is straightforward, the production of a document and the proper handling of responses can be labour-intensive and time-consuming. Thought should be given to how responses are reported and displayed at the outset. Web-based document processes can be made more transparent than paper-based processes.

Using this method

1. Decide what the process is designed to achieve.
2. Design the engagement process, adhering to Cabinet Office rules for written consultation including the process for acknowledging and displaying responses.
3. Draft the document using diagrams and illustrations to make it attractive and readable, and taking into account the needs of the people from whom you most want responses. Translate it into other languages if necessary.
4. Identify the questions to which you would like answers and/or indicate what sort of comments you would find most valuable. Do not ask too many questions or questions to which the responses are likely to be similar.

5. Distribute the document to as many named participants as you can, with a personal invitation to respond, and indication of the type of comments that you would find most useful, and the closing date for receiving them.
6. Receive, acknowledge, collate and display responses.
7. Amend the document in the light of responses and tell participants how they have (or have not) influenced the document, ideally by showing them a re-drafted version.

Checklist

- A readable document
- Specific questions about it
- Database of people and organisations likely to want to comment on it
- A method for distributing the document to the participants, either web- or paper-based
- A method for collecting, collating and displaying all responses (not just a summary) transparently
- A method for acknowledging responses and telling people how their responses have (or have not) been acted upon.

Discussion packs

Overview

There is increasing demand for engagement processes that do more than merely ask people to tick boxes on surveys. The emphasis is moving towards 'deliberative' processes that give participants a chance to discuss issues before they are asked their opinion of them. This is particularly true where the issues are complex.

There is a corresponding growth in the use of deliberative discussion groups and workshops, where the participants are supplied with background information and a series of questions designed to explore, in a structured and systematic way, their responses to the issues. Deliberative events,

however, tend to be expensive and only reach relatively small numbers of people.

Discussion packs can be used as an alternative or in addition to deliberative processes. They usually contain a series of information cards, or scenarios, or explanatory diagrams and text, and also instructions for a self-managed discussion - a discussion that is not guided by a professional facilitator.

Discussion packs also contain forms on which the participants or a designated member of the group can enter the results of the discussion, the answers to the questions asked, and also some information about the size and membership of the group. The results can also be reported in online forms in the same format: paper and online results can then be integrated into one report.

Such discussion packs can be sent to organisations and groups all over the country: Parish Councils, school groups, scout troops, Women's Institutes or

special interest groups - in fact to any group of people who would be interested to have such conversations and would find it easier with some structure to work within. Discussion packs can

encourage widespread deliberation, raise awareness of issues and provide quantitative and qualitative feedback on public or community opinion.

	
An excellent way to have the results of many deliberative discussions without having to organise them	The effort involved in producing materials and marketing the process, and in encouraging and supporting self-managed groups, can be considerable
Enables 'ordinary' people to have discussions about complex issues	It is difficult to monitor the level of real understanding of those participating
The discipline of producing materials accessible to many different audiences helps the sponsoring organisation to communicate the issues clearly	There is a danger of over-simplification
Can reach large numbers of people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to discuss interesting issues in depth	Participation is unlikely to be representative because people have to be strongly motivated to take part in an exercise of this sort
Good for discussing issues that involve personal and social values rather than objective facts	Self-managed groups may not be managed in a way that enables the more subtle aspects of abstract issues to be fully explored
The structure of the questions and the reporting system helps discussions to be recorded in the same way	Relying on participants to record fully and objectively what was agreed can be a problem

Resource requirements

The production of an attractive and well-presented discussion pack can be quite labour-intensive, and the sending of packs and recording of results requires good management. If the process is well marketed and participation rates are high, however, the per capita cost can be very reasonable and the quality of responses excellent.

Using this method

1. Decide how a large number of small group discussions would contribute to your engagement process.
2. Identify appropriate groups to hold such discussions and draw up a plan for reaching and enthusing them, and for gathering the results of their discussions.
3. Draw up an outline of a discussion pack to support them, listing the issues the pack will need to cover and the information it should contain, instructions for reporting the results and advice on holding group discussions that might be useful to participants.

4. Devise a sequence of questions that will enable participants to address the issues systematically and tailor a reporting system to capture the results.
5. Commission text and illustrations to support the information, and finalise the design of the packs.
6. Send the packs out to groups that request them and use additional marketing as necessary to reach more.
7. Monitor responses and acknowledge receipt of paper or online forms.
8. Report results and draw conclusions.

Checklist

- Background materials
- Response forms
- Participant database
- Marketing and publicity
- Online system for recording responses
- System for monitoring participation

Expert panels



Overview

Expert panels are used to gather the concentrated thoughts of a range of experts on a particular issue. Usually lasting a day or less, a group of 5-25 experts is convened and presented with a specific task. The process may involve the presentation and discussion of previously prepared papers, the questioning of witnesses, or a more open discussion forum in which the experts create their own agenda and then work through the items on it.

Expert panels can be extremely productive and cost-effective. Allowing the participants to bounce ideas

off each other can be the best way to produce a rough consensus about a situation or a course of action. It can then be useful to pick out a smaller panel of experts whose different skills and perspectives can provide a rounded sounding board for the future.

If more than a few experts are gathered it is usually wise to employ a professional facilitator to ensure the purpose of the event is kept in mind, and to prevent specialists being side-tracked into discussing the finer and finer details of an issue. A facilitator can also help keep the meeting focused on the implications and practicalities of what the experts are saying.

	
A good way to focus intently on a specific subject and tap the expertise of individual specialists	If the process is not carefully focused it may produce lots of information but about the wrong issues or aspects of the issues
Can produce in-depth analysis of complex issues	Breadth may be lost in depth: too narrow a focus may mean the wood cannot be seen for the trees
A rigorously rational process designed to argue the issues in full, allowing different experts to challenge each other	The rationality of the process may obscure the fact that rationality on its own is rarely enough: most issues have emotional or value-based dimensions that need to be included
Specialists can sometimes consider issues objectively without being drawn into contention around them	The essence of the problem may be the fact that it is contentious
Particular experts can be involved in follow-up processes	The danger of excluding 'ordinary' people and becoming over-reliant on experts who may not appreciate 'ordinary' viewpoints
Expert knowledge can be edited down to a form accessible to people without specialist knowledge	Relatively expensive unless experts give their time freely; also requires long lead-time and skilled facilitation to get best value

Resource requirements

Can be an expensive process if the experts have to be paid; and specialists need careful, and tactful, facilitation to be fully productive.

Using this method

1. Decide how an expert panel will contribute to your overall engagement strategy and what specific issues you would like it to address. It is also a good idea, before you convene the panel, to work out what you will do if their conclusions are unwelcome or contradict the results of other engagement processes.
2. Identify a range of experts representing different points of view and covering all the relevant issues.
3. Gather background information and explanations of why you need their input and how you will use it.
4. Send them an invitation and a range of possible dates. Choose the date that best suits everyone.
5. Identify a small number of experts either to act as a steering group to determine the exact focus of the panel and/or commission background papers from a range of experts.

6. Engage an experienced facilitator with some knowledge of the issues, and ask him/her to advise on ground rules, the use of witnesses, public participation, and how the results should be presented.

Checklist

- Venue
- Catering

- Staffing
- Facilitator with some expert knowledge
- Experts
- Background papers and detailed briefing materials
- Audio-visual equipment
- Time

Focus groups



Overview



Focus groups are groups of 6-12 people carefully selected to be representative of a designated part of the population. They are used primarily for intensive research designed to tease out the depths, subtleties and nuances of opinion. They need to be carefully facilitated, with ideally another person to observe and note how the group responds to particular questions or issues.

Focus groups are research processes, not stakeholder engagement processes. They can

explain what lies behind an opinion, or how people approach an issue, and they can with care be used to discover what proportion of people may hold a particular view. But they should not be used as a substitute for engaging directly with actual stakeholders in situations where merely knowing who thinks what is not enough.

A warning: the term 'focus group' is coming to be used to describe any small meeting of people, regardless of whether they are representative and of the purpose for which the group has been convened. Anyone using the term should be asked to explain what they understand by it.

	
Interaction between participants, enabled by the small size of the group and the skill of the facilitator, can be very productive	Some people have more confidence to participate in groups than others. This may result in an imbalance in discussion.
Focus groups are qualitative processes good for deepening understanding of how people think about issues	They are not quantitative processes and the results should be treated with caution as regards establishing wider opinion
Members can be carefully recruited to fit specific profiles	Because groups are small the wrong mix of personalities can undermine the effectiveness of the process
Focus groups enable a facilitator to design a very precise process that will examine the issues in the way required	It may be difficult to deduce to what extent the group's responses have been shaped by the process
The smallness of the group allows the facilitator to get to the heart of difficult issues	It is not always easy to find a facilitator with the necessary skills, and they can be expensive.
Focus groups can obtain opinions from people who would not respond to other methods because they are not comfortable with writing or because of other constraints.	Variations of ability and articulacy within the group may inhibit some members.
It may be the best process for obtaining the views of people without English	It may be difficult to find a facilitator with the right language.

	
Focus groups can be a way to start the formation of a longer-term group or panel to perform a role or specific tasks	It can be difficult to get the right people to participate.

Resource requirements

Using focus groups can range from the relatively inexpensive to the very expensive depending on how many are required. The minimum number required is usually four but a dozen or more may be needed to gain a full picture.

Using this method

1. Decide exactly how a focus group process will contribute to your overall engagement process and what specifically you want the use of them to achieve.
2. Identify groups of 8-12 people to form focus groups, ensuring they are representative of either the whole community or of the particular groups with whom you want to engage (or hire a market research company to do the work for you).
3. You will probably have to offer an incentive to attend. It needs to be enough to be attractive

but be careful it does not tend to distort the representativeness of participation.

4. Engage a skilled facilitator to run the groups and work with him/her to devise questions and prompts, ground rules and briefing materials if required, and a co-facilitator to be responsible for recording the process.
5. Book venue(s), catering and childcare arrangements if necessary.
6. Produce a report of the process and the results, ensuring participants receive copies.

Checklist:

- Mechanism for creating representative groups
- Skilled facilitator
- Venue and catering
- Audio-visual equipment for recording processes
- Attendance fees for participants
- Process for analysing and interpreting results

Interviews

Overview

Interviews can involve intensive, face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations, or random doorstep or street corner encounters. They can be used to establish in depth, real understanding of the issues, and lay the foundations for an ongoing relationship, or they can provide a snapshot of local views of a particular issue.


The shallower type of interviewing is often most useful as a means to do background research prior to using later large-scale engagement methods in a situation or an area where this has not been done

before. You can ask questions to get a sense of the local context, particular issues, and the sort of engagement methods that might be most appropriate.

More intensive and searching one-to-one interviews can be the most effective way to learn about an issue in depth, but they are resource intensive and require considerable skills. It is also important to do a sufficient number to ensure that the results are more than the opinions of a few individuals.

Interviews are useful if you need to talk to people privately about things that they would be unlikely to divulge in a written process or at a meeting.

	
Best way to obtain information from an individual	It needs a sensitive and skilled interviewer to make the most of it

	
If a good sample is used, it can produce highly accurate results	Large numbers of interviews are required to ensure the results can be accurately extrapolated
Structured interviews can explore issues in depth	Interviewing needs careful preparation to avoid leading or biased questions
Qualitative process that can also yield quantitative results	Collation and presentation of results can be time-consuming
Face-to-face processes can lay foundations for longer-term relationships	Face-to-face processes may raise cultural problems in some communities
Interviewing brings a personal dimension to engagement	It can be difficult to arrange and coordinate interviews, and it is time and resource-intensive

Resource requirements

High: one-to-one interviews are extremely resource intensive unless they are very swift and shallow. Telephone interviews are generally cheaper but may be less effective, depending on the topic.

Using this method

1. Identify the role of interviews in your overall engagement process, what specifically you hope to achieve through them and issues that you feel will be most appropriate to ask about in interviews.
2. Identify individuals with whom interviews are most likely to produce the type of results that you are seeking.
3. Decide who will conduct the interviews and generate briefing notes, questions for them to ask and ground rules for the interviews. Take into account the needs of interviewees from different cultures.

4. Decide what you will do with confidential and non-attributable information that is important and needs to be shared with others.
5. Unless interviews are to be random, contact the interviewees and organise times and places; allow up to two hours per interview if the subject matter will require careful exploration.
6. Report the results, ensuring ground rules following confidentiality and attribution are strictly adhered to.

Checklist

- Means to identify key people to interview: either community leaders or other influential stakeholders, or a sample of people who can reliably reflect the views of others
- A skilled, patient and determined interviewer
- Ground rules for the conduct of the interview, setting out matters such as confidentiality and attribution
- The personal security of interviewees in some areas

Liaison groups

Overview

Liaison groups are normally created to ensure a regular channel of communication between - usually - the authorities responsible for a situation or project and the local community. They tend to involve a relatively small group of people, sometimes only half a dozen, whose job it is to keep open the lines of communication for others and ensure that as issues or problems arise they can be dealt with promptly



and the results communicated back to those who have raised them.

Liaison groups can sometimes last for many years in the case of ongoing projects or situations, with the membership being changed or replaced as necessary; or they may have a specific life to deal with a particular set of circumstances.

There is one particular aspect of liaison groups that it pays to be aware of. Imagine the situation where a liaison group has been established to ease

communications between say, a local community and a new business being established in the area. Over a period of time, the members of the liaison group will become very familiar with the business's point of view, and will report it to the people they represent.

Even if this point of view is entirely reasonable, other members of the community may come to regard the liaison group as having 'sold out' or even being 'bought off'. It is therefore essential that new members are regularly appointed to the liaison group to ensure it doesn't 'go native'.

	
A regular and reliable channel of communication	Those involved in the Liaison Group may be perceived to have 'sold out' by more radical community members
Those involved get to know each other very well and establish effective working relationships, and the trust created can extend into the wider community	The Liaison Group can become too cosy with those regarded by the rest of the community as 'the enemy'
Problems can be nipped in the bud before they escalate	Others may seek to by-pass and isolate the Liaison Group, gradually reducing its effectiveness
Early warnings of future problems can be acted on	The wider community may reject the Group's recommendations
Regular contact can be an effective use of resources	Can become very time-consuming in complex situations

Resource requirements

It depends on the situation. It may involve just somewhere to meet for a few hours every month or two, or it may involve considerable administrative work to arrange meetings, brief members, provide background information etc.

Using this method

1. Identify how the liaison group will fit with other engagement processes and decide how its members should be appointed, elected or otherwise come to serve on it.
2. Decide the broad remit and purpose of the group and the specific issues within its purview.
3. Identify potential members, taking care to include representatives of special interest

groups or those most affected by the issues, and those with relevant expertise.

4. Convene a first meeting to discuss and agree the role, remit and membership of the group, and ground rules, reporting processes and internal process requirements. Raise the question of how often the membership should be 'refreshed'.
5. If the remit of the group includes resolving conflict, consider engaging an independent facilitator/mediator as a member of the group.

Checklist

- Suitable individuals to be part of the liaison group
- Methods to communicate between the group and those between whom it is liaising
- Accountability processes such as regular reports

Mediation and negotiation

Overview

Should mediation and negotiation be included among methods of engagement? Often they are not, perhaps because we tend to think of engagement as processes done by sponsors, usually government or large organisations, to members of the public.

Mediation and negotiation, on the other hand, are processes that can only be done with people.

With both there is an implication of consent and an acceptance of the other person's status as a partner in the process. Negotiation can be defined as a process of exchange among people; mediation as a process that involves using a third party to extend

and sustain the process of exchange so that it does not break down or become deadlocked.

Many engagement processes involve elements of mediation and negotiation: *workshops*, for example, use facilitators whose role is to enable people to work together. The mediation may not be as explicit as it is in a formal quasi-legal setting but it is subtly present.

If mediation and negotiation do become explicit, it will usually be in the later stages of an engagement process when it has become apparent where the major differences are and where they need to be bridged. The likelihood then is that the key stakeholders will meet and attempt to negotiate a solution that meets their respective needs; it is when that negotiation fails or becomes too difficult that a mediator may become essential.

A final role for mediators is in the realm of conflict analysis. A mediator can talk to stakeholders and produce an analysis of the issues in dispute and suggest a process through which they may be resolved or mitigated.

Advantages and disadvantages

There are no advantages and disadvantages with negotiation: it is just something that may have to happen when the time is right. It does have to be handled with care, though, to ensure that those involved do not come to be perceived as somehow favoured above those who are not.

One question that does arise with negotiation is how public it should be. In an ideal world all engagement processes should be transparent, but in the real world it can sometimes be hard to get people to negotiate if they have to do it in public. The answer is often public agreements privately arrived at.

Mediation can be more delicate still, partly because nobody likes to admit a situation is serious enough to warrant a mediator, and partly because nobody likes to admit they need help. If a situation is so serious that mediation is required, the mediator will often talk to both sides separately, in private, before deciding how best to approach the problem. There may then follow a period of joint and separate meetings to explore possible solutions.

Resource requirements

Negotiation requires a commitment of time and energy from key stakeholders. Mediation requires an independent third party and sometimes a serious investment of time and therefore money. If possible use a professional third party: well-meaning amateurs can do more harm than good.

Using this method

1. The time to think about negotiating a resolution to issues is when it is clear who disagrees about what.
2. Choose the people who can best represent your interests and by way of preparation draw up a list of what you want and what the other side wants. Then expand this by drawing up lists of:
 - What is important to you and important to them
 - Your and their priorities
 - What you really need and what they may really need
 - What you want to avoid, and what they want to avoid.
3. You are now prepared to enter into negotiation.
4. Start by listening to what the other side has to say, and asking questions to clarify what is important to them.
5. Agree immediately any common ground between you, then choose to work on issues where you think it may be easy to achieve agreement.
6. When you have built some agreement and some momentum, and you have become used to working together, you can begin to work on the difficult issues.
7. If there are areas where you cannot agree, set them aside and come back to them later, or agree a process to explore the options together, or agree to bring in a mediator to help you find solutions.
8. Keep a careful record of what is agreed and ask people to sign it. If the other side does not have the power to agree to anything, agree a timetable and a process for achieving agreement. In some situations you may have to make do with informal understandings.

9. Whatever the nature of the agreement, it is always a good idea to set up a scheme to monitor how the agreement works in practice and a review process in case it does not work.
10. In projects which are liable to last a long time and give rise to repeated disputes, agree a systematic dispute resolution scheme to address differences as soon as they arise and prevent them escalating and involving lawyers.

Newsletters



Overview

Newsletters are one of the cheapest and most effective methods of keeping people informed as projects advance. Using a newsletter in isolation, however, should not be regarded as engagement.

They are a useful complement to other activities and can be a particularly good way to signpost meetings and workshops and report the results of such methods. They should be kept short and sharp: two

pages at a time are plenty - regularity and quality are more important than quantity. The style should be lively, as colourful as you can afford, and it should welcome the opportunity to spread information about other issues of local interest in addition to the particular project about which it is designed to provide information.

One of the most valuable uses of a newsletter is to publish regularly and prominently contact names and numbers, and it is a good idea to feature pictures of key people to make them seem less faceless.

	
Straightforward means to keep people informed and encourage further contacts	Not an interactive process so can be regarded as 'propaganda'
A relatively cheap - depending on quality - means to reach large numbers of people	Impersonal and will be discarded immediately by a significant percentage
Enables the sponsor to control the flow of information	Can lure the sponsor into thinking that what is written is read, what is read is understood, and what is understood is accepted
An excellent complement to other forms of engagement	Not a substitute for any of them

Resources required

Variable depending on numbers of newsletters to be produced and quality used. If professionally written and produced can become expensive.

5. Call another meeting with the results of the above to decide whether to go ahead.
6. Produce and distribute your first newsletter.
7. Evaluate reactions and tweak the next one accordingly.

Using this method

1. Call a meeting to decide the purpose of the newsletter and who it is aimed at.
2. Research methods and costs of production and distribution.
3. Produce a 'dummy' to give you a clearer idea of the work involved and the practicalities.
4. Draw up a realistic schedule for producing and distributing it, and a list of the topics the first few issues should cover.

Checklist

- Publication dates
- Production schedule
- Writers
- Features
- Editor(s)
- Photographs
- Printers
- Distribution

- Evaluation of effectiveness

Open days and drop-in sessions



Overview

Open days and drop-in sessions offer opportunities for people to see behind the scenes of the sponsoring organisation. They can talk to staff, seek information, discuss local issues or proposals, or simply chat about the things that concern them. The essence of this approach is that it is informal.

From the organisation's point of view it provides an opportunity to provide information, show an interest

in people's concerns, answer questions, and generally show people what goes on behind the public face of the organisation.

The informality does not mean, unfortunately, that no work is required. Staff need to be briefed, some sort of introductory exhibition is usually a good idea, and children need to be distracted while their parents discuss the serious issues. It is also a good idea to collect as many names and contact details as possible: the people who come may well be prepared to respond positively to other opportunities for engagement.

	
A way of reaching out to the community and seeking informal contact	Whole day sessions could be disruptive and take a lot of time for front line staff
Can be used to publicise later consultation or engagement	Direct contact may be painful if the public is hostile. Protesters may use the opportunity to disrupt the event
Can fit into people's personal timetables	It may be difficult to gather information about the public to indicate how representative feedback is
People can be given further information to take away with them	Attendance is difficult to predict and may be patchy; the importance of advertising and marketing should not be underestimated
Gives an opportunity for people to make personal contacts and have individual questions answered	People may be intimidated about dropping in to somewhere unfamiliar
It may also offer opportunities to get feedback from people	

Resource requirements

It is useful to produce some display materials and information for people to take away with them, and prepare questionnaires to hand out. It may be worth giving people other small gifts such as balloons for children or pencils or note pads. This can become expensive if done regularly.

Staff will need to be available for the whole session to meet, greet and respond to questions. Even those not directly involved will need to be briefed.

Using this method

1. Decide how holding an open day or drop-in session will contribute to your overall engagement activities.
2. Identify whether there are particular sections of the community who might welcome this opportunity, or who would respond to this method of engagement. Think about what this might mean in terms of which of your staff should be involved.
3. Identify general staffing requirements, where visitors will be welcomed, and assess impact on other duties.
4. Decide what information should be available to visitors, and in what languages to produce it.
5. Decide what you will seek in return and draft questionnaires or feedback sheets accordingly.
6. Publicise dates, times, purposes and attractions.
7. Organise refreshments, childcare and/or amusements.

8. Brief staff.
9. Meet and greet visitors.
10. De-brief, evaluate and decide how to follow up.

- Materials
- Questionnaires if seeking feedback
- Small gifts
- Catering
- Security

Checklist

- Staffing requirements

Opinion Polls

Overview

The idea of opinion polls is that you ask questions of a small number of people and, provided that the sample is representative, you can extrapolate the results and work out what a much larger number, or even the whole community or nation, think about a certain issue. It will not be absolutely accurate, but knowing to within a few percentage points is usually accurate enough for most purposes. The more

people you sample, the more accurate the result is likely to be.

An opinion poll is not, however, an engagement method but a research method. It does not involve engaging with actual stakeholders, and it can be used to dismiss minority concerns in the name of the majority.

It is certainly an effective way of discovering public opinion, and certainly influential when it comes to policy making, but it is not a substitute for engaging with the people who will have to live with a policy or a proposal that affects their interests.

	
An indispensable tool in a democracy, enabling governments and others to know what people think	A poor substitute for the direct participation of citizens in the running of community and country
A relatively quick and cheap means to check whether a policy or programme will meet people's needs	Liabile to endorse the tyranny of the majority
Provides a snapshot of opinion at a particular moment	May not provide enough time or context for people to give considered replies
Straightforward and accurate if professionally managed	Results influenced by precise wording of questions and can be misleading

Resource requirements

Usually commissioned from an external agency; costs vary according to size of sample and number of questions.

Using this method

1. Decide what specifically you want your opinion poll to achieve – not just the information it will generate, but how this information will contribute to your engagement strategy.
2. Identify the questions you want to ask and who you want to answer.
3. Decide what you will do as a result of all the possible results.
4. Ask yourself if you still want to do an opinion poll - because the results may constrain what you can do subsequently.
5. Commission the poll.
6. Publish the results.
7. Adjust your policies accordingly - or not.



Outreach processes

Overview

Outreach processes provide a way to meet and establish contact with individuals and groups of people who would be unlikely to respond to other types of engagement process. They are particularly useful when the local situation is sufficiently sensitive for individuals to be wary of being seen to have any personal contact with officialdom, and where it is important for contact to be with groups as a whole.

Such meetings can also be the only way to engage with groups who are through their physical circumstances (disability, language barriers, cultural norms) prevented from attending public events.

Most outreach processes involve meetings with individuals, with families, or with small groups. On occasions a larger public meeting may be involved. In all cases it involves going to where the target people are rather than inviting them to come out to where you are.

	
Excellent means of engaging directly with people who may be difficult or impossible to reach through other engagement methods	It may be difficult to provide the support needed in some instances. For example, some groups may only want to meet with women or you may not have a worker who speaks a particular language
Meeting with the same individuals or groups over a period of time and gradually building trust may reveal issues that shallower engagement issues would miss	This can be a slow and painstaking process and despite a huge investment of time may ultimately be unproductive
Good for building relationships with specific individuals and groups	The relationship may be with the group rather than with individuals, and there may be peer pressure to follow the group 'line'.
Good for building relationships across whole communities	The number of such groups can make such a process extremely resource intensive. If not all groups can receive similar attention, there may be perceptions of some groups being more favoured

Resource requirements

Outreach processes can be an extremely cost-effective way of establishing and maintaining relationships with groups of people who would not respond to other methods of engagement. They can also, particularly in the early stages, be quite time-consuming and resource-intensive. If there are many such groups the resources may not be available to reach all.

Using this method

1. Identify individuals and groups who might be more comfortable to be engaged through outreach processes.
2. Consider whether, having established contact, you will have the resources to maintain whatever relationships can be established. Consider also whether other groups will also want this approach, and how to ensure you are not perceived to be favouring some groups over others.

3. Gather information about those concerned, and particularly about any cultural factors that should shape your approach, who makes it, and when it happens.
4. Identify individuals who can be approached to seek an entry into these groups, using community leaders or third parties as appropriate, and seek an invitation to meet.
5. Brief the appropriate staff and agree desired outcomes for the meeting.
6. Conduct the meeting and agree any follow-up action.
7. De-brief the meeting and share information.

Checklist

- Identification of groups who might be receptive to outreach processes
- Identification of staff with appropriate backgrounds and skills

- ❑ Assembling information about such groups and briefing those going to meetings
- ❑ Attending meetings on regular basis to build trust.

Public meetings

Overview

The definition of a 'public meeting' is that it is open to all - in contrast with a 'workshop' which is usually by invitation. In other words, it is the nature of the meeting rather than who attends that determines whether it is 'public'.

Public meetings do not have to involve nervous officials cowering behind tables while angry members of the public hurl abuse. Good design and preparation, ideally in consultation with some of those likely to attend, an experienced and respected chairperson or *facilitator* (preferably independent), and a suitable venue at a suitable time, can all

reduce the risks and make a public meeting a productive event.

They can be effective in enabling a wide range of views to be aired, questions asked, and answers given where they can be heard by others in the room. They also demonstrate a willingness to talk to a wide audience and face public criticism.

On the other hand, large plenary sessions can inhibit many stakeholders, encourage pre-determined statements of position and therefore polarise further differences among stakeholders, discouraging interaction and the exploration of ideas and solutions to problems. It can also be hard to make real progress on complex or controversial issues in public meetings.

	
Public meetings offer an opportunity for people to raise issues, ask questions and directly challenge those in positions of authority	Such meetings can be poorly attended or dominated by an unrepresentative minority
Public meetings are a good way to float ideas and explore possible proposals before they are formalised	What is just an idea may be deliberately interpreted as a definite proposal however carefully the difference is explained
They can provide an opportunity to gather public support for a proposal	This also provides opponents with an opportunity to lobby against it
Good public meetings have great public relations value	Bad public meetings are worse than no engagement at all
Public meetings can provide opportunities for several different bodies to discuss their different roles and areas of cooperation	It may be difficult for people to see where they fit in if the process is presenter-led
A good experience of a meeting can encourage people to become more involved in an engagement process	A bad experience can make people think the whole exercise is useless or bogus
Excellent way potentially to communicate with large numbers of people	It takes time and money to organise a large meeting with no guarantee that people will come
Face-to-face meetings humanise institutions and authorities in public eyes	Some people interpret this as a license to abuse people who are only doing their job

Resource requirements

Public meetings tend to be as good as the time and resources invested in their preparation. The single best way to make a public meeting effective is to use an independent facilitator, who will also help design and prepare it. Good external facilitators do not

come cheap; the next best alternative is to invest in training a few suitable members of your own staff.

Using this method

1. Decide what specifically you want your public meeting to achieve, and therefore who should come to it.
2. Identify a series of steps from beginning to end that will achieve these purposes; it is sometimes easiest to work backwards from the end.
3. Ask yourself what the participants will want from the meeting, and whether your steps will meet their needs as well as yours.
4. Book a suitable *venue*, estimating the likely number of participants.
5. Identify a chair or facilitator and speakers.
6. Send out invitations and/or advertise the meeting.
7. Prepare background materials.
8. Hold the meeting, record key points visibly during it and provide participants with comment sheets so that those who are unable or too inhibited to speak can still make their points.
9. After the meeting report the results to participants and thank them for attending.

10. De-brief and evaluate.

Checklist

- Venue
- Catering
- Staff
- Facilitator/chair
- Public address and audio-visual systems
- Furniture
- Disabled access
- Childcare facilities
- Security
- Invitations/advertising
- Purpose, ground rules, and agenda
- Briefings for speakers
- Evaluation sheets
- Information to be displayed/distributed

Road shows and exhibitions

Overview



Exhibitions, road shows and other display methods use the idea that 'a picture is worth a thousand words' to convey information. They can be taken out to where people are, such as schools, shopping centres and housing estates, rather than having to attract people to them, and they can appeal to groups, such as young people, who may not respond to document or meetings-based methods.

The discipline of creating an exhibition may be as valuable for the creators as for those who see it: it

can help refine ideas or reveal when something is impractical. Exhibitions can also be used to gather immediate reactions from those who see them, and a sequence of exhibitions, illustrating the various stages of a project as it progresses through an engagement process, can lay the foundations for ongoing relationships with local stakeholders and communities.

Good exhibitions, however, can take a considerable investment of time and money. There is not only the printing and photography costs, and perhaps a film presentation, but also the costs of staffing an exhibition so that the people who come can ask questions and get immediate answers.

	
Exhibitions are a good way to reach people who would not respond to other methods	They have to be in the right place at the right time
They can put across some ideas more easily than words	Exhibitions can be heavy on staff time, needing to be attended by enough well-briefed staff to be fully effective

	
People can be given further information to take away with them	The information needs to be consistent with that offered by the exhibition, but also be able to stand alone for those who read it but did not attend the exhibition
Exhibitions create opportunities for direct contact with people	Direct contact may be painful if the public is hostile
A well-run exhibition or roadshow can also raise the profile of the organisation	It may be difficult to strike the right balance between public relations, information-giving, and engagement
It may also offer opportunities to get feedback from people	It may be difficult to gather information to indicate how representative feedback is

Resource requirements

The cost of producing materials to show on display boards as well as materials to hand out can be expensive. If you are planning to use an exhibition at a number of venues or a number of times it can be a cost effective way of producing communication materials, but for one-off events it may be regarded as expensive.

Exhibitions and road shows need to be staffed: at least two people need to be available throughout the day. For busy events this may need to increase. Staff need to be trained and briefed on the subject matter and to be able to engage with people on the issues.

If you intend to use the exhibition to seek feedback or views from people staff need to have a good understanding of the issues, and be trained to use questionnaires or interview methods.

Using this method

1. Decide if an exhibition or road show is a good way to explain your project. Is it something that can be best explained visually, for example?
2. If it is, establish the availability and suitability of venues, how long it will take to produce materials, and when staff will be available, and create a timeline and deadlines.
3. As soon as the materials are available, gather as many people as possible and ask them to study all the materials. Then go over each item in depth asking if the meaning is clear, if it

explains issues at the right level of detail, and if the materials are visually attractive.

4. Edit and test the materials again.
5. Pick the staff who will attend and brief them on the questions they may be asked and how to answer them.
6. Arrive at the venues in good time to set up the exhibition and test equipment.
7. Welcome visitors and try to be as open as possible about all aspects of the project. If a question is asked that cannot be answered immediately, take the person's contact details and respond to them as soon as you can.
8. If you are running a sequence of exhibitions, hold a de-brief session at the close of each to record questions asked and answers given to establish some consistency of responses.

Checklist

- Display stands/boards
- Information printed on them
- Photographs
- Films/DVDs
- Handouts
- Questionnaires/feedback forms
- Staff name badges
- Technical reference materials
- Visitors' book
- Refreshments
- Extension cables and back-up equipment.

Site visits



Overview

Sometimes there is no substitute for getting people out and into the place where a specific problem is happening or for arranging a meeting where something is planned.

Site visits make things real: they get things off paper and into three dimensions. They are also dynamic: people can mix and talk while focusing on the issues rather than on each other. If you can arrange an

interesting speaker to point out the salient issues, and perhaps a cup of tea on site, then people will have conversations they would not have within the confines of a public meeting and they may perceive things differently than they do when reading about them in a newspaper.

The logistics of organising site visits can, however, be quite demanding. There may be health and safety issues to think about, and it may mean organising transport, protective clothing and footwear, so it may be possible only to involve a relatively small number of people.

	
Excellent for helping people to move from the abstract to the concrete	Visits to busy or noisy locations can make conversation difficult
They provide opportunities for informal engagement while maintaining a focus on the issues	Bad weather may reduce numbers or even make a visit impractical
They may allow people who feel intimidated about speaking in a more formal setting to have their say	Health and safety issues need to be assessed and managed
They help participants to see people who were previously just names as individuals with a job to do	If the proposal of a site visit stirs a lot of interest there may have to be several visits or restrictions placed on who can attend

Resource requirements

Very few if the site is reasonably accessible. Transport may need to be offered in some situations, and safety equipment, such as hard hats, may be required for some visits.

Using this method

1. Decide what a site visit should achieve.
2. Identify individuals who are most likely to benefit from a site visit and who will be in a position to pass on their experience to others.
3. Organise the logistics of the visit: timing, transport, clothing.
4. Arrange for the right people to be on site to conduct a tour, explain the project or the situation, and answer questions.

5. Put together any background information that might be useful. Do not make it too glossy: provide straightforward facts and figures and let the project speak for itself.
6. Arrange a refreshment break during which visitors can mix informally with staff.
7. After the visit de-brief staff and discuss whether it would be useful to arrange more such visits and how they can be made as useful as possible both for you and for the visitors.

Checklist

- Transport
- Protective clothing and headgear
- Refreshments
- Insurance



Surveys and questionnaires

Overview

Probably the single most widely used engagement method, surveys and questionnaires are used to collect quantitative answers from which, if the participants are representative, wider public opinion can be deduced. They can also be very useful to get public reactions to ideas or proposals, or discover what people think of facilities or services. 'Tick-box' surveys are simple, straightforward and the results are easily analysed.

But are they really an engagement method - or a research method? The answer is that it depends how they are used and the relationship of the participants to the questions being asked. A service user completing a questionnaire asking about service standards is being engaged; a person completing a questionnaire about something in which they have no stake is merely supplying an opinion.

This distinction is important, because unfortunately surveys and questionnaires are often used when more engaging methods would be more appropriate. The points below about different types of questionnaire and the *drafting of questions* in questionnaires are therefore very important.

	
A straightforward method of collecting quantitative information	Not so good for collecting qualitative information
Can be focused on specific issues	Answers may be irrelevant if focus is wrong
Can be used to gather information from large numbers of people	Always danger of skewed results
Very good method for establishing information that can be re-tested to see if results change over time	One-time questionnaires may produce misleading results
Questionnaires can be adapted to most issues	It is harder than it looks to write a good questionnaire – poor format can produce misleading results
Several potential delivery methods make surveys a flexible way to get responses	Delivery methods can affect accuracy of responses

Resource requirements

Designing a questionnaire can be more difficult and time consuming than you expect. If you are writing the questionnaire yourself, test it on colleagues to ensure the questions follow the advice set out below.

Using this method

1. Decide which type of survey or questionnaire you want to use:

- **Deliberative:** gives people information before asking their opinion
- **Qualitative:** asks people to respond in their own words
- **Quantitative:** asks people to react to various propositions by ticking boxes or marking answers against a scale
- **Online:** can be any of the above done by completing an electronic form.

2. Decide the delivery method:

- **Telephone:** people are telephoned at home and the interviewer completes the form
- **Interview on the street:** interviewer with a clipboard approaches people and asks questions
- **Interview at home:** interviewer arranges to visit
- **Postal:** form completed by householder and returned
- **Online:** form completed online.

3. Decide how you will manage, collate, analyse and use the responses.

4. Draft the survey or questionnaire taking your answers to the above into account.

5. Ask at least five people to complete it. Consider whether your questions have provoked the type of responses that you want.

6. Issue the questionnaire.

7. Receive responses and thank respondents (if you asked for contact details).

8. Collate, analyse and publish the results, and tell people how you will use them.

Checklist

- ❑ Information required and how it will be used
- ❑ Target participants

- ❑ Questions
- ❑ Test to ensure effective
- ❑ Delivery method(s)
- ❑ Collation, analysis and publication of results
- ❑ Thanks and feedback to respondents

User panels

Overview



User panels are used mostly to inform the planning and prioritising of decisions that require input from those who will be using the services involved.

Panels are usually composed of between eight and ten people, reflecting the age, gender, locality and social class of those at whom the services are aimed. They meet for a number of sessions to discuss set topics and give their views. They are often less exploratory than focus groups, given the number of issues to be considered at any one panel, and the process may be designed to build a consensus among participants.

Members of panels may rotate so that at any one time there is a balance of 'old' and 'new' members: this prevents participants getting trapped by earlier opinions and means new ideas and decisions can be reviewed from fresh points of view.

Another type of user panel consists of a larger number of people, chosen to be representative of the local population, who are consulted on particular issues by post or through an online process.

User panels can also be valuable to gather the views of particular groups who might not attend a meeting or may be otherwise difficult to reach, such as carers or minority groups.

	
User panels provide a means to collect the views of people who will actually use the services on offer	Some types of service meet very private needs and this can inhibit open discussion
Panels help service providers with resource allocation and the priority given to different meeting different needs	Some panel members may be reluctant to discuss resource allocation to, or prioritisation of, services required by other panel members
Panels are made up of people recruited to be representative of service users	If they themselves have no experience of needing particular services they may not be in a position to make judgments about its importance to those who do need it
People enjoy attending and feel they are contributing to the community's services	If they are offered incentives to attend this can add considerably to the cost and may sometimes distort the results
Panel members can also contribute the views of friends and family	Personal views can make the process heavily anecdotal and prevent the objective consideration of the issues
Panels can be asked to weigh up the options and reach agreement on particular topics	The pressure for consensus may mean that minority views are disregarded

Resource requirements

In principle user panels should be a relatively cheap method of gathering people's opinions. The cost can vary considerably, depending on how much they are

used and the incentives and/or expenses offered to panel members.

Using this method

1. Decide the focus of a user panel and how you will use the results. Think about what you will do should the results contradict existing policies or resource allocation.
2. Decide on incentives, topics, schedule of meetings and the process to be used during meetings.
3. Decide how often you will need to 'refresh' the panel and appoint new members.
4. Identify and invite potential panel members and devise an induction process so that they understand their role and what is required of them.

5. Appoint and brief a facilitator for meetings.
6. Conduct meetings.
7. Analyse the results, report conclusions and evaluate the process.

Checklist

- Method to identify representative panel members
- Decisions about incentives and expenses
- Schedule of topics
- Briefing materials
- Meeting facilitator
- Venue
- Refreshments

Web-based processes

Overview

In the last few years web-based engagement processes have begun to be more widely used. They offer a number of advantages; people can participate without having to travel to meetings; they save paper; they enable people to focus on the issues that particularly interest them and not have to wade through things that do not; and they work well for people who feel intimidated by speaking in public or for whom writing English is easier than speaking it.

Online methods can be used as stand-alone processes or in parallel to or integrated with offline methods.

Because there are a range of web-based methods available it is important to be clear about what you want to achieve and to choose the method best suited. Many people find the technical 'hows' of IT baffling, so there is a real danger of using the method most easily available (or recommended by the IT department!) rather than choosing the one best able to meet the needs of your engagement process.


We have divided the methods available into three main types; there are variations on these, however, and the best advice is to talk the options through with someone who understands thoroughly the advantages and disadvantages of the different approaches.



Type 1 – Threaded forums and bulletin boards

These methods are cheap (you can download free software) and easy to set up. The idea is that a topic or series of topics are introduced on the forum and people can comment on or respond to other people's responses. Participation in forums can be by invitation only, or it can be open to all. They can be moderated, which means someone manages comments, checks them and often replies to people before or as they are posted, or unmoderated. Forums can be fixed in length with start and finish times or open ended discussions.

The best forums tend to be those set up and run by people with common interests; on the whole they are not very satisfactory as a top down engagement method.

Blogs are a variation on forums, where an organisation or individual writes regular pieces and people can comment or offer feedback.

	
Cheap and easy to set up	Some are not very easy to navigate and need expert input on their design

	
Not too structured or constraining for participants	Moderation can be time consuming and does require skills
	If participation rates are low interest can fizzle out very quickly
	It can be difficult to create systematic reports from unstructured forum responses

Type 2 – Online questionnaires and surveys

A well-designed online questionnaire or survey can be very easy to fill in and can make analysis of results very cost effective. There are a number of points that need to be considered:

Can it be anonymous?

How much information do you need about the respondents? If you want to analyse results by age, gender, ethnicity, or postcode, for example, you will need to gather that data. Unfortunately the more you ask the less likely people are to respond so only ask questions you really need to know the answers to.

How long will it take?

A tick-box questionnaire with 10 questions will take about five minutes to fill in; 10 open questions could take over half an hour. If you want people to take the time to complete a long questionnaire, make sure



they can log in and return to the site so they don't have to do it all in one sitting.

How much information do you want people to read?

Too much information can be a real deterrent, but an online questionnaire does allow layers of information. For example, you can provide a couple of sentences to introduce a question, and links that open up more in-depth information.

The big advantage of online questionnaires is that you can gather lots of data and analyse it quickly, but actually getting people to the website can take as much if not more effort than using a paper questionnaire.

Other than the points above, the advantages and disadvantages of online surveys and questionnaires are the same as for their paper cousins.

	
A straightforward method of collecting quantitative information	Not so good for collecting qualitative information
Can be focused on specific issues	Answers may be irrelevant if focus is wrong
Can be used to gather information from large numbers of people	Always danger of skewed results
Very good method for establishing information that can be re-tested to see if results change over time.	One-time questionnaires may produce misleading results
Questionnaires can be adapted to most issues	It is harder than it looks to write a good questionnaire – poor format can produce misleading results



Type 3 – Online consultation documents

Dialogue by Design has developed a system to enable people to participate in structured online consultation. It can be open to the public or by invitation only to a representative group or specific set of people.

The approach is to enable people to respond to open questions in a consultation document and then to collate and analyse the results using a data analysis system. The findings are then posted on a public

website so anyone can navigate through all the results and review how documents have been changed or recommendations made as a result of the consultation.

The main advantage is that many hundreds or thousands of people can comment in the same structured way so their responses can be easily compared. This method does require a reasonable time commitment by the participant, but it is excellent for gathering responses and comments on complex issues.

	
An extremely cost-effective way of hearing people's views on issues	Excludes people who don't have access to the internet
Allows people to say what they want on a subject at any time of the day or night	Not a substitute for actually meeting and talking to people
Creates a ready vehicle for the exchange of views	Can create the illusion of greater engagement than is really the case
Can be used on a website that will provide other information	Some people dislike computers and technology
Can potentially involve large numbers of people	Participation can be confined to the very dedicated and may therefore be unrepresentative

Resource requirements

Depends on the type of web-based process: can range from the minimal to the fairly expensive.

Using this method

1. Decide the purpose of having a web-based process and how it will contribute to your overall engagement strategy. Consider also whether you will need to do it in addition to or in parallel with an offline process, and how you will integrate the results.
2. If you do not have the requisite skills in-house, appoint professionals to design and manage the process and collate and analyse the results.
3. If it is an open process, publicise its existence and encourage participation. If it is by invitation

to a selected group or a representative sample, send regular reminders to participate.

4. Provide a technical helpline.
5. Monitor participation and be prepared to identify additional participants if participation is insufficient or unrepresentative.
6. Collate and publish results.

Checklist

- Ability and experience to design web-based processes
- Requisite technology
- Participant list
- Means to encourage participation
- Means to collate, structure and display many thousands of responses

Workshops

Overview

There is a fashion for referring to all meetings as 'workshops', perhaps to get away from the negative associations many people, both sponsors and participants, have with the idea of meetings in general and public meetings in particular. Workshops are, however, a very definite type of meeting and it is important to understand what makes them different.

For a start, workshops are always by invitation and, secondly, they are processes designed to enable people to work actively and collaboratively on a common problem or task. They may begin with background briefings and presentations, but, as the

name suggests, they are never merely about providing information or answering questions.



The purposes and processes of workshops also mean they are generally longer than other types of meetings. While the latter may last a couple of hours, workshops are very rarely less than half a day and can last for several days.

Another particular feature of workshops is that they often employ *professional facilitators* or *mediators* who use a range of methods and techniques to encourage group working, deal with conflict, and keep the focus firmly on the tasks at hand.

While 'workshop' is a general term, there are workshops designed for specific purposes, such as '*visioning*', '*future search*' and '*strategic*'

planning; and some based on the use of specific methods, such as '*Mindmapping*' or '*Open Space*'. Methods such as the latter have been packaged and trademarked, with facilitators trained and licensed to use them.

While the packaging of workshop methods can ensure consistency of approach, the methods used in any workshop should be designed to meet the needs of its purposes and the participants. Facilitators need a wide repertoire of skills and techniques, and be flexible enough to use whichever are required from moment to moment.

	
Excellent for discussion of complex issues, analysis of competing options and generation of ideas and criteria for assessing them	Limitation on numbers can make workshops unsuitable for addressing issues where very large numbers of people want to participate
Encourages joint working and problem-solving	Hostile participants may regard small group working as a means to neutralise dissent
Can address conflict directly and facilitate relationships across differences	Can require experienced facilitators and therefore costly
Maximises feedback obtained from participants	Can be perceived to exclude people unwilling to accept the starting assumptions or the way that issues are framed
Builds ownership of the results	Commits sponsors to taking the results seriously
Independent facilitation can increase credibility of process and results	Skilled facilitation can sometimes suppress or defuse conflict without addressing its causes

Resource requirements

An appropriate *venue*, catering, and in particular the hiring of independent professional facilitators to design and manage the workshop process, can make workshops expensive.

Using this method

1. Consider the context within which the workshop will happen, the issues it will need to address, and the people who should be involved.
2. Decide its overall purpose: is it to solve problems, build relationships, or just explore the issues?
3. Decide what specific outputs you want: a list of new ideas, participants' comments on existing proposals, the criteria for members of a working group, and so on. Also decide what status these outputs should have (are they firm decisions or purely advisory) and how you will use them.
4. Decide who should be invited, bearing in mind the purpose of the workshop, the issues to be addressed, the outputs and their status and the methods to be used: decisions around these variables are mutually dependent - they all affect each other.

5. Design the process, choose the methods and agree the ground rules for the workshop. If you are not sure about designing and running it yourself, hire a professional facilitator to do it for you. If you do, make sure he or she is fully briefed and is absolutely clear about what you are trying to achieve.
6. Invite the participants at least six weeks ahead of the meeting, giving them a clear sense of the purposes and an outline agenda.
7. After the workshop thank participants for coming and send them a record of the results.

Checklist

- Venue rental
- Catering
- Staffing
- Engagement of facilitator(s)
- Public address system (avoid if possible)
- Projection equipment for briefings
- Furniture geared to workshop's process
- Preparation of invitations, agendas and background information
- Evaluation forms

- Working materials (pens, paper, blu-tack etc)
- Crèche facilities

Specific types of workshop

Visioning: a workshop to enable participants to think broadly and creatively about the future.

Future search: a workshop to enable participants to focus on the future of an organisation or a community, and sometimes to decide the necessary steps to achieve it.

Strategic planning: a workshop to enable participants to make strategic decisions.

Mindmapping: a technique based on the use of a diagram with a key word, concept, idea or task at the centre with associated concepts, ideas and task radiating out from it. Mindmapping is used to generate and structure ideas; it is particularly useful as a way to understand complex subjects.

Open Space: a method for allowing participants to pursue whatever subjects or issues interest them. Particularly useful for participative events involving large numbers of people.

Appendices

Appendix A: Data Protection

The Data Protection Act 1998 came into force on 1 March 2000. Most organisations have someone who is specifically responsible for ensuring data protection issues are managed in accordance with the Act, and it is essential to contact them and make sure you understand the Act's requirements from the outset of any consultation process.

The main thrust of the Act is that when you collect personal data about people you must process it fairly and safeguard it properly. You must also tell people what you are going to do with it and also, if they ask, give them access to what you have collected.

The Act makes no distinction between data stored electronically or by more traditional means, and it applies to all living individuals, children as well as adults.

The Act applies whenever data capable of identifying an individual is collected: name, address, telephone number, National Insurance number, driving licence number, benefits reference numbers etc – anything which means the individual concerned can be identified.

There are also circumstances that allow people to be identified without reference to a name or number. For example, if you conduct an interview with the only female employee in a certain place it is easy enough for others to work out whom the information concerns.

Tips

- Do not collect personal details such as name, address or date of birth unless it is absolutely necessary. It is perfectly possible to create the profile of a person without such information: age range and gender for example are often enough. If the person wants to stay in touch then you can record more details - but it still does not have to be coupled with the information gathered. If you

do collect personal information do it accurately and keep it up to date.

- Once you have people's personal information make sure you safeguard it. In particular emphasise to anyone who sees it his or her responsibility for keeping it secure.
- Note that you have no right to pass on the personal information you collect. (Any other information you can of course share because it is not covered by the Act.)
- If you do want to pass on personal information you need the consent of the individual concerned.
- You should keep personal information only for as long as you really need it.
- People have the right to see personal information that is held about them. This means that people can ask for a copy of the information you gather for as long as it contains information that enables them to be identified.

What to do next

If you are unsure about any aspect of freedom of information seek advice from the appropriate colleague or from the relevant government departments. For further information, please go to <http://www.ico.gov.uk> Information Commissioner's Office (UK)

Appendix B: Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 is intended to promote a culture of openness and accountability amongst public authorities by providing people with rights of access to the information held by them. It is expected that these rights will facilitate better public understanding of how public authorities carry out their duties, why they make the decisions they do and how they spend public money.

The Act creates two principal obligations for public authorities, from which other obligations stem:

- Each public authority must adopt and maintain a publication scheme setting out details of information it will routinely make available, how the information can be obtained and whether there is any charge for it. The date by which public authorities are required to have their schemes in place varies. Public authorities should consult the timetable in approval process to confirm the submission and scheme active dates that will apply to them.
- From 1 January 2005 each public authority must comply with requests for the information that it holds unless an exemption from disclosure

applies. Public authorities will normally have a maximum of twenty working days to respond to the request, however there are circumstances when this time limit can be extended.

What to do next

If you are unsure about any aspect of freedom of information seek advice from the appropriate colleague or from the relevant government departments. For further information, please go to <http://www.ico.gov.uk> Information Commissioner's Office (UK).