



Community Consultation

Planning Your Activity

You will need to establish a clear brief to ensure that you have the necessary information, resources, time and approach to achieve the desired outcomes. A brief should include:

Background

- What do you want to achieve?

Purpose / Key Objectives

- Why do you need to consult and involve the communities / service users?
- Do you want to improve service delivery, identify gaps in the service, establish the needs of the communities or involve the community in decision-making?
- Has a similar exercise already been undertaken and can you use these results to avoid duplication?

Target Audience

- Who are you trying to consult/involve?

Methods

- How will you consult/involve them?

Plan

- Time scales (including waiting for responses), costs, (skills, commitment, money, time, staff and other resources), and who will be responsible?
- Timing is key - consultation often takes much longer than expected.

Results and Feedback

- How do you intend to analyse your results, and how will the results have an impact?
- How will the results be fed back to the consultees? Is it clear what the outcomes are from the results and have the participants been made aware of these?

Evaluation / Monitoring

- How will you know if it has been successful?

The following community consultation checklist will help to make effective use of any consultation exercise, and should be used in advance to think through what will be required.



Community Consultation Check List

Background.	
Purpose of Consultation.	
Is there any other existing data available?	
Target Audience.	
Methodology – how will the exercise be done?	
Dates (and Venue, if applicable), for Consultation?	
Sample Method (if quantitative).	



Sample Size (if quantitative).	
Identified and Allocated Resources.	
External Consultant (if applicable).	
Partnership Opportunities (if applicable).	
Feedback method.	
Monitoring and Evaluation.	
Names of Lead Officer, and other key group members.	

Signed (Lead Officer)

Date



Undertaking your Activity – Why, What, When, How and With Whom?

Why?

- It is vitally important to clarify the purpose of the Community Consultation activity. You should understand why the exercise is required and develop clear aims and objectives, together with time scales for completion of it.

What?

- What level of Community Consultation is needed? Is the exercise primarily information gathering / giving / sharing, consulting over plans, or involving communities in decision making?
- What previous Community Consultation activity has taken place that you can draw upon?
- What groups do you involve? Communities can be made up of people with different needs, common interests, religions, ethnic origins, perspectives, etc. Where possible, there should be equal involvement from all the members of the community in the Community Consultation activity.

When?

- People are less likely to get involved if they feel that decisions have already been made, and that their involvement is of minor importance. The earlier the involvement, the more likely it is to be a successful Community Consultation activity.

How?

- How will the information from the Community Consultation activity be used – be clear from the start what you want to get from this!

With whom?

- Have you identified the target audience? The list of who to involve will vary according to the service.
- Are there any Equality & Diversity considerations that need to be considered?
- What about hard-to-reach groups? They can be defined as groups who experience barriers such as poverty, language, disability, transport and childcare etc.
- Have communities of interest been identified e.g. BME, Disabled People, Older People, Children and Young People etc?

Useful tips in involving communities of interest

- Who are your community? How involved are they and how accessible are your methods of involvement?
- Liaise with Communities of Interest groups e.g. Older People's groups and Ethnic Minorities, to ensure that they have their voices heard.
- Use a variety of community venues for meetings with local communities and ensure they are accessible to people with disabilities.
- Consider how the timing of events can affect local people such as school hours, meal times, public transport etc.
- Remember to cater for people who may not read or write, by using visual aids, or offering to write down people's comments.

Community Consultation Key Features

1. There needs to be enough lead-in time to consult or involve people. Sometimes, tight deadlines are given to get the community involved, which can ultimately affect the quality of community involvement.
2. The community should feel that they have ownership of any Community Consultation activity including a sense of participation where possible.
3. It is important to build the capacity and skills of the communities involved by providing training and resources to empower them to participate in decision-making at all levels.
4. Need to communicate with the community in a positive and effective way, whilst ensuring that clarity is maintained.
5. The most successful Community Consultation activities are usually those that involve people in practical or direct ways, and show clear evidence of how changes could have a direct impact on their lives.
6. There is a need to be 'honest and realistic' about the purpose and parameters of the Community Consultation activities being undertaken and not to raise expectations, which cannot be met.



7. Feedback does not always have to be in the form of a report. Posters, leaflets, local radio and other communication methods can provide people with the feedback they need to understand how their involvement has influenced decision-making and encourage their continued interest and support.

Monitoring and Evaluating

- Every Community Consultation activity needs to ensure that systems are in place to monitor and evaluate its process and effectiveness.
- Helps you understand whether the Community Consultation activity is working as a way of providing a mechanism that helps the members of the public and other key stakeholders.
- Helps to improve Community Consultation activity by looking at the best and worst of your experiences!
- Evaluating the Community Consultation should be open and honest – something to learn from and share best practice.

What to Evaluate

- Did the exercise meet its objectives? If not, why not?
- Were the objectives clear and relevant to the consultation?
- Were they clear to everyone involved? Did you get views from those you wanted?
- Did those consulted feel that the exercise was worthwhile?
- Were the methods right for your objectives? Did one method work better than another, and if so, why?
- Did you get the required response rate / representative sample / information?
- Was the timetable clear and kept to, and if not, why?
- Was enough time allowed for responses?
- Was the information used easy to access?
 - Relevant to the consultation?
 - Produced in plain English and easy to understand?
 - Available in other languages and formats?
- Did you budget adequately? Were there any unforeseen costs?
- Were there any over / under spends?
- Did you get views you could use? If so, how were they used?
- How has your service / policy changed as a result of the consultation?

- Has the consultation changed the relationship between you, your users and others?
- Was feedback given to those consulted?

Importance of feeding back to participants

- Providing feedback to the participants that have been involved in the consultation activity is part of effective Community Consultation activity. It is also our duty to tell those involved what we have concluded and what we plan to do with the information – feedback is an important part of the process.
- It is good practice to let participants know how their views and opinions have been taken forward and if they haven't, then why not. Consultation & Community Involvement is a two-way process and providing feedback is an essential element of maintaining the participants' confidence in this process.
- All respondents should feel that their contribution has been valued as it may encourage them to take part in future Community Consultation activities.

Disclaimer

This Advice Note has been produced on behalf of the Carmarthenshire Community Toolkit to assist community groups to make funding applications. However, it should not be taken as a definitive guide covering all areas of concern and it is recommended that further advice is sought in appropriate circumstances.