

## Consulting

Asking people, including young people, what they think so that decision-makers can make informed choices.

### Questionnaires and surveys

Surveys can be an effective way of gathering information about people's experiences and views. They can be carried out face-to-face by an interviewer or left to the respondent to complete on their own but are unlikely to provide in-depth information.

When planning a survey think about:

- What you want to find out.
- What you will do with the results and how you will interpret them.
- Who you want to survey and how you will gather responses (face-to-face, telephone, postal, via existing groups, online).
- How many responses you will need to get a statistically significant response rate (good practice suggests 10% is the minimum useful response rate).
- What budget you will need.

Before undertaking your survey do:

- Allow plenty of time for people to respond, for example, if you are surveying voluntary sector groups you are expected to allow 12 weeks.
- Remember that the look and layout of your survey will either encourage or discourage responses.
- Consider using an online survey platform such as Survey Monkey.

Remember, some population groups are more likely to respond to postal or web-based surveys than others. This could affect your results.

### Focus groups

Focus groups are small discussion groups of approximately eight to 15 people and are usually led by a trained facilitator. They can help you to get in-depth responses to an issue and evaluate concepts and explore new ideas.

Before planning a focus group, consider:

- How you will recruit participants.
- What you want to achieve from the group.
- How you will select participants e.g. do you want a random sample or community members?
- What the focus group will involve.
- Where the group will be held.

- How to make the focus group accessible to everyone invited.
- What budget you will need.

Do:

- Allow plenty of time to work with the facilitator to develop an agenda, script and materials.
- Give people plenty of time to decide if they want to be involved.
- Make sure that the results are fed back to the participants.
- Ask participants to complete a simple evaluation sheet at the end of the discussions to find out how the process was viewed.

## Events

Events can be valuable for gaining and sharing information and good practice, networking and building interest in your engagement work.

Before organising an event think about:

- What you want to get from the event.
- Involving a few of the intended participants in the planning if it's a community event.
- How to make the event accessible to everyone invited.
- The safety and well-being of those people attending and also working at the event.  
For more information and tips on how to plan an event, access the [organising events pages](#) which provide support including risk assessment templates.
- What budget you will need.

As part of your planning make sure you:

- Plan well in advance, allowing at least four months for a large event with hundreds of people.
- Book the venue, refreshments, facilitators and/or speakers early
- send out a programme.
- Make sure that you have emergency plans in place in case there needs to be an evacuation.
- Ask attendees to complete a simple evaluation sheet at the end of the event to find out how they viewed it and what they gained.

## Round table workshops

Round table workshops usually involve relevant local stakeholders coming together to brainstorm ideas. The stakeholders can be members of the community, for example, service users, elected councillors, parish councils, businesses or service providers.

Workshops can focus on very specific issues or be more general in order to develop strategy or vision. They can also help to build relationships.

They are different to focus groups, which often only involve service users.

When planning workshops think about:

- Who you want to be involved?
- Whether you need a facilitator on each table if you have more than one.
- How to make the workshop accessible to everyone invited.
- What budget you will need.

As part of your planning you will need to:

- Present relevant specialist and technical information in a way that is easy to understand.
- Use a range of exercises that encourage participants from differing backgrounds to analyse what is presented and make decisions.
- Use flipcharts, rich pictures and spider diagrams to make the discussion engaging.
- Allow time for each table to report back to the whole group.
- Make sure that the results are fed back to the participants.
- Think about how you'll capture information.
- Book rooms and refreshments early.

## Written plans, policies and strategies

Getting feedback on draft documents can transform a service or initiative.

Before publishing your engagement document think about:

- What information you want.
- Who you want to consult.
- What consultation method/s you want to use (focus groups, workshops, survey, web-based).
- What parts of the document people can change.
- Ways to limit the amount of reading that participants will have to do.
- how to let people know about the consultation, for example, by letter for targeted groups.
- What budget you will need.

Before publishing it:

- Be clear about which parts of the document your audience can influence and why.
- Allow plenty of time for people to respond and set up clear lines of communication.
- Make sure that the results are fed back to respondents
- If appropriate, allow time to re-write the document after the consultation closes.
- Recognise that simply posting a document online is not enough to be able to say 'we consulted'.