

How to consult your community



Before you start consulting anyone, you should always ask yourself the following questions. The answers will help you decide what methods and techniques to use:

- Who are you consulting?
- What are you consulting about?
- Why are you consulting?
- Do people (including you) understand what the issues are?
- When should the consultation take place?
- How long will it take?
- Who will interpret the results?
- Who will see the results?
- Are there any comparable results?
- What might happen as a consequence of consulting?

Methods and Techniques

Communities are made up of people of different ages, backgrounds, and skills and it is important to consider this when consulting and using different ways of gathering information and engaging people if necessary.

The table shows a range of techniques that can be used. Key things to consider are how to record information and then analyse the information you receive.

www.smartcommunities.online/community-review/

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On behalf of



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Viney Court, Taunton, TA1 3FB
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No. 311926619.

Consultation method (description)	Strengths	Weaknesses	Best used with	Resources/ time needed	How to
<p>Surveys</p> <p>Structured way of asking questions to understand peoples' behaviour, views and opinions</p>	<p>You can gather information in a consistent, structured way.</p> <p>Because all respondents have to answer the same questions you can easily compare responses</p>	<p>It can take time to design, deliver, collect and analyse surveys.</p> <p>It's also easy to ask unnecessary or leading questions!</p>	<p>People who have time and inclination to fill out forms.</p>	<p>Surveys can be conducted on paper or electronically to save costs.</p> <p>You will need to allow plenty of time to think about the questions to ask and how these will be analysed.</p> <p>You may also want to pilot your survey to make sure it is easy for participants to use and generates the right kind of information.</p>	<p>Spend time planning your survey, thinking carefully about the information you want to find out, how to structure your questions and how you will analyse the results.</p> <p>Pilot your survey with a small number of people.</p> <p>Distribute your survey, either by hand or electronically stipulating a date by which it must be returned Analyse results and look for patterns and inconsistencies in the data.</p>
<p>Model making (Planning for Real)</p> <p>People are encouraged to comment on 3D models of your community expressing their likes, dislikes and views for future action</p>	<p>Interactive and visual way of involving a wide range of people</p> <p>Can be undertaken alongside existing community events</p>	<p>It can take a lot of time to make the models</p> <p>People tend to comment on the physical aspects of your community</p>	<p>This is a great method of engaging a wide range of people who like to participate in a more 'hands on' way</p> <p>Think about getting younger people to make the models</p>	<p>You will need to have a Planning for Real kit (www.planningforreal.org.uk/) or model making materials.</p> <p>Making the model can be fun, but takes time</p> <p>You will need a venue (preferably away from wind and rain!)</p> <p>Facilitators are best used to run the event.</p>	

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<p>Neighbourhood walks</p> <p>Walking around your community, people are asked to comment on and discuss positive and negative features of interest</p>	<p>Good for starting your plan's consultation and establishing key issues of interest.</p> <p>Visual references can serve as good prompts for discussion and allow more varied issues to surface.</p>	<p>Discussion may gravitate towards physical aspects of the community.</p> <p>Could exclude people with mobility difficulties.</p> <p>It can be difficult to capture everything that's said.</p>	<p>People who like to get outside and talk.</p>	<p>Neighbourhood walks are relatively easy to organise and shouldn't require too many resources.</p> <p>You might need pen and paper or equipment such as a smart phone to record what's said.</p>	<p>Plan route</p> <p>Publicise the walk</p> <p>Devise a method of capturing what is said or discussed.</p> <p>Undertake walk</p> <p>Review notes taken from the walk and look to see if there are any key themes or issues that warrant further investigation.</p>
<p>Idea walls/banks/ boxes</p> <p>An opportunity for people to post comments and suggestions in their own time. They can be used at events or in public places over a period of time</p>	<p>Quick and easy to use</p> <p>If used in public places, you might get comments from people who don't have the time or inclination to get involved in other consultation activities.</p>	<p>Takes time to gather responses.</p> <p>The detail of the suggestions might be limited so best used alongside other consultation methods.</p>	<p>People who are likely to turn up at public meetings or frequent places where they are displayed.</p>	<p>Materials for display purposes.</p> <p>Allow enough time to gather and analyse responses.</p>	<p>Decide what you want people to comment on. Do you want to invite general comments about your community or do you want them to think about a particular aspect of it.</p> <p>Produce display materials which clearly state the scope of views and comments sought.</p> <p>Allow enough time for comments and suggestions to be posted.</p> <p>Collate and analyse results, looking for patterns.</p>

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<p>Interviews/ focus groups</p> <p>A recorded conversation with individuals or groups to explore pre- defined issues or topics. Can be structured with pre-defined questions or take the form of a more fluid and open discussion</p>	<p>Particularly effective for exploring how different people experience your community.</p> <p>During the course of an interview or focus group participants can be invited to expand upon issues of interest</p>	<p>Whilst data collected is rich in detail, it can take longer to analyse</p> <p>Because responses are likely to be highly personalised, it's important that you seek to ensure participant's anonymity when feeding back information to your community</p>	<p>Interviews can be used with most people, however some might feel more comfortable to talk about things than others</p> <p>The data can be used to target specific groups in your community</p>	<p>Its best to hold interviews and focus groups in places where people feel comfortable and where conversations can be easily recorded (i.e. no loud background noises!)</p> <p>Recording equipment</p>	<p>Think about who you want to speak to and what you want to talk about.</p> <p>Select participants</p> <p>Agree a time and venue with participants and let them know how you will use their responses</p> <p>Undertake interview/ focus group making sure this is recorded</p> <p>Reflect on the interview/ focus group making a notes</p>
<p>Video diaries</p> <p>People record their thoughts and opinions on video. These can be played back to the rest of your community at a public event</p>	<p>This can be a dynamic way of getting people involved, allowing people to express their thoughts or opinions in their own time</p>	<p>You'll need to think carefully about who you want to record video diaries</p> <p>Some people might be uncomfortable about speaking on camera or having this played back to the rest of the community</p> <p>Time consuming</p>	<p>People who are used to the internet and feel comfortable about sharing their views publicly</p>	<p>Video camera or smart phone, projector or large screen TV</p> <p>Venue for showcasing video diaries to the rest of your community (if desired)</p>	<p>Think about what you want participants to talk about</p> <p>Select participants and provide them with clear guidance about what they should and should not be prepared to talk about. Make sure they have the equipment needed for recording</p> <p>Review video diaries before public screening</p> <p>Hold an event to play video diaries</p>

Consultation method (description)	Strengths	Weaknesses	Best used with	Resources/ time needed	How to
<p>Internet forums and social media</p> <p>An opportunity for people to share ideas and discuss topics of interest online. These can be pre-defined or user generated</p>	<p>Anyone with access to the internet can take part.</p> <p>Conversations are automatically recorded and easily analysed.</p> <p>Can be integrated with your community's website</p>	<p>Excludes people without access to the internet.</p> <p>May attract inappropriate posts if not well moderated.</p>	<p>Young people, people with limited time.</p>	<p>Internet access</p> <p>Basic knowledge of how to set up forums/ use social media.</p> <p>Time to promote and moderate the forum.</p>	<p>Set up a forum or chose an appropriate social media platform</p> <p>Encourage members of your community to access the forum and share their views.</p> <p>Stimulate discussions to keep them alive.</p> <p>Analyse comments and feedback received</p>
<p>Public meetings, Events, Street Stalls</p> <p>An opportunity to attend events that are being hosted another organisation.</p>	<p>Provides the opportunity to speak with a wide range of individuals that reflect your community. It can stimulate discussion and debate on various issues, and with the right tools potentially can reach some sort of consensus. Could generate a lot of data.</p>	<p>You will need equipment such as display stands, maps, pens paper, questionnaires, and leaflets Stall needs to attract people.</p> <p>Could generate a lot of data that will have to be reviewed and understood</p>	<p>Most people</p>	<p>You will need resources to make your table/display/presentation attractive and engaging. The people running the stall should be confident in engaging and speaking with or to the public about the community engagement process.</p> <p>Time to gather data collected and analyse.</p>	<p>Ensure people know you will be at an event.</p> <p>Have a number of people who can talk to people and record their views / encourage enagagment.</p> <p>Good displays / opportunities for all to engage.</p>

How to run a community consultation event

When to hold public events?

Public events can be held at different points in the consultation process. You may choose to hold a number of public events, just one or none at all.

If your main method of consultation is going to be through a survey/questionnaire you may like to consider the following events to help:

1. A pre survey 'pop-up' event to ask two basic questions:

What do you like about living in...

What are your top 3 issues/concerns?

The answers to these questions will help you decide what issues to focus on in the questionnaire, remembering the importance of considering what influence you have as a community to make changes.

Such a pop-up event could be a stand at an existing activity – a fete, market, harvest supper etc.

You could have a stand in the high street / main gathering point in your community on a Saturday morning.

You could ask existing groups to ask their attendees these questions and ask them to feedback to a central point of contact.

You could ask the questions in a social media post and ask for responses either in the comments or to an email address.

You could do all of these things! It depends on how much time you have and if you feel you need to ask as many people as possible. You may find that after a number of responses the key issues become very clear.

2. Launch the survey

You may wish to hold an event to launch the survey, giving you an opportunity to explain the thinking behind it and the importance of responding. You could have laptops/tablets at the event for people to complete the survey, paper copies for anyone who prefers, or you could have people available to complete a survey alongside someone less able or confident to complete it online themselves.

3. Targeted events

If you are looking to understand the needs of one particular group, an event to engage them and ask specific questions may help. For example, if you would like to better understand the needs of Young People, you may wish to attend a youth club meeting, school or go to where young people congregate and ask a set of questions.

4. Prioritisation

An event can be held once the initial responses have been analysed in order to start to prioritise potential actions and projects emerging from the consultation.

5. Launch the Report

An opportunity to provide feedback on what the communities' views are, look at actions to be taken and engage people in helping to make changes or get engaged in projects.

Things to consider when organising / attending an event:

1. Communication

Communication needs to be clear, timely, suitable for the recipient and jargon free. Whether it be an invite on social media, a presentation at a local club, or a poster, the message should be clearly delivered, avoid introducing or discussing other topics, however relevant they may seem. Use your '[Communication Plan Template](#)' to ensure the correct messaging.

2. Accessibility

Think about how people can attend. Accessibility can take a couple of forms, physical access- can all the different members of your community easily access and are comfortable in accessing the venue, and is the venue being used for something else at the same time, that could impede your ability to successfully put on the event or hold the meeting or engage with people. Consider whether there is another event taking place that many people you want to engage with may attend- we've all heard of the 'world cup at the wedding moment.'

Timings - there is never going to be an ideal time for everyone to meet. Consider the different groups of people you've identified and what would potentially work for them. This is when it is particularly useful to have identified potential group leaders, spokespersons, gatekeepers, etc. as they will help identify the best times and venues and potentially help to encourage those within their communities of interest to engage in the process.

When considering accessibility think about the different groups that you want to attend and what their needs will be but be careful as someone with specific accessibility needs may not be immediately obvious. For example, English as a second language, partially sighted, hearing issues etc. Consider how you will help everyone engage. Again, understanding your community will help you consider these issues.

3. Methods of engaging people and recording information

In advance of an event, decide on what you hope to get out of attending. Work out which consultation / engagement method will work best and prepare materials and resources to be able to do this. Consider how you will record information given and ensure it is fed into the process.

If you ask for individuals details consider GDPR and understand how to collect data properly.