

Consulting Stakeholders

Public bodies have always used stakeholder feedback to inform the design, delivery and evaluation of their services.

So what's new? What's new is the high priority now being attached to consultation and involvement and the rigorous, transparent and mainstream way in which it is now expected to be done.

Best Practice Principles

With a myriad of guidance now available on this topic, it is real challenge for organisations to identify clear, concise and practical advice on how best to go about consultation and involvement exercises. At the Social Research Centre, we have already done this on your behalf. In 2009, we conducted an extensive review of leading, contemporary literature (35+ leading resources) on this topic. (See Bibliography). We then combined this with our own practical experience in this area to produce a consolidated list of good practice principles. The following list brings together the latest guidance on how to prepare for, conduct and follow-up on consultation exercises.

You may wish to refer to this list as part of your own consultation work.

Before...

Visible commitment

Demonstrate a clear corporate commitment to involving stakeholders consistently and equitably.

Clarity

Have genuine reasons for seeking feedback and communicate these clearly.

Stakeholder identification & engagement

Identify the relevant stakeholders. Inform them about the purpose and boundaries of the consultation exercise and explain how the outcomes will be used.

Proportionality

Ensure that the inputs to consultation exercises (financial, staff, stakeholders' time etc) are commensurate with the potential impacts of the consultation.

Efficiency

Strive to reduce duplication of effort and the burden on stakeholders by seeking to join-up consultation exercises within your own organisation and across partner organisations wherever possible.

Policy compliance

Ensure that the overall design and conduct of the consultation is compliant with all of the organisation's relevant policies e.g. interaction with vulnerable adults, child protection, physical accessibility, data protection and confidentiality etc.



During...

Timing

Seek to conduct consultations exercises when there are still elements that can truly be influenced by the exercise. The elements which can be influenced should be clearly identified at the outset so that expectations can be managed appropriately.

Time span

Provide stakeholders with adequate time to engage.

Robustness

Use consultation methods that are appropriate to the needs of stakeholders and will yield information which is valid and reliable.

Enabling

Support stakeholders with sufficient and accessible information and, wherever possible, access to tools and skills to enable them to give informed feedback to the best of their abilities.

Accessibility & inclusion

Ensure that suitable methods are in place to support those who may be at risk of disadvantage in giving their views.

After...

Integrity

Report the findings from the consultation in a manner which honours the points made by the stakeholders.

Due regard

Whilst other factors may need to be considered, use the findings from consultation exercises in the manner explained to / agreed with stakeholders at the outset.

Feedback

Notify stakeholders about the outcomes of the consultation exercise. Show how their contributions were used in the decision-making process.

Continuous improvement

Carry out a review afterwards to find out what lessons can be learned from the consultation process (e.g. whether some aspects of the process were more effective than others). Share the lessons learned as widely as possible.

General...

Empowerment

Conduct consultation exercises so that, as far as possible, stakeholders experience them as constructive and empowering interactions with your organisation.

Consistency

Ensure that third parties appointed to carry out consultation exercises on behalf of your organisation can demonstrate that their approach is compliant with the above best practice principles.

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