

Better together: improving consultation with the third sector

A handbook

content



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Before you start - questions for planning consultation

This handbook has been designed as a resource for people with different levels of experience of consultation and of working with the third sector. Some people will benefit from reading the document in full whilst others will use it to dip in and out of as and when they need.

These questions can help you identify what you are looking for:

Before consulting, ask yourself..	If the answer is no, take a look at these sections:
Do you already know your third sector constituency?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the third sector?• Getting to know the third sector• Building ongoing relationships with the third sector• Reaching underrepresented organisations
Are your colleagues and seniors supportive of consultation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building a culture of engagement and learning• Collaborating and planning ahead• Building consultation into decision making
Can anything change as a result of the consultation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building consultation into decision making
Are you clear about why you are consulting?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planning consultation with the third sector• Being clear about the purpose
Do you have a good knowledge of the history of the issue, including past consultations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planning consultation with the third sector• Building consultation into decision making
Are you clear about who needs to be consulted and how you will reach them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deciding who to consult• Reaching underrepresented organisations

Before consulting, ask yourself..	If the answer is no, take a look at these sections:
Are key decision makers and stakeholders clear about why the consultation is happening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building consultation into decision making • Being clear about the purpose • Communications
Have you thought about how you can make it easier for third sector organisations take part?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaching underrepresented organisations • Supporting third sector organisations to take part
Have you thought about how third sector organisations could help you consult better?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devolved consultation: how third sector organisations can help you consult better
Do you know which consultation method to use?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing the right method • List of methods
Do you know how to communicate with a third sector audience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications
Have you thought about what will happen after the consultation finishes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building consultation into decision making • Feedback and follow up
Have you thought about how you will measure the success of the consultation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation and learning

About this handbook

This handbook was produced by Involve and Guidestar Data Services for the Office of the Third Sector and Children England (formerly NCVCCO). It provides advice, information and practical examples to help public bodies engage third sector organisations in decision and policy making.

It aims to complement, rather than replicate, the extensive guidance already available on public and stakeholder consultation and engagement; therefore it includes links to other documents and websites where readers can find more information. This handbook endorses the government's Code of Practice on Consultation and the Compact Code on Consultation and Policy Appraisal.

www.involve.org.uk

www.gs-ds.co.uk

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector

www.ncvcco.org

Who is this handbook for?

The primary audience for the handbook are officials in the public sector whose work involves consultation with third sector bodies. The document also aims to be useful for public sector workers not directly involved in consultation activities but whose work could benefit from more third sector input

How were the examples chosen?

The case studies used in this handbook have not been quality controlled and are not included to represent best practice; rather they have been chosen to reflect a diversity of practices, policy areas and government levels. Some of the examples used in the handbook are taken from the case studies that were used in the research on which this handbook is based. These, along with the detailed research methodology, can be found in the **research report** that was produced alongside this handbook, which can be downloaded from

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/Consultations

What is the third sector?

According to the Office of the Third Sector (OTS), the third sector encompasses voluntary and community organisations (including faith organisations), charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals both large and small, including housing associations and trade unions. It is a diverse, active and passionate sector in which organisations share three common characteristics. They:

- are non-governmental
- are value-driven
- principally reinvest any financial surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives.

Facts and figures on the third sector can be found at:

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/Research_and_statistics/Key_statistics.aspx

See also the **research report** that accompanies this handbook, available at:

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/Consultations

Why consultation matters

Consultation is a vital part of modern policy making, a tool for public authorities to learn from the expertise and perspectives of citizens, business, third sector organisations and other stakeholders. Through consultation, the third sector brings a wealth of experience and insights into decision and policy making, helping public bodies better understand the needs of citizens and society, which in turn helps create more realistic and better targeted policies and services. This handbook focuses on consultation with the third sector, defined as the requests to third sector organisations by public institutions to respond to proposals and contribute to public policy and decision making. The handbook does not cover other forms of engagement between the public and third sector, such as partnership working or service delivery.

Getting to know the third sector

What would you rather respond to on a Monday morning, the consultation you've been emailed or the woman waiting in reception who's partner has just beaten her up and who's looking for some emergency accommodation for herself and the child? That's often the reality that third sector workers are faced with.

Representative from local government

In order to make the most of the skills, experiences and knowledge held by third sector organisations, it is vital that people working in public policy making have a good understanding of the sector, the constraints it operates under and what third sector organisations can offer policy making and public services

What does this mean?

- **Find out how the other side lives.** Take the time to visit third sector organisations to see what a typical working day is like for them, and invite them to do the same with you. Secondments and shadowing are excellent ways to gain insights into a different sector, which can help public sector and third sector workers understand each other better.
- **Map your constituency.** Who are the third sector organisations in the field or local area? Are there any organisations that are less likely to take part in consultation or that have been overlooked in the past? Ask the organisations you know who else should be involved and consider what support you could offer to make it easier for more organisations to take part in your consultation activities.
- **Do not assume that you know best.** Ask your third sector constituency what they want to be consulted on and how, to avoid wasting their time and yours.
- **Acknowledge how third sector organisations see themselves.** Many organisations that fall under the official definition of the third sector do not recognise the term and may not see themselves as part of the sector. Avoid using jargon and ask for help from the relevant organisations to make sure that appropriate language is used when engaging with your third sector constituency.
- **Acknowledge that there is diversity within organisations in the third sector as well as between them.** Staff members of different ranks will have different abilities and levels of willingness to respond to a consultation, with volunteers in particular often finding themselves unable to respond to consultations unless given extra support.

See also: [Deciding who to consult](#), [Reaching underrepresented organisations](#), [Building ongoing relationships with the sector](#) and [Supporting third sector organisations to take part](#)

What others have done

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra): Asking third sector bodies how they want to be consulted

Many government departments now ask their third sector stakeholders what they want to be consulted on and how. When Defra broached this topic in its Third Sector Strategy consultation, it received a number of constructive suggestions; many of them focused on how to engage better with smaller third sector bodies. Suggestions included making the language of consultation more inspiring and jargon-free, introducing an engagement programme between community activists and civil servants and emphasising two-way communication and action through secondments and visits.

In the later stages of the development of Defra's Third Sector Strategy, the department advertised a secondment opportunity for a third sector professional to join the third sector team within the department to support the implementation of the strategy.

See: www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/thirdsector%2Dstrategy

Helpful links

- **Charity Commission** – holds information about all registered charities in the UK: www.charity-commission.gov.uk
- **GuideStar UK** – a database of all registered charities, voluntary organisations, social enterprises and community groups in England and Wales: www.guidestar.org.uk/guidestar.aspx
- **Office of the Third Sector website** – contains key statistics on the third sector: www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/Research_and_statistics/Key_statistics.aspx
- **The Compact website** – information about the Compact and about the community and voluntary sector more generally: www.thecompact.org.uk
- **Consulting the third sector research report** – contains analysis of the research that underpins this guidance, including a typology of the different roles third sector organisations play in society: www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/Consultations
- **National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) website** – contains a directory of local third sector groups and organisations: www.navca.org.uk
- **Getting to know your local voluntary and community sector** – toolkit provided by The National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA): www.navca.org.uk/stratwork/localgov/areaprofiles/vsprofilestoolkit.htm

- **The environment for a thriving third sector report** – contains third sector statistics:
www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/~media/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/research%20paper%20chapter%203%20pdf.ashx
- **The Third Sector Review 2007** – sets out the government's ten-year strategy for working with the third sector:
www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/third_sector_review/Third_sector_review_final_report.aspx
- **Social Enterprise Coalition website** – contains information about social enterprise in the UK:
www.socialenterprise.org.uk
- **Get to know Scotland's Third Sector** – webpage explaining the different types of third sector organisations and the roles they play:
www.scvo.org/scvo/Information/ViewInformation.aspx?al=t&page=&all=&from=DSR&Info=1623&TCID=27&PageName=Facts
- **What is the Community and Voluntary Sector?** – Information and guidance provided by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA): www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=1344967
- **Social enterprise and local government** - Information and guidance provided by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA): www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=8840188

Building ongoing relationships with the third sector

I'm more likely to respond to a consultation where I'm already engaged in a conversation with the [consulting] body.

Representative from national third sector organisation

Effective consultation with the third sector is not just about applying the right techniques and speaking to the right people. Often, the consultation processes seen as most successful are those where there is an ongoing relationship between the organising body and the participating organisations, founded in cooperation and mutual respect. Ensuring that the relationship between public institutions and third sector organisations is productive and sustainable requires **patience**, an **open mind** and an **ongoing commitment** from both sides.

What does this mean?

- **Establish an ongoing working relationship with your third sector constituency** such as stakeholder groups that meet regularly to inform policy or service discussions, oversight groups that help design and monitor the consultation or a larger forum or assembly. Whatever the format, ensure that the working relationship is transparent, membership of any group is open and that it includes a cross-section of organisations. This means thinking about how to support smaller organisations to be involved.
- **Tap into existing networks.** Get to know the relevant infrastructure and umbrella organisations and use their expertise and contacts to build relationships. **Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP)**, **Local Area Agreements (LAA)** and local and regional infrastructures such as **Third sector Assemblies** can provide an ideal forum for promoting consultation with the third sector. However, do not rely entirely on the networks of infrastructure organisations to reach your audience as they may not be in contact with all relevant parties themselves.
- **Maintain communications throughout any consultation process**, and stay in touch afterwards. See also: [communications](#) and [feedback](#).

What have others done?

Communities and Local Government: Introducing a Third Sector Partnership Board

The department Communities and Local Government has established a Third Sector Partnership Board to help improve its understanding of the third sector and the role the sector might play in its work. The Board is made up of representatives from third sector organisations large and small; it aims to serve as a critical friend to the department; bringing voices from the margins into policy making.

See: www.communities.gov.uk/communities/thirdsector/partnershipboard/

Brighton and Hove City Council: Setting up sustainable third sector working groups

When running their housing strategy consultations, Brighton and Hove council officers established working groups with members of the council, social services and third sector organisations. The groups were set up with the expectation that they would continue to meet after the consultation process and help to sustain the relationship between the council and third sector. Explaining the idea behind the process, one of the organisers said: *“once the strategy is published, we don’t want to just stick it on the shelf and forget about it. We want these groups to be self-sustaining, and we want them to come back to us after six months and say ‘right, you’ve done your strategy now tell us what’s been implemented, what’s worked, what’s not worked?’*

See: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=c1188834

Birmingham Third Sector Assembly

Birmingham’s Third Sector Assembly works to promote the influence of the local third sector. One of its key aims is to improve relationships between the sector and public sector partners such as Birmingham City Council.

See: www.bvsc.org/assembly

Helpful links

- **Partnership informationbank** – contains information and tools for building local partnerships with the third sector, provided by the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA):
www.navca.org.uk/localvs/infobank
- **Local Area Agreement and Local Strategic Partnerships** – information and guidance provided by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA):
www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=1174195
- **Communities in Control: Real people, real power** – Empowerment White Paper:
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitiesincontrol
- **Partnership intelligence self assessment questionnaire** – tool for getting the most out of partnership working, provided by OPM:
<https://services.opm.co.uk/lip/home.aspx>
- **Working with the third sector** – National Audit Office report:
www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/05-06/050675.pdf

- **Working together in practice** – a toolkit to support Learning and Skills Council (LSC) working with the community and voluntary sector: <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/LSC/2005/quality/goodpractice/working-together-in-practice-vol-2-working-smarter.pdf>
- **Local Compact Implementation Workbook** –contains guidance on setting up and maintaining a local compact: www.thecompact.org.uk/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=101225

Building a culture of engagement and learning

I wish that more officers were expected to get involved in consultation work, to understand the communities they're serving and to understand the value of the third sector in providing information about those communities that we would not otherwise know.

Representative from local government

If third sector consultation is to become truly embedded into policy and decision making, more needs to be done to help officials at all levels understand how engaging with the third sector can help them in their work. This means building consultation objectives into organisational strategies, offering training in consultation skills and giving staff at all levels the chance to see for themselves how and when engaging with third sector organisations can make a difference to their work.

What does this mean?

Measures that can help achieve this goal include:

- **Investing time and resources.** Running good consultations takes time, as does building and sustaining relationships with third sector organisations. This needs to be acknowledged at the senior level; staff should not be expected to carry out more consultations unless they have the time and funds to do it well.
- **Encouraging secondments and visits,** both from the public sector to third sector organisations and vice versa. If full-time secondments are not feasible it may be possible to lend staff members to other organisations on day release or part-time. Secondments and shadowing can be effective ways of [strengthening relationships](#) and improving understanding between the public and the third sector.
- **Building consultation with the third sector and other stakeholders into institutional strategies and make it a part of the job description for staff at all levels.** This will send a message of buy-in from the leadership of the organisation and will help officials see consultation as an intrinsic part of their work rather than an add-on that is dealt with by consultation units and communications departments.
- **Ensuring that staff at all levels,** including the leadership, have personal experience of working with third sector organisations. The more direct the interaction the better: face-to-face discussion with third sector representatives is more likely to give officials an understanding of their perspective than reading a summary of responses to a paper consultation.

- **Training staff at all levels in the skills and value of consultation with the third sector.** Training should include building knowledge and understanding of third sector organisations and the specific constraints under which they operate. Ideally, training should be linked to an existing consultation exercise in order to give participants practical experiences of engaging with the third sector. Consider encouraging staff to run their own consultation events, thus saving money and making the process less convoluted.
- **Setting up internal and external networks for sharing experiences about consultation.** This allows colleagues to exchange good practice stories and learn from consultations that were not successful.

What others have done

Welsh Assembly and Carnegie Young People Initiative (CYPI): Building a culture of engagement from the top down

In 2005 and 2006 The Carnegie Trust teamed up with the Welsh Assembly and Strategic Developments International to pilot a one-year youth engagement programme for senior officials in the Welsh Assembly. The objective was to go beyond training and one-off events and instead challenge the leadership of key departments to work closely with a consortium of children and youth organisations over the course of a year. The idea was that by giving senior officials first-hand experience of working with the youth consortium, their buy-in for youth engagement and the lessons they learnt would trickle down through the departments, gradually leading to a culture change among the rest of the staff. The Human Resources Directorate in the Welsh Assembly Government supported the pilot and plans are being considered for a wider roll out of the programme. The Carnegie Trust writes that “this innovative approach to cultural change was made possible by the way in which government and the third sector in Wales work closely together, and their receptiveness to CYPI’s idea to challenge conventional approaches to learning and change.”

See: http://cypi.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/files/cypi_final_report_0.pdf

Ministry of Justice (MoJ): Offering participation planning support to government departments

The Ministry of Justice teamed up with public participation experts to offer a support programme to staff from all government departments in the delivery and evaluation of public engagement exercises. The Participation Partners programme was free and offered to all government departments via the Democratic Engagement Team at the Ministry of Justice.

See: [www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/icele/downloads/MOJ_Leaf-HR - LATEST VERSION OF PP BROCHURE.pdf](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/icele/downloads/MOJ_Leaf-HR_-_LATEST_VERSION_OF_PP_BROCHURE.pdf)

Helpful links:

- **The Democratic Engagement Team at the Ministry of Justice** – offers information and support to central government departments in their engagement with the public and stakeholders: www.justice.gov.uk/whatwedo/democraticengagement.htm
- **International Association of Facilitators website:** www.iaf-world.org
- **CIPD website** – contains general information on secondments: www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/lrnanddev/secondment/secondment.htm
- **Is your organisation a learning organisation?** Information and interactive questionnaire provided by the government's Inspire Learning for All website: www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk/go_further/learn_as_organisations/learn_as_organisations/_220/default.aspx

Collaborating and planning ahead

I don't think there could be too many [consultations]. Though it would be nice sometimes if people in government talked to each other so they didn't send them all out at once!

Representative from local third sector organisation

Many third sector organisations feel overburdened by the number of government consultations and frustrated at being asked the same questions over and over again by different departments. Collaborating and planning ahead can help limit the number of consultations that are released, saving time and resources for both the consulting body and the responding organisations. Consulting selectively and avoiding repeating the same questions can also help prevent consultation fatigue among the participating organisations.

What does this mean?

- **Join forces with others where possible.** Working together to consult the same groups saves time and helps ensure that different departments are not asking the same questions.
- **Make use of information already gathered elsewhere.** The government's Code of Practice on Consultation ([see appendix 2](#)) recommends that consideration is always given to whether information gathered in the past consultations can be reused. If so, details of how that information was gained should be clearly stated so that consultees can decide whether to comment or contribute further.
- **Plan ahead.** The Compact ([see appendix 3](#)) recommends that departments keep a consultation calendar showing forthcoming consultations and contact points for further information. These should be made available on institutional websites to keep stakeholders and other public sector departments informed of the plans.
- [Evaluate and learn from consultation](#) and make sure that the lessons learnt are shared across departments.

What others have done

Consultation handbook and calendar – St Helen's Council

St Helen's Council's website hosts a combined e-consultation handbook and consultation calendar, which provides information for staff and the community. Officers can use the handbook to plan consultations and share findings and evaluation reports, whereas citizens and community organisations can use it to find out about ongoing consultations or learn what happened with the ones they responded to in the past. The handbook also contains a database of community and voluntary groups and information about how to ensure diversity in engagement.

See: <http://umbrella.sthelens.gov.uk/Consultations/home.htm>

Sharing events to save time and effort – Brighton and Hove City Council

The Housing team in Brighton and Hove held joint consultation events with the local Primary Care Trust to tap into each others' networks and avoid duplication of efforts.

See: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=c1188834

Coordinating consultation plans – Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)

Many central government departments now have dedicated consultation units that keep track of consultation needs and coordinate the consultations taking place across the departments. The consultation unit at the Department for Children, Schools and Families keeps a list of forthcoming policy developments, from specific issues like changes in legislation to more broad-reaching and open consultations on strategic objectives. The aim is that by coordinating forthcoming consultations the department will minimise the burden on officials and stakeholders.

See: www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/conResults.cfm?consultationId=1505

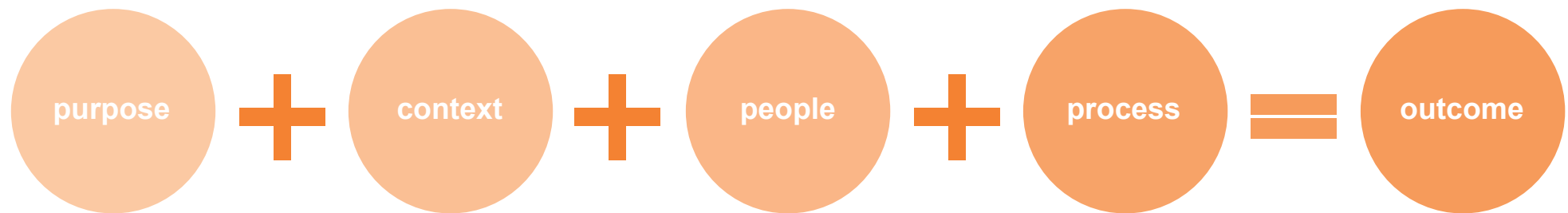
Helpful links

- **Info 4 Local** – provides a database and email updates about consultations relevant for local government:
www.info4local.gov.uk
- **Code of Practice on Consultation** – the official government guidance on consultation:
www.berr.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf
- **Compact Code of Good Practice on Consultation and Policy Appraisal** – contains advice on planning and delivering consultations with the voluntary and community sectors:
www.thecompact.org.uk/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=100320
- **The Democratic Engagement Team at the Ministry of Justice** – offers information and support to central government departments in their engagement with the public and stakeholders:
www.justice.gov.uk/whatwedo/democraticengagement.htm

Planning consultation with the third sector

Many people whose work involves running consultations find themselves replicating processes that have worked in the past. This approach can be mistaken, as it does not take into account what is different about a new situation. Effective consultation with any stakeholder group requires careful consideration of the political, social and institutional context in which it takes place.

A useful formula for making sure that the consultation process is tailored to the situation is:



- **Purpose** – being clear about what the consultation seeks to achieve.
- **Context** – being mindful of the political situation, the culture of the institution running the exercise, the history of the issue and of the relationship between the different parties involved.
- **People** – making sure that there is an understanding of how to involve the right third sector actors and the needs they may have in order to participate.
- **Process** – choosing an approach that fits the purpose, context and organisations involved.

Why consult?

Being clear about the purpose

I think until the council gives some credible evidence that it's actually doing consultation for a purpose... then it's never going to get organisations like our own giving meaningful [input in consultations].

Representative from local third sector organisation

A common cause of conflict and failure in consultations is a lack of clarity on the purpose of the exercise and mismatching expectations about its role and influence. Institutions can sometimes embark on consultation activities without being clear about:

- why they are doing it
- how the process will make a difference
- who will be responsible for taking the findings forward.

Lacking an explicit purpose can lead to mismatching expectations and friction between organisers and participants. This in turn diminishes the chance of being able to plan for and successfully deliver an effective consultation.

What does this mean?

Defining the purpose is the first and often the most important step of any consultation exercise.

- Setting a purpose means being clear about the **desired outcome and outputs**. The outcome is how the exercise will make a difference and the outputs are the different activities and products that will make the outcome happen, such as meetings, workshops, websites, surveys and reports.
- When thinking about the purpose it is useful to **separate the primary objective from secondary objectives**. Primary objectives are the reason the consultation is taking place in the first place, and secondary objectives are any added benefits, such as new working relationships. This helps ensure that the process stays focused and does not get sidetracked by secondary aims along the way.
- Defining the purpose also means clarifying the **scope of the process – what level of influence it will have on decision making** – and making plans to ensure that there are resources in place to take the findings forward.

See the section [Building consultations into decision making](#).

- Finally, it is important to **manage the expectations of all involved**. This means communicating the purpose and scope to everyone who is affected by the consultation.

What others have done

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF): Setting the agenda together

Before the Department for Children, Schools and Families embarked on its Time to Talk consultation on the Children's Plan in 2007, it held pre-consultation meetings with select groups of third sector organisations, which helped shape the purpose and agenda of the consultation. According to one consultation organiser, this led to greater consensus further down the line: *"I think [the organisations] felt that they owned the product because they were not only involved in responding to the consultation but they were involved in thinking about what we consult on and who we ask. They weren't just given a document to respond to; they were actually involved much more on a one to one basis in discussions."*

See: www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/conResults.cfm?consultationId=1505

Birmingham Third Sector Assembly: Managing expectations

The organisers of Birmingham's Third Sector Assembly made the decision to remove the word "consultation" from their promotional materials when publicising a Local Area Agreement event. They felt that the scope for changing the direction of the LAA was limited and believed that, in this instance, the word consultation would raise false expectations.

See: www.bvsc.org/assembly

Helpful links

- **People and Participation** – contains tools and information for planning public and stakeholder engagement: www.peopleandparticipation.net
- **Code of Practice on Consultation** – the official government guidance on consultation: www.berr.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf
- **Compact Code of Good Practice on Consultation and Policy Appraisal** – contains advice on planning and delivering consultations with the voluntary and community sectors: www.thecompact.org.uk/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=100320
- **Deliberative public engagement** – nine principles. Guidance by Involve and the National Consumer Council: www.involve.org.uk/deliberative_principles
- **International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) website** – contains information and tools for public and stakeholder engagement: www.iap2.org
- For more useful guides and resources, see [How to Consult](#).

Building consultation into decision making

A proper consultation should be at the right time, where fundamental feedback can alter the vision.

Representative from local government

Good consultation makes a difference. There is no point in asking people for their views unless the consulting body is committed to carefully considering their input. However, building consultation activities into fixed and time-bound policy processes can be easier said than done. To make sure that the consultation findings can be used in the policy decision-making process requires careful planning by the organisers and ongoing commitment from those charged with taking the findings forward, including senior policy makers and politicians.

What does this mean?

- **Do not consult until there is a detailed plan for how the consultation findings will be used.** This should set out *who* will be taking the consultation findings forward, *how* they will be used and *what weight* they will be given alongside other sources of evidence. Make this information available to those who are affected by the consultation, including participants, policy makers and politicians.
- **Get the right people onboard from the start.** This includes politicians and policy makers who will be affected by or asked to respond to the consultation findings. When the consultation involves face-to-face meetings with respondents, seek to have the relevant policy makers and politicians in the room to ensure that they hear the participants' views first hand.
- **Consult early** to ensure that there is adequate scope for the consultation to influence the decisions or policy.
- **Consult over time.** It may be appropriate to consult iteratively to allow the third sector stakeholders to give their views at different stages of the decision making process, such as the scoping stage, the policy drafting stage and the implementation stage.
- **Provide enough time for participants to respond.** The government recommends a minimum of twelve weeks for written consultation processes, with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and over holiday periods.
- **Do not bite off more than you can chew.** Do not plan activities that require large amounts of data processing, analysis and follow up unless there is time and resources allocated to carry out these tasks.
- **Do not repeat what has been done before.** Find out what other consultations and research have taken place on the same subject and consider whether old data can be used before embarking on a new consultation.
- **Plan for the unexpected.** Make sure that all involved understand the scope of the consultation, but do build in some contingency for dealing with any unexpected issues as ignoring them can reduce the participants' faith in the consultation process.

What others have done

Brighton and Hove City Council: A phased consultation approach

Organisers of Brighton and Hove's housing strategy consultations employed a phased consultation approach extending over a year and a half. At the beginning of the process the subject open for consultation was very broad: a document outlining some of the housing issues was published and respondents were asked to comment and point out the gaps. The findings of the first stage informed the draft housing strategy, which was then consulted on through a range of activities. In this way the consultation developed over time, gradually homing in on the specific issues that the local residents and third sector organisations identified as important. Summing up the experience, one of the organisers said: *"We asked the people that we wanted to consult what was the most convenient way for them to be consulted. And then we tried to do as much of that as we could. We re-assessed every week what our plans were and what our resources were. We asked senior managers to give their policy officers a bit more time to do this. Generally speaking, it worked out."*

See: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=c1188834

Ministry of Justice: National Offender Management Services (NOMS): Listening to stakeholders all the way

The National Offender Management Service worked closely with a third sector advisory group throughout its Third Sector Action Plan consultation. This included extensive work at the pre-consultation stage when the advisory group and other key stakeholders read early drafts of the plan and commented on the consultation process. The advisory group was also involved in reviewing the responses and the final plan. One of the consultation organisers said at the end of the process: *"Our final plan looks quite different as a result [of the consultation]. I'm really pleased about that and I think that our third sector advisory group felt that it really did reflect the key messages that came back from the sector and that it took them onboard."*

See: www.justice.gov.uk/docs/tsap_consultation_1207.pdf

Helpful links

For links to useful guides and resources, see [How to Consult](#).

Who should be consulted?

Deciding who to consult

There's no point in consulting people without understanding what the charity is doing in the first place, and if it's worth their while doing it.

Representative from local third sector organisation

There are several different approaches to selecting participants. The two basic distinctions are:

- **Open consultation**; where all those with an interest in the subject area can take part.
- **Targeted consultation**; where the consulting body identifies a priority audience and seeks to involve only those people. Participants for targeted processes of consultation are usually selected on the basis of one of three factors:
 - o Interest: only organisations with a specific interest in the policy area are invited to take part.
 - o Geographic location: the consultation is only open to organisations operating within a specific locality.
 - o Relationship with the consulting body: the consulting body targets organisations and people that they already know.

The process of identifying who will be affected by the consultation is often referred to as stakeholder analysis. It is common to use a combination of open and targeted consultation methods within the same consultation. Some processes involve different groups and different approaches at different stages. For example, some open consultations involve targeted elements in order to ensure a broad response base or to encourage participation from [underrepresented groups](#).

What does this mean?

The first step is to identify who should be consulted. These questions can help:

- Which third sector organisations are affected by the consultation topic? Map out the constituency of those who could be interested and affected by the issues. If this isn't clear, involve third sector organisations in determining who they think should also be involved; local third sector assemblies and local Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) hold a wealth of information, as do online databases such as the Charity Commission (www.charity-commission.gov.uk), GuideStar (www.guidestar.org.uk) and National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) (www.navca.org.uk/localvs/liv).

- Are there well-established opposing viewpoints on the issue? If so, ensure that the different sides of the debate are represented in the consultation.
- Is there a case for involving different groups at different stages in the consultation? This might involve doing targeted work with a small group of third sector organisations at the scoping stage, followed by an open consultation with a more general audience later on.

What others have done

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF): Different people at different stages

Many government departments now use a staged approach to consultation, targeting a different group of stakeholders at each step of the process. This was the methodology adopted by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in its Time to Talk consultation on the Children's Plan. First, the department held a series of discussions with expert groups involving specifically invited stakeholders, including third sector organisations. On the basis of these discussions there was a wider consultation for the public and other stakeholders, which led to the development of the Children's Plan itself. There was also a handbook for organisations seeking to run their own event, and a separate consultation document for children.

See: www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/conResults.cfm?consultationId=1505

Helpful links

- **Stakeholder analysis** – information, advice and checklist provided by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA): www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=7216611
- **ODI stakeholder analysis information website:** www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Tools/Toolkits/Communication/Stakeholder_analysis.html
- **Euforic stakeholder analysis guidance:** www.euforic.org/gb/stake1.htm
- **Southern Cross University step-by-step guide to stakeholder analysis:** www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/stake.html
- **Scenario Plus stakeholder analysis template:** www.scenarioplus.org.uk/stakeholders/stakeholders_template.doc
- **GuideStar UK website** – contains information on all registered third sector organisations in England and Wales: www.guidestar.org.uk
- For more links, see [Getting to know the third sector](#), [Reaching underrepresented organisations](#).

Reaching underrepresented organisations

If there is a particular area of the third sector that a response is needed from, the personal touch can really help. Normally, if people ring you up and ask you to do things, if you can accommodate it you do try to. We certainly do.

Representative from local third sector organisation

When planning a consultation it is important to ensure that no group is inadvertently excluded from the activities. This can happen when:

- the consulting body does not know its constituency well enough and so fails to target all relevant organisations
- an organisation falls “under the radar” because the consulting body is unaware that the organisation exists, perhaps due to the organisation being small or unregistered
- the consulting body fails to communicate the relevance of the consultation to the target organisations
- the timeframes of the consultation are too tight, making it difficult for organisations to contribute in time
- the consultation method or language are inappropriate to certain groups, thus putting them off taking part.

When considering these issues:

- avoid the term “hard to reach”; many people see this as a stigmatising term and feel that it unfairly shifts the focus of effort away from the body seeking to consult, defining the problem “as one within the group itself, not within [the organisation’s] approach to them”
- also avoid stereotyping when considering who may be at risk from exclusion as it will differ widely depending on the situation and the consultation method.

What does this mean?

The following questions can help identifying which groups might be at risk from being excluded from the consultation:

- How well do you know your third sector constituency? Use local lists to help identify unregistered organisations. A number of organisations hold lists of locally based organisations (for example local authority libraries and compact coordinators, community foundations and local infrastructure organisations). Local third sector forums or networks on specific issues (e.g. disabilities) may also hold details of organisations and groups that are not yet known to the consulting body. (See also [Getting to know the third sector](#)).

- Are there any groups of third sector organisations that are affected by the issue whose views have not been represented to date?
- Are there any groups that could be considered more vulnerable than others, for example because they have fewer resources or because they are affected by language or skills gaps?
- Is it important that the respondents reflect a representative cross-section of the wider public? If the decisions made will affect a wide range of people, are the views of women, elderly people, disabled people or black and minority ethnic groups represented? To assess this it can help to carry out a small demographic audit of the target audience to identify who has contributed and who has not. Which demographic categories are relevant will depend on the topic, but it is important not to overlook these considerations when consulting third sector bodies.

The best way of identifying and reaching underrepresented groups depends on the situation and the group. The following points can help determine the right approach:

- Consider the different types of support outlined in the section on supporting the third sector to take part in consultations.
- Good accessible communications are vital for ensuring that the right people are aware of the consultation.
- Infrastructure organisations and community groups such as faith groups can be invaluable in helping to identify and reach underrepresented and unregistered groups.
- Building relationships with the relevant organisations over time can help encourage wider participation, as can adding a personal touch, such as calling people up, going to visit them and simply asking them what they think of consultations and how they would like to get involved.
- Consider piggybacking onto existing third sector events. Many third sector organisations have a regular calendar of event, ranging from conferences to coffee mornings, support sessions, annual general meetings, fun days, and so on. Attending these meetings and events to give presentations and engage the organisations in policy discussions is one way of getting views. A further step is to offer to fund such an event and then work with the organisation to build a consultation element into the event. *Note: Piggy backing on existing events is not appropriate as the sole method for recruiting stakeholders, as this is likely to identify organisations already connected in some way to each other.*

What others have done

Brighton and Hove City Council: Going to them

In order to reach organisations that would not normally take part in consultations, Brighton and Hove's Housing Team put together a presentation template that could be taken to existing meetings in third sector organisations. Council officers adapted the presentation for each meeting to make sure that it included the questions that were most relevant to that particular organisation. Rather than then asking the organisations to respond to the consultation documents, the officers scribed the discussions at the meetings. Although this informal way of working made it difficult to track the number of organisations and individuals that had taken part in the consultation, this approach gave the officers a wealth of insights into the priorities and concerns of the organisations they spoke to. In the words of one of the organisers: *"You can achieve more in an inter-agency meeting with the third sector than you can with a year's monitoring of national research. Because people would simply tell you where the gaps are."*

See: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=c1188834

Involve and Lambeth Borough Council: Playful consultation

Say&Play is a format designed by Involve for helping authorities reach a broader range of people and organisations in their consultations. The approach, which was first piloted in five schools across the London Borough of Lambeth, was designed to attract busy parents and carers who would not normally have the time to come to consultation events. It involves organising fun and engaging events in venues that are already busy, such as schools, sports centres, churches and town centres. The events combine activities that attract an audience, such as sports, arts or food, and build opportunities to respond to consultation questions into the schedule. The crucial element of this format is the venue; the consultation activity occurs in the spaces and places frequented by the intended audience. The theory is that people are more likely to attend consultation events held in places that they already attend and feel comfortable in. The same philosophy can apply to time- and cash-strapped third sector organisations.

See: www.involve.org.uk/sayandplay

Helpful links

- **Communicating with Communities using Outreach** – a good practice guidance from the department Communities and Local Government: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communicatingwithcommunities
- **Compact Code of Good Practice for Working with Black and Minority Ethnic Community and Voluntary groups:** www.thecompact.org.uk/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=100321
- **Health and Safety Executive guidance on working with marginalised communities:** www.hse.gov.uk/research/misc/hardtoreach.pdf
- **Who is hard to reach and why?** www.sisr.net/publications/0701brackertz.pdf

- **Good practice guide for engaging ethnic communities**, by Voluntary Action Hampshire:
http://action.hants.org.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/Document_Library/EngagingwithBMEMakingItHappen.pdf
- **National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)** – contains information on local third sector organisations:
www.navca.org.uk/localvs/lio
- **Participation Works Resource Hub** – contains information on engaging children, young people and youth groups:
www.participationworks.org.uk/ResourcesHub/tabid/59/Default.aspx
- **The Hear by Right framework** – is a standards framework for organisations across the statutory and voluntary sectors on involving children and young people: www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright
- **NCVCCO Under the Radar** – report highlighting the difficulties faced by under the radar third sector organisations working in children's services: www.ncvcco.org/UserFiles/File/Under%20the%20radar.pdf
- **IDeA Ethical Governance Toolkit**:
www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=1115850#contents-4
- **Engaging Small and Medium Enterprises** – guidance containing useful advice that is relevant for consulting small social enterprises and voluntary organisations: www.sfedl.co.uk/sfedl-research/reports/engaging_small_businesses.pdf
- For more links see: [Getting to know the third sector](#), [Supporting third sector organisations to take part](#).

How will consultation happen?

Choosing the right method

Don't always use the same methods – think about the purpose of the consultation, who it would be useful to hear from and how to make it easy for them to give you the information you want. There is no right way to consult – but some poor practices are self defeating and can create long term damage and distrust.

Survey respondent

Once there is clarity on the purpose of the consultation, the context has been considered and the target participants identified, it is time to select the consultation method. There are numerous tools and techniques available for consultations and new ones are invented all the time. It is important to remember that there is no one-stop solution when planning consultations; a method that works well in one situation will be unsuitable elsewhere. This is why the approach used should always be tailored to the purpose, context and people.

What does this mean?

This handbook recommends that consultation organisers explore the range of approaches available, exchange ideas with colleagues, and commit to being open to try new ideas. The [methods](#) listed at the end of this document are suggestions only and the list is in no way exhaustive; there are numerous tools and techniques available for consultations and new ones are invented all the time.

Mixing methods for best results

It is becoming increasingly common to combine different consultation methods to gain from the different advantages each option can offer and to reach more organisations. This is beneficial to third sector and public sector workers alike; by combining methods the former get more choice in how to be involved and the latter get a more diverse range of responses.

Online consultation methods

More and more consultations now involve electronic elements such as online surveys, response forms or discussion forums. Web-based consultation tools can be relatively cheap and quick to set up and moderate, and they make it easy to collate and analyse data from large numbers of respondents. For the participants, web-based consultations can be convenient because they are easy to access irrespective of the time and location. Some tools, such as online forums have the added benefit of allowing participants to read and respond to other's views as they present their own. However, it is important to be aware of the downsides and risks when using web-based consultation tools. They exclude anyone who is not able to use or does not have access to the internet, offer little opportunity for relationship-building and tend to attract the “vocal minority” rather than a representative sample of the wider stakeholder group. For these reasons it is advisable to always use a multi-channel approach to consultation – combining web-based tools with face-to-face and written approaches. See [List of methods](#).

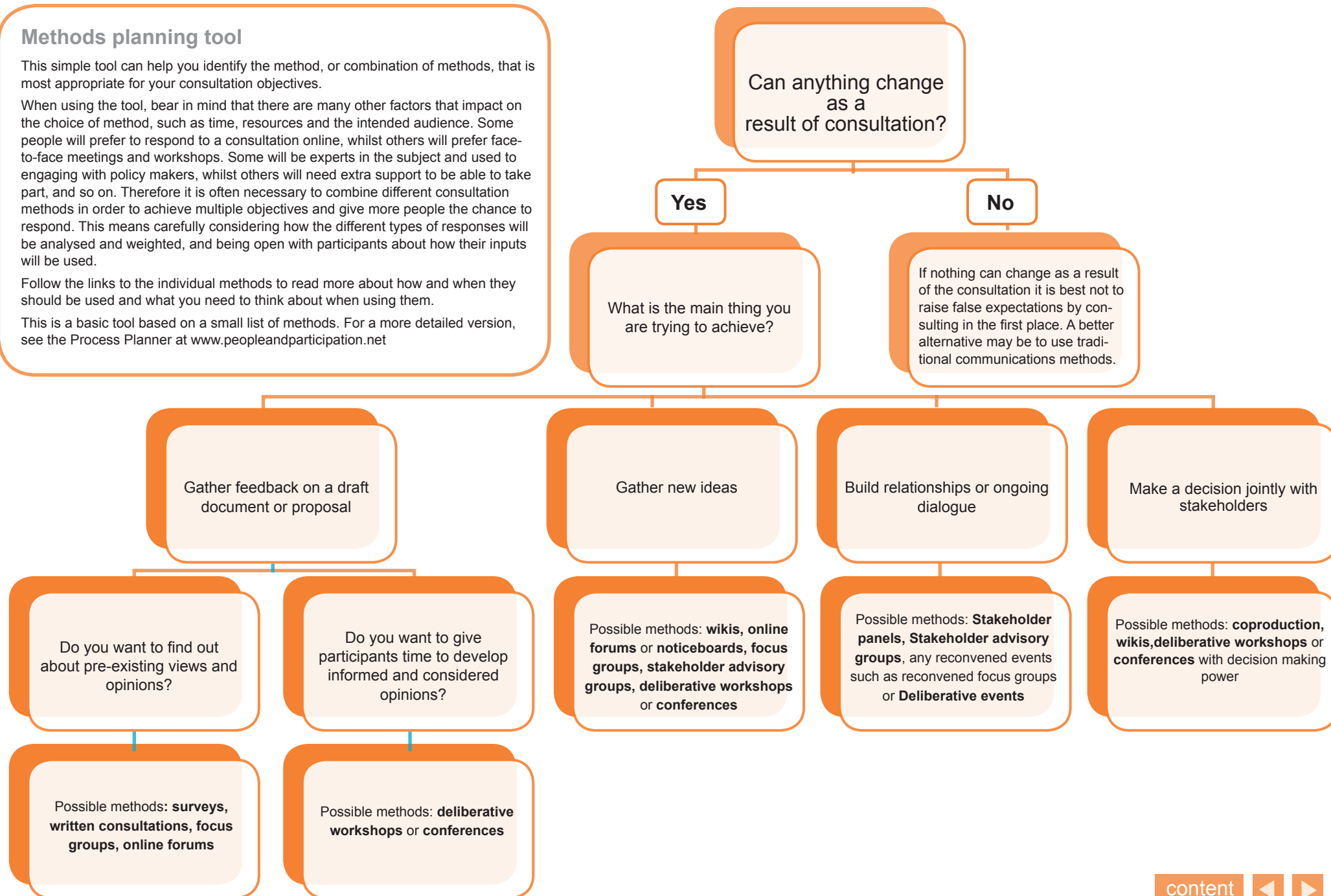
Methods planning tool

This simple tool can help you identify the method, or combination of methods, that is most appropriate for your consultation objectives.

When using the tool, bear in mind that there are many other factors that impact on the choice of method, such as time, resources and the intended audience. Some people will prefer to respond to a consultation online, whilst others will prefer face-to-face meetings and workshops. Some will be experts in the subject and used to engaging with policy makers, whilst others will need extra support to be able to take part, and so on. Therefore it is often necessary to combine different consultation methods in order to achieve multiple objectives and give more people the chance to respond. This means carefully considering how the different types of responses will be analysed and weighted, and being open with participants about how their inputs will be used.

Follow the links to the individual methods to read more about how and when they should be used and what you need to think about when using them.

This is a basic tool based on a small list of methods. For a more detailed version, see the Process Planner at www.peopleandparticipation.net



What others have done

Defra: A pick and mix of methods

Defra's Third Sector Strategy consultation is a good example of how different consultation methods can be combined over time to great effect. In 2007 and 2008 the department carried out three formal consultation processes on its draft strategy alongside deliberative events and the commissioning of seven think pieces from third sector bodies. The result was a comprehensive consultation process, which has been widely commended by participants and organisers. One of the organisers said: *"What we've seen from our evaluations is that the stakeholders who have been involved have found the process extremely useful, they've found it very professional and they've felt that their input into the policy decision-making process has been really valued; they've seen how their input has actually made an impact. So as far as we can tell that policy development process and the engagement around it has actually been very successful."*

See: www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/thirdsector-strategy

California Speaks: Mass consultation via internet and satellite

In August 2007 Arnold Schwarzenegger, the governor of California, led a state-wide conversation on the future of Healthcare in California: California Speaks. Billed as the world's biggest ever single day face-to-face public engagement process, the ambitious initiative engaged around 3,500 people at eight simultaneous events across California. An interesting part of the exercise was the use of the internet and satellite to link large meetings with over 1,000 people to small community meetings taking place across the state. The organisers endeavoured to stay in touch with participants after the end of the process via emails and a website full of information and tools for taking further action.

See: www.californiaspeaks.org

Bristol City Council: edecide

Bristol City Council used edecide, an online deliberation tool, to find out what people thought of cycling in the city centre. The method used could be described as an interactive questionnaire system. The user answers questions as in a conventional online questionnaire, but then counter-arguments and further information is fed back to them in order to elicit more in-depth consideration of the issue than a simple questionnaire would otherwise produce.

See: www.edecide.net

Helpful links

- **People and Participation** – a website with information and resources for people working with public and stakeholder engagement, including methods, planning tools, case studies and a resource library: www.peopleandparticipation.net

- **Deliberative public engagement – nine principles.** – Guidance provided by Involve and the National Consumer Council: www.involve.org.uk/deliberative_principles

- **International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) website** – contains information and tools for public and stakeholder engagement: www.iap2.org
- **Portsmouth consultation handbook** – award-winning guide to consulting citizens and stakeholders: www.portsmouth.gov.uk/media/PCC_Consulting_People_handbook_pt.pdf
- **Cumbria County Council Consultation planning website:** <http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/communityinformation/default.asp>
- **Dialogue Designer** – a tool developed by Dialogue by Design to help organisations plan consultation and dialogue processes: <http://designer.dialoguebydesign.net>
- **Dialogue by Design video guides to online consultation:** www.dialoguebydesign.net/flash/frameset.html
- **Electoral Commission's Democracy Cookbook:** www.dopolitics.org.uk/Toolbox/toolbox-9.cfm#recipes
- **Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre** – a government-owned website with information about public and stakeholder engagement, focusing on science and technology policy: www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk
- **International Centre of Excellence for Local eDemocracy** – information and tools for e-consultations, focusing on local government: www.icele.org
- **Queen's University e-consultation guide** – information and tips for running effective e-consultations: www.e-consultation.org/guide
- **UK and Ireland E-Democracy Exchange** – an online group for people working with e-democracy in the UK and Ireland: <http://groups.dowire.org/groups/ukie>
- **Armchair Involvement** – online guide to using technology to engage people and stakeholder groups, focusing on health care: www.institute.nhs.uk/building_capability/armchair_no_comment/armchair_involvement.html
- **Democracies Online** – international knowledge-sharing website for e-democracy practitioners: www.DoWire.org
- **E-learning centre** – resources for online learning, collaboration and consultation: www.e-learningcentre.co.uk

Communications

What makes consultation good? A willingness to listen. It doesn't necessarily mean that anything is going to happen, but a willingness to listen makes a big difference.

Representative from national third sector organisation

Open, clear and continual communications are vital to the success of a consultation exercise. Good communications help ensure that:

- The expectations of participants, organisers and partner organisations are managed
- Respondents feel that their input is respected and valued
- Participants from different backgrounds can understand and respond to the consultation on an equal footing.

What does this mean?

There are three levels of communication that need to be considered:

- communication about the consultation process
- the style and language of consultation documents
- two-way communications.

Communications about the consultation process

This includes:

- Publicising the launch of the consultation to the right audience, using a range of media including the internet and making use of infrastructure organisations, regional and local organisations and networks as appropriate. See also guidance on [reaching underrepresented groups](#).
- Providing clear and accessible information about the [purpose](#) of the consultation and what is going to happen when. Care should be taken to ensure that potential respondents are not misled about what the exercise is for.
- Informing respondents if plans are changed or the schedule slips.
- Keeping websites and other information sources up to date throughout and after the process.
- [Feeding back to participants after the consultation ends](#)

Style and language of consultation documents

[The document] spoke in a particular language... it was such civil service speak. "What is it you want?" I was shouting at the paper! When it's worded like that, it makes me think that you don't actually want my opinion. You've already decided what you want to decide and this is just some exercise for you.

Representative from local third sector organisation

Good communications means ensuring not only that communications happen, but also that they are in a style and language that is accessible to all participants. This means that they should be:

- clearly laid out
- written in plain English
- free from unnecessary jargon.

For the Compact guidance on consultation documents, see [Appendix 3](#)

Two-way communications (the importance of listening)

I think the only message that people need to have when they're consulting is that consultation is a process of listening; it's not a process of arguing with people.

Representative from central government

Consultation is meaningless unless the institution in charge is genuinely prepared to listen to the respondents and take their views on board. However, it is not enough to do this behind closed doors; the consulting body needs to be seen to listen and able to explain why certain items are taken forward or not. Being willing and seen to listen means:

- Giving honest responses to the issues and questions raised by the participants.
- Taking seriously any criticisms that arise and being seen to do so.
- Making consultation responses and analysis documents publicly available (unless confidential).
- Providing [feedback](#) to participants after the consultation about how their input was used and how it made a difference.

What others have done

Knowsley Council: “Youth-proofing” Participation Standards

Knowsley Council used the help of local Young Advisors to “youth proof” their Participation Standards for involving young people. Young Advisors are trained assessors aged between 15 and 21 who are employed as consultants to show community leaders and public servants how to engage young people in community life and decision making. Young Advisors are trained by the Young Advisors Charity to help organisations in the public, private and third sectors to “youth proof” their policies and practices.

See: www.youngadvisors.org.uk

Helpful links

- **Code of Practice on Consultation** – the official government guidance on consultation: www.berr.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf
- **Compact Code of Good Practice on Consultation and Policy Appraisal** – contains advice on planning and delivering consultations with the voluntary and community sectors: www.thecompact.org.uk/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=100320
- **Effective communications with the public** – online guide provided by the National Audit Office: www.nao.org.uk/effective%5Fcommunication%5Ftoolkit
- **Online guide to engaging people with limited English proficiency and low literacy groups** – by the US Department of Transportation: www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/lowlim/lowlim2.htm
- **Browsealoud** – a tool used to allow people with literacy issues to take part in online engagement activities through using mouse rollovers to read the text aloud: www.browsealoud.com
- **RNIB web accessibility guide** – contains useful information about how to make websites accessible for people with visual impairments: http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_webaccessibility.hcsp
- **Am I Making Myself Clear** – Mencap guidance on consulting people with learning difficulties: <http://november5th.net/resources/Mencap/Making-Myself-Clear.pdf>
- For more links see [Supporting third sector organisations to take part](#)

Supporting third sector organisations to take part

Small [organisations] don't have the sort of people who can spend time knowing how to respond to government consultations, and frankly don't have the connections.

Representative from central government

Public sector consultations sometimes show a lack of sensitivity to the pressures facing third sector bodies. In trying to meet all the needs of the consulting body, they overlook the needs and expectations of the participants. Although many campaigning organisations and larger charities have dedicated policy teams to lobby decision makers, smaller organisations may be lucky to have one permanent member of staff. For frontline organisations, responding to consultation can mean taking valuable time away from their core activities and is therefore often not a priority. Others are not familiar with the language of policy making and struggle to respond to formal consultations as a result. Public bodies seeking the views of a range of third sector organisations need to be aware of these different constraints and should always consider how they can support third sector organisations of different sizes and capabilities to take part on an equal footing.

What does this mean?

There are two kinds of support that needs to be considered: logistical support and helping those involved take part on an equal footing.

Logistical support

Logistical support helps organisations that want to take part do so. This means thinking through the following questions:

- **What is the cost of taking part to the participating organisations?** Consider ways in which you could reduce the cost, such as by:
 - compensating for lost time and resources
 - reimbursing travel expenses
 - offering a range of ways of taking part in the consultation activity, including online options.
- **How accessible are events and meetings to different audiences?** Factors that should be considered include:
 - hosting meetings in accessible places and times. ask the target group what venues and times work for them
 - ensuring that venues have disabled access
 - visiting meetings and events held by third sector organisations to gather views rather than expecting them to come to meetings elsewhere
 - providing a carer or childcare allowance to cover the costs that may be incurred by those with family obligations.

- **Is the timing of the consultation conducive to participation?** Make sure that consultation is not conducted at inappropriate times of the day or year. Consider:
 - o taking account of the role that religious or school holidays may have in preventing participation
 - o extending the consultation period when consulting over holiday periods or at the end of the financial year when many third sector organisations are busy with funding bids
 - o for evening activities, providing refreshments and safe forms of transport to encourage participation
- **Do the planned activities comply with equalities legislation?** Ensuring that no individual or organisation is excluded from the consultation on the basis of their gender, age, disability, religion, ethnicity or sexuality is a legal requirement. Consult current equalities legislation if unsure.
 See: <http://edit.equalityhumanrights.com/en/forbusinessesandorganisation/publicauthorities/pages/whatdopublicauthoritieshavetodo.aspx>
- **Be extra conscious of the burden of consultation on voluntary organisations.** Consider different ways of reaching out to volunteers and staff, such as evening meetings, online forums, events at weekends and so on. When working with volunteers ensure that they are acknowledged for their involvement; say thank you for taking part as part of the feedback process.

Helping those involved take part on an equal footing.

The second type of support is to help organisations and people from different backgrounds take part on an equal footing.

- **Are there gaps in skills and capacity that will affect the ability of some third sector organisations to take part?** Consider what can be done to make it easier for them, such as:
 - o providing all documentation in plain English; avoiding jargon
 - o offering translation services and translated documents
 - o always providing a named contact for an officer who can answer questions about the consultation, the terminology and the policy area
 - o offering briefing sessions about policy making and the policy area to target groups
 - o supporting networks and infrastructure organisations that offer training, advice and information to third sector organisations
 - o see section [Communications](#).

- **Are there cultural issues that need to be considered?**

- o For example, will you need to provide separate events for men and women? Are the consultation activities equally relevant to older and younger participants?
- o Consult members of the target group or relevant infrastructure organisations to ensure that the planned activities are culturally sensitive.

- **What is in it for the participating organisations?** What is being done to ensure that the participants find the exercise meaningful?

Things that make a difference include:

- o providing clear background information to help organisations understand why the consultation activity is relevant to them
- o asking the target group how, when and where they want to express their views.

What others have done

Birmingham Third Sector Assembly: Supporting the local third sector

Birmingham Third Sector Assembly is one of several third sector assemblies that have been set up across the country. The assembly is designed to grow the third sector's ability to influence and strategically improve outcomes for the people of Birmingham. The Assembly also acts as a channel for communication between voluntary sector organisations and public sector bodies. It also provides consultations, briefings and networking opportunities. The Assembly is hosted by the BVSC, The Centre for Voluntary Action.

See: www.assembly3.org.uk

Defra: Paying for think pieces alongside traditional written consultation and workshop events,

Defra commissioned seven “think pieces” to inform their third sector strategy consultation. The think pieces were paid for by Defra and thus allowed the responding organisations to spend time putting together considered submissions. The initiative was very well received both by Defra and the participating organisations. In the words of one of the think-piece authors: *“I thought that was quite well handled because they said at the start of their consultation: ‘we’re very open to lots of different ideas and what we’d like is some thinking; not just a response to questions but some thinking from the third sector’. And that’s what we did and I think that process was very good.”*

See: www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/thirdsector-strategy

Helpful links

- **Design for Access** – Manchester City Council guidance on ensuring that venues are accessible to disabled people:
www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/designforaccess2.pdf
- **Equalities and Human Rights Commission website** – contains information about legal duties and responsibilities regarding equalities and human rights for public sector organisations:
<http://edit.equalityhumanrights.com/en/forbusinessesandorganisation/publicauthorities/pages/whatdopublicauthoritieshavetodo.aspx>
- **Equalities Toolkit** – including information on the legal framework and how to ensure that events are accessible, provided by Regional Action and Involvement South East (RAISE):
www.raise-networks.org.uk/inform/docDisplay.cfm?iDocID=849
- **Involvement for Real Equality: the benefits for public services of involving disabled people** – guidance by the Disability Rights Commission (now Equalities and Human Rights Commission) and Office for Public Management (OPM) on how to ensure inclusivity and overcome barriers to involvement:
<http://edit.equalityhumanrights.com/en/forbusinessesandorganisation/publicauthorities/disabilityequalityd/Pages/Disabilitye.aspx>
- **Involving disabled people in planning future strategies** – a research paper by Leeds City Council and Leeds University with useful guidance on how to involve disabled groups in stakeholder and public engagement:
www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies/archiveuk/armer/LCC%20report%204.pdf
- **Third sector skills report 2008** –report by the UK Workforce Hub:
www.ukworkforcehub.org.uk/DisplayPage.asp?pageid=12689
- For more links see [Communications](#) and [Reaching underrepresented organisations](#)

Devolved consultations: how third sector organisations can help you consult better

If people are saying “we have had all these responses from here... but we have had nothing from there...” then a phone call from the local council to the voluntary service could help plug those gaps; they could inform them of the best people to speak to.

Representative from local government

Public bodies often ask for help from third sector organisations in designing and delivering consultations with the third sector. Third sector organisations can help improve the impact and reach of a consultation in a number of different ways, including by:

- providing feedback on the consultation plan and language to ensure that they are suitable to the intended audience
- providing the consulting body with information about the target audience
- informing their members and networks about the consultation opportunity and about the consultation topic
- running devolved consultation events, perhaps using consultation packs put together by the consulting body
- collating responses on behalf of their members and networks.

Many consultations are also delivered by third sector organisations that specialise in public and stakeholder engagement. These organisations are often well placed to carry out this work as they tend to be familiar with the third sector audience and the conditions it works under.

What does this mean?

- **When asking a third sector organisation to take part in scoping activities or advise on consultation plans, consider:**
 - o How well do the representatives you have selected match the broader audience that you intend to reach with the consultation? Often the people asked to take part in scoping meetings or to comment on consultation plans are senior staff from established third sector organisations, who are already familiar with the policy environment. This can mean that important perspectives are missed out. If possible, seek to involve a diverse group of people at every stage of the consultation.
 - o Consider the time and cost implications for the organisations that are giving you advice, and whether it would be appropriate to reimburse them for their time.

- **When asking a third sector organisation to deliver consultation activities, consider:**

- o Is the organisation resourced to do this work? If not, what payment, reimbursement or other forms of support will be required?
- o Does the organisation have the necessary knowledge about the topic to carry out consultation activities without assistance? If not, or if you are unsure, consider how they can be supported, such as by providing them with consultation kits or making sure that somebody from the consulting body is on hand at events to answer questions.
- o Does the organisation have the necessary skills to carry out the consultation activities? Do not assume that they know how to consult well; check their credentials and provide necessary support and training if needed.
- o Be clear about who you want the organisation to reach with their devolved activities: other third sector organisations or members of the public?

- **When infrastructure and umbrella bodies respond on behalf of their members and networks, consider:**

- o What is the relationship between the organisation and its members or network? Always make sure that the lines of representation are clear; do not assume that the organisation's position is representative of the views of its constituents.
- o How inclusive is the membership of the infrastructure organisation? Be aware that solely relying on their help to deliver a consultation is likely to mean that some organisations are missed out.

What others have done

Greater London Authority (GLA): Consultation kits and capacity building

For the London Mayor's Housing Strategy of 2007, the Greater London Authority worked in partnership with Homelessness Links to produce "consultation kits", which frontline organisations used to consult homeless people. A training workshop was also organised for these organisations to ensure that they were fully supported to carry out the focus groups and other consultation activities.

See: www.homeless.org.uk/inyourarea/london/policy/mayor/2007.09.06%20Final%20summary%20of%20responses.pdf

Ministry of Justice: National Offender Management Service (NOMS): Devolving consultation to reach the right people

When consulting on its Third Sector Action Plan, NOMS commissioned Clinks, a national umbrella body for organisations dealing with offenders and their families, to carry out devolved activities in four different parts of the country. The devolved events brought back detailed information from local and regional bodies, which fed into the overall consultation findings. One of the organisers said of the consultation results: *"I think that our third sector advisory group felt that it really did reflect the key messages that came back from the sector and that it took them onboard. And that it came up with some solutions. So I think it was very interactive... it was a genuine consultation."*

See: www.justice.gov.uk/docs/tsap_consultation_1207.pdf

Democs – the deliberation game

The new economics foundation (nef) has developed Democs (deliberative meeting of citizens) – a deliberation tool that helps small groups of people engage with complex policy issues. Democs has been used in a variety of settings to help stakeholders learn about a topic, develop their views, seek common ground with the other participants and state their preferred policy position. Democs has been used on subjects as diverse as stem cell research, homelessness, international trade and climate change, by organisations in the public and third sectors including Oxfam, the Human Genetic Council and the Greater London Authority.

See: www.neweconomics.org/gen/democs.aspx

Helpful Links

- **Participation Works guidance on working with infrastructure organisations:**

www.participationworks.org.uk/Portals/0/Files/resources/k-items/participationworks/howtoguides/Infrastructure%20guide%20lowres.pdf

- **Navca: What is a local infrastructure organisation?**

www.navca.org.uk/about/whatisanlio.htm

- **Communities and Local Government Community Power Packs:**

www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/896459.pdf

What happens next?

Feedback and follow up

Feedback's critical, you know. If you don't get anything back you think, "Oh, well why am I bothering? Why am I wasting my time?"

Representative from local third sector organisation

Once the findings of a consultation have been analysed and taken forward, giving feedback to participants is crucial. Without clear feedback on the findings of the consultation and how they were analysed and used, participants are likely to feel that their input was not valued. This can cause frustration and lead to a deterioration of the relationship between the consulting body and the third sector stakeholders, undermining future attempts at consultation and partnership.

What does this mean?

- **Make the feedback accessible.** Many people feel that updating a departmental website is not enough and that email updates or mailouts are more useful. After large consultation processes, briefing events can be a good way of giving people detailed feedback and the opportunity to ask questions.
- **Let the participants know how the findings were used.** Providing feedback to participants should not simply be a case of circulating a summary of the consultation responses. A clear message from the third sector organisations who took part in this study was that they wanted information about how the findings of the consultation had been *used*.
- **Get in touch more than once.** It is good practice to provide regular updates, for example on receipt of responses (to let respondents know what will happen next), after the initial analysis (to let them know what the findings were) and once the policy impact is determined (to let them know how their input was used).
- **Always include a brief summary document** setting out the key findings and outcomes.
- **Encourage regional, local and infrastructure organisations to forward the feedback to their constituencies.**
- **Provide a named contact point** so that participants can ask questions.
- See Compact guidance on style and language of consultation documents in [Appendix 3](#)

What others have done

Involve in Jersey: Staying in touch

When Involve and the government of Jersey ran a large community conference about the effects of the ageing population on Jersey's economy and society, Involve committed to staying in touch with the participants for six months after the event. Those who wanted to remain informed about the project left their contact details and were sent bimonthly updates by email and post informing them about the conference findings, the government's response and how the process was taken forward. There was also a website set up where participants could download the conference report and other information and get in touch with the other participants. The updates were brief and did not involve large amounts of work for either Involve or the government of Jersey, but they meant that participants stayed involved and informed after the project finished. Several participants wrote back saying how much they appreciated being updated about what happened next.

See: www.involve.org.uk/Jersey

Evaluating and learning

We just have to learn from our experiences; if we haven't done it really well, what we can learn about it for next time. Making sure that stakeholders are helping us to improve that process, getting their feedback and getting them to evaluate us on a whole.

Representative from central government

Evaluating the consultation process is important; it helps establish whether the original objectives were met and the right organisations were reached. However, evaluation is also a crucial element of capacity building: through evaluating a consultation process staff members can learn what works and not, helping them to do things differently and better in the future. Evaluations can support the credibility of a consultation by demonstrating that public bodies take it seriously and are willing to learn from their mistakes. Sharing evaluation reports can also be a highly effective way of sharing lessons across departments and authorities.

What does this mean?

Evaluation is carried out for two reasons: to measure achievements and to learn lessons for the future. A comprehensive evaluation includes assessment of:

- The methods used.
- The objectives; whether they were realistic and whether they were met.
- The participants targeted and those that responded.
- The context in which the consultation was set.
- The cost, benefits and impacts. This involves weighing up the inputs (time and resources) against the outputs (e.g. consultation activities) and the outcomes (e.g. policy impact, unexpected benefits).

The scope of an evaluation depends on the size and context of the consultation. Whatever the type of evaluation, it is important to plan for it at the **very outset of the consultation process**, to ensure that sufficient resources are put in place to carry out the evaluation. It is vital that evaluation is not undertaken as an afterthought once the consultation is completed as this is generally too late for important information to be gathered and for lessons learnt to have an impact on the process and final outcome.

This section is informed by Making a Difference - evaluating public participation in central government, which is available at:

www.involve.org.uk/evaluation

What others have done

World Wildlife Foundation UK (WWF UK) and Shared Practice: Building evaluation into a project from the outset

When the WWF UK and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) embarked on a three-year project working with community groups to develop a community-based approach to sustainable living, evaluation was a priority from the beginning. Independent evaluators Shared Practice conducted a literature review that informed the project plans, alongside devising an extensive evaluation process including qualitative and quantitative research methods, a mixture of analytical frameworks, regular reviews and plenty of opportunity for stakeholder involvement. The project is a good example of how evaluation can be useful not just at the end of an engagement activity, but as a way of learning and taking stock at different steps throughout the project.

See: www.sharedpractice.org.uk/Downloads/CLASL_summary_report.pdf

Helpful links

- **Making a Difference** – a guide to evaluating public and stakeholder engagement:
www.involve.org.uk/evaluation
- **Was it worth it? Evaluating public and stakeholder consultation** – guidance by the Consultation Institute:
www.consultationinstitute.org/research/briefingpapers/Was%20It%20Worth%20It.pdf
- **Guide to evaluating engagement in science:**
www.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/downloads/rcuk/publications/evaluationguide.pdf

List of methods

The aim of this list is to give readers an overview of the range of methods available for consultation and other forms of engagement. The list is not exhaustive; there are numerous tools and techniques available for public and stakeholder engagement and new ones are invented all the time. This list also includes a couple of more informal approaches that are often used by public bodies in consultation and which should therefore be acknowledged.

- written consultation (paper and online)
- surveys
- wikis
- focus groups
- online noticeboards, blogs, instant webchats and online forums
- informal conversation
- stakeholder panels
- stakeholder advisory and expert groups
- deliberative workshops and conferences.

For more on methods, see [Choosing the right method](#).

For a more comprehensive list of methods see: www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/methods

Written consultation (paper and online)

Description

Traditional form of consultation where stakeholders are asked to read hard-copy or electronic documents and submit a response to questions about the document by letter or using email, an online form or a questionnaire.

When to use

- When a draft plan or document is already in place and stakeholder feedback is sought.
- When dealing with stakeholders who are likely to want to respond at a time that suits them.

When not to use

- As a single method when one of the goals of the consultation is to build strong relationships with stakeholders.
- As a single method when consulting underrepresented or marginalised groups.
- As a single method when some stakeholders are likely to need more support and information in order to respond.

Things to keep in mind

- Written consultations can give the impression that the policy is in the later stages of development and that there is little scope for change, which can put some stakeholders off responding.
- Ensure that the language and style of document is appropriate to the target audience: avoid using jargon as this can put people off responding.

Surveys

Description

A quantitative research method used to gauge views, experiences and behaviours. They can be carried out online, on paper or in person. They allow structured responses to multiple questions.

When to use

- When seeking to identify and quantify the opinions of a group of stakeholders.
- When asking respondents for their preference on a choice of set options.
- When seeking statistically significant data about the views and experiences of a particular group of people.

When not to use

- As a single method when one of the goals of the consultation is to build strong relationships with stakeholders.
- When seeking information about why people think or behave the way they do.

Things to keep in mind

- As in all social/market research methods there is a risk that sampling error or the wording of the questions affect the findings.
- A consultation questionnaire should always include open-ended questions and comment spaces to allow respondents to elaborate on their opinions and raise additional issues.

Description

Online software allowing users to contribute to online documents. Several contributors are able to modify the document at the same time. The software then tracks the changes to the document, recording on the webpage the number of times the document has been changed and by whom. Participants are normally asked to register before contributing.

When to use

- When seeking to promote collaborative working with stakeholders in a relatively quick and informal way, without having to bring people together in person.
- When dealing with respondents who are likely to want to respond at a time that suits them.
- When seeking feedback quickly and easily.
- When the subject area requires little explanation.
- As one of several methods in a phased or iterative consultation process, offering participants the opportunity to comment at different stages.

When not to use

- When there is no time or resources to moderate the online submissions.
- As a single method when some stakeholders are likely to need additional support or information in order to engage with the topic or contribute online.
- As a single method when one of the goals of the consultation is to build strong relationships with stakeholders.
- When seeking statistically significant data.

Things to keep in mind

- Wikis tend to attract mainly people with a keen interest in the topic and so may only capture the views of the “vocal minority”.
- They require significant amounts of publicity and drive to maintain meaningful levels of web traffic and participation

Focus groups

Description

In-depth, facilitated conversations with a small group of stakeholders (usually between 6 and 12 people). These can be run as one-off events or be reconvened over time. Sometimes identical focus groups are held with different stakeholders to measure and compare views of different groups.

When to use

- When seeking the views of a specific group of stakeholders.
- When seeking to engage stakeholders who are less likely to respond to a written consultation.
- When the stakeholders involved would benefit from the opportunity to meet and network.

When not to use

- As a single method of consultation – focus groups only involve small numbers of stakeholders and tend to be framed by the consulting body.

Things to keep in mind

- As in all social/market research methods there is a risk that sampling error or the wording of the questions affect the findings.
- A focus group facilitator should always make use of open-ended questions and allow time for respondents to elaborate on their opinions and raise additional issues.
- Focus groups require skilled facilitation to ensure that all participants are given an equal voice.

Online noticeboards, blogs, instant webchats and online forums

Description

These methods all encourage stakeholders to contribute to an online space by posting their comments and responses. There is some interactivity in that commentators can read what others have written and reply or elaborate on previous comments.

When to use

- When dealing with respondents who are likely to want to respond at a time that suits them.
- When seeking to capture informal debate between individuals and stakeholders with a keen interest in the consultation topic, without having to bring them together in person.
- When seeking feedback quickly and easily.
- When a more informal approach is appropriate.
- When the subject area requires little explanation
- As one of several methods in a phased or iterative consultation process, offering participants the opportunity to comment at different stages.

When not to use

- When there is no time or resources to moderate the online submissions.
- As a single method if some stakeholders lack the means or expertise to contribute online.
- To replace face-to-face meetings.
- As a single method when one of the goals of the consultation is to build strong relationships with stakeholders.
- As a single method when some stakeholders are likely to need additional support or information in order to engage with the consultation topic or contribute online.

Things to keep in mind

- These methods tend to attract mainly people with a keen interest in the topic and so may only capture the views of the “vocal minority”.
- They require significant amounts of publicity and drive to maintain meaningful levels of web traffic and participation

Informal conversations

Description

When a consulting body approaches stakeholders directly to discuss their views on the consultation topic or plans. Although not strictly a consultation method, informal conversations nevertheless form part of many public sector consultations, and many third sector respondents in this research listed informal chats as a way of giving their views on policy.

When to use

- When seeking to build or sustain a relationship with an organisation or individual.
- As an early pre-consultation approach to help identify key issues and get early, informal feedback on consultation plans.
- When seeking to hear the views of or achieve buy-in from a key stakeholder.
- When seeking to engage stakeholders who are less likely to respond to a written consultation.

When not to use

- When seeking to build relationships with a broader group of stakeholders.
- As a sole or central approach in consultation.
- When seeking statistically significant data.

Things to keep in mind

Informal conversations are not traditionally recognised as a form of consultation. They can appear selective and closed to those who are not involved and, if used, should be seen as a complement to rather than a central part of any consultation.

Stakeholder panels

Description

These are large and often representative groups of stakeholders convened by public bodies, who are regularly called upon to respond to consultations or give their input and feedback in other ways.

When to use

- When the consulting body wants a group of stakeholders “on call” to respond to consultation requests and give ad hoc feedback on policy issues.
- When there are likely to be multiple consultations on similar issues.
- When a consultation will run over a long period of time.

When not to use

- When seeking to involve time-poor stakeholders who may be put off by the level of commitment involved.
- When the consulting body lacks the time and resources to maintain the panel.

Things to keep in mind

- Setting up and maintaining stakeholder panels take time and resources so this approach is only suitable for organisations with the time and commitment to maintain the relationship in the long run.
- Being a panel member is a significant commitment for stakeholders and this should be acknowledged by the consulting body. Some form of reimbursement or incentive may be appropriate.
- Stakeholder panels can appear selective and closed to non-members. Hence, panels are best seen as a complement to other, more inclusive consultation methods.

Stakeholder advisory or expert groups

Description

These are small-scale stakeholder committees that are assembled to inform decision making, respond to consultation questions or monitor consultation activities and policy developments. Provided with access to the most relevant information, the group may have one-off or ongoing meetings.

When to use

- In the pre-consultation or early consultation stage, to comment on and inform consultation plans.
- When seeking early and focused engagement with key stakeholders.
- After the consultation, to monitor progress and hold the authority to account.
- When the stakeholders involved would benefit from the opportunity to meet and network.
- When seeking to engage stakeholders who are less likely to respond to a written consultation.

When not to use

- When seeking the views of a wide range of organisations.
- When seeking statistically significant data.

Things to keep in mind

Stakeholder advisory and expert groups are not traditionally recognised as a form of consultation. They can appear selective and closed to those who are not involved and, if used, should be seen as a complement to rather than a central part of any consultation.

Deliberative workshops or conferences

Description

Facilitated events where the focus is on exploring a policy issue in depth through deliberation, encouraging those involved to learn from information given and from each other's different perspectives.

When to use

- When the subject area is complex and the debate would benefit from explanation, reflection and time to develop considered opinions.
- When seeking to gauge not just people's views but why they think like they do.
- When the decision will require trade-offs between different policy options and participants working together can explore the implications of alternatives to result in a better informed decision.
- When the decision-making body cannot make and implement the decision along; there needs to be buy-in from others.
- When the stakeholders involved would benefit from the opportunity to meet and network.
- When seeking to engage stakeholders who are less likely to respond to a written consultation.

When not to use

- As sole method of consultation if some key stakeholders are unable to attend the event or events.
- As a measure of the views of the wider stakeholder group, as people who have not had the opportunity to deliberate may come to very different conclusions.

Things to keep in mind

- Deliberative workshops and conferences require time and effort to get right. Consult Involve and National Consumer Council's Principles on Deliberative Public Engagement for more advice:

www.involve.org.uk/deliberative_principles

- Deliberative events require skilled facilitation to ensure that all participants are given an equal voice.

Coproduction

Description

Coproduction is an approach to decision-making and service design rather than a specific method. The term refers to a way of working whereby decision makers and stakeholders work together to create a decision or a service that works for them all. The approach is value-driven and built on the principle that those who are affected by a service are best placed to say how it should be designed and run.

When to use

- When decision makers are genuinely willing and able to share decision-making powers with stakeholders.

When not to use

- When dealing with contentious issues and/or a large constituency of affected people, which can make managing the process difficult.
- When policy makers lack the time or commitment to take stakeholders' views into account.
- When there is limited interest in the subject matter among potential participants.
- When there is a limited timeframe for consultation

Things to keep in mind

Coproduction approaches can be time and resource intensive, as interactions between stakeholders and policy makers are ongoing and participants need to be supported at each stage of the process. These types of approaches should only be used if there are sufficient resources in place to follow the process through.

Appendix 1: HM Government Code of Practice on Consultation: Seven Consultation Criteria

Criterion 1: When to consult

Formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence the policy outcome.

Criterion 2: Duration of consultation exercises

Consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible.

Criterion 3: Clarity of scope and impact

Consultation documents should be clear about the consultation process, what is being proposed, the scope to influence and the expected costs and benefits of the proposals.

Criterion 4: Accessibility of consultation exercises

Consultation exercises should be designed to be accessible to, and clearly targeted at, those people the exercise is intended to reach.

Criterion 5: The burden of consultation

Keeping the burden of consultation to a minimum is essential if consultations are to be effective and if consultees' buy-in to the process is to be obtained.

Criterion 6: Responsiveness of consultation exercises

Consultation responses should be analysed carefully and clear feedback should be provided to participants following the consultation.

Criterion 7: Capacity to consult

Officials running consultations should seek guidance in how to run an effective consultation exercise and share what they have learned from the experience.

The government's Code of Practice on Consultation is available on the department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform's (BERR) website:

www.berr.gov.uk/bre/consultation%20guidance/page44459.html

Appendix 2: Summary of the Compact Code of Good Practice on Consultation and Policy Appraisal

Key points for effective consultation and policy appraisal

- “ Build consultation into your regular planning cycle and consult early.
- Appraise new policies and procedures, particularly at the developmental stage, identifying as far as possible any implications for the sector at national, regional and local level.
- Give consultees enough time to respond and be clear about their purpose.
- Write documents in simple language and be clear about their purpose.
- Explain where decisions have already been made – make clear what you can and what you can't.
- Use more than one method of consultation and learn from others in both the public and the sector.
- Be flexible and sensitive to the needs of those you wish to consult – think about how to reach all of the intended target audience, and take account positively of the needs, interests and contributions of those parts of the sector which represent minority groups and the socially excluded.
- Encourage those consulted to give honest views, for example by assuring confidentiality when it is requested.
- Publicise the consultation and encourage participation by involving membership infrastructure organisations.
- Analyse carefully the results of the consultation and report back on the views received and what you have done as a result.
- Evaluate carefully after consulting, and learn lessons for next time.”

The Compact Code of Good Practice on Consultation and Policy Appraisal is available at:
http://www.thecompact.org.uk/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=100320

Appendix 3: The Compact guidance on consultation documents

“All consultation documents should be concise, clearly laid out and written in simple language that will be understood by the intended audience, avoiding jargon (external testing for plain language is commended). Consideration should be given to making the document available in accessible formats and different languages. Consultation documents will ideally contain or be accompanied by the following:

- a summary (ideally no more than one page);
- a description of the issue, proposal or problem being addressed;
- the purpose of the consultation and, if appropriate, the objective which the proposal is intended to deliver;
- the issues on which views are being sought; wherever possible they should take the form of clear questions and/or fairly argued options and avoid a simple ‘Yes/No’ format;
- an explanation of what decisions, if any, have already been taken and an explanation of why a particular option is favoured;
- if relevant, various sources of opinion and information, and factual statements that are properly referenced (for example, from academics or consumer groups);
- where appropriate, an explanation of who is likely to be affected, and how, including an assessment or impact statement covering the likely effect of the proposals on voluntary and community organisations (for example, any implementation role or increased costs envisaged);
- where appropriate, an invitation to respondents to submit their own ideas or assessment of how the proposals will impact on voluntary and community organisations;
- the deadline for responses, and wherever possible an outline of the proposed timetable for the rest of the decision-making and implementation processes including a statement of how feedback will be given;
- a description of the issue, proposal or problem being addressed;
- the name, address and, wherever possible the telephone number and e-mail address of a person whom respondents can contact if they have further queries;
- a list of those being consulted; the document might also ask consultees to suggest any other organisations or individuals who should be consulted;

- a request that those responding should explain who they are and, where relevant, who they represent and specifically who they have further consulted (to help ensure that responses from representative bodies are properly weighted); and
- a statement that responses will normally be made available unless the respondent has requested that they remain confidential;
- an explanation of any constraints that may have limited the full application of the guidance contained in this Code of Good Practice;
- an invitation to provide feedback on the consultation exercise itself and make suggestions for improving consultation in the future.

Making consultation material available in accessible formats

“Where necessary, consultation materials should be provided in accessible formats, for example, Braille, large print or audio formats (further advice on this can be obtained from the Royal National Institute for the Blind), and languages other than English. Be ready to deal sympathetically with requests for materials to be made available in such formats. If necessary, consider other ways of consulting these groups, for example through face to face discussions. If the consultation applies to the people of Wales, remember that it will probably need to be published in English and Welsh in line with the requirements of the Welsh Language Act.”

The Compact Code of Good Practice on Consultation and Policy Appraisal is available at:

http://www.thecompact.org.uk/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=100320

Appendix 4: How was this handbook produced?

This handbook is based on the findings from a six-month research project conducted by Involve (www.involve.org.uk) and GuideStar UK into the most effective way for government, local authorities and other public bodies to involve third sector organisations in decisions and policy making.

The project was commissioned by the Office of the Third Sector (OTS) and Children England, formerly the National Council for Voluntary Child Care Organisations (NCVCCO).

For the research report that accompanies this report, including a detailed methodology and bibliography, see: www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/Consultations.

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