

TOOL 13 – CONSULTATION METHODS

The following table is a list of possible consultation methods which a community group/organisation could consider. This is not a definitive list and there are others which could also be considered.

(The following information is taken from DHSSPS Consultation Guide for Managers and 'A Guide to Better Consultation' produced by Oldham Borough Council)

Consultation Method	When used	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Surveys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> by post by telephone face-to-face - on the street face-to-face - at home self-response - e.g. handed out 	<p>Surveys are used to gather the views of a sample of people to act as an indication of the views of the whole target population.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When hard figures are needed - trends and benchmarks When issues are already known but need to be quantified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statistically sound - control of respondents means it will be representative of the 'population' as a whole Results easy to report back Can compare with other surveys (both internal and external), previous findings and future benchmarking Familiar to most people Can give people time to think about their response Can reach a large number of people Can target specific groups Can apply "scientific methods" which can give insight into the opinions and views of the whole community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little time for respondents to consider responses/ deliberate or add their own thoughts Can be expensive Inflexible – the agenda is set by the "researcher" Non-english speakers and blind or partially sighted people could be excluded if the survey is self-completing Sample may be too small or biased and might not provide reliable results Cannot explore an issue in-depth Response rates can be low
<p>Group Discussions e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus groups Stakeholder meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For analytical research When you need to understand (reasons for attitudes/ behaviour) and generate new ideas Before a quantity survey, to identify the issues to quantify 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enables people to express why, not just what Useful for in-depth analysis of how a service is perceived Can help to include groups which are often excluded Discussion can follow the mood of the audience – not prescriptive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot be used to extrapolate results to whole population - not statistically reliable Usually only meet for two hours More "vocal" people used to meetings may shout others down
<p>In-depth interviews</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting a "feel" for the issues Initial research for sensitive subjects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In depth response – can probe to a greater extent Good for sensitive subjects where people may not respond to a structured questionnaire/group discussion Also good for people confident in one-to-one situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respondents may be wary of discussing private and confidential information

Consultation Method	When used	Advantages	Disadvantages
Open Public Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow members of the public to find out about and express their views on a particular issue. Provides a two-way means of communication and facilitates interactive discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides opportunities for a collection of views Transparent process and allows for a two-way flow of information Issues can be discussed in full and views are shared at the meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May not be truly representative of the locality Can be difficult to organize and to manage The format may prevent people from attending or discussing
User panels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small groups of users and service provider representatives meet regularly to discuss issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a useful sounding board to test proposals and get feedback Useful in formulating ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs to have broad representation With passage of time no fresh perspectives
IT Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email internet polling Internet chat rooms Information kiosks On line survey tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relatively inexpensive Rapid response rates Broad geographical reach Similar benefits to questionnaires Quick way to collect info 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited by access to it May not be representative as some people may not be able to use computers, internet etc. Need to be planned specifically for its use Cannot ask open ended questions