

All about Consultation (workbook)



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Other documents needed:

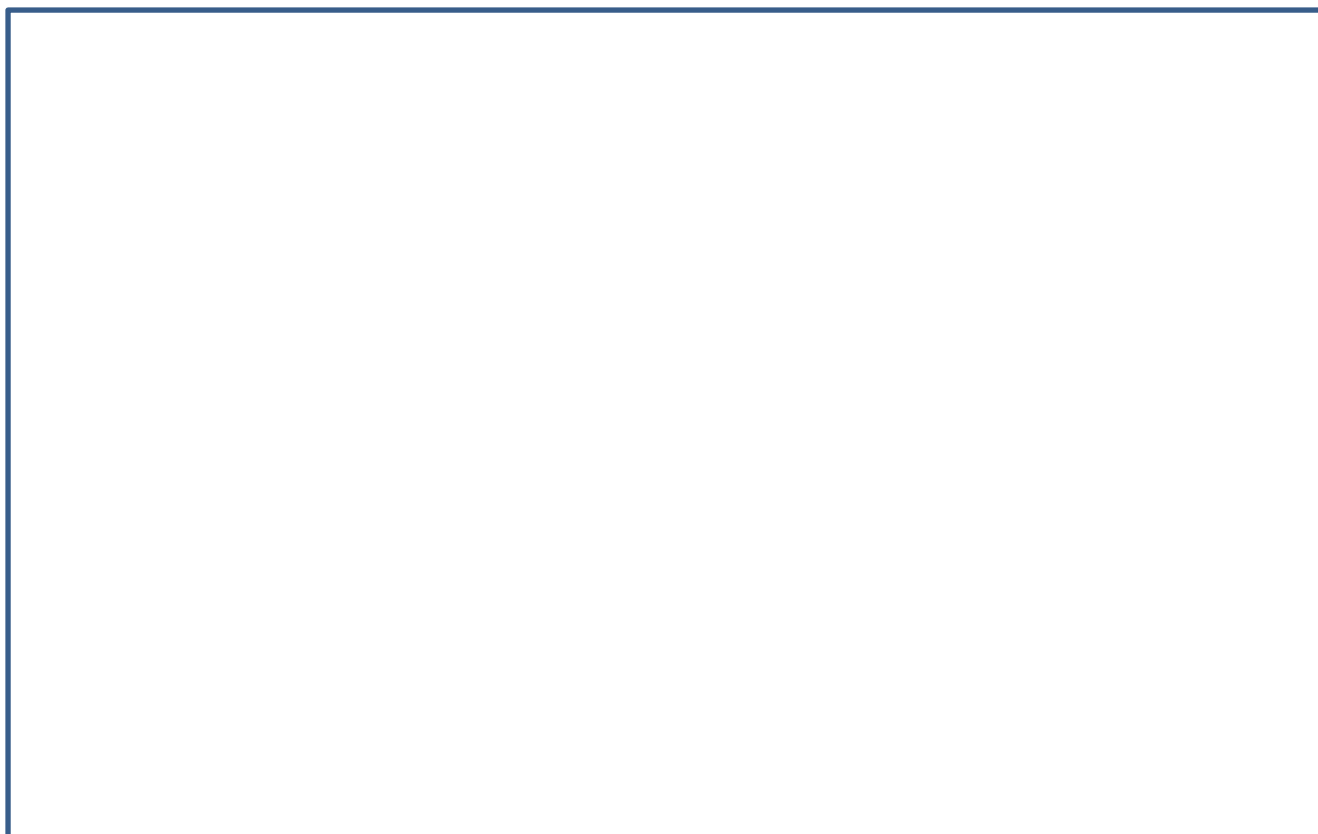
Skills Audit Guide
Consultation Methods Compared
Stakeholder Analysis
Community Consultation Questionnaires

About Consultation

Consultation – the art of engaging with people that results in more people participating, feeling valued, more projects, activities – building a sense of community.

What do you think is good and not so good about these examples of consultation, all of which could be described as “engagement”? Would any encourage more people to participate, or new ways of doing things? Would you do something different?

1. A committee organise an exhibition to inform other members of the community about a project they are doing, hoping to get support for their ideas and volunteers to help.
2. An organisation has made a decision to cut services which affect a community so they call a public meeting to try and address the issues, but don't intend to change their decision.
3. A council want to know what issues there are in the community so they use a variety of methods to find out what is good and what the issues are. They are open to ideas to improve things and ready to take issues forward or support others where needed.



Various people have done work on the theoretical processes of engagement; here is an example showing the progression from giving information to community action.

A ladder of participation (Wilcox, 1999)

Information
Consultation
Deciding together
Acting together
Supporting community initiatives

Information - tells people what is planned, it isn't a two way conversation and there is no citizen participation.

Consultation - offers some options and listens to feedback, but does not always allow new ideas (it depends on the method you use).

Deciding together – this encourages additional options and ideas and provides opportunities for joint decision-making.

Acting together - different interests groups decide together on what is best and for a partnership/group to carry it out.

Supporting independent community interests - local groups or organisations are offered funds, advice and other support to develop their own community ideas - empowering people and encouraging full participation in society.

The 5 step framework from International Association for Public Participation may help.

Inform	Provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the opportunities, problems, alternatives and/or solutions	Keeping the public informed through information dissemination. One –way process that is starting point of dialogue.	Effective information dissemination is vital, with honesty about non-negotiable areas of influence. • Newsletters • Websites • exhibitions
Consult	Obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	Consultation is a term recognised in law: must invite responses and consider them before making decision, although under no obligation to make changes.	It is a structured episode, not a process: • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings
Involve	Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	Joint consideration of public responses with the community before decisions are taken, with feedback on how community has influenced decisions	Fluid, ongoing process and face to face dialogue: • Workshops • Deliberative Polling

Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	Look to the community for help in formulating solutions, incorporating recommendations into the decisions as far as is possible	Face to face dialogue with community representatives and those affected. • Participatory decision-making
Empower	Place final decision-making in the hands of the public	Requires investment in time and resources and community capacity building	Supporting community control through the existence of highly developed local structures • e.g. Community Development Trusts

2. Why do some people participate but others don't?

What sort of person do you think is most likely to engage and be active in the community? Why are you involved? Do you have the time to do it perhaps? Can you think of other reasons and what sorts of people in general find it easier to participate?

What sorts of people do you think might not? Why do you think that is?

In general the people likely to engage and be active in the community are:

- Middle aged/active retired
- More likely to be male
- Those with higher educational qualifications
- The more affluent

Some of the groups who are less likely to engage are:

- Older people with just the state pension
- Those without transport
- Travellers
- Young people
- Farmers and agricultural workers
- Carers
- Homeless people
- Families with young children
- People with long term physical or mental health problems
- Military personnel or other short term residents
- People from minority groups

More thoughts on why people participate.

Whether people are 'active' citizens will vary greatly depending on their social, environmental and personal circumstances so the main reasons for people getting involved are:

- "A personal interest" or common interests
- An aspiration to change things
- Faith
- Exposure and access to community and voluntary sectors
- An opportunity to voice opinions and see something happening as a result

People will be more involved if:

- They have a voice in the community and feeling a sense of empowerment gives people a stronger commitment to their local area and as a consequence they will be more likely to be a part of local activities.
- They are also more likely to get or stay involved politically when an active interest is shown in their opinion and they feel their engagement was influential and something came out of that engagement.
- Social networks are also an important factor in people getting involved. Some triggers include 'being asked', 'word of mouth' and the influence of community 'motivators' (people who want to involve others in improving things).

Common reasons for participating:

- **emotional reactions** - such as anger at a decision, a response to a threat, or wanting to improve something locally
- **personal life events** - such as a new relationship, retirement, moving area or having children
- **external influences** - such as a natural disaster, finding about something for the first time, or just being asked if they'd like to join in

Resources people have (or don't have):

Whether people feel they can participate depends on:

- **Practical resources** - time, money, access to transport and health. Various changes in an individual's life can dramatically change the practical resources they can draw upon, either positively or negatively.
- **Skills, knowledge and experience** - These resources can be transferred to and from other spheres of life, such as work or leisure.
- **Emotional** – the confidence to feel they can take on or complete a task. A lack of confidence can prevent somebody from participating, and may be the reason why people feel unable to take on new roles they are unfamiliar with. It takes a lot of confidence to be able to take on something new that you have no experience of.

Personal relationships and social networks are also a factor, because they provide practical and emotional support to individuals to enable them to participate.

Another thing to consider is you!

Why are you participating and what sort of person are you?

Which sorts of people do you feel comfortable engaging with? Who is in your comfort zone and who isn't? Does it affect which method/s of engagement you feel comfortable with? Also how might your reasons for being involved affect how you engage.

A Skills Audit

For whatever project you are doing a skills audit helps you as an individual to look at where your skills lie and if you do it as a committee it identifies whether you have all the skills you need between you or whether you need training or people with those skills. **Try this short one individually and then if you belong to a committee do it as a group to see if you have any skills gaps on your table (See the Skills Audit Guide)**

Skills	Good at this	Not so good	Not skilled
Like to work in a team			
Work on my own			
Like meeting new people			
Confident and outgoing			
Comfortable with risk			
Good listener			
Able to work with a variety of people			

If you don't have a good balance of skills and personality types, how do you think that might affect the way you consult? How might it affect the way you work as a team and what you want to achieve? Might it be a factor in whether more people participate or are "put off" and how can you take steps to remedy any shortcomings?

Other things to think about when consulting people:

- How good a listener are you? Have you really heard and understood what someone is saying to you?
- Be careful about your own opinions and judgements you want to enable people to give their views not discourage them.
- No matter how nervous you feel, smile and be welcoming - help others to relax and they will give you far more information

Consultation methods:

Using the document “Consultation Methods Compared” have a look at these groups of people and mark which methods you think would help you to engage with them.

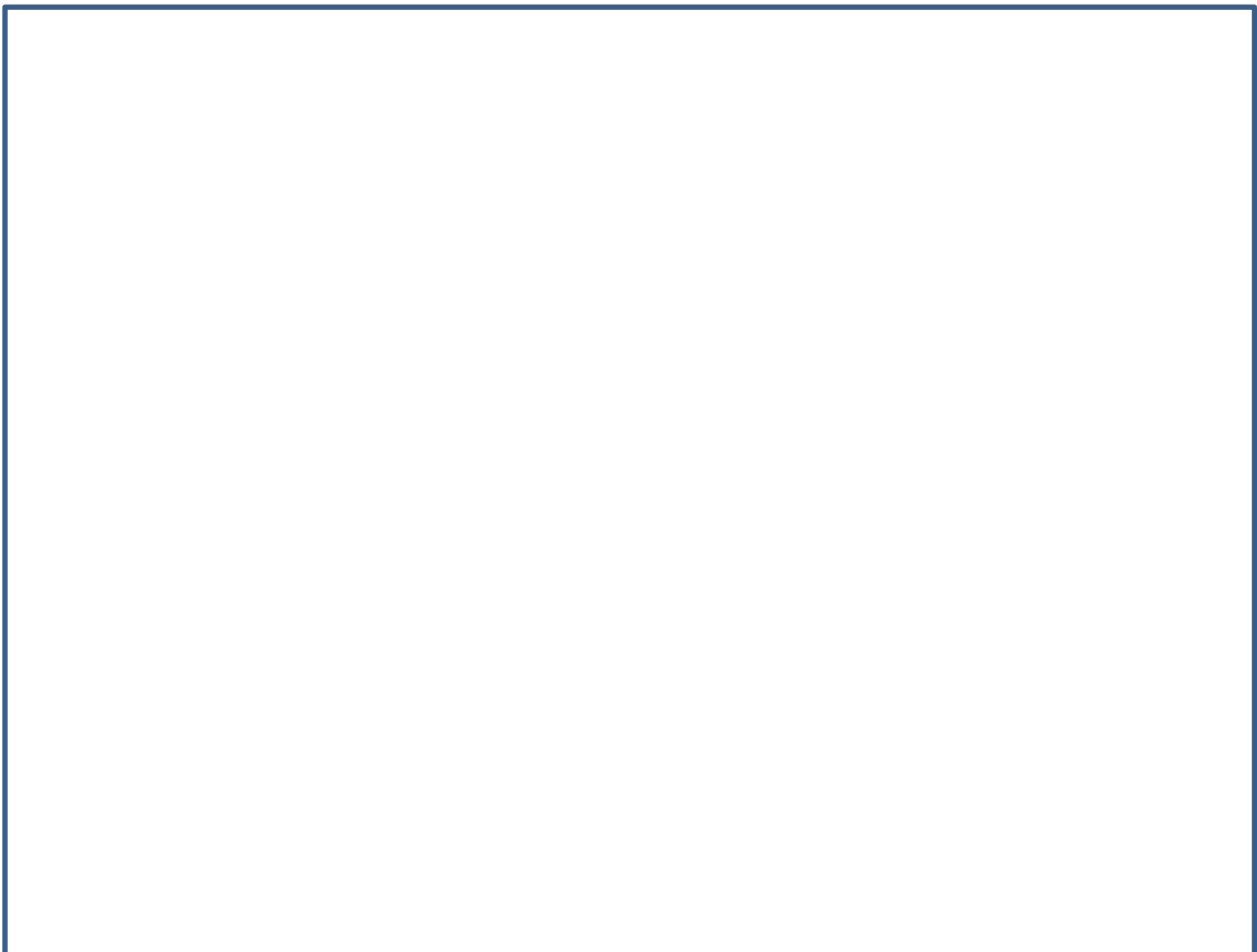
Section of the community	Children & Young people	Carers	People at work	People with long term health problems (mental or physical)	Businesses	Older people	Young Families
Suggestion Boxes							
Postcards							
Leaflets or flyers							
Contacting Clubs and organisations							
Informal chats or surveys							
Community walks							
Drop-in events							
Community events							
Public Meetings							
Questionnaires							
Website							
Social Media							
Business Breakfast							
Informal Action Plan							
Schools							
Street/open space montage							

Use of Language

Have a think the about use of language which could be a barrier to people completing questionnaires, attending meetings, reading reports or wanting to join a committee. People have varying levels of reading and writing skills, and may not understand terms being used (would everybody understand what “infrastructure” is for instance?) etc.



How do you think you could make it easier for people with a whole range of language skills to participate? Do the people in the groups you have just looked at have particular needs?



Action Plans

As well as asking people for their opinions what about asking them to write down the issue/s and what action/s they feel could be taken to move things forward:

Action Plan			
What is the issue?	Action to be taken	Who can help with this?	Resources needed
Issue:			

People can then be encouraged to volunteer to take forward actions and projects.

Analysis of the information you have collected

Depending on the size of you town or village or the event/s you will have lots of information, give time to think about how you will make sense of it **before** you do the consultation!

For example we use themed sheets to cover all the likely areas people might want to give their views on but breaking it down into related areas:

- Traffic/transport/Highways
- In your Parish/Town
- Health/Education/Leisure
- Development & Economy
- Environment & Utilities

It helps people to see what others have written on related topics instead of looking at a sea of post it notes and helps people think about actions. It also then helps people explore the issues in more depth, gives us more of a feel about the issues and helps when we write reports to give effective feedback.

You don't need to do those themes and it might be the theme of the meeting is housing so you would look at splitting that into areas that would help you understand more about the issues and for feedback that helps to move towards looking at solutions.

There is further guidance on writing questionnaires in the document "Community Consultation Questionnaires" and some thoughts further on in this workbook.

Volunteers & Working groups

More people participating means more things can be done so having already looked at:

- Reasons why people participate or don't
- Who might find it easier to volunteer
- How you (and committees) can encourage or discourage people
- Steps you might take to make it easier for people to have a go

Another thing is how people find out and how well it's presented to them so next, communication and publicity.

Communication and publicity:

Have you got it planned or are you just hoping people find out?

Communication of what you are doing, to the right people, at the right time, and in the right quantity and detail is vital to any project and any consultation work you are doing.

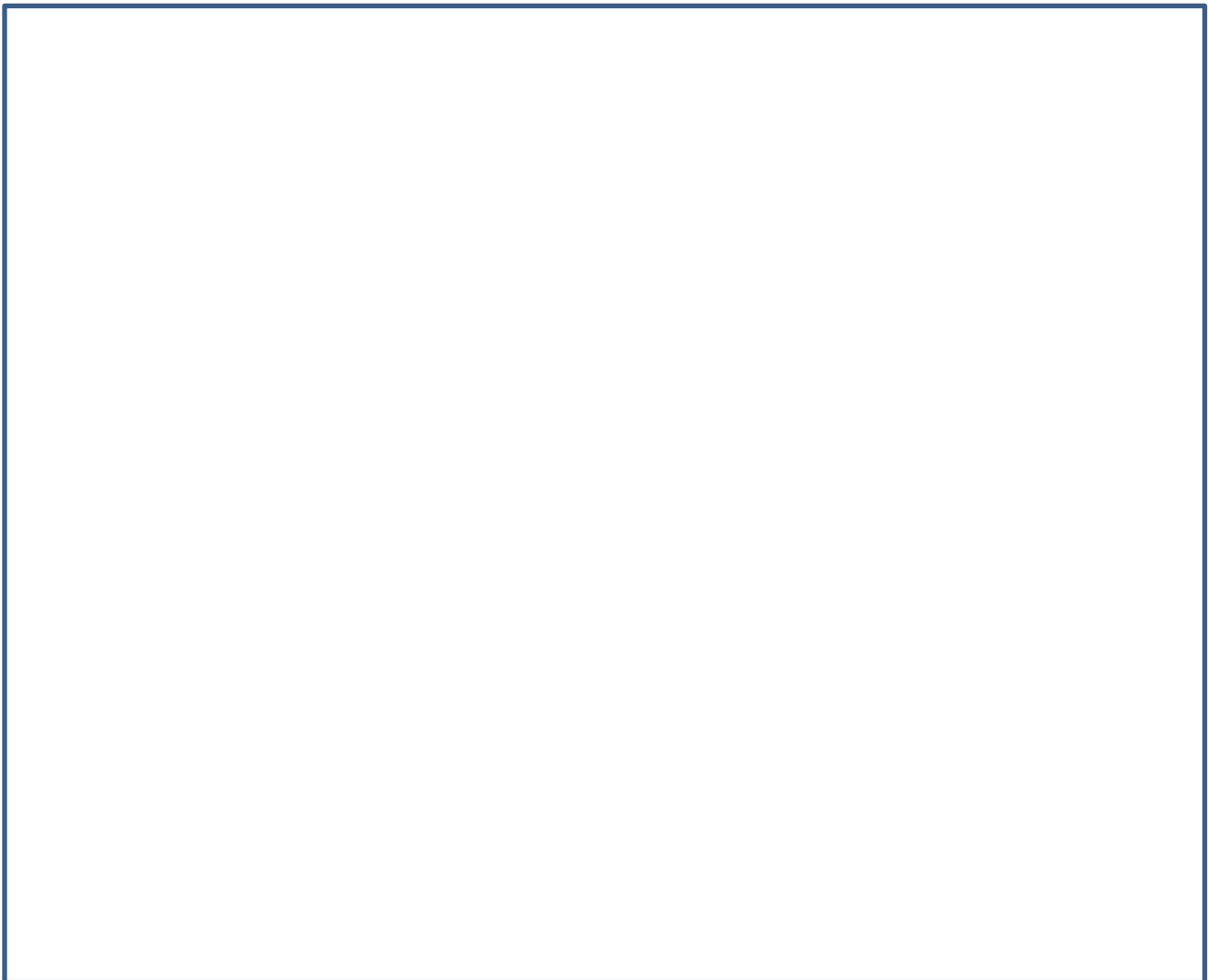
It's useful to do a Stakeholder Analysis (separate document)

- Projects use this to identify groups, the influence they have and who might be least likely to engage but for whom the plan might have the most benefits or impacts (and in a Neighbourhood Plan who you need to keep on board for the referendum)
- It can be used to help you to make sure you do consult and engage with everyone in your community (plus other agencies, statutory authorities) and helps you to see who your most needy groups are
- It also can help with communication and deciding on the best way of keeping in touch with diverse groups (you can never do too much publicity but targeting it gives people the level of information most appropriate for them)

Publicity

It seems you can never do enough publicity – there always seems to be one person who says “I didn’t know it was happening” or “No-one told me”!

How will you feedback the results of any consultation work that you do? For instance a website, local magazine, postcards..... Thinking about the groups you looked at earlier what might help to reach people in those groups and what might be suitable for them. How can you interest people?



Questionnaires

A common way of reaching as many people as possible in a community is to construct a questionnaire. Good questionnaires need time and careful thought so please have a look at our guide “Community Consultation Questionnaires” Here are a few guidelines:

Issues first

1. Find out what the issues are first – use a variety of methods to engage with people to find out
2. A questionnaire can then be used to find out more about the issues and what people would like to do about them
3. You can then look at possible solutions or ways forward

Design

- Easy to complete – people don’t have the same level of reading skills
- Easy to read – make sure the font is big enough and use one like “Arial”
- Avoid jargon – keep the language simple
- Avoid putting busy or dark backgrounds behind text – people may not be able to read it

Design the questionnaire for the “whole” of your community to get back the widest range of responses

Questions

Use the “so what?” test to decide how useful it is to ask a particular question – how will you be able to use the information? Will this help you understand the issue and take action?

Avoid lots of open comment questions – random comments are a nightmare to input & analyse, better to include an option as part of a question so comments are relevant to the subject.

Arrange the questions logically so that people feel the questions are leading somewhere.

Avoid:

Yes/no questions – they have their place but in general just a yes or no will not take you further forward

Leading questions – you are looking to encourage people to express their views not bolster yours

Two or more questions in one – unfortunately this is easy to do.

Questions you know the answer to – instead ask something you don’t know the answer to.

Population profile questions

What would it be useful to know about who is completing the questionnaire?

1. Male or female
2. What age group they fall into
3. The area they live in (using a map to define the areas is easiest)

By asking them you can analyse by:

- **Area** – is something an issue in one area or more than one
- **Age groups** – do different age groups have differing views or need different things
- **Gender** - do men and women have different views or is an issue affecting them differently

You can also use all three together to help you drill down further into the issues

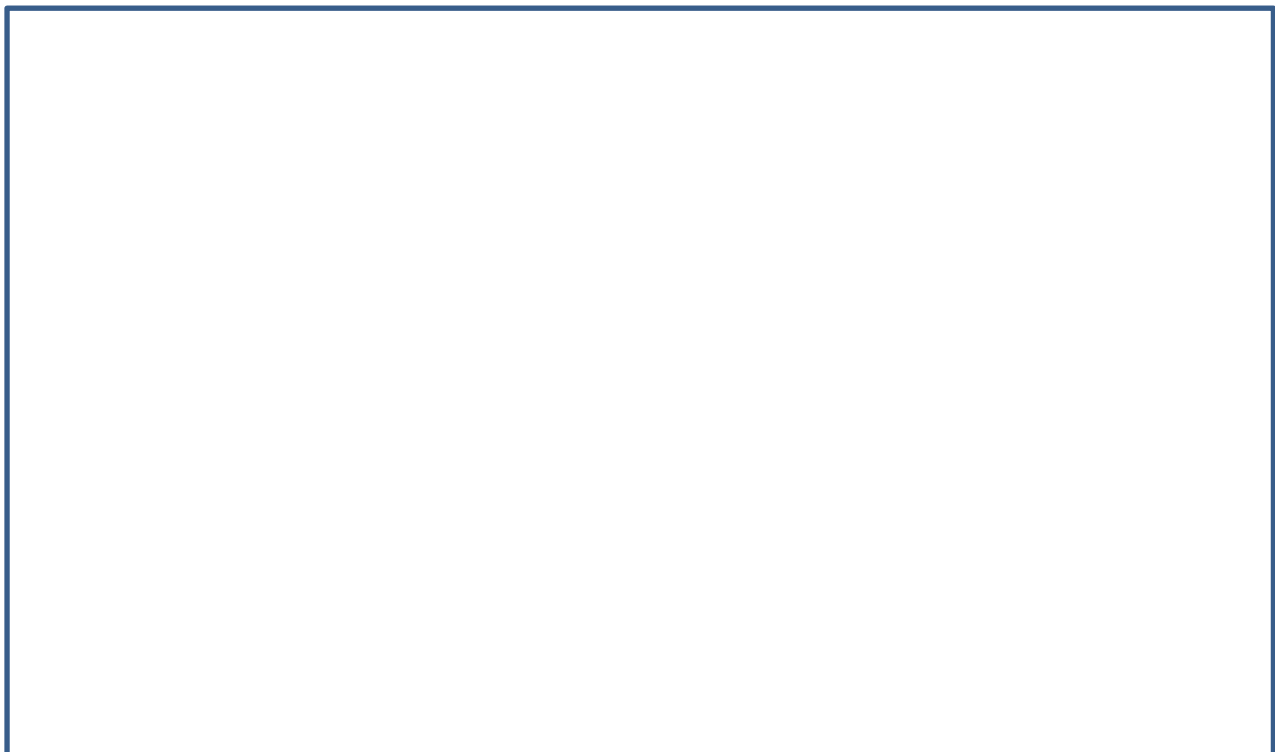
There is far more in the big guide.

Managing expectations

So, you've asked people for their opinions and what actions they would like to see taken.

How will you manage their expectations?

What do you think can be managed locally and what will need outside help and investment? An action plan with priorities and timescales helps What do you think?



In our reports we have started putting information about how long things are likely to take, potential costs, and any further information we can. This is to give people insight into why sometimes it takes a long time to get the improvements they would like or that it's just not possible due to the costs. We could probably do more, what about you, what do you think would help?

We used information from the following sources in addition to our own documents:

ICARUS training notes re stakeholder analysis

Also information from the ACRE Toolkit and various RCC's including Oxfordshire RCC, Action in Rural Sussex, Community First (Wiltshire)

http://www.sharedpractice.org.uk/Downloads/Pathways_summary_report.pdf

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140805153301/https://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/community-engagement-toolkit?page_id=&page=1

Would you like to discuss consultation more?

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