

4 Research methods

This section looks at the actual methods you use to carry out research. We saw in Section 2, when we looked at research theory, that community groups often used three approaches: surveys, case studies and action research. Whichever approach you use, you will need a combination of research methods to carry it out. These are the tools of research and you can use them in different combinations according to your research purpose.

The methods community groups are most likely to use are

- **questionnaires**
- **interviews**
- **focus groups**

Other methods used include user panels, written consultations, oral history and story telling, and participatory and creative approaches.

a Questionnaires

Questionnaires are one way of collecting information by asking a selected set of people a set of questions. Usually they are structured, asking the same questions in the same order. The census form is an example of a highly structured questionnaire. Questionnaires are a widely used research tool. They can be administered over the telephone or face-to-face by an interviewer, or self completed as a written exercise with little or no direct contact between the researcher and the respondent.

They are useful for

- **gathering data from large numbers of people**
- **gathering straightforward information about something specific**
- **providing statistical data**

and less useful for

- **collecting detailed information and explanations**
- **finding out why someone holds a particular view or opinion**
- **engaging people in answering the questions**
- **when you have few resources to pay for printing, postage etc**
- **when issues of literacy, language and disability means not everyone is able to read or understand the questions.**

We look at which questions to ask, types of question, questionnaire design, appearance and piloting.

Deciding which questions to ask

The questions you need to ask should stem from the initial questions you identified at the beginning of the research, or from any subsequent reassessment once you have collected some background information. Start by listing all the information you need to answer these initial questions. Lay the list out on cards in as logical an order as possible and draw out specific questions that relate to each piece of information. You will probably need to edit down this initial list of questions making sure that each question you decide to keep relates back to your initial research questions. Once you have been through this process you will be in a position to design your questionnaire.

Types of question

Each question on your questionnaire will be either an open question or a closed question.

Open questions

These require an answer from the respondent that has not been pre-determined by the researcher. The question allows for an open-ended reply.

Q What do you like about your school?

.....
.....
.....

Closed questions

There are a limited number of possible responses to these questions where the researcher has asked a yes/no question or has provided a list of possible answers.

Q Do you use local bus services?

Yes

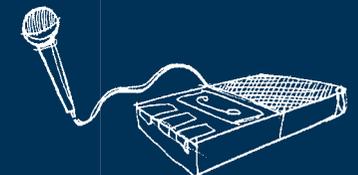
No

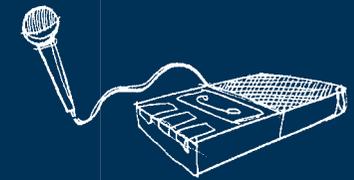
Q How many times a week do you shop at local shops?

Never

Less than three times a week

More than three times a week





Open and closed questions can both be asked in different ways, outlined below:

Lists

A list is made and the interviewee selects all those that are relevant to them.

Q Which of the following events have you attended in the community hall over the last year? Tick all that apply.

- Pantomime
- Coffee morning
- Disco
- Aerobics
- Harvest festival
- Barbecue
- Concert

Category

This gives a set of categories and the interviewee can only fit into one of the answers. It is often used for age categories.

Q How old are you? Please tick appropriate box.

11-17	<input type="checkbox"/>	18-24	<input type="checkbox"/>	25-34	<input type="checkbox"/>	35-44	<input type="checkbox"/>
45-54	<input type="checkbox"/>	55-59	<input type="checkbox"/>	over 60	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Grid

This is a table or grid that helps to answer two or more questions at the same time.

Q A. Please tell us which of the weekly programmes you have attended at the community hall and how often you go to them. Please tick all that apply.

	Once a year	Once a month	Once a week	Twice a week	Other please state
Aerobics					
Older people's group					
Youth club					
Coffee morning					
IT training					

Ranking

The interviewee is asked to place something in order of rank or importance.

Q What do you think needs to be done first in the town centre?

Please place the following in order of importance with 1 being the most important and 5 the least important

New bus shelters

New play area for children

Security fencing around community centre

CCTV for shops

Kick about for sport

Scaling

This involves the interviewee putting a scale against certain questions.

Q How much input do you have in the running of the building? Who makes the decisions about...

Only one number should be selected as an answer

1 = I make all the decisions

2 = I help to make the decisions with others

3 = I help sometimes to make the decisions

4 = I have never helped to make any decision

5 = I am not allowed to make any decision on this matter

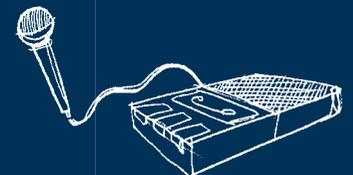
What time the centre opens and closes

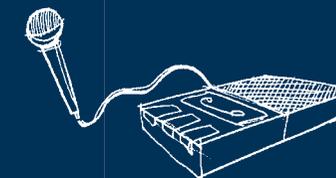
Who is allowed in the building

What activities are going on in the building

Where activities should be advertised

What the priorities are for funding





Quantity

The answer is a number, without any other information.

Q About your centre

How many adults use the centre on a daily basis?

How many children use the centre on a daily basis?

How many of your users have a disability?

Questionnaire design

Wording

It is important to ensure that you use sentences that mean the same to everyone. Different words mean different things to people, so some sentences may be understood differently by the interviewee.

Q How often do you use the local shops?

A great deal

Sometimes

A certain amount

Very little

How would you interpret this? What do a great deal and a certain amount mean? This example is clearer.

Q How often do you use the local shops?

Everyday

Once a week

Once a month

Never

You want people to answer all the questions so that your statistics, percentages, numbers and other analyses are valid. It is important that people understand the questionnaire, otherwise they may miss out questions.

Is this question straightforward?

Q What school does your child attend?

Bowes Primary

Nightingale Primary

Huxley Primary

St James Primary

This question assumes that the person filling in the form only has one child and the child goes to one of the named schools.

If the interviewee has more than one child what do they do? Do they tick all that are relevant? Put the ages in the box? Try to squeeze in the answer under the section? The interviewee may simply leave it blank.

Memory

When answering a question such as 'what subjects did you take at school?' some adults will be able to remember what they did, others will not remember at all. If they forget to include one of the basic subjects such as English or maths, do you assume that they didn't study it, even if you know in reality they probably did? It might be better to make a list people can tick, to ensure answers are more accurate.

Double questions

Be careful not to ask two questions in one, such as 'Do you go to arts and English evening classes?' If they answer yes, does this mean they attend both classes or do they only go to one? It would be better to separate the questions.

Leading questions

The way a question is structured can force an interviewee to answer in one way only. Remember that though you may be carrying out your research to prove something, you discredit your research if you ask questions such as the following:

Q Do you not agree that the local tenants should have the right to express their views at the local housing committee meetings?

The answer is likely to be yes, as this is the answer you appear to want.

Presuming questions

Q The Housing Association does not perform its job as well as the Council's Housing Department has done. What would you like done about it?

The tenants may not think this.

Useless questions

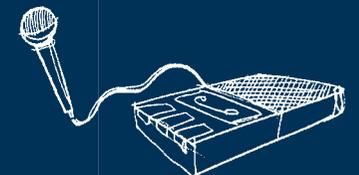
Beware of asking questions that provoke a useless response.

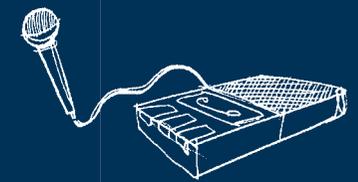
Q If you won £3 million what would you do for the rest of your life?

This could get a silly response such as 'fly to the moon' or 'I never will win that much money, so what is the point in thinking about it?'

Sensitive or offensive questions

An obvious example is 'How old are you?' Instead it might be better to put ages into sections and ask the interviewee to tick which one they fit into. Use your common sense – or ask someone you know if they would find it offensive or embarrassing.





Content

Cover

On the cover include

- the name of your organisation
- names of any sponsors
- the purpose of the research
- a return address and date
- confidentiality and what this means
- prize draw to encourage responses – if you have names and contact details.

You should also thank people for filling it in.

Instructions

You will also need to provide instructions.

- never assume questions are obvious and straightforward
- give specific instructions for each question e.g. circle, tick or delete
- provide examples of completed questions.

Serial numbers

Use serial numbers even if you have only a few questionnaires to go out, so you can identify place and date of distribution.

Put the serial number on the front cover e.g.

- 0087 – the 87th questionnaire
- 003 – location/street/group
- 0101 – Jan 2001

If you plan to follow up people who don't reply, you will need a way of identifying them without compromising confidentiality or privacy.

Coding boxes

These help to sort out the raw data once the questionnaire has been completed, see page 41, Section 5a. If you are coding responses manually, you will need coding boxes on the right hand side of the sheet in a column headed 'for office use only'

Questions	Office use only

Layout

- Make sure that you put adequate spaces between the questions, as this will help people to distinguish between them and make it easier to analyse later.
- Make sure that you keep the questions in some order. Start with straight forward questions then move onto ones that need a more thoughtful response. Keep the questions in categories: don't hop about with questions on different topics. This way people will know where they are – you do not want to confuse them or put them off filling in your questionnaire.
- Keep the response boxes in order. Try to keep them to the right of the page and in line as you go down the page. This is not only more pleasing to the eye but easier to manage when analysing information.
- Using the same types of questions with similar layout can increase boredom but make it easy to answer. Using a range of different question formats reduces boredom, but can be more confusing to answer. This kind of issue can be resolved at the piloting stage.

Piloting

When you have completed the questionnaire, put it down and go back to it later for a second look. Then give it to some people who haven't been involved so far to try it out. Ask them if there were any problems. Could they follow the instructions? Did they understand the questions? Were the options given appropriate? You should also try coding their responses. Did they answer all the questions as you had intended? Did they follow instructions, for instance, circling or ticking as you had asked? Did they make extensive use of 'don't know' or 'other' options? If so, you may need to rethink some of your categories. You may need to go through this stage more than once.

b One to one interviews

The distinctive features of one-to-one interviews are that people give their informed consent to take part and they are pre-arranged. The researcher sets the agenda and explains context of the interview.

When to use interviews

Interviews are used when you want detailed specific views or opinions, or you want data on emotions, relationships, feelings or experiences. They are useful for dealing with sensitive or complex issues and areas. They can highlight key issues to be explored later or follow up interesting themes emerging from questionnaires.

Types of interviews

When using interviews as a way of collecting data, you will have to decide what type of interview best suits the research question.

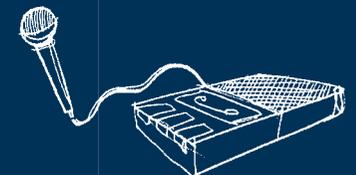


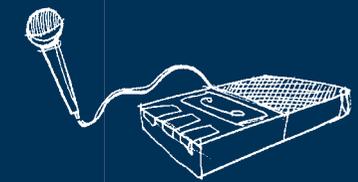
Interviews can be completely unstructured or highly structured. Consider the information that you need to collect before deciding on the format.

Structured interviews are carried out face-to-face using a questionnaire with a standardised format and a predetermined list of questions with limited option responses. Standardisation in terms of wording, range and order of questions means that analysis is relatively easy. They are often used to collect large volumes of data from a wide range of respondents and lend themselves to the collection of quantitative data.

Semi-structured interviews are more open and flexible, although still with a clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be answered. Their flexibility allows respondents to develop ideas and elaborate on issues if they choose.

Unstructured interviews are as unobtrusive as possible, with certain themes for the respondent to pursue in their own way. They are most useful as a method of discovery rather than checking out answers to specific questions and lend themselves to in-depth investigation of people's experiences and feelings.





Interviewer effect

In a one-to-one interview the focus is on the relationship between the two people. If something gets in the way or adversely influences this relationship it can affect the quality of the information generated.

Age, gender, ethnicity, appearance, social status and speech patterns all affect how people respond to someone and will influence the trust and rapport between the researcher and the interviewee. The skill of the interviewer lies in striking a balance between maintaining neutrality (in views and appearance) and establishing rapport. Questions need to be worded carefully to avoid leading questions, as in questionnaires.

If you have chosen to use interviews as a way of engaging with people and encouraging them to talk in depth about their personal experiences, you should still try to remain neutral, while establishing an empathetic relationship with the interviewee. If the aims of the research are specifically to help people express and reflect upon their experiences and make connections, you will need excellent communication and people skills. The ability to listen actively, to summarise and reflect back what your interviewee has said and to pick out and develop key points are all needed. If you

have chosen this approach be aware some people will expect interviewers and researchers to be 'expert' and to appear objective and neutral.

Who to interview?

As interviews can take quite a long time and generate a lot of information, they are usually done on a much smaller scale than self-completed questionnaires. In qualitative research, respondents are usually chosen on the basis of non-probability sampling, see page 22, section 3d. This means that they are handpicked or volunteer to participate in this stage of the research. They are not expected to be representative of the population at large. They may have a special contribution to make to the research or a particular insight to give based on experience or position within an organisation.

If you do want to use interview data to make comparisons and generalisations then your way of choosing respondents might need to be more representative and follow guidelines and methods of probability sampling. See page 21, section 3d.

Approval

Will you need permission to interview someone either because they are accountable to others or are under-age?

Where and when to hold the interview

The time and the location need to be selected on grounds of access and personal safety first and foremost. For example, are you going to interview someone in their home? Consideration can then be given to issues of privacy, interruptions, comfort and seating arrangements (best at a 90° angle).

Interview structure

Make sure the interviewee understands the purpose and context of the research that you are involved in, the format of the interview and how long it will take. Set up any recording equipment in negotiation with the interviewee.

Ask easy questions to start, together with questions about their background or interest in the topic area. Use trigger questions or materials to get them to talk in more depth. Towards the end ask them if they have left anything important out or if there is anything they want to add. Always thank them for their time and ask if they would like to read through your notes or analysis to make comments.

Recording data

There are only a few choices about how to record interview data: written notes, audio-taped interviews and video-taped interviews.

Relying on one method alone can be risky. For example, if the equipment fails then your interview is lost. This is important when conducting interviews out of the office. Keep things as simple as possible. If you do use equipment make sure that you have back up batteries or can access a mains point in the interview location.

Most research uses both notes and audio taped interviews. Notes need to be done during or immediately after the interview but there is no need for electrical equipment and you can record non-verbal language or cues and context.

Audio taped interviews are useful as a permanent record of what was actually said but the presence of the tape recorder can inhibit people. Transcribing can take three times as long as the interview itself, although summaries can be made instead of a full transcript.

Interview skills and attributes

There are a number of skills needed in order to conduct successful interviews and encourage people to feel at ease:

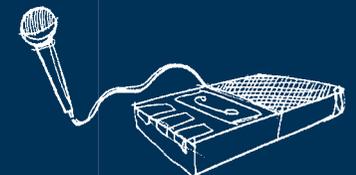
- being fully attentive
- active listening
- being sensitive to feelings and nuances
- being tolerant
- recognising when to encourage silence or an opportunity to reflect
- make positive eye contact
- using a non-judgmental approach
- using prompts, probes and checks appropriately
- being observant

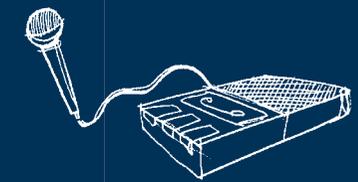
Costs

The main element is time to set up and run the interviews and to analyse the information. There may be some expenditure on travel, tapes and photocopying.

Advantages of interviews

- useful for getting the views of people who feel uncomfortable in a group
- a verbal approach for people who find written questionnaires difficult
- can be flexible, allowing new issues and ideas to emerge
- can generate detailed explanations and feedback and explore sensitive and personal issues
- can be a positive and empowering experience
- high response rates
- can clarify misunderstandings about questions
- when it would be impractical to get a group together





Disadvantages of interviews

- **interviewers generally need training**
- **small numbers limit the ability to generalise**
- **costs and resources are high per individual interviewed**
- **do not provide much statistical information**
- **can take up a great deal of time**
- **can be intrusive for people**
- **provide few standard responses, making it harder to analyse**
- **reliability uncertain due to possible interviewer effect.**

c Focus groups

A focus group is a group interview or discussion with about six to twelve people meeting together to share opinions and experiences around a specific topic or issue that has been decided in advance. They need to be led by an experienced facilitator.

Advantages of focus groups

They can be useful for exploring attitudes and experiences about less sensitive or less controversial topics and gathering in-depth information as the discussion gets people talking and provides triggers to people's experiences. They are good for getting people to relate their own experiences. They are particularly useful for getting a range of opinions and suggestions for future development of your service or activities. They can be used in conjunction with other research methods, for example as the first stage of a research process to discover what issues and concerns are important.

Disadvantages of focus groups

Fewer questions can be asked in a focus group than in a one-to-one interview, because of the time needed for group discussion. Focus groups are not appropriate if confidentiality is an issue or you require

sensitive data from individuals. You cannot use focus groups to generalise your findings – even though a range of opinions is generated – as they are the opinions of your focus group members only. Finally, the logistics of getting an appropriate balance of people together at a convenient time and place can be difficult.

Points to be aware of

- **the need for an experienced facilitator and for an observer**
- **the difficulty in recording what people say**
- **sometimes people are reluctant to discuss personal or political issues in a group**
- **occasionally people will agree with points made in order to avoid confrontation and argument**
- **a few people may dominate the discussion – though an experienced facilitator should prevent this**
- **the group may not challenge each other and therefore reach a conservative agreement**

- **People should be paid their travel and childcare costs. Sometimes they are also paid a small amount of money (£10) in recognition of their time.**

Designing your questions

Your starting point will be the research questions you have already identified, see page 18, 3c Designing your Research. Place these issues in logical order and develop questions. Start off with a general and fairly straightforward question to get people talking. Use each subsequent question to narrow the discussion and focus on the issues, moving from the general to the specific. For example move from what has happened to how it felt and then to suggestions for improvements if your research focuses on services. Your questions should not change topic randomly as this will inhibit discussion from flowing. Each question should relate to a specific issue but be broad enough to encourage a group response. This will include the sharing of experiences, ideas and opinions. Avoid closed questions that result in yes or no answers.

Example

This focus group was used to gain information from parents on their opinions of bringing up young children in the area their organisation was based in.

- 1 *Can you introduce yourselves and say what you most like about the area?*
- 2 *What do you least like about the area you live in?*
- 3 *What sort of things makes an area good for young children?*
- 4 *Do you feel there are things to do with young children in the area?*
- 5 *What is the one thing you would like to see in the area?*

When designing questions for the discussion you should also list prompt questions after each question explaining what you mean and encouraging the initiation of discussion or further elaboration. Discussion should last no longer than 90 minutes – obviously this limits the number of questions and issues that can be discussed.

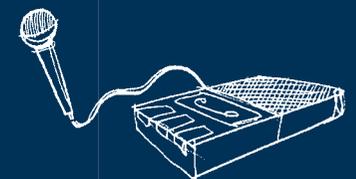
Who should be in the focus group?

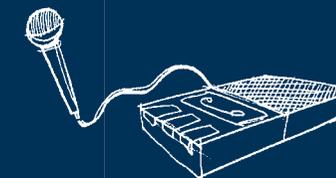
Members of focus groups need to have had direct experience of the topic or issue for discussion, or share particular relevant characteristics, for example:

- **all have used local public transport**
- **all have experienced being given the same diagnosis**
- **all live in a particular locality or area.**

In this way all the members of the focus group will have something in common. They are also likely to have differences between them such as gender, socio-economic status, age, sexuality and disability. You will need to decide how much the group needs to have in common and in what ways they are likely to be different from each other in order to provide a rich and detailed discussion with a range of views and opinions.

The groups can be focused on people with things in common – people of the same ethnic group, gender, sexuality or age, or people who are in long term unemployment or who live a particular housing estate. This can enable comparison between groups (although you will not be able to generalise your findings) or may highlight needs for different groups.





Ideally when recruiting use informal networks such as places of worship, community organisations and schools. Ensure you explain to people what you are researching and why.

How many should be run?

Often you will need to run more than one focus group. Some researchers may meet with the same group several times to explore one issue in depth. It is unlikely that a small organisation will have the resources to do this. In other pieces of research you may need to cover the views of people living in different areas, or with differing needs. For example, a group for parents of children with learning difficulties wants to conduct some research on the education services provided locally, and so they may need to hold separate groups for parents of children of different ages. Depending on the purpose of the research between three and ten groups should be enough.

Where to hold a focus group

The venue should be:

- local to where people live or work
- accessible to people with different needs

- warm and comfortable with refreshments provided
- an informal environment where people will feel free to express themselves.

Running the focus group

Before the group starts check that any equipment is working and make sure the seating arrangements will enable all group members' voices to be heard. Ask people to complete a short demographic questionnaire and explain that it is important to know the focus group's make-up.

Practical issues

- welcome people and put them at ease
- say when the session will end and go over housekeeping arrangements such as toilets and fire exits
- offer refreshments and give out name labels
- introduce your organisation, what you do and why you are running these focus groups. Explain how a focus group works and how it will contribute to your work or research.

- explain about recording and the role of the observer and facilitator
- establish ground rules for the meeting
- emphasise the confidential nature of the focus group and what this means in practice i.e. opinions and experiences, if quoted, will not be traceable to specific individuals
- use flipcharts throughout to note down the group's responses and issues that are important
- towards the end ask people how they have found the focus group – do this as a round with everyone having a chance to speak
- thank people for their time and their opinions and explain what will happen next with information they have given you
- when people have left, debrief as soon as possible and write down your own thoughts and feelings about the focus group.

Facilitating the discussion

The aim of the focus group is to encourage focused discussion and the more often the facilitator speaks the more disjointed the discussion is likely to become.

The interaction between the focus group members is all-important, as this will generate the rich detail and range of information. Hence the role of the facilitator is to guide the discussion as discreetly as possible.

A facilitator should

- use warm-up techniques to ensure everyone says something early on
- encourage members to contribute with prompts such as 'What do others think?' 'Why do you think that?' 'Does anyone disagree with this comment?'
- not offer judgment about anyone's contribution
- be assertive and stop some members from talking too much and at the same time ask direct questions to those who have said very little and wait for them to reply
- be flexible. If interesting points arise, take time to follow them up

- be sensitive to members' feelings.
- end the group on a positive note.

Role of the observer

A focus group will need an observer in addition to the facilitator who will

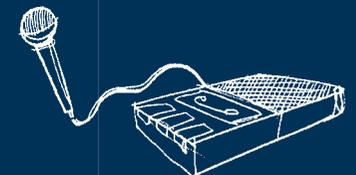
- be responsible for the recording equipment
- assist the facilitator if a group member becomes upset or angry
- help welcome people and set them at ease
- observe and make notes about important points, areas of conflict and tension, topics which provoke humour and other reactions
- take down quotes that seem particularly important or central to the discussion
- provide additional feedback to taped discussions and, where there is no taping, to provide the main narrative of the discussion.

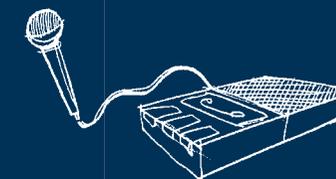
d Other investigative methods

There are a number of other ways of finding out what you need to know. You may find that they suit your approach and the focus of your research and that they complement any other research methods you are considering using. While some of these approaches may be beyond the scope of small organisations, think about adopting some of their principles, as they can provide fresh ways of eliciting people's views.

User panels

This involves users of a service meeting with those responsible for planning and running that particular service. They differ from focus groups in that they are set up to meet on a regular basis for an agreed period of time, say one year, in order to make improvements and ensure the service meets user needs. They are a tool for consultation that actively involves people, with an opportunity to voice concerns and questions and providing feedback.





Things to think about

For user panels to be really successful there are a number of factors to consider:

- **they need to involve a cross-section of users, management and day-to-day service deliverers. 10-12 people is ideal**
- **the more commitment shown by senior management, the more influence the group will have**
- **be clear about who you would want on the panel and why**
- **appoint members for a fixed period of time**
- **provide support and funding to enable people to attend, possibly using interpreters for community languages**
- **hold meetings at times and in places that encourage people to attend, not just the 'usual suspects'**
- **use other means of consulting to avoid total dependence on the panel. It is not an independent organisation**
- **make the time for members to take issues back to other groups in order to gain wider feedback and opinions**
- **take it seriously.**

Open and public meetings

These may be one-off events or a series of meetings about particular issues affecting the community. They are open to everyone and are held in public places that encourage people to attend. They are usually advertised through the local press and local networks. Sometimes particular groups are invited to attend and give presentations about relevant issues. Public meetings often have low attendance and those who do go can sometimes be seen as 'gatekeepers' of that community; you may need to check out whether their views are indeed representative.

Things to think about

- **People are more likely to attend if the issue affects them directly; publicity should be clear about the impact of the issue on people's lives.**
- **Use other methods in association with public meetings; the people who turn up will not be representative of the whole community.**
- **Provide a meal, refreshments or entertainment to encourage people to attend.**

- **Use the event to collect more information; try asking people to complete a short questionnaire whilst they are there.**
- **Use a variety of publicity channels such as newspaper, local group networks, attending local meetings to tell people about it, a lively leaflet.**
- **Ask people to let you know if they are attending especially if you are planning food and drinks.**
- **Give some thought to how the meeting will run; who will speak and for how long; what opportunity there will be for people to say what they want, how much of the meeting is about giving information and how much will be focused on information gathering.**
- **Record what has been said; arrange for note takers to be in attendance or tape record the meeting.**
- **Reporting: be clear how views from the meeting will be reported and taken forward.**
- **Provide interpreters, crèche facilities and a loop system to make attendance and participation easier.**

Written consultation exercises

A formal way of inviting people to make comments on proposals and policies.

Written documents are sent to people who are seen as having an interest in the issue or a useful contribution to make.

The documents should be clearly laid out and written in simple language with minimal jargon or technical terms. Try out the document on someone who knows nothing about the issue and see if it is clear to them. Remember that written papers will exclude those who do not read or write English and that other formats may be required to enable some disabled people to participate.

They should contain the following items:

- short summary
- description of issue, problem or proposal
- purpose of the consultation
- clear questions for response
- explanation of any decision already taken and why
- what information has already been gathered about the issue

- explanation about who is likely to be affected by the proposed changes and in what way
- timescale for responding
- how to send back responses
- list of those who are being consulted
- request for respondents to explain who they are and whose interests they represent
- statement that responses will be publicly available unless they request confidentiality

Things to think about

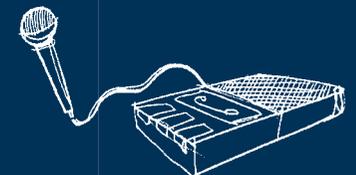
- publicise the consultation exercise
- use the internet if appropriate
- be prepared to consider printing documentation in other formats and languages
- allow enough time for people to consult other groups
- give feedback to respondents about the outcomes and decision taken as quickly as possible

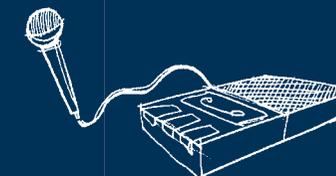
Oral history and story telling

This can be an excellent way of getting a great amount of rich detail and information about particular topics. Often oral history is used with older people as a way of finding out how neighbourhoods have changed. It can also be useful if you want to know how people with chronic conditions cope on a day-to-day basis and what their concerns might be. Asking people to tell their story is a very powerful way of gaining insight into people's lives and histories. If this is also done in a group context it can provide a supportive atmosphere for people to remember significant events in their own lives and in the life of the community.

Things to think about

- find someone who is skilled at working with people in this way; people may recount traumatic events or memories that cause grief and it is important to support people in this process
- when doing this work with groups it is crucial to invite people with common histories. Otherwise individuals can feel left out and isolated if they are not able to take part in the discussion.





Participatory approaches

These methods of eliciting and representing issues and concerns can be used with many different types of groups about very different concerns, problems and issues. They have been developed with the specific of giving a voice to those who often go unheard.

They all hold in common an approach that tries to get beyond words and encourages people to show the issues and concerns in ways that create an impact. Participatory approaches were developed, and are still primarily used, in Africa, Asia and South America. More recently there has been great interest in adapting these approaches to work in the UK. Some of the organisations listed in Further Resources, section 7a hold special courses in participative approaches. The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation has pioneered an approach called 'Planning for Real' that is particularly relevant for community development and planning.

Creative approaches

These can also be very participative and involve people in making or doing something for public view. They can bring people together around local issues in ways that meetings may not.

- **Videos**

Making a community video will involve learning new skills and will promote discussion around what to edit out and what to include. In the process of making the video explanations will have to be given to local people thereby increasing the number of people who know about the research. The end product is tangible and can be used for a variety of purposes from fundraising to promotion.

- **Photographs**

Taking photographs about people or an area is a fairly similar process to making a video. You could hold a public exhibition of photos that show the issues, concerns and strengths of a community. It is a tangible end product and can be very useful to raise further discussions.

- **Murals and paintings**

A more permanent artifact is a wall painting or mural that depicts the issues which are important to people. It is preferable to work with a community artist as the end product should be of high quality to gain credibility and show people the value of what they can do. It may be useful to keep a photo diary of the work in progress and notes of the comments made in group discussions in order to produce a publication at the end of the project.

- **Community theatre**

This is a very participative way of working with groups of people, with a view to putting on a public performance around specific issues and concerns. It is crucial to work with experienced directors who specialise in this type of theatre, as the high standard of performance will affect the longer outcome. It is a very useful way of working with groups to bring out the issues before performance takes place. It is also useful when the performance is linked to workshops to discuss issues raised. This approach can be used with small groups of performers or with larger groups of up to 50 people.