Queensland Government

Community engagement techniques

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> **Queensland Health would like to acknowledge the Scottish Department of Communities for much of the information in this document. For a comprehensive range of community engagement resources and techniques, visit the Scottish Department of Communities website at:**
>
> http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/scrcs_006693.hcsp

Community engagement ranges from simple information sharing to consultation and finally, to active participation. This document provides detailed information about techniques that can be used when engaging with communities.

Information sharing

This is defined as a 'one-way relationship in which government departments, private organisations or community based groups deliver information to the general public or wider community' [2]. Information sharing can be either passive access to information by people through avenues such as the telephone, publications and websites, or active measures to disseminate information to the community through education and awareness raising activities.

Information sharing techniques

Effective information sharing requires information that:

> is accurate and easy to understand

> is easy to access

> is relevant and interesting to the intended audience

> is delivered through appropriate channels

> is tailored where necessary in language, style and content

> directs the community to where they can access further information if required [4].

Local information sharing techniques include:

> paid advertising

> briefings

> community fairs or events

> community meetings

> displays

> education and awareness programs

> fact sheets

> informal club forums

> media stories

> news conferences

> newsletters

> newspaper inserts

> online information processes

> shop fronts

> telephone hotlines [4].

Consultation

This is defined as a 'two-way relationship in which the general community provide feedback on issues' [8]. Feedback consists of the views of individuals or communities on policies, programs or services that affect them directly or in which they may have a significant interest.

Consultation can occur at various points in the policy, project or program development and planning process and can be used to help frame an issue, identify or access options and evaluate existing policies, programs or services. Consultation can involve issues that are specific or quite general.

Critical elements of effective consultation include a shared understanding of how community input will inform policy or decision making processes, and timely feedback to participants on how their input contributed to the final outcome [8].

Consultation techniques

Local consultation techniques include:

> committees

> focus groups

> anecdote circles

> discussion groups

> online consultation (using the Internet)

> appreciative inquiry

> public meetings

> petitions

> polls

> interactive displays

> open house events

> open space events

> one-on-one interviews

> public scrutiny

> opinion surveys.

More information about each of these consultation methods is provided below.

Committees

A committee is a small group of concerned people, usually elected or appointed, working together to deal with a particular concern. Committees need a clear task to complete and should follow proper meeting procedures to ensure everyone gets a say. A committee established to look at falls prevention in a local area might have representation from older people's groups, local service providers, local government and local service organisations. Agreed terms of reference, a clear agenda and minutes are also needed. The aim of a committee is to reach agreement on future actions (unlike focus groups and discussion groups) [8].

Focus groups

These are small group discussions that generate in-depth information on a specific topic. Focus groups need to be kept relatively small so members have the opportunity to contribute and there is scope for discussion between participants. Normally, they should involve no more than ten people. A discussion guide should be agreed in advance and someone should be identified to lead the group discussion. Make sure questions are simple, and will draw out the issues you are keen to explore. This is especially important with focus groups of older people where care will need to be taken around issues of confidentiality, comfort and trust [8].

Anecdote circles

Anecdote circles are similar to focus groups but the aim is to gather stories and experiences, rather than opinions. Basically, you ask a small group of people (normally between four and twelve) to tell you their stories about a particular topic. Explore themes, but don't seek agreement, action or answers – just gather experiences. Older people are a rich source of experience and history. This can be very useful to planners and decision makers [8].

Discussion groups

A discussion group involves gathering concerned local people to examine issues in detail and express a range of opinions. Discussion groups can be a useful way of gathering personal or qualitative data. These groups need to be carefully facilitated to ensure everyone gets a chance to speak. This is especially important when older people are involved. For example, a discussion group could be held using languages other than English to encourage community consultation with people who don't speak English as their first language [8].

Online consultation (using the Internet)

The increasing use of the Internet presents a range of new communication and consultative opportunities. Building in ways for the community to use the Internet and other online methods (eg. email) to provide feedback allows the consultation process to reach further. It also enables community members who might not be able to participate using other methods to be involved eg. older people, people with a disability, those not confident enough to go to public meetings and those in rural and remote areas.

Appreciative inquiry

Appreciative inquiry is a way of organising a group discussion to focus on the positive aspects of the issue being discussed. Appreciative inquiry focuses on identifying the best of existing practices by looking at what currently works well. This information is then used to think about how existing activities could be improved in the future [8].

Public meetings

By organising a public meeting, you are offering everyone in the community to attend and have their opinion heard. To facilitate consultation, it is important to have a strong chairperson who can make sure that the meeting flows properly and that all get a chance to speak, not just those with the loudest voices.

Petitions

By creating a petition, community members have an opportunity to 'make a stand' about an issue by signing. This commitment to an issue can be very important as a first step to further community engagement and subsequent local activity.

Polls

Allowing people the chance to register their opinion via a local poll is a good way to quickly assess the current situation. A simple vote on a topic will give you an idea of the level of local awareness and support for an issue, and open up the way for other engagement strategies.

Interactive displays

Interactive displays allow people to make comments and give feedback on information or options presented to them through a display. Interactive displays can be set up in different ways. For example, it could simply involve giving people the opportunity to ask questions, or other methods such as stickers, comment cards or graffiti walls could be used to obtain feedback. Interactive displays can be a useful technique for involving people who are not used to being consulted on their views, or who may be less confident about expressing their views using more traditional engagement methods [8].

Open house events

An open house event involves using a local venue as a drop in centre, allowing people to gather information and share their views. An open house event should run over at least a whole day and evening to enable different people to access the event. By allowing people attend whenever they want and for as long as they wish, involvement by a wider cross section of the community is possible. Generally, events are held in trusted and well-known local venues such as libraries, senior citizens centres, community or neighbourhood centres or schools. At the event, people should have the opportunity to gather information (eg. through stalls and displays) as well as share their views (eg. through workshops). People should be able to choose which parts of the event they would like to participate in. To attract people to the open house event, 'fun' elements should also be included eg. games for children and classes for adults [8].

Open space events

Open space events bring together a range of people to discuss issues around a central theme. The events are based around workshops that participants create and manage themselves. Open space helps to translate detailed discussions into action plans. It provides an opportunity to bring together the knowledge of all participants and is attractive because they set the workshop agendas. Although it appears to be flexible and informal, there are strong reporting and recording structures in place. Events are based on a central theme and participants agree on issues that are important. These are prioritised to form workshops for the event. Open space allows the most important issues to be raised and gives people for whom these issues are most relevant, the opportunity to discuss them. The workshop groups are a way of bringing together all the issues, data and ideas around a topic. The discussions of each workshop are recorded, and participants can access them at the end of the event. A condensed action plan can then be determined, and circulated to participants. Open space has been found to be a very effective technique that focuses ideas and is a catalyst for quickly translating them into action [8].

One-on-one interviews

By seeking out people and asking them a series of well planned questions, you can gain an understanding of the 'general opinion' about a topic. The data gathered during such interviews needs to be carefully analysed and reported to provide an accurate representation of public opinion. The number of people interviewed should be as large as realistically possible to ensure the full range of community views is captured. Involving people one-on-one is also a good way of raising community awareness, and finding and recruiting others who may be able to help progress the issue.

Public scrutiny

This approach gives people the opportunity to find out more about how public services are run, and to ask questions about how they are delivered. Public scrutiny involves bringing together communities and service providers to give people the opportunity to review how services are provided. The scope of this scrutiny can vary from simply allowing the opportunity to ask questions, through to being able to influence how services are developed and delivered in the future. In some cases, public scrutiny can be ongoing which provides a framework for monitoring how services are provided and getting feedback on customer satisfaction. This approach is useful when you are keen to ensure that your services meet the needs of older service users, and you are prepared to act on the results of public involvement. You should give some thought to how confrontational the event could be. If there are high levels of dissatisfaction, public scrutiny could be challenging and you will need to be prepared to make changes. Trying to develop an ongoing relationship with people involved in monitoring service provision on a longer term basis could be a way of beginning to build trust [8].

Opinion surveys

Opinion surveys involve people responding to a questionnaire, either by completing a form or answering the questions in an interview eg. door-to-door/ street interviews. Opinion surveys are a good way to:

> find out the opinions of local people on a particular topic in a structured way that can be extensively analysed

> gather data on the profile of an area

> provide a baseline for measuring changes in people's views

> inform people about the study or initiative that is taking place

> prompt further involvement by asking if people would like to receive information or invitations to future events

> reach a large number of people and involve those who may not be in a position to engage in other ways.

With postal surveys, a better response is usually achieved if there is a prize draw for returned questionnaires. Door-to-door surveys mean the quality and level of response may be better and they also allow a greater level of personal interaction. Door-to-door surveys can also ensure that certain groups such as older people are targeted [2].

Active participation

This is defined as 'a collaboration in which community members actively shape policy options, but where the responsibility for final decisions rests elsewhere' [2]. Active participation recognises and acknowledges a role for the general public in shaping policy dialogue and proposing policy, program and service options. Active participation processes enable individuals and communities to raise their own issues with government, the corporate sector and the non-government or community based sectors and can also encourage or enable participants to take responsibility for their contribution to solutions. Responsibility for authoritative decisions or policy formulation usually rests with government but may, in some instances, be shared with citizens or institutions [2].

Active participation techniques

Active participation techniques can include:

> participatory action research

> advisory committees

> charrettes

> citizens' juries

> community conferences and seminars

> legislative theatre/drama workshops

> story dialogue

> focus groups

> scenario planning

> partnerships for active participation

- › future search

- › the LENS method

- › planning for real

- › citizens' panels

- › participatory rapid appraisal

- › collective learning techniques (World Café)

- › graphic recording

- › community forums

- › community animateurs

- › community visioning

- › community auditing and profiling.

More information about each of these active participation methods is provided below.

Participatory action research

Participatory action research (PAR) has emerged in recent years as a significant methodology for intervention and change within communities and groups. Put simply, action research is 'learning by doing' - a group of people identify a problem, do something to resolve it, see how successful their efforts were, and if not satisfied, try again. PAR is a method of research where creating a positive social change is the predominant driving force. PAR grew out of social and educational research and exists today as one of the few research methods which embraces principles of participation and reflection, as well as the empowerment and emancipation of groups seeking to improve their social situation. It is now promoted and implemented by many international development agencies and university programs, and countless local community organisations around the world [7].

Advisory committees

By gathering a group of knowledgeable local stakeholders together, you can develop an advisory structure that adds value to a project or community consultation process. An agreed terms of reference needs to be in place and it is important to clearly establish that the committee has an advisory role only.

Charrettes

A charrette is a way of organising community engagement over a short, intensive time period eg. two to three days. Before the charrette, identify key stakeholders and invite them to attend, organise the venue, refreshments and accommodation, plan the agenda (leaving plenty time for breaks and networking) and identify and address any barriers to participation. The charrette involves listening to the views of all stakeholders, profiling needs and experiences, creative thinking about possible future options and visualisation of, and planning for, the future. It is vital that you take action after the charrette by summarising the key findings and providing feedback to all participants so they know what will happen next, and how to stay involved [9].

Citizens' juries

A citizens' jury is a small group of people who meet over a short period of time (eg. between three and five days) to be informed about a specific local issue or topic (eg. falls among older people in the area) and to debate the issue in order to come to conclusions or identify solutions. Citizens' juries are organised by an agency or organisation to gain public input on a particular decision or identified areas for action. Juries can feed into particular decisions by an organisation or debate a specific topic and make recommendations about it. For example, a single-issue topic could be a decision on where to site a residential aged care facility. A jury could also be held to discuss senior safety and debate potential solutions. The format is broadly similar to that of a court case, with members drawn from the community. The jury is presented with evidence and can question and discuss this with the 'witnesses' presenting verbal evidence. An independent moderator leads the jury in their discussion. Once all the information has been considered and presented and the jury has had sufficient time for deliberation, they make a series of recommendations. Citizens' juries can be expensive to run due to the level of staff input required. The main requirements are a suitable venue and the time spent organising the event, preparing evidence and recruiting jurors [8].

Community conferences and seminars

Community conferences bring together local people to receive information and give feedback on issues of shared interest. Community conferences provide an opportunity to inform local people and receive feedback on the plans, service developments or strategies for an area. Community conferences are one-off events and can be limited in terms of the depth of community engagement that can be obtained. However, they can also be the first step in developing more in-depth community involvement.

Legislative theatre/drama workshops

Legislative theatre is one example of using the arts to promote public involvement in relation to service provision. Legislative theatre can be used to increase interest in local issues and developments, particularly among individuals or target groups that may not engage using traditional methods such as public meetings. Legislative theatre can assist policy makers in identifying local priorities and consulting on issues and service developments. Local people are involved in developing a play that it is relevant to their local area. During performances, the audience is encouraged to participate so that there is interaction and debate. For example, theatre could used to promote public involvement in a falls prevention program. Volunteers could develop a play detailing the life of an older person. In the course of the performance, audiences could be asked to comment on the issues arising and to suggest changes and initiatives that could make a difference to the older person's life. Good practice recommends that this process should be part of a wider process of community development and be organised by an agency with access to good local links and networks. The agency organising the process needs to be clear on what they want to learn and what they intend to do with any feedback received [8].

Story dialogue

This approach involves bringing together people with different experiences of an issue to raise awareness and create understanding. Story dialogue involves sharing experiences about a particular issue. It can be used as a way of raising awareness about an issue. For example, to get people involved in falls prevention issues, you could bring together all the different people who have a view on the issue such as older people, health care providers, older people's advocates, social workers, and so on. A critical part of the story dialogue approach is to

ensure that all participants are able to put across their views and experiences in a non-judgmental setting. Story dialogue is best used when everyone has different opinions and views on an issue, and you are keen to build understanding and work jointly to address the issue [8].

Scenario planning

Scenario planning is a technique that tests out a number of 'future scenarios' for the development of a community or neighbourhood. By looking into the future, scenario planning can help communities or organisations explore the impact of decisions. These are usually quite specific scenarios such as the building of new public spaces in a community or the siting of a new bus route [8].

Partnerships for active participation

Working in partnership with communities involves a long term commitment to engaging with individuals and groups. This is often seen as the most intensive community engagement method, as it involves participation and influence of communities within decision making structures. Partnerships with communities involve ensuring people are able to influence the decisions that are made on a particular issue through long term involvement in decision making structures. This can involve setting up a community engagement structure which feeds into decision making. Partnership working with communities doesn't always have to happen through formal partnership structures. Putting in place agreements to involve communities in your decisions through consultative events and feedback can be another way of working in partnership, provided community views are really taken into account. This is a valuable way of ensuring that the skills and experiences of communities are able to influence the planning and delivery of services and activities. It can be a way of providing an overall structure to your community engagement activities [8].

Future search

Future search is a way of organising intensive meetings and discussions about future actions on a particular issue. It involves bringing together large groups of people (at least 60 to 80 people) to discuss their experiences and plan for the future. Future search is a specific technique with a standard methodology that should be followed. Future search involves bringing together everyone with an involvement in the issue for three days (two nights). People work in small groups as 'stakeholders' (people with shared perspectives) and in mixed groups (people with different views). Every person has a chance to speak and listen. At times, the

whole group comes together to discuss issues. This makes it possible to develop a shared understanding based on the experiences of all those present. The minimum length for a future search event is four half-day sessions, spread across three days to allow for 'soak time' [8].

The LENS method

Developed in Holland in the early 1990s, the LENS method offers an alternative approach to traditional survey methods. LENS allows issues arising from resident surveys to be explored in more detail and potential solutions to be examined. Usually, surveys focus on the existing situation and give people a limited number of potential responses. LENS provides an alternative based on 'future analysis', finding out what people want to see happening in the future. It allows greater creativity in people's responses, generating a wide range of ideas for community development. It works through a series of question and answer sessions between a researcher and a residents panel. Residents are initially asked to respond to a series of set questions about living in their area. Respondents can then attend panel meetings where responses to the survey are discussed and priorities for action are identified. The outcome is a detailed plan setting out priorities, solutions, responsibilities and resources required [8].

Planning for real

Planning for real has been used since the late 1970s as a way to bring about improvements to neighbourhoods and communities. It gives local people a 'voice' and professionals a clear idea of local people's needs. Planning for real is a practical technique involving a 3D architectural model of a local area, which people use to decide what needs to be done to improve their surroundings. Seniors groups have used it to tackle all sorts of issues relating to housing, traffic, community safety, vandalism and the living environment (eg. parks and play areas). Planning for real engages people, gives them an overview, generates ideas and gives them a chance to join in. Working out what is best for a neighbourhood depends on all kinds of expert knowledge: from planners to the designers to local organisations. All these people are used to study plans and diagrams of their patch. The model gives local people without this technical knowledge a way of seeing how the neighbourhood might look after development plans have been implemented. Problems and opportunities that remain hidden or only partly seen from street level are often more apparent from the overview offered by a 3D model. From its roots in the late 1970s, planning for real has been developed and successfully applied to areas of open

space, derelict sites and town centres as well as housing estates (small and large). As the technique has been successfully applied in different situations, it has gained recognition among funders of projects as well as community workers and groups. Planning for real has been used as part of project bids to show potential funders the degree of community involvement in the proposed project and also to establish the credibility of a project with local people [8].

Citizens' panels

Citizens' panels involve a representative sample of the local population (between 500 to 3,000 people) who have agreed to take part in consultation activity. Potential participants are normally recruited by random sampling, or door to door recruitment. Panel membership should be broadly representative of the population, so consider issues like age, gender, ethnic origin and disability when recruiting members. Panel members are asked to complete surveys on a regular basis. You can choose to ask the whole panel to fill in the survey, or target particular groups eg. older people, minority ethnic groups. Often citizens' panels are set up jointly (eg. by community planning partners) so surveys can explore a range of different issues in a coordinated way. Generally, citizens' panels can achieve high response rates, and are fairly cost effective. They can also measure whether people's views are changing over time, which helps to assess the impact of service developments [8].

Participatory rapid appraisal

Participatory rapid appraisal is a way of using lots of different community engagement techniques to understand community views on a particular issue. The aim is to enable local people to assess the issue, and make their own plans to address it. It is usually done quickly and intensively over a two or three week period. A series of methods, including interviews, focus groups, mapping, events and so on are held during this time. The process is designed and led by local people [8].

Collective learning technique (World Café)

The World Café is a living network of conversations around questions that matter. It is an easy-to-use method for fostering collaborative dialogue, particularly in large groups. Using the World Café empowers leaders and other professionals to intentionally create focused networks of conversation around an organisation or community's real work and critical questions. World Café conversations assume people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges. They are based on the natural process by which

authentic conversations enable people to think together, create shared meaning, strengthen community and ignite innovation. Given the appropriate context and focus, World Café dialogues allow members to access their mutual intelligence to achieve desired outcomes. The process is simple, yet often yields surprising results. In a World Café gathering, you join several other people at a café-style table or in a small conversation cluster to explore a question or issue that really matters to your life, work or community. Others are seated at nearby tables or in conversation clusters exploring similar questions at the same time. People are noting down or sketching out key ideas on the Café's paper tablecloths or large cards. From these intimate conversations, members carry key ideas and insights into new small groups. This cross-pollination of perspectives is one of the hallmarks of the World Café. As people and ideas connect together in progressive rounds of conversation, collective knowledge grows and evolves. A sense of the larger whole becomes real. Innovative possibilities for action are made visible. For more information, visit: www.theworldcafe.com

Graphic recording

Graphic recording involves the using an artist to represent the ongoing discussions at an event using symbols or pictures. This artist could be a professional, or could involve a nominated community representative or facilitator. The pictures are drawn during the discussions for all to see, meaning that people have the opportunity to see what people are saying. This approach is particularly useful for anyone who has literacy difficulties, learning difficulties or people who do not speak English as their first language. However, it can be an interesting way of involving communities in discussions. This approach would usually work best with a professional artist, to ensure the discussions are effectively displayed visually [8].

Community forums

Community forums usually operate on an area-based level. They bring together local people to discuss issues, which then feed into area-based strategies or partnerships. They allow structured community representation on strategies, activities and partnerships that affect the local area. Community forums also provide a regular link between organisations and local people, and encourage long-term involvement by the community.

Community animateurs

Community animateurs help promote and organise the participation of local people in activities that help make positive changes to their community. Animateurs are recruited from the local community and can receive fees and training for a fixed time period. The role of the animateur is to provide a focus for increasing community involvement and input in development programs in their local area eg. falls prevention initatives, health programs, crime prevention programs. It can also be used to increase local skills and provide employment training. Animateurs work with local voluntary groups to help them develop their work. They can become involved in community audits, deliver training on community issues and undertake work placements in a range of community and health organisations [8].

Community visioning

Community visioning involves a group of people coming together to develop ideas about what they would ideally like their community to be like. Assisted by a trained facilitator, groups meet to agree on a vision for their area, look at ways of achieving this vision and work to develop an action plan [8]. Visioning can be used on an area-based level, for community regeneration planning or to examine specific services eg. health and education. Community visioning encourages ownership and is a positive approach to talking about change. It also provides an opportunity for the community and service providers to work together on developing agreed, shared priorities and actions. Community visioning can involve conference or workshop events. Agreeing on the vision and the action plan is likely to take place over a period of months.

Community auditing and profiling

Community auditing uses a range of different techniques to build up a picture of the profile, needs and experiences of a group of people. This could be in a particular area, or a particular community of interest or to explore a particular issue. For example, you could undertake a community health audit, or a community safety audit. You should gather information about the community using the following methods:

› reviewing existing quantitative data

› conducting surveys, focus groups and resident interviews

› visual methods eg. mapping strengths and weaknesses of the area, neighbourhood walks.

The community engagement methods used should be based on local circumstances. Make sure you involve communities in designing the way your community audit will be undertaken [4].

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