

s c r u t i n y



Scrutiny Research Team

A literature review of engaging hard to reach / hear groups

**Research report for the
Local service board scrutiny panel**

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1. Introduction

This study was commissioned by the LSB Panel to establish :

- What are 'hard to reach / hear' groups
- What are the main difficulties encountered trying to engage these groups
- What techniques can be used to overcome these difficulties and which principles need to be considered when attempting to engage with hard to reach / hear groups.
- How to avoid domination by specific interest groups.
- Examples of good and bad practice in consulting hard to reach groups.

2. Background

There is currently a strong emphasis from both local and national government on improving policy making and service delivery in public organisations (Reid 2002). The focus is on modernising government and providing best value in services. Public participation, accountability and openness in decision making are key elements of this, making consultation a central part of both national and local governments' improvement strategies (Reid 2002).

Decision makers are now realising the benefits of public consultation in identifying specific local issues and solutions, improving transparency and accountability as well as giving communities a stake in the policies that affect them. All of these factors mean that effective public consultation is key to the development of almost any new policy or initiative. This increased emphasis on consultation does however bring with it certain issues that need to be addressed in order that the consultation that is conducted is both meaningful and effective.

Many consultations in the past by both national and local governments have relied on public meetings and focus groups to gather people's opinions on a particular policy or initiative. While these techniques do help to gather peoples

opinions they tend to attract those who are most politically active or hold a specific interest in a particular topic. They do little to try and discover the opinions of the so called 'hard to reach' in an area, who require a far greater degree of focus and effort in order to be engaged in the consultation process . The fact that people do not attend such consultations does not mean that they are not interested or hold no opinion on the subject matter (Nottinghamshire County Council 2007). In fact many of those unrepresented at a consultation could hold valuable information or opinions that could help in the development process. There may however be issues around communication, trust, confidence, or financial constraints which affect whether a person can contribute effectively to a consultation process.

As such it is vital for national and local governments alike to have some form of strategy for consulting those who are 'hard to reach' in their consultations. Some previous efforts by local authorities to consult 'hard to reach' or minority groups have been seen as an afterthought to the consultation process and are therefore perceived as 'tokenistic' (Reid 2002). This paper will examine what exactly 'hard to reach / hear' means, some of the difficulties in engaging such groups, techniques to overcome these difficulties and some examples of good practice.

3. What are 'hard to reach / hear' groups?

When examining the majority of the literature surrounding the terms 'hard to reach / hear' there is a distinct lack of clarity about its definition (Freimuth et al 1990). The terms are often used inconsistently to describe any form of minority groups such as homeless people, gays or lesbians, drug users, disabled people and even young or old people. These are the groups that are often identified as being those most difficult to engage in the political process and to gauge opinions. However many commentators argue that using an umbrella term such as hard to reach / hear to describe such groups implies a homogeneity within groups that does not exist (Brackertz 2008, Freimuth and

Mettger 1990). In so doing 'it defines the problem as one within the group itself, not within your approach to them' (Smith 2006)

The result of such an approach is that the terms 'hard to reach / hear' can become loaded and can result in potentially stigmatising or pejorative terminology (Murphy 2006). Freimuth et al (1990) have identified "Hard-to-reach" audiences being called obstinate, recalcitrant, chronically uninformed, disadvantaged, have-nots, illiterate, malfunctioning, and information poor. They argue that these labels reflect communicators' frustration in trying to reach people unlike themselves, and that the responsibility for engaging these groups lies with the consulting organisation and not the groups themselves. Therefore the term 'hard to reach / hear' is context specific and there is no single list that can define groups of people that are hard to reach (Nottinghamshire County Council 2007, Freimuth et al 1990). Those groups that are hard to reach / hear in one area may be highly involved in the political process elsewhere.

The physical number of a particular group is not the only factor which contributes a group being hard to reach /hear however. There are other issues that can contribute to a specific group or population being difficult to engage. Disappointment from previous consultations resulting in a lack of trust within a community can make large numbers of people 'hard to reach / hear' as they may have become disaffected with the consultation process (Brackertz 2008). The problem of people being over consulted too can often result in particular groups being disillusioned or particularly selective about the type of consultation they take part in.

One factor to bear in mind about hard to reach / hear groups is that some of the more recent literature does distinguish between hard to reach and hard to hear. Damoderen et al (2006) argue that hard to reach groups are those which are difficult to consult with due to problems with access. Hard to hear groups on other hand may be easily accessible groups, but may lack the confidence, motivation or resources (financial, knowledge or skills) to engage in a particular project or initiative. This is an important distinction as it takes

differing skills to engage with those who are hard to reach, who may have the capacity to engage but are not easily accessed, than it does with those who are hard to hear, who may be easily accessible but lack the skills to engage and require. The hard to hear therefore may need to up-skill and build their capacity before they can properly engage in the consultation process. In addition to this it is also important to recognise that hard to reach groups can also often also be hard to hear.

However as this study examines issues and techniques which cover both those which are 'hard to reach' and 'hard to hear' the term 'hard to reach' will be used to avoid confusion through the rest of this study.

There are a range of factors affecting whether a group is 'hard to reach' and the following section will look at these in more detail before section 4 examines some of the principles and techniques that can be used to help overcome these difficulties.

4. What are the main barriers encountered when trying to engage these groups

As section 2 highlighted, the 'hard to reach / hear' are not a single group, rather the term is context specific and can therefore apply to almost any group of people depending on the area and circumstances. As such there are numerous barriers which can be encountered when trying to engage such a variety of people depending on the situation. It is therefore almost impossible to make a comprehensive list of the barriers that can be encountered on such a context specific term. There are however certain overarching barriers which can be identified that can apply to almost all groups which are being consulted and should be identified and addressed before any consultation takes place:

4.1. Methodological barriers:

The methods used in a consultation can have an impact on its effectiveness and whether those hardest to reach will be involved (Nottinghamshire County Council 2007). The typical local authority practice of relying on one off public meetings or a small number of focus groups for example is unlikely to attract new participants to a consultation process.

Advertising the process through written signage alone can discriminate against the illiterate and those with visual impairments while those who are disillusioned, mistrusting of the local council or politicians or lacking in confidence are also unlikely to attend.

Therefore the most important thing about the choice of consultation methodology as identified in the majority of the literature is to use multiple methods (Reid 2002, Brakertz et al 2008, Tumbridge Wells Borough Council 2008). There are numerous consultation techniques and methodologies which can be used in a wide variety of areas and appeal to people from differing cultures or backgrounds. To ensure that a consultation reaches those who are hardest to reach it is vital to choose the appropriate methods by examining any specific needs of a particular group. These techniques and principles will be expanded upon in section 4.

4.2. Physical barriers:

Another barrier to the effective consultation of hard to reach groups are physical barriers. An obvious example of this would be holding a consultation event for people with disabilities in a venue that does not cater effectively to their needs. There are however other considerations to be taken into account when examining physical barriers such as access for parents with young children, ensuring there are enough / correct facilities at events and the provision of childcare for parents who may need it.

Barriers to access are not just physical in terms of the architecture, structure or layout of the building or in its access arrangements. Environmental factors

such as the design and materials used in fixtures and fittings, signage, acoustics, sight lines and lighting can also have a major effect on accessibility (Nottinghamshire county Council 2007).

4.3. Attitudinal barriers :

Differing significantly from physical barriers, attitudinal barriers can have just as substantial an impact on consulting with the hard to reach and can have a longer lasting effect on those who are consulted. Attitudinal barriers consist of how those conducting the consultation approach and respond to groups and individuals and the assumptions they may make. Staff may have poor awareness of differing cultures or people with disabilities and could easily offend without any intention (Reid 2002). A great deal of work may have gone into getting a particular group to participate and this work can easily be undermined by a consultants' actions or attitude. This can not only affect the current consultation but can also have a dramatic impact on future consultations as groups are unlikely to continue to participate if they feel unhappy or insulted by attitudes or actions (Brakertz 2008).

4.4. Financial / Resource problems:

It is important to remember that some hard to reach groups may not have the finances or resources that other groups may have (Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power 2000). This issue may be as simple as individuals or groups not being able to travel to a particular consultation because of transportation costs. Certain groups may also lack resources to respond to written consultation or may lack internet access for online consultation. It is therefore important to consider any resource implications for the groups that are targeted before the consultation takes place (Reid 2002).

4.5. Cultural

As consulting with hard to reach groups can often involve ethnic minorities, it is vital to consider the cultural barriers that could occur during a consultation

(Reid 2002). This could be as simple as difficulties with language, so documents may require translation or interpreters may be required for face to face consultations. Certain facilities may also be inappropriate for particular cultures, while certain dates may be more significant to individual cultures which can strongly impact on their ability to attend a consultation.

Printed materials are seldom the best method for contacting hard to reach groups, particularly from differing cultures. Significant numbers of people who speak languages other than English, cannot read or write in that language.

4.6. Gender

When consulting with certain groups it is important to consider whether the gender of those conducting the consultation may be issues. It may be advisable when consulting an all male group to have a male facilitator as they may feel more comfortable and more open in their discussions with a fellow male. The same can be said of an all women's group who may be more forthcoming with a female facilitator. This issue may be more influential when dealing with particularly sensitive topics or groups such as domestic violence or medical issues.

There are also issues to consider when planning a consultation which can have an impact dependant on the gender of those targeted. The location, timing and type of consultation can all have an impact on whether people may be able to access a consultation. Meetings held late at night may prevent women especially older women, from attending as they may not feel comfortable going out in the evening. Consultations in clubs or bars may also be more attractive to males while not so attractive to women which may be also applicable to certain cultural groups.

4.7. Timing

It is critical to take the timing of any consultation into consideration especially when targeting hard to reach groups. Even if the correct methods have been selected and the cultural, physical, attitudinal and financial problems have

been addressed, the timing of a consultation can still have a dramatic impact on its success. Conducting a consultation during the day for example would usually exclude young people from the proceedings, unless it were a school holiday, as well as people who may be at work. On the other hand older people can be wary of going out in the evening and so might not partake in a consultation when its dark. As mentioned in the section on culture above, certain cultures may have significant dates throughout the year which may also prevent them from taking part (Reid 2002).

All of these factors need to be taken into account when considering the timing of a consultation and must be examined individually depending on the groups that are trying to be reached.

4.8. Consultation fatigue

Many groups feel that they are being consulted on everything. As government guidance emphasises the need for as many groups as possible to be included, similar groups can often be consulted on numerous occasions. This problem is difficult to avoid and groups themselves should be allowed to decide whether they wish to respond and what they prioritise as most relevant (Reid 2002).

Clearly there are some considerable barriers which need to be taken into account when attempting to engage with those identified as hardest to reach. It is important to recognise that some groups may have none of these problems while others may be affected by a multitude of these problems. The most important thing to remember is that hard to reach / hear groups are not homogenous, and each group has to be examined on an individual basis to see which of the potential problems may arise with them. In so doing it will be possible to highlight potential problems and implement a consultation strategy that will help alleviate these issues through using differing methodologies and techniques. It is therefore vital to take into account that no single consultation

method is ever likely to provide the answer to effective consultation and each group has its own individual issues, needs and priorities. Section four shall therefore go on to highlight potential techniques and principles for engagement of hard to reach / hear groups which can help avoid some of the barriers identified in this section.

5. What techniques can be used to overcome these difficulties and which principles need to be considered when attempting to engage with hard to reach / hear groups.

There are numerous consultation techniques that can help to engage particular hard to reach / hear groups but these are context specific. This section will first outline a set of common principles identified from the literature that should be considered when trying to engage with the hard to reach / hear groups. This will be followed by some generic techniques which can help effectively engage with hard to reach / hear groups. The final section will then give a brief examination into some of the issues and potential methodological solutions for dealing with some of the more common 'hard to reach / hear' groups.

Appendix 1 provides a comprehensive list of consultation techniques as well as their strengths, weaknesses and cost. This list should be examined when attempting to select the most appropriate consultation methodology for particular groups.

Principles to consider when consulting with hard to reach / hear groups.

These were identified from a wide selection of the literature including Cheltenham Borough Council 2000, Brackertz 2008, Reid 2002:

a) Hard to reach / hear groups should be included in all consultations

It is important that the opinions of all are included in any consultation to help inform decision making and have a more accountable development process. The inclusion of hard to reach / hear groups may mean that the process takes slightly longer but it will also help to ensure that all factors have been taken into consideration for a development.

b) Use a variety of methods

One consultation method will rarely be enough to gather the opinions of all the people required especially when dealing with hard to reach groups. Methods need to be selected according to the group being targeted. Staff needs to be trained in effective consultation techniques to ensure they are aware of the best possible methodologies

c) Plan Effectively

Consultation with these groups requires careful planning and enough time should be allocated for effective consultation at each stage of the process

d) Be clear about who your 'hard to reach / hear' groups are.

Hard to reach / hear groups are not homogenous so there is a need to find out as much as possible about the target audience in order to recognise potential difficulties and address them accordingly.

e) Work out how to get their attention

Every group in society can be reached somehow. Find out which organisations already talk to your audience and see what works.

f) Work out what you want from those you are consulting with

Before consulting look at what you are trying to achieve. This will avoid asking irrelevant questions to prospective consultees.

g) Identify whether literacy is an issue

It has been estimated that around seven million adults in England and Wales have literacy or numeracy challenges – can your messages be understood?

h) Be aware of financial / resource barriers

Many hard to reach / hear groups lack resources which affects their ability to respond to consultations. Take steps to ensure all groups can be heard by providing support (financial or otherwise) to allow them to participate.

i) Staff attitudes

Staff attitudes to groups and individuals can create barriers or can enable participation. There are many issues which staff need to be aware of when communicating with groups, and the most important are:

- **to avoid making inappropriate assumptions**
- **to avoid any discrimination in their language or behaviour**
- **to avoid any approach which can be seen to be patronising**

(Reid 2002)

The best people to provide advice are the people who are affected by the issues – they are the experts.

If staff are facilitating a discussion or other group activity, it is important that they:

- ensure that participants are comfortable
- allow all participants to have a say
- ensure that the activities and timing are appropriate
- explain where the activity fits in the overall consultation process

Appropriate training and guidance should be provided to all staff who are involved in the consultation process.

j) Look for internal or external joint-working opportunities

Find out if any other departments within your organisation are engaging with your audience and talk to them. If an organisation is conducting several different consultations on differing topics, these could be combined with particular 'over consulted' groups to help alleviate repetition and save both time and resources for the consultee and the organisation (Nottinghamshire county council 2007). This can help avoid duplication of consultation as well as expand your organisations network for potential future collaboration.

k) Take the consultation to them

Make consultation as easy as possible by taking the questions to them, at times that suit them and in places that they feel comfortable.

l) Be aware of your image

Councils traditionally have the reputation of deciding first and consulting later – be realistic as to how you may be seen by your key audiences. Try to

involve those affected by a development as early as possible in the process. This can help improve decision making and the democratic process as well as potentially preventing opposition in the future caused by rumours or hearsay.

m) Establish a two-way relationship – talking and listening

Consultation should be seen as merely the first step in a relationship that will outlive your immediate needs and address some of theirs. The process should not be viewed as a one off exercise but rather the beginning of an interactive relationship between an organisation and those affected by its work.

n) Demonstrate that you have listened

Feedback is invaluable in cementing a healthy consultative relationship – ideally show them what difference their thoughts, words and ideas have made, and always feedback to those who have taken the time to participate in a consultation.

o) Avoid asking meaningless questions

Do not make assumptions as to the level of prior knowledge of your audience, but make the necessary information freely accessible before the event. Ensure all questions in the consultation are relevant so that participants don't become disillusioned with the process and your organisation gets all the information it requires.

p) Consider first and lasting impressions

Look at how you interact, at your dress, language and style and be open and honest in your approach. This early impression will affect the lasting relationship.

q) Be mindful of language barriers and key words

Consider which words are meaningful to the group you are consulting and blend them with certain of your own words that will give credibility.

r) Give them something they want

If you can begin by giving them, or proving that a previous consultation gave them, something that may have been promised then you will start on a positive note.

s) Take your time

Although consultation is often specific and time-sensitive, a relationship will need to be established early to make a real connection and build trust. This will enable an organisation to have a better rapport with minority groups who could then be more willing to take part in a consultation (Freimuth 1990).

Personal contact at the earliest possible stage of a consultation may take time but will help identify obstacles and the means to overcome them.

t) Allow people to have their say

When people have become involved in a consultation, take the time to listen to what they say. Face to face meetings are often the best means of engagement providing the identified barriers have been addressed.

These are the main principles concerning engaging with any group but are particularly relevant to hard to reach / hear groups according to the literature.

The table below provides some guidance for general techniques which can help achieve more inclusive consultation.

5.1. Techniques for inclusive consultation

These were identified by Brakertz 2008 with some additional comments from the researcher.

Publicity

The best publicity comes through using a wide variety of media such as:

- Local newspapers
- Community radio
- Pamphlets

- Newsletters (e.g. neighbourhood house, sports clubs)
- Website
- Email bulletins
- Library

Making contact

Contact should not be limited to simple mail outs or posters. Where possible face to face contact should be made in areas where your particular group may congregate e.g. :

- Service clubs
- Sporting clubs and associations
- Interest based community groups
- Faith based groups
- Ethnic groups
- Local leaders
- Use service providers to contact, consult (e.g. aged care services)
- Staff networks

Participation incentives

Incentives can help involve those who may be wary or unwilling to participate. These may only be small items but demonstrate an appreciation for people giving up their time. Once people have contributed and received their incentive they may be more willing to contribute in future as they can see their opinion is valued.

- Paid focus groups, interviews, surveys
- Food vouchers, prizes
- Barbeques, children's activities

Formal consultation methods

These are the more traditional methods of consultation which are a good way of consulting with the 'mass' population

- Citizen researchers (interviews, surveys, focus groups)
- Think tents and listening posts
- Drop-off and pick-up surveys

Informal consultation or community-building methods

These are more informal methodologies which can help to engage those who may be hard to reach or require an alternative method of engagement to be heard.

- Fishing trips
- Street parties
- Mural projects
- Outdoor movies

New technologies

These can also be used to reach those who may not normally contribute and are especially effective with young people who enjoy the use of modern technologies.

- Text messaging
- Online survey
- Casual sounding email

Access

Arrangements need to be considered and plans for appropriate transport and venues are vital for effective consultation.

- Appropriate / accessible venues
- Child care
- Consult out of hours
- Help people fill in a questionnaire
- Cover transport costs in advance or provide your own transport

Information

Needs to be adapted into numerous forms and languages to ensure that all can be included in the process.

- Pamphlets in different languages
- Audio tape in different languages
- Websites in different languages
- Braille

- Translators
- Large print

A more comprehensive list of potential consultation methodologies to aid the consultation process can be found in appendix A.

The final element of this section is a brief guide into some of the issues to consider and potential methodologies for consulting with the most prominent 'hard to reach / hear' groups. This is by no means exhaustive and is very open to interpretation, however it does give some areas to think about when attempting to reach these groups.

Potential issues and methodology's for hard to reach / hear groups taken from Cheltenham Borough Council (2004):

a) Black and minority ethnic groups

Issues to consider:

The major issue with dealing with BME groups is the level of diversity. It is vital to be aware of the number and differing types of BME groups in an area and any consultation exercise needs to recognise and be designed to be inclusive for those groups. There is also an issue with the language barrier which may prevent many BME groups taking part in regular consultation exercises as well as the cultural barriers identified in section three.

Methodology:

Many of the formal or informal methods can be used to consult BME groups. The difference comes about from any specific needs a group may have and this means tailoring any exercise (meetings, letters, surveys) to these needs, with translator services if required. The best approach is usually to conduct surveys on a face-to-face basis if possible. Interpreters may be required for any face to face consultation and It is important to remember that the best interpreters as people from the target community, not people who may speak their language (Nottingham Council 2008).

Proper training in equalities and diversity should also be supplied to ensure that those conducting consultations can work effectively with people from all back rounds and do not cause offence, whether deliberate or accidental.

b) Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community

Issues to consider

The main issue to consider here is that gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people are not readily identifiable as a group and their needs may not differ greatly from the rest of the community, except for a few specific areas such as policing and healthcare. It is therefore important to utilise the focused responses that can be obtained, but there is another issue in identifying the sources of such responses.

Methodology:

Again, many of the traditional methods mentioned can be used, but the issue is over how to target the specific gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender sections of the community. The best tactic would be to consult through the community groups and help lines. These services may also be able to offer advice as to the best approach to take.

c) Homeless people

Issues to consider:

There are a host of difficulties trying to consult people who are itinerant or who have no permanent home. Such groups often have more pressing priorities and are unlikely to be adequately represented locally. Such people will have specific needs and views relating to these needs. Exercises need to be planned so that such groups can see their responses are valued and making an impact, but also that these responses will be treated with the strictest confidence.

Methodology:

The fact that these consultees have no permanent address rules out many traditional techniques. The best approach would seem to be to conduct surveys on a face-to-face basis, but some authorities keep lists of people

placed in temporary accommodation which may be of value, but need to be handled sensitively.

d) Older people

Issues to consider:

Consulting with older people can produce a good amount of responses as they may have time to spare. But the format needs careful consideration and should be kept as simple as possible, whilst also inviting comments. Other considerations such as whether to utilise online consultation also need to be made.

Methodology:

Many of the traditional techniques can be used to consult with older people, but some such as face-to-face or telephone interviews may unnerve some older people. There are other issues to do with access and hearing that should also be considered when choosing a venue.

e) People with caring responsibilities

Issues to consider:

Time is a big issue with this group. The responsibilities placed upon them are such that both the timing and the format of any consultation attempt are crucial. Making it relevant and providing adequate information are also very important.

Methodology:

Lengthy consultation methods requiring consultees to devote significant time would not be appropriate for this group. Techniques that have a range of questions that can be answered quickly and easily and are clearly relevant would be the best approach. There are a range of organisations and groups that exist to support and help carers in the area, and it is recommended that advantage is taken of the knowledge and contacts these groups may offer.

f) Disabled People

Issues to consider:

It is important to choose venues carefully and look at access and other facilities, including how easy the venue is to get to. Issues surrounding people with sensory impairments and learning disabilities also need to be taken into account when planning the consultation.

Methodology:

Methods that remove the access issue, such as telephone or postal surveys, can be useful, but meetings can offer disabled people a chance to get more involved. Holding an exercise at an existing disability centre will take consultation to this group and again solves the access issue. Aids such as large print, minicom, induction loop system and sign language will help disabled people get involved.

It is often advisable when planning consultation with people with sensory impairments to involve organisations and other services who are used by the sensory impaired. In so doing it is possible to get advice on the physical layout of a proposed consultation site prior to any consultation taking place.

Accessibility guidance for disabled people should be available throughout all local authorities so it is important to consult this guidance before any consultation takes place. If a council does not have suitable guidance then the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) can provide further advice and can be found at http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2005/ukpga_20050013_en_1

g) Socially excluded people

Issues to consider:

In the past these people have been identified as one of the most difficult to consult successfully. A combination of disadvantage factors can impact severely on their daily lives, meaning they take little notice of attempts at consultation. Issues of confidence, comprehension or ability to articulate may also have an effect. They will have specific needs and many will be service users. Specific consultation becomes more difficult if such groups fall into

other categories such as BME groups or homelessness, as this compounds the problem. Online consultation, for example, may not work well.

Methodology:

Tailoring any consultation exercise is very important. An exercise that is structured to be as personal and relevant to this group as possible may encourage more responses. Adequate information should be given in an appropriate format and the potential influence that their views can have on proposals that may affect their lives should be made very clear.

h) Travellers

Issues to consider:

Travellers are another poorly represented group that have specific needs that are often very different from the majority of the wider community. The issue of trust is a considerable one and any attempt at consultation should seek to establish this first.

Methodology:

Of the traditional techniques, an open and honest face-to-face approach will perhaps be the best to adopt. One suggestion would be to try and encourage members of the travelling community to help with the consultation. This could help to build trust as well.

i) Young people

Issues to consider:

The key consideration is that it is children and young people's right to be consulted in the decisions that affect them. Aside from this, there is a wealth of knowledge and opinion that can be very useful in shaping service delivery, but the approach needs to be carefully tailored to appeal to the specific age groups. Often innovative versions of existing methods can be very effective, and face-to-face surveys can help explain to young people what a proposal will mean to them. It is also a good way of building trust and getting them to open up.

Methodology:

This is dependent on the age group. With younger children the use of pictures, drawings and other visual aids can be of great use. With younger adults it is crucial that they know their views are being taken seriously and that they are being listened to. If this can be proved to them via feedback then they will be more willing to take part again. In either case, it is vital that young people feel comfortable in being consulted. The use of online and electronic surveys and SMS text messaging technology can take advantage of more interactive techniques which could appeal to younger people.

6. How to avoid domination by specific interest groups.

A problem that can arise in any form of consultation is the domination of discussions and opinion by specific interest groups who proceed to drown out any other opinions. These dominant groups generally come in two main forms. The first are often strong groups within the community who are politically active, have some information, a lot of local knowledge and believe they represent the community. The other are those who have a self interest in preventing a particular project or development, often called Not in My Back Yards (NIMBYS) (Stein 1990).

Both of these groups can be very vocal at public meetings or consultation events as they often feel passionately about particular issues and will work to get themselves heard and gain support. It is often difficult to prevent this from occurring as people have the right to speak at both public meeting and consultations and these interest groups can often dominate proceedings intimidating anyone who may wish to express an alternative view.

While these situations are difficult to avoid on particularly contentious issues, there are certain techniques that can be used to try and minimise their occurrence:

6.1. Techniques for avoiding special interest group domination:

As these groups can often be very vocal and rely on their vocality to gain support, **silent or written methods of consultation** can often be most effective. This can still involve asking numerous groups to participate in a meeting, where instead of vocalising their concerns, groups can be asked to write down their top five priorities / concerns / solutions anonymously. In so doing everyone will have the opportunity to contribute and issues don't have to be vocalised which can result in the domination of one particular group or individual.

Other techniques to avoid such domination include using a '**talking stick**', whereby only the person holding the stick may voice their opinions and the stick is passed around the group in a fair manner allowing everyone to have their say without any interruptions.

When inviting groups to be consulted organisations may often be aware of which group will oppose a particular development. By **inviting a single member from a multitude of groups** to a consultation there can be a more balanced collection of opinions and no one group should have the opportunity to dominate.

Opposition to developments by both NIMBYS and special interest groups can be founded upon misinformation (Stein 1990). It is therefore advisable to get as many groups as possible involved from the very beginning to prevent rumour and conjecture about a particular development.

Stein (1990) argues that the use of public meetings to try and prevent this type of misinformation / opposition from occurring is rarely effective as they can often be hijacked by specific interest groups or NIMBYS. Rumours or titbits of information are usually in the public domain a long time before any public meetings are held so those in opposition often use the meeting to publicly air their concerns, meet other likeminded individuals and disrupt or pervert the information process (Stein 1990). It is however important to

ensure that groups in opposition to a particular project or development do have an opportunity to air their views, but a methodology should be selected which will allow all to participate and avoid domination by one particular group.

7. Examples of good and bad practice in consulting hard to reach groups.

7.1. Good Practice:

Engaging homeless people

Brackertz (2008) provides a good example of engaging homeless people through a community art project. The example below is taken from Brackertz (2008)

Victoria Council undertook a community art project to engage its homeless people. The aim was to invite them to tell their stories through art as a means of facilitating social interactions, validating their experiences and linking them to services. The project was also intended to build acceptance of diversity and provide an expressive outlet for the wider community. In this way, it was a means to reframe a public space that had been contested by different socio-economic groups in recent years. The tangible result was to be a public mural to be erected in the contested space. The target groups were people experiencing homelessness (mainly at the secondary level, e.g. people in temporary accommodation, such as rooming houses or refuges) and the wider public.

The method involved inviting participants to use damp clay to create a tile, together with the community artist. During the process, the artist talked with them about the concepts they wanted to illustrate and assisted them in creating images. They were later invited back to paint their tiles. This facilitated ongoing engagement, extended interest in the development of the mural and allowed participants to reconnect with others involved.

The success of the project depended on council's ability to involve a cross-section of homeless people and the wider community. An outreach approach was adopted, and the process of recruiting people became an integral part of the project.

The artist spent many hours on the streets speaking with and getting to know local homeless people. Her ability to build a genuine and ongoing rapport with them contributed greatly to this. The artist used her strong community ties to 'put out the word' about the project. She talked to homeless people about how the clay tiles would be made and the aims of the project. In the process, she gained support from well-connected local people who assisted her to distribute flyers that detailed times, dates and venues of art sessions. The flyers, which were also placed in strategic locations around the area, were hand written in large script and presented information in a simple, personal and casual way. This informality in promoting the tile-making workshops communicated the relaxed style of the artistic process and helped to convey that the venues were safe and inviting community spaces.

The choice of venues for creating tiles and their times of opening was also critical. They had to be familiar, safe, welcoming and easily accessible. The artist's studio, where many of the art sessions took place, was located in community gardens that adjoined a local park. The gardens were traditionally a venue for community barbeques, and the park hosted a farmers' market. The artist's studio was regularly open, even when there were no pre-scheduled art sessions. This meant that many of the homeless people the project sought to involve were already familiar and comfortable with the settings chosen for the art sessions. At the same time it maximised opportunities for members of the wider community to participate. In addition, a mobile 'clay studio' was set up in parks frequented by homeless people, at pre-existing service providers and community groups, and at schools.

Lesson

While many homeless people are a hidden population, this example shows that it is possible to successfully reach out to them and get their input into council processes. The success of these initiatives depends as much on resources and planning as it does on the persons undertaking these processes, their skills, local ties and ability to connect with a wide range of people.

It is not possible to engage homeless people by imposing a project on them. Appropriate engagement requires reaching out to people living on the streets and in public and community housing, and taking time to understand issues of homelessness. This is achieved through building trust, developing ongoing relationships, and ensuring that homeless people are heard and their voices acted upon.

Electoral Commission consulting Ethnic Minorities about the General Election (2005):

Mori provide a good example of the benefits of an effective and varied sample framework when consulting minorities. The example below is taken from Mori (2006)

In the first study of its kind, Ipsos MORI conducted a face to face survey of 1,200 ethnic minority participants' across Great Britain looking at their attitudes towards the 2005 General Election, including reasons for voting and non-voting. The study supplemented the British Election Study. In addition to researching areas with a high proportion of ethnic minorities, the sampling frame also included ethnic minorities living in areas where they were not heavily concentrated. This proved to be extremely important as the two different groups of ethnic minorities recorded very different results demonstrating the need to consult across a wide area and the danger of regarding minorities in a homogenous light.

(Mori ca 2006)

7.2. Bad Practice:

Choosing accessible venues

Brackertz's study (2008) highlighted the problems which can occur when accessibility is not taken into account properly in a consultation. The example below is taken from her study (Brackertz 2008).

A consultation meeting aimed at the whole community was held at a local bistro/restaurant. While the venue was well known to locals, located centrally and easily identifiable from the street, the way in via the front entrance was only by a steep flight of stairs, making access difficult for a range of people, including elderly persons, the disabled, and parents with prams. An alternative access point at the rear was not advertised in the information about the consultation, was not well signposted from the street and was cumbersome – persons with special needs could ring a bell at the rear entrance and staff would then assist with entry. In addition, the access ramp was not fully compliant with council's own accessibility standards (due to its historical standing, the building was granted special exemption by the Victorian government's Building Appeals Board).

Lesson

When choosing a venue it pays to consider whether a range of community members are able to physically access the site.

8. Conclusion

The main lesson to be taken from this report is the contextual nature of those groups seen as hard to reach / hear. This means that any or no groups can be hard to reach and it is the position of the organisation attempting to consult that makes a particular group hard to reach / hear and not the situation of those being consulted. An organisation who works with drug users or the homeless for example would have little difficulty in reaching these groups as they already have established contacts from which to draw on. A local authority conducting a study with the same groups however may find them far harder to reach as they may have very little contact or experience with this target audience. Therefore who is hard to reach and why is dependant on those conducting the consultation and **not** necessarily related to the groups themselves.

Hard to reach / hear groups are not homogenous and can vary significantly in type and number depending on the consultation situation. As a result of this there are no fixed guidelines or techniques which can be used to ensure that consultations include hard to reach / hear groups. There are, however, good practice principles which should be followed as well as multiple techniques and approaches to minimise potential difficulties in consultations. Therefore it is the responsibility of those conducting the consultation to identify who they need to consult, who could be hard to reach / hear, what the potential problems for reaching these groups could be and what techniques are available to overcome some of these difficulties.

Section three of this report helps to identify some of the potential barriers for effective consultation of the hard to reach / hear while section four gives some principles and techniques for avoiding these issues. Appendix one further provides some guidance on the wide variety of consultation techniques available as well as some of their strengths and weaknesses.

The most important lesson to take into account when attempting to reach any number of groups in a consultation is that one consultation method alone will not be enough. Therefore there needs to be adequate time, resources and planning allocated for any consultation exercise to ensure those hardest to reach are included. Organisations therefore need to realise both the work and resources required for effective consultation which includes those hardest to reach / hear, as well as the added value they can bring to the development process. Mindset is an important factor for this and staff at all levels need to think that no group is 'hard to reach / hear' but rather that some groups may be harder to consult with depending on the circumstances. However there is always a way to reach anyone, it just takes enough thought, time and resources.

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