

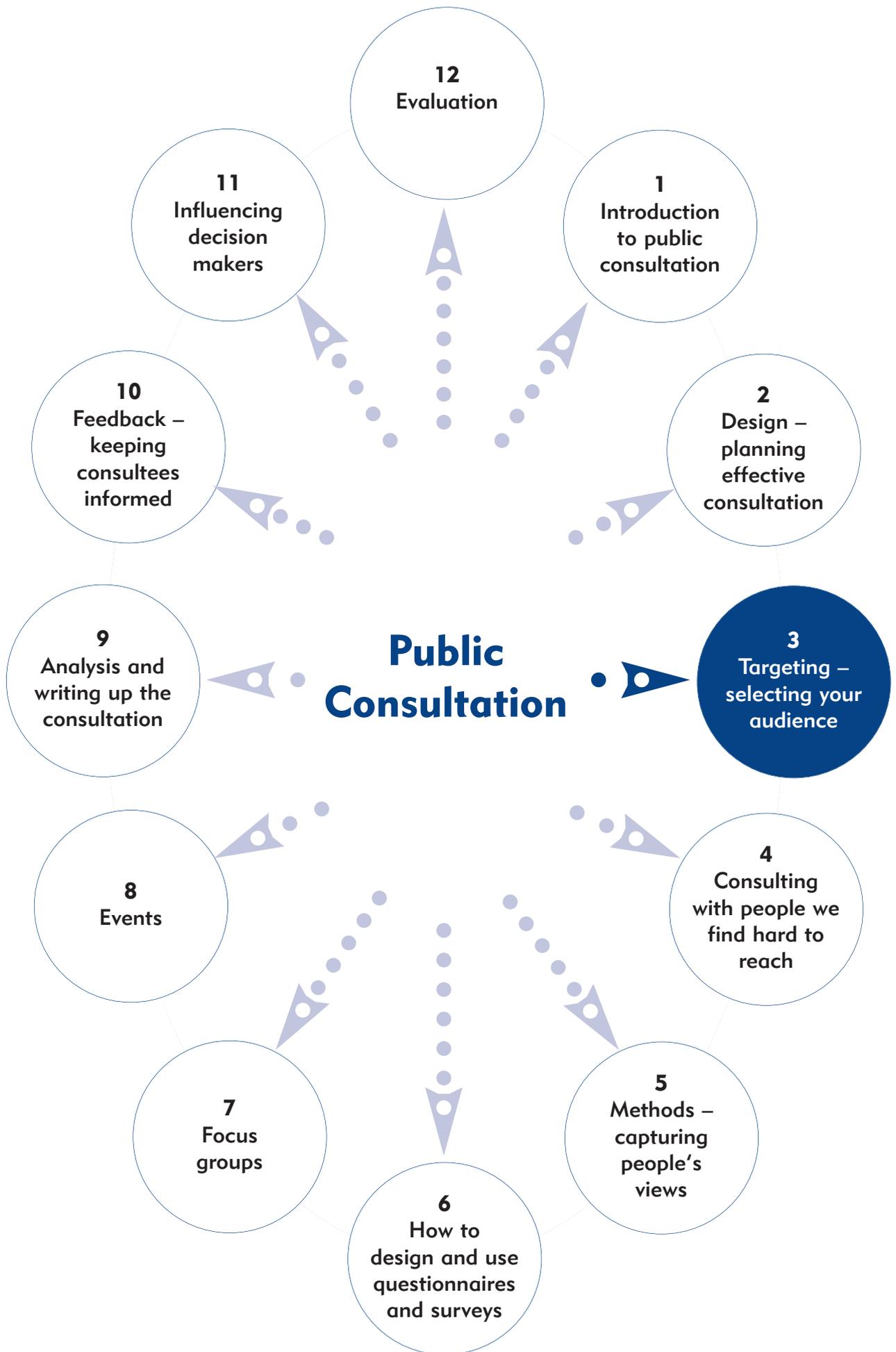


Nottinghamshire
County Council

Consultation in Nottinghamshire Targeting - selecting your audiences



guide 3





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Introduction

It is important to identify specific individuals and organisations to consult with and to be clear about the choices you make. Failing to make clear choices runs the risk of excluding consultees whose contribution could make an important difference.

The first task is to identify the potential audiences. Once this has been done identifying appropriate consultation methods to capture their views becomes much simpler. When the size of the intended audience is known it is also easier to judge whether the whole audience should be invited to respond or whether you should target a representative sample.

Recording audience selection decisions

Sometimes your potential audience is huge and it may be appropriate to mail every household in the county. However, often the audience can be refined and a clear picture of people's views established by being more selective. A citizens' panel, citizens' jury or a sample can be an appropriate alternative to large-scale consultations.

Whatever audience is selected, a record needs to be made of the selection so that the eventual decision maker is able to judge the reliability of the information contained in the consultation report. In addition, you may be required to give information about the consultations following a Freedom of Information Act request.

If any group of people will be disproportionately affected by a proposal, you will need to show how you will ensure that their views are to be obtained. If the views of these people might not normally be readily available through general consultation methods you must show how you will ensure their voice is heard.



Identifying your audiences

The Consultation Institute defines a stakeholder as 'an individual, group or party that either affects or is affected by an organisation, policy, programme or decision'. Within this definition are a range of quite distinct people and groups. The individuals that you need to include can be readily identified by assessing each in turn against the original purpose of your consultation.

The following 10 types of consultee should always be considered:

1. Those that are directly affected

The most obvious audience to be selected are those whose daily lives will change as a result of the proposed decision or action.

2. Those that are indirectly affected

People whose daily lives will change because others have been affected for example voluntary organisations who may see changes in demand for their services as a result of the Council's actions.

3. Those who are potentially affected

People who may or may not be affected but if they are, the consequences for them could be significant. Sometimes individuals or groups that do not appear to be involved, interested or likely to notice a change can be affected both adversely or for the better.



Take a moment in planning the consultation to think about which groups may be affected and if potentially affected individuals can be catered for invite them to participate. The potentially affected are groups or individuals who may have a different experience as a result of the decision to be made or who may have to adjust their behaviour.

4. Those whose help is needed to make the decision work

People whose support, involvement or consent is necessary if the decision is to be implemented.

They may be needed to deliver the outcome, to promote it, or to provide some resource without which the decision is nullified. For example, staff who would deliver a new service, district council partners or bodies that regulate core activities.

5. Statutory bodies and public utilities

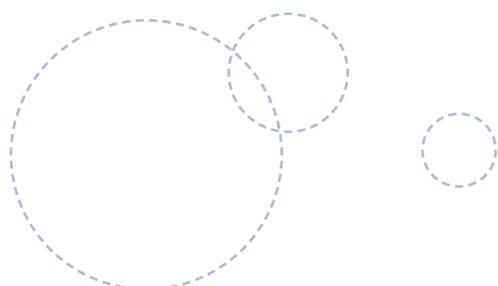
These organisations' consent may also be needed to deliver a project. We may have a legal duty to consult with certain organisations.

6. Those who have relevant expertise

Recognised or potential experts on the topic. They may have studied or published views on a topic, provide expertise on the options or be able to sway or inform other opinions.

7. Those who are just 'interested parties'

This can include people who have previously expressed an interest in the topic or area (for example local community activists or the local history group). Plus those who have been involved in similar issues or expressed views in the local media.



8. Local residents

Residents within a reasonable distance of a facility or initiative should be included – as should their political representatives. A good rule of thumb is to consult people within a 5-minute walk (approx 400 metres) to capture those with a clear local interest.

9. Service users

Existing, potential and previous service users should be included if they can be identified. For existing service users this usually requires consultation at the point of use.

Potential users might be identified from people living within the normal catchment area for the service. Previous service users are more difficult to ascertain, but various lists may be available, for example old library card records.

10. Employees

Employees who are currently involved in the service should be invited to help shape its future.

Key consultees

Key consultees are all those people and organisations whose agreement is needed for the project to take place. In most cases, decision makers will be explicit about their need to obtain their views – failing to get a response may raise questions about whether the exercise was valid.

In addition to partners likely to be involved in the project, key consultees could also include opinion formers – people or bodies whose views are listened to by a significant number of others, such as the media.

Wherever possible you should meet with key consultees before the consultation to agree how best to conduct the consultation itself. Pre-consultation meetings with key consultees help avoid excess cost and subsequent criticism of the consultation process itself.



Elected representatives

Elected councillors may have many competing roles in a consultation – decision maker, local resident, partner, service user or opinion former and their role in a consultation is likely to vary case by case. Other elected representatives, such as local MPs may also need to be consulted.

There are three things to take into account when consulting with elected councillors:

1. Local councillors should be informed of all consultations in their division.
2. If councillors of a particular political group are informed about a consultation, then the appropriate spokespersons of the other political groups should be informed too.
3. Sometimes councillors will have to take 'quasi judicial' decisions which mean they must not take sides in advance of a decision – this will impact on how they might respond to any consultation and how they may wish to be involved.



People who we find hard to reach

Before proceeding with a consultation take a moment to think about whether there are any individuals or groups that you may have unwittingly excluded or may not be adequately catered for. Check whether the consultation methods you are proposing are sufficiently inclusive and whether they are likely to capture the views of all your intended consultees.

The usefulness of a consultation in informing a decision and its impact on the reputation of the Council are heavily dependent on:

- making sure that consultations are open to all communities
- demonstrating that we have thought about and tried to remove barriers to participation and
- taking steps in our approach to ensure that it fits in with the County Council's equalities agenda.

Stakeholder records

The Consultation Institute recommends a single stakeholder database incorporating contact details for all the Council's key corporate stakeholders. The Customer Management team is working towards a central database of stakeholders and currently has a lot of useful records on key stakeholders. Most departments and our public sector partners also have their own specialist lists.

These are a useful resource and can help to co-ordinate consultation across different departments. Contact the Customer Management team who can let you know about what other consultations stakeholders are involved in and who holds departmental lists.

This will assist in identifying consultation clashes or duplication and so reduce consultation fatigue.

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Nottinghamshire County Council's consultation standards

1. A consultation mandate should be completed and approved by your departmental co-ordinator/ champion before the start of any consultation. *(Guides 2 and 11)*
2. The consultation should be logged on the County Council's consultation database. *(Guides 2, 10 and 11)*
3. For key decisions a public engagement plan should be published with the forward plan. *(Guides 2 and 11)*
4. In planning a consultation, the specific communication needs of groups and individuals who are often otherwise excluded should be considered. *(Guides 3 and 4)*
5. A minimum of 12 weeks should be allowed for consultation on major decisions. *(Guide 2)*
6. The name, address and contact number of the person responsible for the consultation should be published on all consultation materials. *(Guides 2 and 10)*
7. The consultation material should make clear by what date responses are required, in what format and to whom they should be sent. *(Guides 2 and 6)*
8. The consultation should include a face-to-face element where consultees are able to meet, question and put their views to the decision-maker(s). *(Guides 4, 5, 7 and 8)*
9. Any venue selected for a consultation event should meet the Council's accessibility code. *(Guides 4 and 8)*
10. Any complaints about the consultation, questions asked, materials or time allowed should be noted in the consultation report. *(Guides 9, 10 and 11)*
11. A notice of decision should be published for each consultation. *(Guides 10 and 11)*
12. Feedback regarding the responses, the Council's decision and how the consultation influenced it should be given to consultees. *(Guides 4, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12)*



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published **May 2007**

This publication can be made available
in alternative formats and languages
upon request.