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THE CHARTERED INSTITUTION OF HIGHWAYS
& TRANSPORTATION 'SMARTER' TRAVEL GUIDE

MANAGING CONSULTATION

WHAT THIS COVERS

Consultation is a widely used method of involving stakeholders and the public in developing and implementing policy. For example, the Department for Transport requires local authorities to carry out extensive consultation in developing their local transport plans.

If carried out well, it can be a useful tool for helping consultees understand smarter travel and be part of a wider behavioural change programme.



Used courtesy of Martin Breschinski, on behalf of TfL

THINKING SMART: MANAGING CONSULTATION

What is consultation?

Consultation is one type of engagement with stakeholders and the public to obtain feedback on policy options and proposals. It is often used as a formal part of the policy-making process to inform the detail of a decision. Consultations can vary in depth and quality and involve a range of techniques including workshops, online tools or written responses to a document.

Is there any 'official guidance on consultation'?

The Government has had a code of practice on consultation since 2000. The third version was introduced in July 2008. It is compulsory for all Government departments but optional, though recommended, for local authorities. It sets out seven criteria:

1. When to consult: Formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence the policy outcome.
2. Duration of consultation exercise: Consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales.
3. Clarity of scope and impact: Consultation documents should be clear about the consultation process, what is being proposed, the scope to influence and the expected costs and benefits of the proposals.
4. Accessibility of consultation exercises: Consultation exercises should be designed to be accessible to and clearly targeted at those people the exercise is intended to reach.

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5. The burden of consultation: Keeping the burden of consultation to a minimum is essential if consultations are to be effective and if consultees' buy-in to the process is to be obtained.
6. Responsiveness of consultation exercises: Consultation responses should be analysed and clear feedback provided to participants following the consultation.
7. Capacity to consult: Officials running consultations should seek guidance in how to run an effective consultation exercise and share what they have learned from the experience.

I'M PLANNING A CONSULTATION, WHERE DO I START?

Before starting a consultation, you should have clarified the following issues:

- ◆ What is the scope of the consultation?
 - What can change as a result?
 - Is consultation appropriate? If not, there is no point going any further.
 - What are the risks to reputations, resources, failure to deliver and relationships between all those involved?
- ◆ Establishing a clear purpose and getting agreement on this from the relevant people within your organisation. A 'good' purpose is highly focused/defined.
- ◆ Deciding who to consult – eg open to everyone or only to selected groups.
- ◆ What are the expected/intended outputs and outcomes from the consultation?
Can have primary ('essential') and secondary ('nice to have') outcomes.
- ◆ Context for the consultation so you:
 - Understand the links with other activities going on at the same time;
 - Can build on previous engagement and learn lessons from the past;
 - Avoid duplication with other consultations.
- ◆ Assessing what will be your organisation's response to the consultation and how to deal with it, particularly if it is contrary to the views of the consultees.
- ◆ Agreeing the design of the consultation with the project team and senior management.
- ◆ Setting a timescale for the consultation and sticking to it.
- ◆ Reviewing the process.

ARE THERE OCCASIONS WHEN A CONSULTATION IS NOT APPROPRIATE?

Carrying out a consultation is an important step. If it is not done well, it can damage both the organisation's reputation and the policy proposal being consulted upon. There are occasions when consultations should not be undertaken.

- ◆ If a decision has already been made and there is little or no room for change.
- ◆ If there is insufficient time to take the responses into account before making policy decisions.
- ◆ As a tick-box exercise because it is required and there is little intention of taking any notice of what comes out of the consultation.
- ◆ As a delaying tactic because it is too difficult to make a decision immediately.

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WHAT IF CONSULTATION ISN'T APPROPRIATE? ARE THERE ANY OTHER METHODS OF ENGAGING WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND THE PUBLIC IN DEVELOPING POLICY?

Methods of engagement can be divided into 3 main groups: getting information to the public, getting information from the public and bringing people together. Depending on the circumstances, some of the techniques set out below may be more suitable than holding a consultation.

The following summarises the typical PTP project process:

GETTING INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC	GETTING INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC	GETTING INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC
Briefings	City/town walks	On-going advisory groups
Feature stories	Focus groups	Panels
Internet	Polls and surveys	Fairs and events
Mass mailings	Public meetings	Meetings with existing groups
Exhibitions	Consultation	
Information repositories	Web-based hotlines	
Paid adverts	Field trips	
Presentations to community groups	Public hearings	
	Visioning workshops	

HM Government Code of Practice on Consultation
<http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf>

