Section Six - The Consultation Process Resources

6.1 - Data Storage

Once you've collected all of the relevant information you need to be able to examine the data more closely. To do this you should transfer your findings from the hard copy responses to some other means of storage. This is most likely to be a spread sheet or database.

There are a number of reasons for this:

1. Paper copies of any information can be easily lost or damaged.
2. Paper copies are more easily identifiable to individuals and anonymity may be a prerequisite of your research
3. Storing information electronically enables security measures to be put in place
4. Storing information electronically allows for easy interrogation and analysis of data
5. Electronic information is easily transferred into written reports

If you struggle with IT packages you should contact your departmental research and information Officers or ISD to discuss the building of suitable data storage systems.

Who to Contact - The first point of contact should be your own departmental consultation / research officers:
Consultation & Involvement Officer Research & Information Officers
Alternatively, advice is available from corporate research officers:

6.2 - Software Packages

Relevant IT Packages

These range from the very familiar packages like Microsoft Excel to the more complex, limited licence packages like SPSS (Statistics Package for the Social Sciences). Each has its specific uses depending on the type of research and analysis you want to undertake and the resources and skills you have.
What follows is a short list of packages available within the Local Authority. It is not by any means exhaustive but you are unlikely to come across any others in your work.

Some of the packages mentioned here will be familiar to everyone and there is training available within Bury MBC for Access and Excel. Other Packages, such as SPSS, will be on limited licences only and should you require their use you will need to contact your departmental R&I Officers.

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Microsoft Access -

This is a database package which provides an efficient means of data storage for small and one off research and consultation projects. It simply allows you to create tables in which you can store all the information you have collected in named fields, i.e. name, age, gender etc. Once all your data is put into the tables you can begin to draw out your findings. Access allows you to make queries which pick out certain pieces of information from the whole table for you to examine. Data can also be transfered from Access into other packages which allow you to carry out more detailed analysis of the information.

Microsoft Excel -

This packages uses spreadsheets that will allow you to analyse data. It is probably the most commonly used package for simple analysis that we have.
You can put information into a spreadsheet by either typing it straight in or by transferring information from another package.
Once your data is in the spreadsheet you can perform many different functions, such as creating graphs and charts, calculating simple statistics such as percentages and averages and creating more complex formulas.

Pinpoint -

This package enables the user to design a questionnaire on screen. The questionnaire can then be printed and sent out to be completed by the sample of participants OR it can be electronically sent by e-mail and filled in on screen by participants (providing you also have a copy of the software).
After collection the data is then placed into the questionnaire on screen. Pinpoint will produce charts and tables of the data which can then be used in reports.

SPSS -

This package requires an in depth knowledge of statistics. It treats data in the same way as Excel in that it uses spreadsheets as its basis, but its capabilities are much more far reaching and the training required is much more intensive. This is really an academic package but is incredibly useful when more robust and statistically significant information is required.
It will perform a range of advanced statistical procedures on comparatively large datasets.

MapInfo -

This is a Geographical Information System (GIS) which is used to store and present information with a geographical basis. The package requires very specific training, however, its application is invaluable when the information you have is useful for locality planning. Several copies of the software are available across the authority.

6.3 - Using The Media

What Can You Write Press Releases About? Firstly we need to address what news actually is: generally speaking 'news' is an event which has just happened or is just about to happen and which is of interest to the general public. Below are some examples of happenings and events which may be suitable for media exposure.

- Announcements of events which affect the general public e.g. open days, public meetings, seminars etc.
- Openings of new centres or threats of closure due to lack of finance e.g. homes for the elderly, homeless shelters.
- Fund-raising events, however, hundreds of these take place and only the more unusual ones are likely make the news.
- Grants and awards made to the organisation.
- The results of public surveys concerning the organisation.
- A statement by the organisation about an issue currently in the news.

For more ideas for news items search through your local press.

Publicity in newspapers, or on radio or television can be extremely beneficial. News items about an organisational activities can attract audiences to events, alert potential clients to their organisation's services or perhaps recruit volunteers. Publicity can increase the general public's awareness of the causes or issues they are involved with and help to change people's misconceptions. It can also increase their organisation's credibility, as the public will assume that if it is worthy of media coverage it must be making a valuable contribution to the community.

Writing Press Releases

A press release is a method of offering news items about your organisation to a newspaper, radio or television station. The service is free and obviously extremely useful but there is no guarantee that your news item will be used. All press releases are read by the recipients but a great many end up in the bin. The usual reasons for this is that it was:

- Too boring - The editor decided that the news contained in your press release was not of sufficient interest to the general public.
- Too late - The news release was interesting but out of date when the press release was written.
- Poorly written - The press release contained some interesting news but was so confusingly written that the editor could not spare the time to rewrite it.

How Should a Press Release Be Written?

As straightforwardly as possible. Don't waffle. Get straight to the point in the first sentence. Then continue, sentence by sentence, by anticipating what the reader is likely to want to know next.

Try to ensure that the first two paragraphs contain the answers to as many as possible of these basic questions: ***who? what? when? where? how? why?***
Near the end of the press release you should incorporate a quote from someone in your organisation.
You may want to use the media in advance of an exercise to publicise it, for event coverage and for feedback of outcomes to the public.

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6.4 - Contacting Out Research

Before selecting a research organisation, you will need to prepare a short research brief. Talk informally to one or two companies before putting the brief together, to get a feel for what they could provide and what they would expect in a brief (although care must be taken not to prejudice the outcome of the tender).

The research brief (5-10 pages long) should cover:

- The context of the work, why it is being undertaken, including background information about the project
- The aims and objectives of the research
- What you want to know, from whom and for what purpose
- How the results will be used
- Any particular requirements about the research (for instance, quality checks, number of reminders and so on)
- The desired timescale
- A requirement to clean and verify the data, (if data input and analysis are part of the specification)
- Resources available including staff time and budgetary constraints
- Criteria for selection of tender (eg the relative importance of cost and quality factors)
- The date of further interviews if the company is to be chosen on the basis of price, then indicating resources available could clearly influence the outcome. Or you could ask them to outline what could be provided for a given sum.

Companies should specify in their tenders;

- The research technique to be used. You may already have specified the broad approach but could still require details of how they will carry it out.
- The sampling technique
- The sample size being proposed (how many people they will be targeting and what response rates they expect).
- Number of reminders (or call back visits or phone calls)

They should give their reasons for each of their choices, including cost versus effectiveness

The brief should also ask for examples of similar work done elsewhere, two referees who can comment on working relationships with the contractors, the name of the person who will be liaising with the council and the arrangements for liaison and payment arrangements.

It will normally be required to invite three or four companies to tender for the work.

Costs

Cost depends on:

- the method of consultation
- number and complexity of questions
- numbers involved

A postal survey with 1100 responses could cost between about £4,000 and £10,000. An in-home interviewer survey could be anything from £20,000 to £30,000.

Costs should include

- Sampling
- Administration
- Data input
- Data analysis
- Report writing

You need to be very careful about what exactly you are getting for your money. Some aspects can be specified quite precisely (eg a two hour presentation to a group of 50 members and officers). Others are harder to identify. Some companies, for instance, have much more thorough quality assurance processes than others. Cost must be balanced against other factors.

Selecting the Contractor

The following criteria may be used to judge the tenders

- Presentation of the tender
- Understanding of the brief
- Team composition and expertise
- Methods
- Outputs
- Cost-effectiveness.

Use an in-house research officer to provide a technical analysis of the proposals. Check returned tenders for comprehensiveness, for example, travel costs included, cost of presentations and production of copies of final report.

Managing the Contract

Some keys to success

- fairness and understanding
- regular, clear communications
- set up a schedule of meetings
- Key named contacts
- Any amendments to the brief should be made and agreed in writing. (but don't be too rigid about sticking to the brief they may have ideas that improve it)

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A specification should cover the following areas:

- Background to the research
- The overarching aims
- Objectives
- Method (if you have already decided)
- Any specific requirements
- Outputs needed
- Project management outline
- Budget
- Time table
- Personnel
- Confidentiality
- Key areas to be covered in the tender.