Guidelines for planning & managing national consultations

Environment Agency

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Guidelines for Planning & Managing National Consultations

Introduction

Consultation can take many forms and have many purposes. The starting point for Environment Agency staff is to decide:

- what purpose a consultation has;
- who needs to be consulted, and therefore;
- what form it should take.

The role of these guidelines is to help you to make these three critical decisions when planning your consultation, and to follow through into successful implementation.

Sometimes, of course, you will not have total choice about either the purpose or the form your consultation takes. But even in the case of statutory consultations there can be purposes beyond simply doing what is required – for example, a well-designed statutory consultation can build better relationships with customers and stakeholders as well as gathering the essential feedback.

There is always room for design and ingenuity in the processes we use, and this document is intended to inspire and guide rather than instruct.

The guidelines are divided into three main sections and four supplementary annexes:

Section 1	What is consultation?
Section 2	Step-by-step guide to designing, implementing and evaluating consultation processes
Section 3	Common myths and fears
Annex A:	Identifying and selecting stakeholders and consultees
Annex B:	Resources for consultation
Annex C:	Techniques for consultation
Annex D:	A framework for evaluating consultation

The guidelines seek to be both thorough, with lots of checklists to help you approach consultation systematically, yet concise enough to be readable and easily useable. **They are designed for use in national consultations**, though many of the principles and techniques will also be relevant in local situations (depending on resources and objectives).

The overarching reference document for formal written consultations by Government and Government agencies is the Cabinet Office *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, published in November 2000 and intended to apply to all consultation documents issued after 1 January 2001. The Code can be downloaded from the Easinet (from the "Consultation Document" section under "Information Resources"). These guidelines embrace the Code while at the same time offering guidance on other forms of consultation, such as meetings and workshops.

Section 1. What is consultation?

Section 1.1 Consultation in context

We should start by putting consultation, and these guidelines, into context. In the last few years the need to consult has been appreciated more than ever. 'Stakeholder consultation' and 'stakeholder participation' seem to be all the rage – but far from being a fad, it is based on the clear business case that talking to people early saves time and money later.

> *The main purpose [of consultation] is to improve decision-making, by ensuring that decisions are soundly based on evidence, that they take account of the views and experience of those affected by them, that innovative and creative options are considered and that new arrangements are workable.*
>
> Cabinet Office Code of Practice

The word 'stakeholder' has also come into vogue relatively recently, and who exactly can be defined as stakeholders in any situation is always a matter of debate. For our purposes here, a stakeholder is defined as 'a person or group of people who perceive that they have a stake in something – usually a policy, proposal or programme that will have some impact upon them'.

Our focus here is on national consultations, so in this context the main objectives of stakeholder consultation for the Environment Agency are to:

- improve proposals, policy-making and decision-making by seeking early input from stakeholders, particularly expert stakeholders;
- comply with statutory requirements to consult;
- minimise later disagreement by identifying potential problems with any proposals;
- provide a forum in which to discuss and seek resolution of current or future problems;
- publicise the Agency's concerns or intentions before final stages in the policy process;
- establish the scope for future collaboration and further involvement of stakeholders, and start to build those relationships;
- learn more about the impact of national proposals on local conditions;
- promote a wider sense of ownership of proposals and increase their acceptability;
- enable accurate information to be pooled and shared;
- to gather ideas and perspectives the Agency may have overlooked;
- demonstrate accountability and responsiveness (reputation issues).

The main objectives of stakeholder consultation for consultees are to:

- provide a means for them to influence decisions that may affect them;
- ensure that minority interests are not overlooked;
- enable consultees to offer advice, expertise and information to benefit others;
- help the Agency appreciate the possible impacts of its policies and proposals, especially where these may be experienced by some as divisive, discriminatory or unreasonable;
- provide insight into the Agency's thinking and activities.

Stakeholder consultation also has a wider purpose in establishing the necessary dialogue among different interest groups that will allow society to find the balances and compromises that will characterise a more sustainable future.

The fact that the Agency has a consultation coordinator and consultation managers in Environment Protection and Water Management reflects the importance attached to it.

Section 1.2 What does 'consultation' mean?

Consultation can mean different things in different circumstances so we need to begin by scoping the range and purpose of activities associated with it, discuss some related terms, and then establish the principles that make for successful consultation.

Consultation is used to describe processes that seek the views of individuals or groups on policies or projects that may affect them directly or indirectly. It can take place at any stage of policy development or even before it. Consultation can be used to evaluate existing policies or formulate or assess options for implementing specific proposals.

While we tend to think of consultation as sending out a written document and inviting written responses, it can in fact take many forms. A well-designed and managed public meeting, for example, is appropriate in some situations where public concerns need to be addressed openly and personally. A web-based document review is useful for an iterative process that builds common understanding of technical issues. A workshop with invited experts may be useful to focus on complex, specialist issues, while a questionnaire may be a simple way to gather opinion on a range of issues. All of these are equally valid forms of consultation, and you will find some detailed discussion of their advantages and disadvantages in Annex C.

Sometimes bracketed with consultation you will find terms such as *public participation* or *citizen involvement*. These generally indicate a more profound level of engagement between the Agency and its stakeholders, where intensive dialogue and deliberation require a greater commitment of time and resources, resulting in participants understanding each other much more thoroughly and building a future capacity for real partnership.

Choosing a level - taking a stance

When an organisation is managing or promoting a consultation or participatory process, the appropriate activities will depend on which stance it takes.

In his "Guide to Effective Participation", David Wilcox presents five levels - or stances - which offer increasing levels of <u>control</u> to the others involved. The levels in this "ladder of participation" are, in summary:-

- **Supporting**: helping others do what they want, perhaps within a framework of grants, advice and support you provide.

- **Acting together**: not only do different interests decide together what is best, they may form a partnership to carry it out.

- **Deciding together**: you encourage others provide some additional ideas and options, and join in deciding the best way forward.

- **Consultation**: you offer a number of options [or an initial proposal] and listen to the feedback you get.

- **Information**: the least level of involvement people will expect, if what is planned affects them in any way.

Wilcox develops these ideas into a table that summarises the stances, typical processes, typical methods, benefits and issues.

LEVEL / STANCE	Information	Consultation	Deciding together	Acting together	Supporting
Typical process	Present and promote	Communicate and feedback	Consensus building	Partnership building	Community development
Typical methods	Leaflets Media Video	Surveys Meetings	Workshops Planning for real strategic choice	Partnership bodies	Advice Support Funding
Initiator stance	'Here's what we are going to do'	'Here are our options - what do you think?'	'We want to develop options and decide actions together'	'We want to carry out joint decisions together'	'We can help you achieve what you want within these guidelines'
Initiator benefits	Apparently less effort	Improved chances of getting it right	New ideas and commitment from others	Brings in additional resources	Develops capacity in the community and may reduce call on services
Issues for initiator	Will people accept consultation?	Are the options realistic? Are there others?	Do we have similar ways of deciding? Do we know and trust each other?	Where will the balance of control lie? Can we work together?	Will our aims be met as well as those of other interests?
Needed to start ...	Clear vision Identified audience Common language	Realistic options Ability to deal with responses	Readiness to accept new ideas and follow them through	Willingness to learn new ways of working	Commitment to continue support

Notes to table

- The '**Typical process'** line identifies the *types* of processes usually associated with the level; many other processes are possible (e.g. Supporting can take many forms including community development).

- Higher levels are likely to involve some elements of lower ones too - you can't build partnerships without communicating well and developing consensus.

- **'Typical methods'** give examples of structures and methods.

- The '**Initiator stance'** line suggests how the initiator [the Agency in this case] might present themselves and the level they are working at to others.

- The '**Initiator benefits'** line suggests what the initiator might have in mind - but this will obviously depend on the situation. If the initiator is being open, this agenda should be made obvious. People are generally sensitive to hidden agendas: they may not know quite what is going on, but suspicion breeds mistrust and undermines the chances of collaboration.

- **'Needed to start...'** suggests some of the prerequisites for success - that is, pitfalls if you don't get them right. As with the **Typical process** line, some at the top (i.e. Supporting) also require those lower down (e.g. Information).

The table is meant to be an aid to thinking, rather than a rigid framework. The idea of an initiator taking a stance should be useful, for example, in helping the Agency think through what it is trying to achieve and whether consultation is the best approach. However, it may be necessary to change stance. For example:

- an information giving process may lead to protests (or enthusiasm and offers of help), and turn into a consultation or joint decision-making process

- the Agency may invite people to join a partnership or joint decision-making process, only to find that most people just want to be consulted on a limited range of options.

Section 1.3 Principles of effective consultation

The process – the *how* – of consultation is as important as the subject matter. The following principles, which apply at all levels and to all forms of consultation, will help ensure consultation is effective and appropriate:-

- **Inclusiveness**: encourage the participation of all stakeholders who have an interest in or who would be affected by a decision.

- **Transparency, openness and clarity**: ensure stakeholders are given all the information they need, tell them where information is lacking or things are uncertain, indicate clearly what they can or cannot influence by contributing, and provide an indication of next steps.

- **Commitment**: show respect for both stakeholders and taxpayers by giving consultation the appropriate priority and resources, and when it is done demonstrating that it is a genuine attempt to understand and incorporate other opinions even when they conflict with the Agency's existing point of view.

- **Accessibility**: provide different ways for people to participate - the UK is a diverse and multicultural society and it is essential that people from all parts of the community are able to participate in consultations on issues that may affect them if they choose to do so.

- **Accountability**: as soon as possible after the end of the consultation period respond to participants with an unambiguous account of how and why their contributions have - or have not – influenced the outcome, and ensure there are routes for follow-up including reporting on final decisions, strategies and/or implementation plans.

- **Responsiveness:** there is little purpose in spending time and money on consultation if there is no willingness to listen to its results. Those doing the consulting must be open to the idea that their existing proposals can be improved (or are wrong), and that they will, if necessary, be amended. Those being consulted must perceive that their voice will be taken seriously, and that things can be changed. If they do not perceive this, they will not participate, the consultation exercise will be regarded as a sham, and it will be harder to involve them the next time their views are needed.

- **Willingness to learn:** all consultation should encourage both the Agency and stakeholders to learn from each other, and this means a style of process that is as interactive and as incremental as possible to build increasing layers of mutual understanding, respect and relationship.

- **Productivity:** the ultimate purpose of all the Agency's activities, including consultation, is to improve the environment. How a consultation will do this needs to be set out to encourage stakeholder participation and assure them that the Agency is not wasting either its resources or their time.

Section 2. Step-by-step guide to planning and implementing a consultation process

The following chart takes you through the process steps that should help you decide what is the most appropriate form of consultation for your project. Each step is dealt with in more detail in the subsequent pages of these guidelines.

> *Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.*
>
> Cabinet Office Code of Practice

In overall planning, you will want to ensure that the consultation is done at the most appropriate stage in the process.

The general principle is 'the earlier the better', but equally, 'better late than never'.

The crucial decision is about what kind of input you require at each stage and how this can be taken on board. For example, if you are consulting on a written document, if you do it too early your objectives and drafting may be too vague for people to be able to comment with sufficient precision; but if you do it too late it may be very difficult to incorporate valuable external input.

Likewise, in a face-to-face meeting people may need something more than a blank sheet of paper to respond to: an outline of the Agency's thinking will give them a framework within which to think – but avoid detailed proposals that may suggest minds are already made up.

The following diagram summarises the steps from advance planning of a consultation process, through its systematic implementation to thorough evaluation both of the results and of the process itself.

Step 1
Set out the entire process to provide a sense of the overall timing and the resources required.

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Step 2
Identify purpose, people, context and constraints

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Step 3
Choose your method(s)

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Step 4
Reality check

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Step 5
Detailed planning and design

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Step 6
Implementation of the consultation

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Step 7
Analysis of consultation results

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Step 8
Responding to consultees

↓

Step 9
Evaluation of the consultation process

Step 1. Set out the entire process to provide a sense of the overall timing and the resources required.

It is extremely useful to set out the entire process right from the beginning through to the end, including implementation and final evaluation - as in the steps diagram above - before you do any detailed planning. It will give you a sense of what will need to be done by when, and also a preliminary indication of the time and other resource needs for different steps of the process.

Step 2. Identify purpose, people, context and constraints

> *It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.*
>
> Cabinet Office Code of Practice

The most effective approach would be to change the order of the tasks outlined in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice and start with establishing the purpose of the consultation.

Step 2.1 Purpose: what do you want to have at the end of the consultation?
Think about what you are really trying to achieve, for example:

- a better understanding of the issues among stakeholders (including promotion and influencing objectives);
- help and advice from stakeholders, resulting in a better policy/decision;
- information from the stakeholders on the implications, costs and benefits of different policy options;
- demonstrate and improve reputation for accountability and responsiveness;
- prevention of problems later;
- compliance with a statutory requirement;
- confirmation that your proposals are on the right lines;
- statutory consent to your proposals;

- comments and suggestions on alternative proposals / options;
- detailed comments on a preferred alternative / option;
- beginning of a long-term relationship with stakeholders;
- opportunities for joint working and funding e.g. partnership initiatives;
- detailed and carefully considered comments from experts.

A clear sense of the purpose will help you decide on the appropriate methods, who to consult, and enable you to decide at the end whether the process was successful (although achievements can sometimes surpass initial objectives). Write down the objectives and keep as a record.

Do not try to be over-ambitious. Focus on what is needed for the particular task (and what may provide some useful footholds for future activities), but recognise that formal consultation exercises are always limited and cannot do everything.

Finally, ask yourself what could be in it for the people you are consulting: what benefit will they get from spending time and effort responding to you? How can you add value to the process for them?

Step 2.2 People: whom do you need to consult?

> *A document should so far as possible include an assessment of the impact of the proposals on groups likely to be particularly affected, and every effort should be made to ensure that views are received from all such groups. Departments should always consider whether there is a particular impact by gender, age, ethnicity or disability; in particular regions, or types of area; or on the socially excluded.*
>
> Cabinet Office Code of Practice

The first general point to make, when you are trying to identify stakeholders, is that it is better to involve too many than to miss out some who are crucial. Having said this, a blanket approach is no substitute for careful consideration, as unnecessarily burdening stakeholders who don't have an interest on this occasion may prejudice their involvement next time, when they might otherwise have made a valuable contribution. In some cases, there will be statutory consultees (see below) but even in these circumstances it is worth considering if including additional stakeholders could add value to the process.

The following generic questions usually help to find the right people:-

- Who will be affected, positively or negatively, by what is proposed? For example:
  - communities;
  - employees, customers, contractors, suppliers, partners, trade unions and shareholders.
- Who supports or opposes any changes.
- Who holds official positions relevant to what is proposed.
- Who is influential on the subject?
- Who runs organisations with relevant interests?
- Who has been involved in any similar issues in the past? for example:
  - regulators, government agencies and politicians at regional or national levels;
  - non-government organisations and other national interest groups.

Having said this, bear in mind that stakeholders are defined as 'people who perceive they have a stake in something', and to this extent are self-defining. If somebody thinks they are a stakeholder, who are you to argue with them? Equally, make efforts to go beyond the 'usual suspects' and try to think of others who may wish to contribute, or whose contribution could be valuable and who could be excluded unless special efforts are made to include them (e.g. minority ethnic groups, special needs groups).

Another excellent way to identify stakeholders is simply to make a list of the obvious ones and then ask them "who else should be involved?" and "how do I contact them?" Stakeholders are often better placed than we are to know who should be consulted. You do this every time you make a new contact until eventually you don't hear any new names. Even so, as the list of issues to be addressed becomes public, more stakeholders tend to come out of the woodwork, so you should never close the list. (Annex A provides more detail on stakeholder analysis and involvement).

For a first pass you should always think about:
- the public at large – or just a sample;
- particular sections of the public e.g. those at risk from flooding;
- statutory consultees;
- non-statutory consultees;
- Agency staff;
- Regional Advisory Committees and Area Environment Groups;
- other governmental organisations;
- representatives of special interest groups, such as local or national NGOs, trade bodies/industry associations or trades unions;
- individuals with particular technical expertise;
- the Agency's 'customers' – however defined;
- mixed groups of experts, lay people, and the public.

Then ask yourself:-
- What will motivate each group to participate?
- What might prevent them participating?

Answering these questions will clarify what you are trying to do, and the main audiences you are trying to reach, and whether they are likely to be interested. This is the time to examine the practical constraints and wider context.

Step 2.3 What is the context?
Think about what else might affect what you do:-
- What is the history of the issue? How much do people already know about it? How sensitive is it?
- What are the statutory requirements?
- At what stage in the project should the consultation be launched?
- How much can stakeholders affect the policy or project?
- What other consultations by the Environment Agency, Government Departments or others or others have been, are or will be addressing similar issues or involving the same stakeholders – especially if they are running within the same time window as yours?
- Do we need a risk assessment exercise or policy appraisal to consider the social, economic or environmental impacts of these proposals before they go out to wider consultation? what about a regulatory impact assessment?
- What is the internal approval route for the consultation document, and for final decisions?
- What internal communications mechanisms are needed to ensure Agency staff are kept informed?
- Have you taken on board lessons from previous consultations around this subject?

Step 2.4 What are the constraints?
And finally think about what will *limit* what you can do:-
- By when does the consultation process have to be completed?
- Does the time available include holiday periods when people tend to be away?
- What is the budget?
- What other Agency resources are available?
- How much internal support is there for this consultation?
- How much flexibility is there in what you can or cannot do? (there may be work instructions that act as constraints, e.g. CAMS guidance)
- How much interest will there be among potential consultees?

In fact all things considered, is consultation still a practical option?

This last question is crucial: too much consultation and the resultant ‘stakeholder fatigue’ means that people may be less willing to be consulted when it is truly necessary – to say nothing of an unnecessary cost for the taxpayer.

If you are really not sure about the extent of the consultation you need to do, it might be worth telephoning a small but representative group of stakeholders to get some impression of whether you should embark on a wider and deeper process.

See Annex B for some further thoughts about the resource requirements for effective consultation.

Purpose, people, context and constraints are always intertwined, and a consultation process must be designed taking all of them into account. Asking these questions will help you see more clearly the nature and place of the consultation in the policy process.

Step 3. Choose your method(s)

Once you are clear about the purpose of the consultation, you know whom you wish to consult, and you have noted which fixed parameters or external factors, for example, may constrain your choices, you are in a position to decide what method of consultation to use.

Assess the different tools and techniques available to you (see Annex C), and decide which of them will best enable you to involve the stakeholders, address the issues and achieve the objectives you have set within the time, budget and other parameters you have identified.

Sometimes the choice of method will be obvious. Most of the time, having answered all the questions above and reminded yourself of the options available to you, you will probably begin by ruling out the consultation methods that are obviously *not* appropriate. For example, if your prime objective is to build better relations with a small group of stakeholders, you will not want to use a questionnaire. Equally, if you want to involve thousands of people you will not want to use focus groups.

Having ruled out the clearly inappropriate, the best advice is then to mull over the options for a day or two, discuss them with colleagues, perhaps do a simple note of - all things considered - the advantages and disadvantages of each. In this decision-making process there is no substitute for a mixture of creativity and common sense. If resources allow, and there is potential to add value, different options can be thought of as complementary rather than alternatives.

Once you think you know the method of consultation you want to use, work through the following three steps to confirm, amend or develop your choice of method.

Step 4. Reality check

Now is the time to check everything you have done so far. Will your chosen method(s):
- meet your objectives?
- reach your target audience?
- be achieved within the time and budget you have available?
- produce a response that you have sufficient resources to manage and respond to?

Be ruthless with yourself. It is much easier to re-design the consultation, if you have to, at this stage before you have to spend a lot of time and money.

Also use your imagination. For example, put yourself in the shoes of different stakeholders. If you were they, how would you react to getting an invitation to come to a meeting on this issue? Or how would that stakeholder respond to the consultation document and the questions you have drafted?

Would *your* immediate reaction be to participate – or to bin it? Seeing a process through the eyes of the stakeholders is one of the best ways to check how realistic your plans are. Give some of them a call: tell them your plans and ask for their reactions. You could also check on the experiences of others who have adopted this type of approach or consulted on this issue before. What worked? What didn't work? What would they do differently if they had to do it again?

Step 5. Detailed planning and design

Once you have chosen your consultation method you need to do some detailed planning for your consultation. Clearly the more complex and large scale the consultation the more time and effort this will take. But even for the smallest consultations it is worth checking off these stages.

Step 5.1 Establish a project plan

Include details of:

- timeline (remember to allow time for translating documents into Welsh or other minority languages);
- budget;
- key dates and actions.

Be realistic about how long things take and always allow more rather than less time for responses. As soon as you can, forewarn key stakeholders that a consultation is in the offing so that they can set aside the resources required for a response.

The Cabinet Office guidelines require written consultations to be open for a minimum of twelve weeks. It is worth remembering, however, that this does not include preparation and internal approvals, nor time for analysis of the results – which could take several weeks or even months. It may be that you choose to run a range of consultations that occur within the twelve-week period such as workshops, Internet consultations or public meetings. If the consultation is to happen over a holiday period you will be well advised to allow longer than twelve weeks.

Even at the planning stage, you should talk to the Agency's consultation coordinator, to ensure that the period when you are intending your consultation to be "live" (in the hands of consultees), doesn't coincide with that of other, similar consultations as this might detract from the response you receive.

Step 5.2 Materials, venues, invitations

Decide what materials the stakeholders will need by way of background information and decide how it is to be created and distributed.

> *A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.* Cabinet Office Code of Practice

- For example, if you are consulting on a written document, ensure the language used is neutral, user-friendly and avoids jargon wherever possible, and where necessary (depending of course on who is being consulted) translated into minority languages and Braille. Breaking a consultation into manageable chunks can help to make it accessible, particularly where specific questions are asked. This will also help when it comes to analysing the responses.

- If your chosen consultation method is an exhibition you will need to put a lot of thought into exactly what form the exhibition should take, how it will provide information to people, and how they in turn can respond to what they see or hear. If an exhibition is to be staffed, as it should be, then those staffing it will need to be briefed on the subject matter so they are aware of the sort of questions they are likely to be asked and how to answer them.

- If you are planning a public meeting or a workshop you will need to hire a suitable venue. Also give serious thought to using an independent facilitator, especially if the meeting is liable to be stormy: it frees you up to put the Agency's point of view without being accused of hijacking the process. Bring in facilitators as early as possible: their job is not just to run the meeting – they can advise on every aspect of its design and what is most likely to make it a success. For example, they can help you decide what information people should have in advance and what it is realistic to achieve in a given amount of time.

- Most consultation methods involving a specific invitation (i.e. probably not public meetings and exhibitions) will require a separate covering letter explaining the consultation process and how the results will be fed back to consultees. (If it is written consultation you will be well advised to reproduce that information in the document itself as covering letters often seem to get separated from consultation documents, and either the covering letter or the consultation document should indicate compliance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice.)

Step 5.3 Publicity and marketing

One of the toughest aspects of consultation is getting people, first, to realise that it is happening and, second, getting them to respond. If you are sending invitations to specific individuals to get their input on a document, marketing is less of an issue; if they are motivated they will do it.

But getting people to come to a public meeting or an exhibition, for example, requires a marketing exercise and this should be part of the whole planning process. How you market a particular consultation will be determined by who you want to consult, but the methods are available are those used for marketing anything:

- mail shots;
- leaflet drops;
- advertising in local and national newspapers etc.;
- trade press or the newsletters of interest groups/representative bodies/trade associations.

Unfortunately, there is currently no constantly-updated central database containing the names and contact details of every individual and organisation who has ever shown interest in issues covered by the Agency! However there are various stakeholder databases available within the Agency (often held by other consultation managers), albeit designed for different reasons, which might be of some use. In some cases those included on these databases will be subject to data protection constraints.

Ensure internal awareness as well as external (intranet, cascade brief, posters, flyers, etc) - there may be as much internal as external expertise to be drawn upon. In addition, it is likely that other staff will be asked about the consultation, and it reflects well on the organisation for as many staff as possible to know what is going on so they can respond to key external audiences.

Step 5.4 Preparing to respond

Consider how you will deal with the responses you expect to receive (both in quantity and form), and establish appropriate and specific systems – for example, decide who is actually going to write and thank those who respond. Those who take the trouble to give you the benefit of their time and energy deserve a rapid and serious acknowledgement of their input. It may also be necessary to ask them how they would like their response to be reported: for example, anonymously, from them as an individual, or as a representative of their company/organisation.

You may also need to screen responses for issues that are outside the scope of the consultation but which nevertheless need a response. For example, responses to policy papers sometimes include a complaint or a comment about a specific issue that needs to be dealt with separately.

Step 5.5 Approval routes
If the consultation involves a written document you need to establish the internal approval route and likely timescale for approval for the consultation and for any final decision-making process. As consultations are not stand-alone processes, but a part of something bigger (eg. policy development), the approval routes should have been prescribed, for example by a lead Director, at the outset – ie. same time as they were established for other elements of the work (eg the policy itself or the implementation plan).

Step 5.6 Internal communication
Communicate the agreed process to all relevant Agency staff and distribute details of times and places if you want Agency staff to come to particular meetings.

Step 5.7 Analysing the results of the consultation
Decide how you will analyse and assess the results of the consultation. Where the structure of the consultation (eg. based around a series of specific questions) has steered or focused responses, this makes the analysis much easier. Independent analysis of the findings can sometimes provide a useful additional measure to reassure respondents that the consultation is open and objective.

Step 5.8 Evaluating the consultation process
Decide how you will evaluate the process of consultation and the criteria you will use for measuring whether it has been a success (relate this back to objectives of consultation), and what methods could be used for the evaluation (e.g. market research of a sample of consultees). If you are running meetings, design a written evaluation form, and consider using it to obtain details of other stakeholders who should be involved, or even use it to gather comments that people were unable or unwilling to say during the meeting.

Evaluation does not need to be comprehensive, but it is worth putting a marker down at this stage to allow time for it. In addition, thinking about the evaluation (and how you will know whether it has been a success) can help clarify exactly what you hope to achieve, and so help with planning. See Step 9 below and Annex D for more details on evaluation.

Step 6. Implementation of consultation

Step 6.1 Finalise materials
Finalise all drafting of documentation, press releases etc and gain relevant approvals. Ensure that the Agency sponsors in DEFRA **and NAW**, are aware of the forthcoming launch. In most cases they will have been made aware of, or even involved in, the drafting of consultation documents, for example, at an earlier stage as a part of the 'no surprises' rule. Exhibition panels may also require approval for the same reason, and it may be tactful to ask for comments on a proposed agenda for a public meeting.

Any other government departments that should be aware of the consultation should be informed at this time: remember, for example, DTI or the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Step 6.2 Coordination
Ensure that the consultation coordinator is a named point of contact on the documentation/covering letter for comments/complaints from consultees on how the consultation process has been managed. Technical questions about the specific consultation should, however, be clearly routed to the appropriate manager.

> *Departments should monitor and evaluate consultation, designating a consultation co-ordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.*
> Cabinet Office Code of Practice

Complete the appropriate *pro forma* (you can find a copy on the Easinet under "Information Resources"- "Consultation Documents") and send it to the consultation coordinator at least a week before the launch. There is no longer any formal requirement to notify the Cabinet Office in advance of launching Agency consultations. However, as mentioned earlier, if the consultation coordinator is aware at least of the topic, timescales and target audience of your consultation some time in advance, he may be able to advise you of other consultations occupying the same space, and safeguard against the risk of consultation fatigue. Clearly if you notify him right up against your launch date, there may not be any flexibility to respond to that risk by delaying (or bringing forward) the launch.

Step 6.3 Launch the consultation
A launch event should be regarded as a valuable marketing opportunity. It may even be appropriate to invite key stakeholders: use it as an opportunity to motivate people to get involved.

Step 6.4 Monitor feedback
Don't wait for all the responses to come in before you start your analysis. Keep checking that the process is delivering the required outcomes. If it is not, consider what can be done to adjust it. Would it be possible, for example, to run a series of workshops or an electronic process (both of which can be organised fairly quickly) to supplement the existing process?

Step 6.5 Acknowledge responses
Acknowledge feedback and input from stakeholders as soon as possible, certainly within two weeks of receiving their comments or their attendance at a meeting, and repeat the explanation in the covering letter or the original invitation of how their input will be used and when they can expect to hear the results of the consultation process. A standard letter or even postcard may be sufficient: just ensure people do not feel they have responded into a black hole.

Step 6.6 Check inclusivity
Check the feedback from stakeholders to ensure it includes responses from hard-to-reach groups and, if necessary, take additional steps to ensure their participation. Remember: the range of consultees that have responded may be one of your success criteria.

Step 7. Analysis of consultation results

> *Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed…*
>
> Cabinet Office Code of Practice

There are two main possibilities as to how responses or input should be analysed:

- responses to consultation are analysed by an individual with expert knowledge of the content, for example a technical author, who then makes recommendations on which points should be accepted and which rejected, providing reasons for each

- a working group performs the same task; such a working group may consist of internal Agency staff, or of independent individuals, or even of a panel of stakeholders convened for the task.

Whichever method is used to analyse the results of a consultation, it should be apparent that they have been assessed on their merits and reasons provided for that assessment.

Step 8. Responding to consultees

> *[Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed], and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.*
>
> Cabinet Office Code of Practice

Step 8.1 Keep records

It is good practice to keep a full record of all responses (and whether you accepted the points made or not) so you can produce a report on the consultation, as well as a revised version of the document (or whatever) you were consulting on.

In analysing the responses, you will have exercised personal judgement to decide which responses to accept, and which to reject. Whatever your final conclusion on a point of view, it must receive full and fair consideration. Keeping detailed records of why certain proposals and comments were accepted, and others not, will help clarify your own decision-making process. Remember, the responsibility for the decision rests with the Environment Agency, not the consultees, so acceptance or rejection of comments has to be based on EA policy and priorities as well as personal professional judgement. However, it is essential that the Agency be able to provide a full audit trail of how decisions are made, especially when the issue is controversial.

Step 8.2 Reports and response documents

You should aim to show stakeholders the full extent of opinion received so that they appreciate the entire range of views on the issue.

You should also produce, as the Cabinet Office Code of Practice requires, a report on the consultation that sets out how stakeholders' input has been used and what its impact has been. This document should also explain how specific significant comments made have been accommodated – or, if they have not been accepted, on what grounds they have been rejected. If the purpose of the consultation was to help make the choice between a number of possible options, explain what choice has been made and why. Sometimes it may be sufficient to provide a simple matrix with summaries of the views expressed and the Agency's response to them.

While there is no template available for a consultation response document, you might find it useful to look for inspiration on the consultations section of the Agency's website, where other consultation managers have published their own response documents.

If you are reporting details of all responses as they were received, you should also check whether participants want their input attributed, and how they want to be described etc. It is not usually necessary to proactively address every single comment made by every consultee, but you should be prepared to explain, for example any reasons for rejecting a specific comment, if asked.

All these points presuppose that the responses are going to be made publicly available. If this is not so then it must be stated in the consultation.

Step 8.3 Acknowledgments and thanks

Send 'thank you' letters and copies of the final consultation report to all participants, and tell them about the next steps in any decision-making process. If you received submissions in Welsh or another minority language, then thank you letters and responses should also ideally be in that language.

Step 8.4 Internal and other reporting
Send copies of the report of the consultation to any other departments or interested parties within the Agency and externally, and publish on the website.

Step 9. Evaluation of the consultation process

> *Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated*
> Cabinet Office Code of Practice

Step 9.1 Carrying out the evaluation
There are two elements you will want to consider in evaluating any consultation exercise:
- evaluating the outcomes of the consultation;
- evaluating the process used in the consultation.

Evaluation does not have to be difficult or time-consuming, but it is essential that it be done - to establish whether you have achieved your original objectives, and to identify any lessons from the experience that could be useful in future. A simple evaluation should also help in simply recording the basic details of what was done, by whom and what the results were.

There are eight areas any evaluation of consultation should cover:
- objectives;
- levels of Agency involvement;
- methods and techniques used;
- response;
- inputs;
- outputs;
- outcomes;
- using the results.

In Annex D you will find a table providing a basic framework for evaluating Agency consultations.

Step 9.2 Reporting the evaluation externally
Provide details of the evaluation to participants, as appropriate. This may simply be a paragraph in the consultation report, or a separate short report.

Step 9.3 Reporting the evaluation internally
Share the evaluation and learning points with other departments and consultation managers. This could be by ensuring that the Agency consultation co-ordinator has details of the findings of the evaluation, so they can use them in devising future guidance or training, or can simply pass them on to other interested staff. Make sure you do use the results of the evaluation, so that future consultations are easier and better.

Section 3. Common myths and fears

- ***Doesn't consultation draw attention to - or even create - problems?***
  It may draw people's attention to something sooner - but a proper stakeholder consultation exercise is unlikely to be used in a situation that would not attract attention sooner or later anyway.

- ***Why should anyone bother to run a complicated and expensive consultation exercise if they don't <u>have</u> to?***
  Firstly, because involving stakeholders helps to make proposals as good as they can be. It's not just about answering protests, it's about actively seeking people's views and ideas to improve initial proposals.
  Secondly, working with stakeholders helps anticipate future problems and build the skills and relationships necessary to prevent them. In the long run, involving stakeholders should save time, money and a lot of unnecessary headaches.

- ***Does it not just bring out 'the usual suspects' and the people who shout the loudest?***
  The reason for spending plenty of time on stakeholder analysis, and on general preparation of the process, is to ensure that all stakeholders are reached - not just the ones who tend to dominate. Besides, it often turns up potential allies as well as adversaries.

- ***How do I decide when I need to consult?***
  A critical question as unnecessary consultation squanders time, energy, money and the good will of those consulted. The reasons for consulting divide into two broad categories:
  - it is required by legislation (for example, planning) or
  - it is not required but it is strongly advisable.

  It is the latter category that usually prompts the question above. The many reasons for consulting are described at length in Section 1, but the short answer is that it is usually advisable to consult when:
  - there is public concern or sensitivity about something, and the likelihood of future conflict is such concerns are not addressed
  - it will be difficult to implement policy without stakeholder support
  - stakeholder input will improve the quality of the eventual result.

- ***What happens if there are people of other cultures involved?***
  The more differences of culture there are, whether racial, professional or organisational, the greater the scope for confusion and misunderstanding, and the more important it is to invest time and effort to ensure stakeholders' concerns are properly appreciated.
  Working across cultures may mean additional time and effort, but it is often vital to make that investment.

- ***Won't involving stakeholders just slow down the whole process?***
  It may cause some delays if it turns up unexpected problems, but in most cases it will save time in the long run if it means the Agency is not wasting time later trying to win people round to decisions in which they have had no say.

- ***Can stakeholder consultation resolve direct conflict between outright adversaries?***
  Sometimes, but definitely not always – it depends on the source of dispute. If, for example, disagreement stems from misinformation or partial understanding of proposals, some intense discussion of the issues may resolve it. A good consultation process can also help people to appreciate each other's concerns and perceptions more clearly. Sometimes agreement on a certain issue is impossible, but the process leads to an agreement to disagree about that issue while agreement is sought over less contentious issues, so progress can still be made.

Annex A: Identifying and selecting stakeholders and consultees

A:1 Categories of stakeholder

- **Statutory consultees**. These are the easiest group to define, because generally speaking they are pre-defined by regulation. Statutory consultees are bodies with which the Environment Agency is 'required' to consult; they include bodies such as government agencies and local authorities. While you need to ensure you follow the correct statutory processes for consulting these organisations, they can also be included in non-statutory consultations.

- **Strategic stakeholders** (non-statutory consultees). This group can be defined as people who represent organisations, whether at a national, regional or local level whose support of or opposition to what is proposed would be significant, or who have particular information or expertise to offer. Examples might include trade bodies, national organisations such as RSPB and Friends of the Earth, professional associations, and so on.

- **Community stakeholders.** This group includes individuals or organisations that are interested because they live in a community likely to be directly affected by what is proposed: interested individuals, representatives of residents associations, clubs, church groups etc.

There are two general points to make. The first is that it is better to involve too many than to miss out some who are crucial. The second is that it is always potentially dangerous to put people into boxes; for example, some who appear to be 'community' stakeholders may feel their concerns are more properly 'strategic', while others can be fitted into more than one box.

A:2 Prioritising stakeholders

If you end up with too many stakeholders and limited resources with which to consult them, then you have to start prioritising: an uncomfortable but sometimes necessary process. This is most likely to happen when you plan a meeting or workshop approach and then discover that there are more stakeholders than you appreciated.

If it becomes clear that the number of interested stakeholders outstrips the resources available to consult them all to the extent that you would wish, the first step is for the initiator to bring this fact to the notice of the other key stakeholders.

There are then several options available:
- increase the resources available for consultation;
- use a process that can involve larger numbers at lower costs (e.g. using the Internet or via the post);
- take a staged approach and involve different stakeholders at different stages;
- invite everyone on a 'first come, first served' basis;
- explore which individuals' or groups' interests could be effectively represented by others.

Negotiate and establish criteria for categorising stakeholders according to the degree to which they will be affected by the proposals or should properly be able to influence it, and allocate resources accordingly.

You should also be aware of the Agency's Stakeholder Analysis tool. This has been developed out of the need to understand the Agency's transactions with its stakeholders, and provides a valuable checklist for anyone involved in consultation. You can gain access to the tool through the Corporate Affairs of e-business intranet sites. Alternatively, contact Tina Hulbert (who developed it!).

A:3 Special needs

Identify which stakeholders may need special assistance in order to participate on an equal footing. For example, what languages should written material be translated into? And everything produced by the Environment Agency must be in line with the Welsh Language Policy.

In some cases it may be appropriate to provide other translations, such as a translation of the key issues or just the invitation to participate, into other languages to encourage other groups to feel their views are welcomed. However don't assume that written translation is always the answer. If there are relatively small numbers of people involved, however, it may be more effective (both in terms of time and quality of engagement) to arrange face-to-face meetings using an interpreter.

You may also need to consider other issues which may prevent people from being involved, such as ensuring physical access to meeting places for people with disabilities, timing meetings to enable parents with small children to attend, holding meetings in different venues to reach certain cultural groups (e.g. religious centres). Sensitivity and effort are the most important principles here, to ensure you consider the needs of those you want to engage with.

There is a Government compact with the voluntary sector, providing guidance on links to the sector, which has special guidance on working with black and minority ethnic groups (and local communities). For more details see http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/main/gateway/index.html

Annex B: Resources for consultation

B:1 Time

How long should a consultation process take? Every consultation will be different and should be assessed separately but, leaving out items such as the drafting of long documents and the effect of holiday periods, here is some rough guidance on how long each stage should take:

1. **Identifying clear objectives and outcomes** including liasing with colleagues in other departments and perhaps talking to some key stakeholders is ***unlikely to take less than a month and two months might be more realistic.***

2. **Designing the consultation process**, discussing it with colleagues and again perhaps with some key stakeholders, identifying the right stakeholders, choosing the detailed techniques and allowing some time to re-think it all: ***another month at least***.

3. How long it takes to **implement the consultation process** will depend on the process and the methods you use: ***a conventional written process should allow three months***; a workshop might be over in a day, with another day or two to write up the results, but then those results need to be published and distributed.

4. **Providing feedback** to individual stakeholders, in the form of thanks for their contribution, should be done immediately; after the end of the process the collated results and some form of formal summary or response should be provided ***within, ideally, two or three weeks of the process ending***.

5. **Evaluation of the process** should be done ***during or immediately after the process*** and the results fed back to stakeholders.

6. Finally, **designing and publishing the results** can take anything ***up to four months***.

B:2 People

Every consultation process requires the tasks above to be done: whether they are done by one person internally, a departmental team or an external consultancy depends on the nature and size of the consultation and the resources available for it. However, consultation is a resource-intensive process and cannot be managed effectively without adequate resources. It is extremely unlikely that it can be done effectively by adding it into the existing responsibilities of a member of staff.

B:3 Money

The resource implications of setting up and running a participative process are determined by a range of variables:

- how many stakeholders need to be involved;
- how complex the issues are;
- how much prior planning and preparation is required ;
- how many meetings are needed or how much needs to be spent on document preparation and translation, postage, consults etc;
- how much time is required for the collation and analysis of responses; and
- how much time is required for internal management, coordination and evaluation etc.

The cost of consultation can range from a few thousand to a few hundred thousand pounds: it depends entirely on what you want to achieve and how you decide to do it. The Agency operates within certain budgetary and resource constraints and it may therefore be necessary to amend the selection of consultation techniques and the overall process to reflect available resources.

Annex C: Techniques for consultation

C:1 Choosing techniques for consultation processes

C:1.1 Background

A wide range of tools and techniques can be used for stakeholder consultation. These are not mutually exclusive and can be used in parallel on the same consultation exercise as appropriate.

The purpose here is to introduce the most common and indicate their strengths and weaknesses, and thereby provide some indication of when each should and should not be used. Remember, however, that designing a consultation is like designing anything else: there are no absolute rules and plenty of room for creativity and imagination in how you do it.

Also, given the amount of consultation done nowadays, and what might be called 'consultation fatigue', finding novel and different ways to consult people is essential to maintain response rates.

The most common approaches are:

- consultation paper and request for comments;
- information gathering by questionnaire or even telephone;
- meetings
  - face-to-face meetings
  - public meetings
  - workshops
  - advisory panels, committees, seminars and forums;
- exhibitions;
- the Internet.

Each technique has practical advantages and disadvantages, but you will also want to consider other issues such as:

- the need to stimulate responses;
- how much you want to test new approaches, and lessons from past experiences with similar stakeholders;
- using several methods in tandem, or in sequence;
- your own practical constraints (time, cost, staff availability etc).

C:1.2 Variables affecting choice of consultation method

Choice of consultation method and overall planning depends on a number of key variables. Some, such as the availability of time or resources, are usually givens; others need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The following are the variables that are most likely to have a strong influence on the consultation method chosen.

- Time available
- Number of stakeholders
- Type of stakeholders
- Means of accessing stakeholders
- Geographical spread of stakeholders
- Stakeholders' familiarity with the subject
- Whether there are existing relationships among stakeholders
- Type of relationship Agency has or desires with stakeholders
- Stakeholders' special needs
- The Agency's role in the project
- What else the Agency is doing on the same or similar issues
- Resources available
- Statutory constraints
- Complexity of issues

- How controversial or sensitive the issues are
- Purpose and objectives of exercise
- What stage in the process
- History on earlier consultations on the subject – the baggage
- Internal Agency/government politics around the issue
- Type of responses required
- Likely volume of responses
- Requirement for responses able to be assessed on merit rather than source
- How responses/data are to be analysed

If this seems a little daunting, it might be best to start by considering the purpose of the consultation, the target consultees and practical considerations and constraints. Crucially, early consideration should also be given to how technically complex and controversial the subject matter is and how important it is to resolve conflict and create or strengthen relationships among stakeholders.

C:1.3 Consulting on technically complex issues
Where the subject matter is technically complex, such as with the development of new regulations or licensing procedures, there are two main considerations:

- First, proposals should be developed through preliminary consultation with key stakeholders on whom they will have most direct impact, especially if it is economic, before they go out to wider consultation.

- Secondly, technically complex subjects are best understood when they are in written form, and in these circumstances a publication of proposals and a request for written comments is appropriate. A mixture of 'open' and more structured questions helps stakeholders to comment both on generalities and on specific issues. In these circumstances it may also be appropriate to convene small groups of experts to test out plans before or part way through drafting.

If there are areas where the Agency is itself unsure of the best way forward, it should be explicit about the dilemmas and ask for specific information or ideas that will help to resolve them.

C:1.4 Consulting on controversial issues and situations
Situations are controversial when they exhibit more than one or two of the following characteristics:
- many different stakeholders are focusing on many different issues
- the situation evokes contrasting feelings, values and perceptions
- the factual information currently available from different sources is contradictory or contested
- different stakeholders have different cultures, styles, and approaches to the situation
- there is a recent history of conflict or unresolved problems around the situation
- there is a high degree of uncertainty around the situation and how it will be resolved
- relationships among stakeholders are non-existent, poor or deteriorating
- there is a likelihood of conflict or legal action in the future if the situation is not properly addressed.

Where situations are controversial, consultation processes that allow stakeholders to compare their different approaches and to challenge each other's interests and priorities are preferable to processes that put the Agency in the position of judge and jury. In these situations the Agency's role is as much to facilitate mutual understanding of different issues and concerns, as it is to reach a final judgement.

This need not invariably mean using a meeting or workshop format. An electronic process, for example, that enables large numbers of stakeholders to compare different viewpoints may well be an effective way to establish areas of common ground and difference as a prelude to formulating proposals, but it is less able to help people build relationships across serious divisions of opinion.

One point that always needs consideration is whether meetings with campaigners should be 'open' or 'closed'. Open meetings are transparent and sometimes campaigners will only come if a meeting is to be open; on the other hand, an open meeting can encourage grandstanding and 'speaking to the gallery'. Invitations to closed meetings are often treated with suspicion, but there are circumstances in which campaigners may welcome the opportunity to speak off the record and indicate where there may be room for compromise – something they could not do in public without alienating their supporters.

If the situation is critical, using an independent third party 'honest broker' or professional mediator may be the best way to decide how to advance the situation.

C:1.5 When <u>not</u> to consult

There are situations in which consultation in any form may do more harm than good:

- when there is no real commitment to it
- when all the key decisions have already been made and the whole exercise would therefore be a sham
- where there is no detailed knowledge (e.g. of the areas of conflict on the issues, or of the interests of the stakeholders)
- when there is not enough time, or
- when there are insufficient resources for design, professional facilitation, implementation and dealing with responses.

C:1.6 Consider the questions to ask

All forms of consultation involve asking questions of stakeholders. The challenge is to find questions that steer between being so general that they are either unanswerable or the answers are not terribly useful, or so specific that they constrain people and produce replies which may or may not be helpful.

The following tips are about asking questions generally, whether they are in written documents or during face-to-face meetings.

- Types of question:
  - 'closed' questions get yes or no answers
  - *what* questions get information
  - *why* questions get explanations, justifications and rationalisations
  - *how* questions are best to get people to think through the consequences of their opinions and offer practical solutions
  - 'leading' questions are so framed that the stakeholder feels manipulated into accepting the question's premise even if he or she does not agree with it. Avoid at all costs.

- Questions can also be used to separate:
  - facts from feelings; causes from effects; arguments from assertions; issues into their component parts
  - underlying needs and grievances from 'presenting' problems.

- Always explain *why* you are asking a question: setting out a dilemma or a number of options for a way forward helps people understand what you want of them.

- Prepare people to hear the question: a short introduction, such as "*I'd just like to ask...*" if it is a meeting or *"A key question is…"* if you are writing can also soften the impact of a tough question.

- Ask people to be specific by providing examples wherever possible or appropriate.

- Encourage participants to join you as problem-solvers by asking questions such as: *"How might this issue be resolved?"* or *"How can we ensure this situation is prevented in future?" "How can we take this forward?"* and so on.

Thinking through the actual questions you want to ask at this stage can be a very effective way into Step 5.

C:2 Consultation processes

C:2.1 Consultation paper and request for comments

The conventional form of national consultation within the Agency is the written consultation process supported by the Agency's website. A document is sent to 'interested parties' and usually made available via a website or other means to others, and they are all asked to comment by a certain date. Where a website is used an e-mail address is usually provided for written submissions. In some cases written consultation documents have a series of questions to help people frame their responses. In due course a digest or summary of the responses received should be published.

Advantages:	Straightforward and well understood.
Disadvantages:	Consultation documents are inevitably based on assumptions that may or may not be shared by stakeholders (for example, that economic growth is always a good thing). If such basic assumptions are not shared, many stakeholders will feel unable to comment or feel that their comments cannot be taken seriously. Likewise, if a document relies on, for example, scientists working for a government agency, its scientific basis may be rejected by some stakeholders on the grounds that the authors are working to a pre-set agenda. If large numbers of responses are received, it is often difficult and resource intensive to analyse and use the comments. It is also difficult to provide clear feedback on comments to participants.
Good for:	Getting detailed input on policies and proposals from professionally and technically qualified stakeholders where basic assumptions are already known to be shared.
Not so good for:	Getting input from 'ordinary' (i.e. non-specialist) stakeholders.

C:2.2 Information gathering

Opinion surveys, interviews and questionnaires are all direct and effective ways to gather information about stakeholders' views. They can be useful, providing they reach a wide range of stakeholders so they offer a cross-section of opinion, which is carefully analysed. 'Focus groups' can be an effective research tool but their members are not necessarily stakeholders and therefore the results may not reflect stakeholder opinion.

Advantages:	They can collect a wide range of views using fairly limited resources of time and money
Disadvantages:	These methods only gather information in response to the questions asked: they may miss opinions or concerns that are not asked about. Equally, stakeholders may, intentionally or otherwise, give partial or misleading responses; they may resent the intrusion on their privacy, and they will receive no feedback on their views.
Good for:	Getting a feel for a situation especially where time and resources are limited.
Not so good for:	Resolving polarised situations where stakeholders really need to deal with each other directly; going beyond people's existing preconceptions and prejudices.

C:2.3 Meetings

Meetings come in all shapes and sizes, so we need some differentiation here.

- **One-to-one meetings.** These involve the Agency (possibly with an independent researcher or independent facilitator) meeting individual stakeholders or groups of stakeholders to discuss the issues.

Advantages:	Such meetings enable stakeholders' issues and concerns to be addressed directly, accurate information can be given in direct response to specific questions; and direct communication and personal links can be established.
Disadvantages:	They can soak up large amounts of time and money.
Good for:	Making personal contacts with individual stakeholders or groups.
Not so good for:	Getting stakeholders to understand each other's point of view.

- **Public meetings.** Well-designed public meetings can avoid situations where harassed and fearful managers cower behind large tables while angry members of the public hurl abuse. Good design and preparation, ideally in consultation with some of those likely to attend, an experienced and respected chairperson or facilitator (preferably independent), a suitable venue at a suitable time, and invitations to appropriate numbers of appropriate people for the process can all reduce but not eliminate the risks.

Advantages:	Can be effective in enabling a wide range of views to be aired, questions asked, and answers given where they can be heard by others in the room.
Disadvantages:	Large plenary sessions can inhibit many stakeholders, encourage pre-determined statements of position and therefore polarise further differences among stakeholders, discouraging interaction and the exploration of ideas and solutions to problems.
Good for:	Demonstrating a willingness to talk to a wide audience and face public criticism.
Not so good for:	Making real progress on complex or controversial issues.

- **Workshops.** Workshops of one form or another are the staple diet of processes described variously as 'public participation' or 'stakeholder dialogue' or 'stakeholder engagement'. Probably the most significant characteristic of such workshops is that the initiators and the stakeholders decide *together* what needs to be discussed and how to do it, and they are aided by independent facilitators who work on behalf of all those involved.

Advantages:	Workshops can be one-off events lasting one or two days, or they can be part of a sequence stretching over many months or years; they can achieve results, such as relationship-building, that other processes cannot.
Disadvantages:	Workshop-based processes can be slow, complicated and costly compared with other forms of consultation; ideally they require independent professional design and facilitation; some control of the process must be surrendered to the stakeholders. Some stakeholders may also want to charge for their time.
Good for:	Making stakeholders feel really involved and listened to.
Not so good for:	Simply explaining a pre-determined Agency position or retaining total control over the process.

- **Advisory Panels, Committees, Seminars and Forums.** Groups of people, both lay and expert, can be drawn from local communities, trade unions, non-government organisations, industry associations etc to advise on the issues faced by stakeholders. Such meetings can be regular, frequent or one-offs.

Advantages:	Ideas can be tested and concerns identified before they ever reach the public domain; communication can be made through participants with wider groups of stakeholders; recommendations can be offered on potentially controversial issues in order to prevent unnecessary problems.
Disadvantages:	Tend to rely on an exclusive group of people who may, because they become 'insiders', become increasingly divorced from the concerns of 'ordinary' stakeholders.
Good for:	Airing of current issues among people who understand the issues.
Not so good for:	Widening involvement from range of stakeholders.

C:2.4 Exhibitions

The Agency has not, historically, used exhibitions for consultation purposes, but many organisations find them very useful as a means of explaining projects and gathering the reactions of those who view them. They are particularly useful where a project may involve visual intrusion; for example, an exhibition can give people a good idea of what a wind farm might look like from different directions.

Advantages: A picture is worth a thousand words: exhibitions enable people to see what you want them to understand, and can be set up in public places such as shopping centres.

Disadvantages: Exhibitions need to be very good to be effective, and they need knowledgeable staff on hand to answer questions, so they tend to be expensive. They may also attract relatively few people unless well advertised or in a public place.

Good for: Conveying information and involving people who would be inhibited by or unable to attend a public meeting. They can also be useful as one strand of a wider consultation strategy.

Not so good for: Enabling stakeholders to air their views or talk to each other, or for getting systematic, high quality feedback.

C:2:5 The Internet

There are a number of techniques for consultation via the Internet:
- stakeholders can gain access to draft or consultation documents (given appropriate publicity),
- people can participate in on-line conferences, e-mail exchanges and electronic forums or,
- an initiator can use specially designed consultation software to enable stakeholders to participate in structured consultations offering a number of iterations with feedback loops.

It is likely that, as public familiarity with the Internet increases, it will become an increasingly effective consultation tool; for the present it should never be used in isolation.

Advantages:	Enables the potential involvement of large numbers of stakeholders for relatively little cost and can allow all stakeholders to see the comments of all other stakeholders. Comments can be analysed systematically and in an automated and semi automated way.
Disadvantages:	Internet access, although steadily increasing, will still exclude some stakeholders. Even with access, some people simply prefer traditional communication methods.

Good for:	Consulting large numbers of people relatively cheaply and providing simpler ways of analysing responses (depending on design / software).
Not so good for:	Building personal relationships among stakeholders or issues.

Annex D: A framework for evaluating consultation

Evaluation can allow those running consultation to check that the exercise did in practice deliver the objectives originally envisaged, and provides the evidence of what worked well (and what worked less well), so they can learn lessons from the experience and do it better next time.

The following table provides a basic framework for evaluating Agency consultations. It is intended as a guide to prompt thinking, rather than a model to suit every consultation.

	Rationale / explanation	**Key questions / issues**	**Possible criteria for evaluation**
Objectives	To check whether what was done achieved the original purpose(s)	What were the original objectives? Were they achieved? If not, why not (e.g. not correct at start, not clear, or process not appropriate to objectives)?	Examples of misunderstanding of objectives by participants Everything worked to the original plan Objectives and plans had to be changed as process developed
Level of Agency involvement	To check whether the Agency stance was appropriate	What stance was chosen (see Section 1.2)? Did the stance have to change during the process?	Comments on Agency role (praise or complaints) Questions about Agency role internally
Methods and techniques used	To check whether appropriate methods and techniques were used	What methods were used? How were those methods chosen (e.g. with stakeholders)? How were those methods explained (e.g. to stakeholders and Agency managers)?	Types of responses sought were received Ease of operation Methods understood by participants and Agency managers
Responses	To ensure the level and range of responses validates the exercise	How many responses were received? What types of responses were received? Were responses received from all key stakeholders? What efforts were made to reach relevant but traditionally under-represented groups? How were responses dealt with? How did you report back on action based on responses?	Levels of inclusivity (i.e. no key stakeholders excluded) Numbers of responses (e.g. 10% response rate on large consultation is good; more is excellent) Participants satisfied with Agency reaction to responses Agency managers aware of Agency actions and how these were agreed

Inputs	To identify the costs of the consultation	How much staff time did it take? How much did external consultancy cost? How much were print and distribution costs? How long did it take (in calendar time)?	Staff time in hours, or equivalent of full-time post over period Invoiced costs Internal and external print, postage etc Time from start to finish
Outputs	To identify what was produced and organised	What written products were done (e.g. press releases, consultation brief, draft document, questions)? What events were organised (e.g. meeting, workshop, exhibition)? What process was used for analysing and reporting on responses?	Good responses in a form which were easy to analyse Clear progression from initial draft to final version (if document) Internal and/or external report on consultation process and outcomes
Outcomes	To identify what was achieved	What were the results of the exercise? What has changed as a result of the exercise (e.g. immediate or long term, personal or group, organisational, small scale or system change)? What are the lessons for future practice (e.g. what worked well - or less well)? Any specific comments from consultees about the process?	Improved Agency policy and/or practice Environmental improvements which had wide support Positive feedback from stakeholders about process and outcomes New relationships Increased trust and understanding of the Agency and its role Willingness of participants to be engaged again
Using the results	To ensure the lessons from the process are shared and understood	Is there a final report of the evaluation (e.g. a paragraph in the report on the consultation)? Is the report being circulated internally and/or externally? How is the report being publicised (e.g. intranet, email notice to key individuals etc)? How will systems need to change as a result of the findings of the evaluation?	Extent to which the consultation exercise is known about in the Agency Extent to which the lessons are articulated and taken on board by other staff Changes to systems as a result.

Notes to table

- Changing objectives, methods etc during the process is not necessarily a bad thing, as long as there is a clear decision process for making the changes that is communicated fully to all involved.

- Depending on the nature of the consultation, you may want to weight these areas differently, and you may want to add other areas - such as the wider context for the specific exercise being evaluated, and identifying the stage reached if the evaluation is being done in the middle of a major consultation exercise.

- Detailed criteria for evaluating any exercise will depend on the specific objectives of the consultation; the above table is just intended to stimulate thinking and provide a framework for a basic approach.

For more information, see *Evaluating Participatory, Deliberative and Co-operative Ways of Working*, InterAct, June 2002; available on www.interactweb.org.uk