

Briefing note seven: Consultation

Consultation

Consultation is when you ask members of the public for their views and use these views to inform your decision making. Consultation can be about any aspect of the research process – from identifying topics for research through to thinking about the implications of research findings.

You might, for example, hold one-off meetings to ask people's views on the importance of a study and areas that it is important to measure within the study. Research funders may consult members of the public by asking for their views on research grant applications.

If this is the first time you have involved people in your research, it can be a good starting point. It can also be a way of getting the views of a larger group of people. However, think carefully about what you are asking and what you will do with the information. You might find that people are frustrated at being asked for their views without a commitment from you that you will act on them. There is a danger of 'consultation fatigue' for individuals and organisations who have been consulted before and think that their views have been ignored in the past.

If you decide to consult with people on your research we recommend that you:

- give them enough time to respond
- feedback on the actions you have taken as a result of the consultation
- ask if they would like to hear about the findings of the

research.

Benefits of consultation:

- it enables you to find out people's views
- it can be useful when exploring sensitive and difficult issues
- you can get a wide range of views
- you can involve people in discussion and debate.

Challenges of consultation:

- you might not get the broad views you hope for
- people might have previous bad experiences of consultation where their views were not listened to
- you might require an experienced facilitator.

An example of consultation: Consulting parents about the design of a randomised controlled trial of osteopathy for children with cerebral palsy

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 20 parents of children with cerebral palsy and other neurological conditions, asking them to choose between four trial designs, to talk about noticeable changes in their child's condition and their views about payment for trial treatment. By consulting parents about the design of the research, the subsequent trial achieved excellent recruitment and retention rates. ([Edwards et al 2011](#))