

Community Consultation Skills

Consideration for the planning of community consultation



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Active participation consultations should be designed to enable community members themselves to set the aims and objectives of the services and programs that they want to instate and decide what the measures of effectiveness are. Community members must be given every opportunity to plan and manage the projects that meet their needs, while all stakeholders must be invited to contribute their ideas and participate as well.

Some participants may periodically wish to step back and gather their thoughts, ideas and opinions and that is okay, but they should be gently encouraged to participate as frequently as possible. It is important to remember that some community members will never have been consulted by service providers before; they will not initially understand what the procedure requires, and what it may mean for them. Therefore, you must be prepared to take some time to build the confidence and trust of the group. These investments of time and energy made at the beginning of a project will be soundly repaid by the successful functioning of consultations, as they get underway.

As a final note, you will need to consider how you intend to foster active participation of both women and men, so that both groups feel comfortable expressing their views and do not feel threatened or marginalised by the solutions identified.

Engaging community members consultation processes

Engaging the community is a critical foundation for a successful consultation. If people from the community do not view consultations as something beneficial for them, they will not come. If people do not participate actively, then the resulting services w

Consideration of who to invite is important. Communities are not homogenous, and different groups have different needs. Marginalised groups, such as women, older people and youth, cannot be assumed to be

Effective facilitation

As a community consultation facilitator, you will need to adapt to a range of cultural attitudes and circumstances, not to mention changing group dynamics. Sensitive and effective facilitation requires a number of skills and characteristics:

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If you are not confident that you have sufficient skills and experience, you may consider attending facilitation training or working with a co-facilitator.

For more information on effective facilitation, including how to work with interpreters, please consult the accompanying booklets *Tips for Trainers* and *Working with interpreters*.

Following up a community consultation

A key element in meaningful community consultation is providing participants with the opportunity to be involved in identifying a plan of action to address issues raised, and in the implementation and evaluation of services and programs wherever possible. The consultation is only the first step in the process of active participation. Therefore, taking the first steps in creating an action plan should be included in the consultation agenda, as one of the final sessions. It should include identifying next steps and forming working groups that give participants the opportunity to be involved in an ongoing way.

Further information

When planned carefully and run well, community consultations are an essential and empowering step in engaging communities and working