

EFDS Consultation Guidance for sports clubs.

1 Why consult?

Sporting organisations should consult widely to ensure that when developing their policies, procedures and programmes they are informed by a wide range of experiences and take into account the impact of any proposals on the diverse communities that make up the population.

For NGBs and other providers of sport, consultation with a diverse range of individuals and organisations represents an opportunity to bring a range of new knowledge, experience and expertise to bear on their developments.

Appropriate organisations from the diversity sector should be willing to offer their advice to sport based on objective experience and appropriate consultation with those they are advocates for and work with.

Effective consultation:

- Enables others to contribute to the policy making process;
- Symbolises sport's commitment to be open and accountable;
- Leads to more realistic and robust sport policy that better reflects people's needs and wishes;
- Helps to plan, prioritise and deliver better services throughout sport;
- Can create a working partnership and mutual understanding with those consulted;
- Identifies problems quickly enabling matters to be put right before they escalate.
- Can help to identify and develop new partnerships and programmes potentially leveraging in new additional funds.

2 The process and evaluation of consultation

There are many ways of consulting. There is no right method for any given circumstance. All sorts of conditions influence which methods will provide useful information, and there are no guarantees that just because one method worked well once it will do so again.

Careful thought should be given to the aim of the consultation, the nature of those being consulted, and the timetable for action. Sometimes talking to people will be as valuable as writing to them, or more so. It may be appropriate to use a variety of methods.

a Good consultation requires careful planning.

The key is to get the best spread of views from those most likely to be affected, and from those with the most to contribute. It can be helpful to seek views from voluntary and community organisations in the diversity sector themselves as to how best to carry out a particular consultation exercise.

Consideration should also be given to whether a consultation might best be undertaken in partnership with voluntary and community organisations, and whether that would lead to any additional resource implications for the organisations involved.

The most important tip is not to rely on just one method. Using more than one method increases the chance of a better response – both in terms of quality and quantity. Different methods can also produce different results.

b Written consultation

Written exercises provide a formal means by which people can be invited to comment on policies and proposals. This helps to make policy-making properly accountable, and ensures that knowledge and experience are shared more widely. There are different types of written consultation, ranging from wide public consultations, on for example Government Green Papers, to small-scale consultations with specialist groups on minor or technical matters.

Guidance on consultation documents is set out below.

c Other methods

Written consultation exercises are just one way to consult. Other ways include opinion surveys (postal and face-to-face); meetings; focus groups; user panels; and the internet. Surveys can give an indication of a weight of views, while qualitative research through, for example, meetings, focus groups or panels can provide an understanding of the range and complexity of views. In organising public meetings care should be taken to ensure that they are fully accessible, and adequate notice should be given to relevant interested bodies.

d Set objectives

Set clear objectives from the start of the consultation. Why are you doing it? What do you want to find out? Who are you going to ask? How are you going to do it? What are you going to do with the results? As with all objectives, they should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-specific). At the end, you want to be able to measure whether:

- objectives were clear;
- they were relevant to the consultation itself and linked to your wider planning process; and
- they were explained to, and understood by, all relevant staff and those consulted.

e Who you consult with

Set specific targets for the levels of response you want from different groups (think about users, potential users, representative groups, and particular groups – for example older people, disabled people, women's groups, carers, community groups and Black and Minority Ethnic organisations). Information about which consultation methods worked for which groups will be very useful for the future. At the end, you will want to be able to measure whether:

- you got views from those you wanted;
- you were successful in consulting minority, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups;
- different groups responded to different methods;
- you gave feedback to those you consulted; and
- those consulted felt that the consultation was worthwhile.

f Evaluate your methods

Identifying which methods to use is clearly central to effective consultation. You need to bear a number of issues in mind, including who you want to consult, what sort of information you want, and how much money, time and experience you have. At the end you want to be able to measure whether:

- the methods used were right for the objectives of the consultation;
- if you used more than one method, which one worked better than others and why; and
- you got the required qualitative and/or quantitative information, response rate and representative sample.

g Timescale

The length of time consultation takes is often underestimated. You may give a deadline for responses, but what will you do if people ask for extensions? Have you planned how you are going to report back on

the results? This can take longer than the consultation period itself. At the end, you want to be able to measure whether:

- the timetable was clear and kept to – if not, why not; and
- enough time was allowed for responses.

h Information provided

Remember to evaluate the effectiveness of any material you produce as part of the consultation process. Did the posters used to advertise your open meeting attract the right audience? Was putting material on the internet an effective way of encouraging responses? Did you succeed in making information available to the right people? At the end, you want to be able to measure whether information was:

- easy to access;
- relevant to the consultation;
- produced in plain language and easy to understand; and
- available in other languages and in other formats (for example, Braille, audio cassette) where appropriate.

i. Costs

You need to be able to show that you got value for money from your consultation. Some methods are much cheaper than others, but the information you get may not be of any use. Include staff time and training in your budgets and evaluation – this can be the most expensive element, particularly if you are running the exercise in-house. At the end you need to be able to measure whether:

- you budgeted adequately;
- you made savings in particular areas or overspent in others (and why); and
- unforeseen costs arose and what they were.

j. Effect of the consultation

The key question is whether anything changed as a result of the consultation. At the end, you need to be able to measure whether:

- you got views that you could use;
- you have actually used those views;
- the consultation has led to some identifiable change in your policy or service; and
- the consultation has changed the relationship between you and those consulted, users and others.

k Training

Evaluation is an effective way of identifying any training needs in relation to consultation and policy appraisal. Training which involves

input from voluntary and community organisations can be a useful way to meet those needs, and share experience and best practice.

3 Important notes on developing the relationship with your members / consultees.

- Be honest – do not make promises that cannot be kept.
- Having met with and developed a relationship do not dump or finish with someone abruptly – respect the relationship and develop meaningful communication that is two way and which aids the development of equality.
- For any relationship to work compromises need to be made.
- Embrace and work with new partners as they present themselves as long as they can contribute to the priorities of your club and you have the capacity to work with them.

4 Summary - Key points for effective consultation and policy appraisal.

- Build consultation into your regular planning cycle and consult early.
- Appraise new policies and procedures, particularly at the developmental stage, identifying as far as possible any implications for the club at national (if appropriate) regional and local level.
- Give consultees enough time to respond and be clear about their role in the consultation.
- Write documents in simple language and be clear about their purpose.
- Explain where decisions have already been made – make clear what you can change and what you can't.
- Use more than one method of consultation and learn from others in the sport, diversity and other sectors.
- Be flexible and sensitive to the needs of those you wish to consult – think about how to reach all of the intended target audience, and take account positively of the specific needs, interests and contributions of those parts of the sector which represent women, disabled people, minority groups and the socially excluded.
- Encourage those consulted to give honest views, for example by assuring confidentiality when it is requested.
- Publicise the consultation and encourage participation by involving membership and infrastructure organisations.

- Analyse carefully the results of the consultation and report back on the views that were received and what you have done as a result.
- Evaluate carefully after consulting, and learn lessons for next time.