1. **Community Needs –**

**Consultation and Engagement**

1. Think of the community/ communities to which you belong/ identify with. List them here:
2. What makes them ‘community’/’communities’?
3. What are the features of this ‘community’/ these ‘communities’?
4. Name and describe a situation or issue that you care or feel passionate about or are motivated to do?
5. What skills, knowledge, experience and qualities can you bring to the situation/ issue?

**Consider the following:**

* Are community members participating?
* Are community members making real choices?
* Are community members making decisions?
* Do community members have self esteem?
* Are community members treated with dignity and respect?
* Do community members have access to reliable information?
* Can community members collectively decide and prioritise their own needs, issues and problems?
* Can community members collectively resolve their own needs, issues and problems?
* Can community members get together to make decisions about future direction for community development?
* What environmental issues are the community facing, or will possibly face in the future?

The goals of your project will be set by the interplay between the services and products you are equipped to provide and the needs of the community you serve.

Once you have gone through identifying your communities assets and resources, you will need to establish how you can best serve its needs. You may think you know what your community needs. You may even be right. Nevertheless, you must still consult your community peers first to find out what they want – and you must do this genuinely, with a mind open to change.

What your community wants may not always be the same as what it needs – your job may be to persuade your community that they have needs that they have not turned their minds to – and if there are latge differences between wants and needs you need to know about that too. You may decide to change your direction, or you may decide to spend more on community education, but you must establish a clear link between your goals and the goals of the people you want to involve.

Finding out what your community says it needs is incredibly iomportant because unless there are common goals, you may be unable to gain committed and motivated volunteers, you may lack clients, and you will have little support from funders and stakeholders.

There are resource implications to consultation, and you may have to balance your ideals with your finances, but consulting your community can be done in many ways. Look for a process that will give you the information you want and move you along the way to finding solutions within your present resources.

Questionaires and surveys can help, focus groups and open-ended investigations are better, and best of all is a forum made up of your potential clients, and stakeholders where you can think things through productively as a community.

***Interviews and background research***

Begin by talking to a few of the influential people who you know in the area – the heads of the community, local personalities and officials.

Ask them to identify:

* The important issues for the community and what they think is needed.
* Who else should be consulted.

If the issues are really clear, or if you cant afford resources to go further, this may be all you need to do as you will probably have already developed a resonable insite into your community’s needs. Remember that the best ideas can spring from the collision of many different positions.

***Surveys***

If there isn’t any existing research done about your area, you my want to carry out a survey of your own. Your not doing an academic research project, you just want a guide to action, so don’t fret too much about statistical accuracy. A survey – e.g. handed out to community members can give you an idea of how people feel about the issues that concern you. Give a copy to anyone who shows an interest.

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**Sample community needs survey:**

The (insert name of your group) is conducting a survey about the current and future needs of (your community).

To help us move forward, we would like to know about what you would like from our project, which (insert your purpose. Eg. To provide organic food for the community).

**Questions:**

1. How would you like to see your community change in the next five years?
2. Are there needs or gaps in programs or services that are not being met at the moment?
3. Are there any changes taking placein your community that concern you? What are they? What might be done about those changes?
4. What programs do you know of that people are trying in other places that we should try in your community?

**About you:**

We would just like to know a little bit about who has answered our questionaire. We promise that the data will be used for no other purpose and will be destrroyed after the survey is completed.

(add here any information that you would like to collect about the respondents e.g. Age, gender, job etc.)

**Anything else?**

Please feel free to provide any additional comments that you think will help improve our project/ group:

Thank you for working with us.

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***Focus Groups***

If you can gather a selection of people from your community around a table and take them through the options for your present and future work, you will throw a real light on your operations and your priorities.

Start with a list of issues, and make sure not to wander too far from the list.

**Ask:**

* What are your main concerns?
* What people/ groups in particular have these problems?
* Do you know where to find any previous data, or experts on these issues in this area?

Focus groups are good at finding out about perceptions, but not so good at finding out facts. Don’t undercut the opinions expressed by your group, but make sure to check their statements before taking action.

You may have to take extensive notes, so make sure you allow yourself adequate time, or perhaps tape the conversation if you have access to a recorder.

Groups have no resource limitations – you can keep holding focus groups until no new insights come up and you’ve heard everything before, but your unlikely to have that much time. Go forward when you’re so well provided with new ideas that you have all you can handle!

**Review**

When you have all the information gathered that you can use, line up the expressed needs and work out your priorities.

***Prevalence:*** is the need widespread?

***Severity:*** is the need serious or only a minor inconvenience?

***Selectivity:*** is it expressed most by a particular segment of the community?

***Possible interventions:*** Some needs are going to be very real but out of your reach; you will have to pick out the needs that you are capable of addressing.

Pull the common factors and the surprising insights out of your research and see how they line up with your previous assumptions of what your particular community needs. Think about what new partners have emerged in the course of the consultation process, and how you might be able to work with them.

At the end of the process, you should have more than a cold set of statistics – you should have a picture of the agreed needs you should be addressing to best serveice your community, and a story about how you will go about dealing with them. A story that you can use to convince, motivate and inspire your volunteers, your staff and your funders.

Translate this story into a set of new goals and strategies. Plans that you can now be more confident of producing results that your community actually needs and wants.

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| **CONSULTATION**  **TECHNIQUES** | **OBJECTIVES** | | | |
| **Information**  **Giving** | **Information**  **Seeking** | **Information Sharing** | **Participatory**  **Decision Making** |
| Publications |  |  |  |  |
| Promotions/ Campaign |  |  |  |  |
| Guarantees of Service |  |  |  |  |
| Complaint Resolution |  |  |  |  |
| Enquiry Responses |  |  |  |  |
| Polling/Surveys |  |  |  |  |
| Research |  |  |  |  |
| Search/ Conferences |  |  |  |  |
| Public Enquiries and Hearing |  |  |  |  |
| Discussion Papers |  |  |  |  |
| Submissions |  |  |  |  |
| Seminars/ Conferences |  |  |  |  |
| Networking |  |  |  |  |
| Public Meetings |  |  |  |  |
| Focus Groups/ Workshops |  |  |  |  |
| Customer Councils |  |  |  |  |
| Advisory Committees |  |  |  |  |
| Consultative Committes |  |  |  |  |
| Public Forums |  |  |  |  |
| Policy round tables |  |  |  |  |
| Informal Discussions |  |  |  |  |

**Deeper Engagement**

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|  | **Communicate** | **Consult** | **Collaborate** | **Co-Create** |
| **Purpose of Engagement** | To proactively share information | To understand and respond stakeholder concerns through open and constructive dialogue | To work in partnerships with stakeholders to advance mutual goals | To co-create innovative solutions to inter-organisational & societal issues |
| **Methods of Engagement** | \*Interactive websites  \*Blogs  \*Phone Lines  \*Sustainability Reports | \*Informal Meetings  \*Forums  \*Design Panels  \*Stakeolders in Strategic Planning | \*Joint Ventures a NGO’s  \*Partnerships | \*Social Issue Networks  \*Industry Task Forces  \*Cross-sector Coalitions |
| **When to Apply Engagement Method** | \*There is new information to share  \*As part of a quarterly or annual reporting cycle | \*Part of planning, & decision-making process  \*Part of ongoing cycle od consultation | \*When you have shared goals and common purpose  \*When you are working towards the same end and can share assets | \*When you are faced with a complex, cross-boundary, systems issue |
| **Desired Outcomes** | \*Heighten Awareness  \*Impart information  \*Build credibility | \*Deepen mutual understanding  \*Gain insight  \*Improve plans and decisions  \*Build trust and support | \*Efficient & effective use of resources  \*Buy-in and joint action by all partners  \*Achievement of goals, together | \*Innovation solutions not otherwise possible acting indepenently  \*Systems change |
| **Structure** |  | | | |