

Why are consultations important?

There are hundreds of reasons to run a consultation. Here's just a few:

- To seek the opinion and views of staff or key stakeholders against a proposed change in working practice or hours
- To see what users think of a particular service, activity or building
- To find out how the local public feel about a change within their area
- To find out how the local public feel about a proposed or possible change that could take place within their area
- To see if a new service proposal or business idea is viable within a particular area

So, as you can see, the majority of consultations that take place are led by companies or businesses within the public and private sectors alike. And they are run as a means of determining how a particular audience feels about an idea, a service or a change.

Consultations can be cumbersome things to organise. If you are going to run a consultation you have to determine who the audience is going to be, how that particular audience will be able to access information about the consultation, how you are going to be able to communicate with the audience and importantly how the audience is going to communicate their views back across to you. Then there is the collation of all of the consultation feedback, and of course the decisions that fall out of the consultation then need to be made. This can be particularly difficult if the opinions expressed throughout the consultation do not match the opinions that you had anticipated would be expressed. And finally, you'll then need to find a way to re-communicate your determined action back to all participants, based on the outcome of the consultation.

So, yes, consultations are time consuming to organise and to run. But they are hugely important and so are usually well worth the time and money you invest into hosting one. Some of the key benefits that come out of running a consultation are listed here:

- You can avoid making big financial and service design errors. By consulting with potential customers you can ascertain what they do and don't like, want and need, and thus can then ensure that any new business you pull together or any amendments to your current business or service you choose to make is in line with real need and desire.
- It helps individuals feel valued. Whether it be staff, customers, clients or the general public, if individuals are made to feel as if they are valued and their views are valued and considered, regardless of the outcome of the consultation you are bound to increase the respect they hold for you.
- There is a moral or governed requirement. For some issues, such as work place restructures or redundancies or changes that are likely to be made to public services, there is a governed or legal requirement to lead some form of consultation with any individual who may be affected by these changes. Thus, if you are concerned that your consultation falls into this bracket, it is always better to run the consultation than to skip over it and hope for the best.