

PAPER

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Community consultation

Bob Dick (1990) *Processes for community consultation*. A resource document prepared for the use of facilitators and members of local area consultative committees associated with the community consultation project for road planning in Queensland.¹

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This is a resource document for members of local area consultative committees, whose task it is to guide a process of community consultation associated with road planning in Queensland. The process is intended to provide effective communication between community members, officers of the Department of Transport, and others.

The process will be judged successful if there is very widespread community involvement, effective communication between community and Department, and increased understanding between the various people involved.

The two aspects of this process which will do most to ensure the success of the consultation are ...

- local area consultative committees which use their skills, energy and enthusiasm to involve others in constructive interaction; and
 - community citizens who involve themselves as individuals, who speak for themselves, who try to take into account information from all those affected, and who are willing to pursue the good of the community as a whole.
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Summary ...

... which provides an outline of the consultative process, and a guide to the document. This summary is intended to be a convenience for those who have already read the document, or for those who are looking for particular information within it.

The consultative process has a clear purpose: to provide for a readier and more constructive interchange of information, most commonly between the community and the Department of Transport. To do this, local area consultative committees are formed. They act as intermediaries between community and Department.

See *Chapter 3: Committees and other groups*, which describes the setting up of committees and their role

The consultative processes used might be characterised as collaborative, and participative. That is, they provide effective communication so that people are helped to develop a real understanding of a range of points of view, and a breadth of vision which encompasses the wider community; and they involve as many of the stakeholders as possible in the process.

See *Chapter 2: Assumptions*, which explains non-adversarial and participative approaches

Most issues will probably originate with requests from either Department or members of the community. Local consultative committees respond by identifying the stakeholders, defining the type of involvement required, and then choosing the process which will involve as many stakeholders as possible in addressing the issue.

See *Chapter 4: Guiding the consultative process*, which identifies some types of issue, and briefly describes appropriate methods

When a method is chosen, it is then designed in more detail, its implementation is planned, and it is carried out.

See the detailed descriptions in Part 3

Part 2 of the document, consisting of chapter 5, is directed towards the interim committees which set in place the consultative structure. It outlines that consultative structure, and describes the process which can be used to set it up.

A consultative structure is set in place to enable consultation to occur. The consultative process is guided by a local area consultative committee, created by an interim committee, itself using a consultative process.

See Chapter 5: Creating the consultative structure

The remainder of the document, from Chapter 6 onwards, describes a number of processes which can be used for community consultation. It expands upon the brief descriptions given in Chapter 4.

Action planning: a planning method which develops a detailed action plan for achieving a goal, and a plan for monitoring goal achievement.

See Chapter 6: Action planning

Interviewing: A technique for collecting information through sensing interviews. The process described is convergent interviewing. It is structured for rigour and economy; the content is left open so that the information is not pre-determined by the questions.

See Chapter 7: Convergent interviewing

Delphi: A technique for generating agreement out of disagreement using a highly-structured process and a skilled facilitator. A face-to-face version is described.

See Chapter 8: Face-to-face delphi

Small-group surveys: A more-participative and robust alternative to mail surveys, for collecting information. The version described is an action-oriented version of group feedback analysis.

See Chapter 9: Group feedback analysis

Managing intergroup conflict: A process is given for intergroup conflict resolution, a technique for exchanging information between groups for increased mutual understanding and mutually-satisfying outcomes.

See Chapter 10: Intergroup conflict resolution

Juries: Random selection, or stratified random selection, is described as an alternative to elections or other methods of choice. This may precede information collection or information exchange.

See Chapter 11: Juries and panels

Committee meetings: Some general principles and guidelines are presented, to help committees run their own meetings productively and enjoyably.

See Chapter 12: Meetings for committees

- Community meetings: Here are some general principles for using meetings in community consultation. See *Chapter 13: Meetings for consultation*
- Neighbourhood meetings: Community members are used to host meetings within their own neighbourhood. These meetings have many uses, but especially information collection or information exchange. They produce unusually high participation rates compared to most other methods. See *Chapter 14: Neighbourhood meetings*
- Generating agreement: The process described is “option 1½”, a simple technique which can be used within other processes when they are not working well. See *Chapter 15: Option 1½*
- Strategic planning: Search, a large group technique for strategic planning and information collection, is described. It generates higher levels of consensus than many methods, and can also be a catalyst for generating community involvement at the start of a consultation program. See *Chapter 16: Search*
- Stakeholder analysis: This is a method for helping a group to decide who to involve, and how to approach them. See *Chapter 17: Stakeholder analysis*
- Surveys: Survey feedback, a means of collecting information economically from large numbers of people, is presented. See *Chapter 18: Survey feedback*
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Preface

How do you condense the experience of many people, accumulated over many years, into a document brief enough to be useful? I'm not sure. It is a matter of opinion which material is most important, and I suspect most people would reach somewhat different judgments. However, there was a pressing need for this resource document, so here it is.

This is a brief account of the philosophy, concepts, strategies and tactics of a collaborative and participative approach to community consultation. It is written for people who are not accustomed to such processes.

It is a three-part document. Part 1 is written primarily for members of the local area consultative committees. These are community committees who have the central responsibility for guiding the process of consultation. The sections in Part 1 provide some background, explain the assumptions behind the approach, and provide general guidance. Occasional parts also contain information for the interim committees which set up the local area consultative committees, and the facilitators from the independent consultancy team which assisted.

Part 2 is addressed mainly to the interim committees. It describes the processes used to set up the local area consultative committees, often in step-by-step form. It also expands upon the role of the various committees and groups involved in the exercise.

Part 3 is a recipe book of methods which can be used for community consultation. In most instances it provides step-by-step descriptions of one version of each of the processes. While others might make a different selection of processes, or choose different recipes, these are almost all techniques which I have used often, and which work well.

The document cannot be encyclopaedic in its coverage, and is not intended to be. Only some of the possible methods are described; and even then, many other variants of those methods are possible. If you are experienced in other consultative methods and you are sure they will achieve the same aims, you are encouraged to use them. Provided the result is collaborative (that is, genuinely win/win for all the stakeholders) and participative (that is, each person speaks for herself while trying to take account of the views of all), the actual processes don't really matter.

In fact, if you follow the processes and recipes slavishly, they may not work as well as they might. You are strongly encouraged to make the effort of tailoring the processes to suit your own style and situation. This will help you to develop an understanding of the processes, and they will work better for you. If you are already experienced in this style of community consultation, you have almost certainly already developed your own approach, and will do better to continue to use it.

The document is in many ways a collective effort. Although I prepared the initial and subsequent draft, it would have been a much poorer effort without the help I have been given. Many of the processes and techniques I first learned from others who were unselfish of their ideas and expertise.

Fred Emery, Alan Davies and Alastair Crombie, of the Centre for Continuing Education at Australian National University, may recognise their contribution here. So may Eve Robinson and Dell Woodcock, who had a hand in the origins of many of the locally-developed techniques. I have drawn on earlier material (including some in which Tim Dalmau had a hand), and have incorporated suggestions from many people. Further, some of the ideas written up here took shape during the early planning by the design team: Elinor Drake, Alf Lizzio,

Keithia Wilson and myself. I owe a substantial debt to them all, as well as the many other students and colleagues with whom I have worked.

I have taken into account the comments I have received from Department of Transport personnel and members of the consultation team. The consultation team consists of Liane Anderson, Jenni Barrkmann, Joe Denis, Martin Grimmer, Diane Guthrie, Jenny Horwood, Peter Pacey, Eve Robinson, Elizabeth Synnot, Vikki Uhlmann, and John Wood.

In particular, the present version of the document incorporates valuable and sometimes extensive comments from Tim Dalmau, Jenny Horwood, Alf Lizzio, Peter Pacey, and Elizabeth Synnot.

— — Bob Dick September 1990

Part 1

The consultative approach

This first part of the document sets out the overall philosophy of the approach. It also describes the role of the local consultative committees and facilitators, and gives a brief outline of consultative methods which might be used. This is preceded by an overview of the context within which the program is being conducted.

Chapter 1: Context

This document was prepared primarily as a resource document for members of the local area consultative committees being set up as part of a community consultation process. It is also intended to be a useful resource for two other groups: the interim committees which have the task of setting up the local consultative committees, and the independent consultancy team which is facilitating the process. This introductory chapter gives an overview of the process, and describes its context and purpose.

Introduction

The community consultation process for road planning will initially take place in two areas: the portion of Route 20 from Toowong cemetery to Everton Park, and the Cavendish Road open level crossing in Coorparoo. It may later be extended to other areas.

In the consultation process described, the overall approach is collaborative. The aim is to secure the widest possible community involvement and participation in providing and receiving information about road planning. Part 1 describes some of the ways this aim can be achieved. To address these aims, it has a brief introductory chapter and three other chapters. Chapter 1, the present chapter, provides the context.

"The aim is to secure the widest possible community involvement and participation in providing and receiving information about road planning."

The second chapter outlines some of the important assumptions underlying the approach used. It contrasts the process used with the win/lose and representative processes more familiar to most people.

Chapter 3 outlines the use of committees and working parties in the consultative process. It says a little about how they can be formed, and discusses their role. Some suggestions are offered to facilitators, and to committee members.

The fourth chapter begins by identifying some different types of issue, and discussing how the issues might come to the attention of the consultative committee. The section explains in broad-brush terms the overall stages. It also discusses some of the ways in which you can collect and disseminate information. In addition, it discusses ways in which agreement can be reached when different people hold differing views. It identifies some specific methods, though not in detail.

Purpose

In this instance the purpose of consultation is to enhance road planning. The intention is to assist the Department of Transport to arrive at design decisions which represent the best balance the following three considerations ...

- between engineering and financial constraints,
- the needs of the travelling public, and
- the attitudes and wishes of the local community.

Therefore the consultation process can be thought of as providing a channel for communication. It enables the interchange of these key sets of information between those with a direct stake in the relevant road planning. In particular, this requires making community attitudes and preferences accessible to the

Department of Transport, and making issues of road design and the needs of the wider community known to the local community.

Mechanisms

The key mechanism for consultation is the use of local committees as intermediaries between the local community and Departmental officers. In the present exercise, these are known as *Local area consultative committees*. To manage relationships between them and other bodies, various other coordinating committees are also being set up. A team of independent external consultants provides social science advice and expertise to the Department and the other groups.

The five committees or groups of immediate interest, and their functions, may be briefly described as follows (there are more detailed descriptions of the role of the local area consultative committees in Part 2) ...

Local area consultative committees. These act as intermediaries between the community and the Department through the Project coordinating committee on matters relating to the relevant local section or area. They help to place in contact appropriate Departmental officers and community members.

Project coordinating committees. These committees are responsible for enabling coordination between the local committees, and liaison between the Local area consultative committees and the Departmental working group. They are necessary only where several local area consultative committees require coordination.

Departmental working group. The Departmental working group provides administrative, technical and social expertise, and administrative support, as reasonably required, to the various committees and groups. It also serves as a point of contact with the Department, a source of information about the Depart-

ment and its officers, and a means of disseminating information from the community through the Department.

Strategic liaison committee. This committee consists of representatives of other groups with an interest in road planning and from outside the local community, and people with expertise in relevant fields. It makes available to the Department and the local communities the information available from these wider interests, and informs these wider interests of the experience gained in the community consultation. It is the forum for considering the results of the community consultation and the outcomes of other studies.

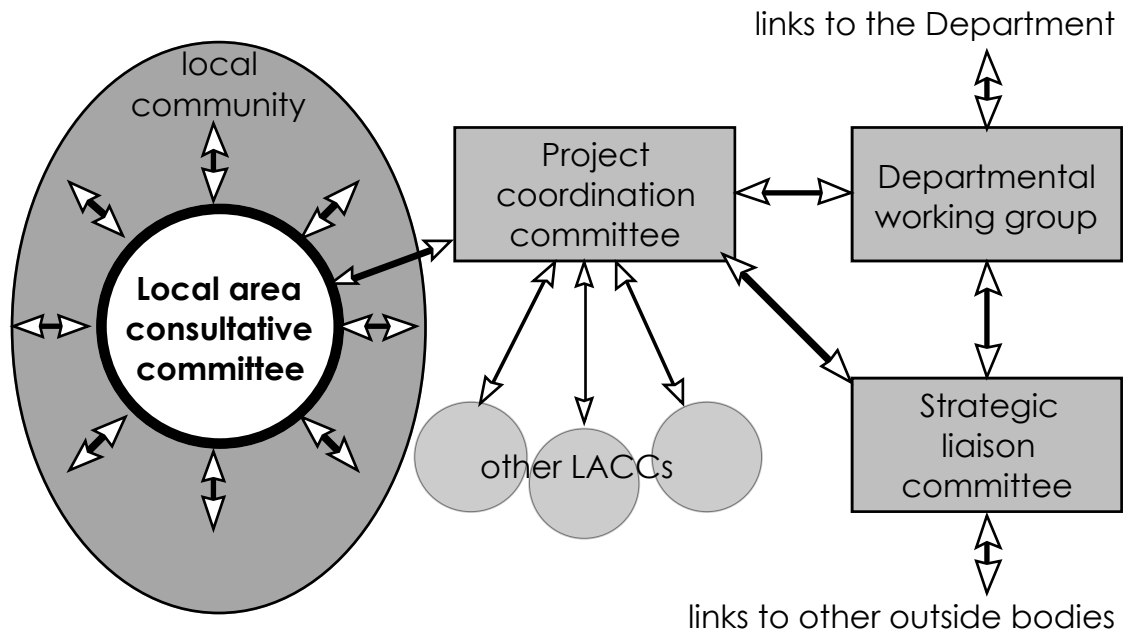
Independent consulting team. The independent consulting team provides independent advice on the people and process aspects of community consultation to the Department and other committees and groups. It helps set up and maintain the groups and their links, and evaluates and documents the consultative process.

The structure, as it appears from the vantage point of the *local area consultative committees*, can be summarised in the diagram below.

As can be seen, the local area consultative committees are a point of contact within the community, especially the local community. Where there are multiple local committees, they also form (with members drawn from their ranks) the Project coordination committee. This is to handle liaison and coordination between the different areas. There are also links to the Departmental working group within the Department of Transport, and the Strategic liaison committee to represent the wider community, interest groups, experts, and wider studies related to the consultation program ...

It is important to recognise that this is *not a hierarchical arrangement*. The local committees are of and for the community. They respond to community concerns. The project coordination committee, if one exists, is formed by the local area

consultative committees to help them achieve coordination with committees in adjacent areas.



The other groups allow contact between the community consultative process, the wider community, and the Department of Transport. The essence of the structure is that the process is driven from the community, not elsewhere.

“this is not a hierarchical arrangement”

In particular, the Strategic liaison committee also serves a coordination role between various consultative programs, other studies such as the South-East Queensland Passenger Transport Study (SEPTS) and the Freight Study, and other bodies. The Strategic liaison committee therefore has two roles.

- There is a global role, relating local studies to state-wide issues.
- Just as importantly, there is a local role providing a voice for interest groups and non-local stakeholders in local consultation.

There may be a core group of members to address the global role; they may be augmented appropriately for the purpose of local consultation.

Most of the rest of the document is addressed directly to the members of the local area consultative committees. Some parts of it are also addressed to the interim committees, or to the facilitators.

Local developments

From comments which have so far been made in the associated communities, it is apparent that there is some confusion about the role of community consultation. This is most apparent for Route 20. In particular, people are asking: “Hasn’t it already been done?” They have in mind the environmental impact study carried out by Sinclair Knight and Partners (SKP).

This initial overview may help to provide some context for the later material in this document, and to provide something of an answer to that question.

Differences from the Sinclair Knight study

Sinclair Knight and Partners is a southern engineering consultancy. It carried out considerable community consultation along Route 20 and in other western suburbs over a period of about a year and a half. It is not surprising that some people believe that the consultation has been done, and the present exercise is superfluous.

It is therefore useful if we understand, and inform others of, the differences between the SKP study and the present program.

The SKP study was an environmental impact study. Its function was to report on the relative feasibility of various options for road planning in the western suburbs. In particular, it compared the use of Route 20 with other options. Commu-

nity consultation was used widely to collect community attitudes, and to obtain community reactions to earlier working papers printed during the course of the study.

In comparison, the present community consultation will be associated with various safety works carried out along Route 20, and other road planning, over the next decade. (It may extend beyond this.) Among other things, it is to involve community stakeholders in informing the Department of Transport about community attitudes to these matters.

Consultation, in the SKP study, depended mostly on contact with various interest groups, and submissions from people who wished to have a say. The present consultation aims to obtain whole-community attitudes towards specific aspects of road planning, and to do so by creating as much direct community involvement as possible.

In brief ... The SKP study investigated strategic options in the western suburbs. The methods used depended primarily on consultation via submissions from and meetings with active volunteers and interest groups. The present consultation involves community stakeholders in providing information to the Department of Transport about *specific* design options associated with specific road planning. The processes being used are intended to involve as much of the community as possible; to this end, local enthusiasts are used to contact a wider community than it was feasible for SKP to contact.

The prior existence of the SKP environmental impact study has implications for the present program. In additions to the matters discussed above, two issues, especially, are prominent. Firstly, some local stakeholders believe that they have already “done” their consultation, and will be more difficult to involve than might otherwise be so. Secondly, some polarisation of opinion arose during the previous consultation. Interest groups, who have developed an infrastructure in the area, became mobilised and are still active.

Loss of interest

The loss of interest may be partly countered if we are clear about the function of the present program and the way it differs from the SKP study. However, we can expect a lower tolerance to high-profile consultation methods than would normally be expected.

Even under more favourable circumstances it is often difficult to get a person to attend more than one meeting on a given topic. This will be exacerbated where previous consultation has been carried out. (Similar comments apply to the Cavendish Road level crossing project.) We may therefore have to depend more on low-profile methods than we otherwise would, and to make more use of methods which tend to generate high response rates from the community. There is less room for error than would usually be the case.

To make matters worse, some local area consultative committees can be expected to operate over quite long periods of time. Unless this is given special attention, it will be difficult to maintain the committees for more than about two years at a time. Important aids to longer-term operation are dealt with in a number of places in this document. To summarise some of them here, the most important are ...

- realistic expectations;
 - a slow rotation of members through the local committees;
 - creating enough local ownership that you maintain a reserve of people who are willing to play a part;
 - keeping meetings interesting and productive through the use of appropriate meeting procedures;
 - devolving as much work as possible to temporary working parties of direct stakeholders;
 - having one working party with specific responsibility for maintaining continuity;
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- meeting only as often, and for as long, as the committees' tasks require.

See the later subsection on "Maintaining involvement".

Polarisation

It is evident that opinions are highly polarised. The predictable consequence is that the local community is cynical and mistrustful. Some of this mistrust will almost inevitably be directed towards us.

Our interests are best served, I think, by being frank about our function and our motives ...

- It will serve no purpose to be coy about the Department of Transport's financial support for the exercise. We (committee members and facilitators) can instead be open about it. We can also state clearly that it is our intention to serve *all* the stakeholders, not just the Department, within the constraints of the program. The Department, on all the evidence we have so far, understands and accepts that our allegiance is not to them, but to the stakeholders as a whole.
- People will naturally be interested in our own views about the best options for the road design under consideration. Again, I think honesty is our best policy. We can declare that some of us have strong views. We will express them if pressed, but for the purposes of the consultation exercise they are not relevant. *We are associated with the program to ensure that the community as a whole is heard.*

It is also likely that many of the people who would be likely to volunteer to be members of local committees have already been involved in community activity. Many of them will formerly have sought involvement to pursue particular outcomes. It is important, I think, that we recognise the valuable contribution these people have to make. Provided they are willing to adopt the philosophy and process goals of a collaborative and participative approach, we and the community can welcome and benefit from their involvement.

We may need to be even clearer than usual about philosophy and process goals. People are so accustomed to win/lose methods that we can expect old habits to win through occasionally in the early stages of the program. For the most part, however, we can expect those involved to monitor their own style and approach. Over the years I have been pleasantly surprised at the willingness of opinion leaders to place their energy and skills in the service of all the stakeholders when they realised that it was possible and useful to do so.

Chapter 2: Assumptions

Overall, through the consultative process, you (the members of the local consultative committees) have one major role. You provide a means by which members of the community and the Department of Transport can more easily talk to each other, and with greater understanding.

The consultative process offers the community a way to voice its concerns and opinions to the Department of Transport. At the same time, the Department can inform the community about its intentions, and about the design options being considered. In many instances the process may also help people of differing opinions to understand each others' point of view. On some occasions you may be able to use it to help develop agreement out of that disagreement.

"You encourage those taking part to understand each others' point of view. You also urge and help them to pursue outcomes which take all points of view into account"

These aims require processes quite different to those which most people know and use. *The chosen approach can be described briefly as collaborative rather than adversarial, and participative rather than representative.*

Collaborative processes

The consultative process is collaborative in this sense: you encourage those taking part to understand each others' point of view. You also urge and help them to pursue outcomes which take all points of view into account. Collaborative processes are sometimes described as *win/win*.

Collaborative processes seek to help each person to articulate her² own point of view clearly, and to understand the views which others express. You encourage

people to exchange information in a cooperative way, and to seek outcomes which satisfy everybody. There are a number of potential advantages ...

- decisions are based on more information and better understanding;
- decisions are often more creative, going beyond the solutions which people bring with them;
- the processes are more satisfying, and tend to improve relationships.

Such processes may initially feel “strange” or “artificial”, as people are not used to them. As people become more practised with the processes, however, they come to recognise the greater enjoyment and effectiveness they allow.

Collaborative processes ("win/win")	Adversarial processes ("win/lose")
Full and factual information	Selective and inaccurate information
Seeking common ground	Bargaining from extreme positions
A third option often results	One of the two options is chosen
Options chosen on their merits	Determined by political skills

Collaborative processes may be contrasted with the adversarial (or win/lose) processes which are more commonly used in Western cultures for decision-making. In such approaches, different people present different viewpoints. Their presentation might be described as advocacy: each person or group strives to have a particular point of view prevail. Eventually, one point of view is chosen, or a compromise is reached. Often, the eventual outcome reflects the power or

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2. Unless the context dictates otherwise, you are invited to treat feminine gender as indicating male and/or female.
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influence of the people involved, or their skills in presenting a case, rather than the quality of the opinions.

Rules of debate, including majority votes, are commonly adversarial. A majority vote, for instance, selects the option favoured by the majority. The minority are expected to accede to the views of the majority in return for being allowed to take part in the vote.

"You are there as servants of the community, to engage community members in speaking directly for themselves."

The consequence of using adversarial processes is that people are more successful for themselves when they are selective in the information they provide and seek. They may give the information which is most favourable to their own case, and most challenging to the opposing case. Effective listening behaviour may be rare; people are likely to listen most closely for information which they can refute or use as ammunition in their own cause.

Industrial relations, politics, and the law are instructive examples.

Because collaborative processes are rare, it may take you a little time to familiarise yourself and others with them

Participative processes

A participative process is one which seeks to involve people directly. Within participative processes, people speak and act for themselves. This has particular implications for your role as members of the local area consultative committees. You are there as servants of the community, to engage community members in speaking directly for themselves. Such processes offer advantages, among others, of ...

- greater community interest and involvement;
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- more accurate and more complete information for the Department of Transport and others; and
- the potential to rekindle the community spirit which is often lacking in urban settings.

Participative processes contrast sharply with the more common representative processes. In representative processes, a group of people *speak and act* for the particular group of people from which they are drawn. As a result, the representatives tend to ...

- assume a right to speak on behalf of an “electorate”;
- adopt adversarial methods to support their electorate’s view and challenge the views of others;
- lock themselves into the position they advocate, out of a concern that they would otherwise betray their electorate.

Participative processes	Representative processes
Each person speaks as in individual, for herself	Each person speaks for a different interest group
People are able to change their mind or devise a new option without reference back to any interest group	People may want to check options with their interest group before agreeing to any proposal
People act for the benefit of the whole community	People act for the benefit of those they represent

They sometimes also adopt extreme views initially, to give themselves room to manoeuvre during bargaining. This can cloud the issue, as well as making it difficult for people to change their minds in the light of new evidence.

When combined with *collaborative* approaches, *participative* processes therefore increase the probability that people will try to take everyone's concerns into account.

Collaborative participation

The community consultation processes, therefore, are both participative and collaborative. There are certain actions which you can take to achieve this.

The most important feature is that people *pool information* rather than defending a point of view. The collected information is then used, by all, as a basis for the next steps — for example, decision-making. They seek to base their revised opinions on *all* the information which has been presented.

You play an important role in bringing this about.

From the outset, you ask people to be willing to modify their own position as they come into possession of extra information. You encourage people to provide information while discouraging advocacy

— you ask people “*to inform rather than to persuade*”. You ensure that each point is listened to, and understood, before allowing the process to proceed.

“The community consultation processes ... are both participative and collaborative.”

You can recognise such processes by the behaviour of those taking part. People listen to one another in a genuine attempt to understand other positions. They express their own views without dogmatism, more in the spirit of offering information than advocating a conclusion. They try not to back themselves, or anyone else, into a corner.

The end results are likely to include at least a better understanding of all positions, and also better relationships. They may also include outcomes which are genuinely satisfying to all or most of those involved, or more empathy for those whose views could not be accommodated.

As people are most accustomed to processes which are representative and adversarial, you may at first find it hard to adopt participative and collaborative processes. It is the intent of this document to provide some guidance in this.

A word to the facilitators on the consulting team ... How readily this occurs may well depend on how well *we* practise what we preach. The model we provide may have an important influence on the behaviour of others.

Chapter 3: Committees and other groups

It is important that the consultative process is of and for the community. To this end, those of you who are members of the local committees guide the process, assisted by facilitators with expertise in appropriate areas of social theory and practice. The role you adopt, and the way in which you are chosen, may have an important influence on the process as a whole.

Part 2 describes your role in some detail. The sub-section below provides a summary of its key features.

The role of committee members

You might summarise your role as that of intermediary. You act to bring about effective communication between the community and the Department of Transport. You help to ensure that each understands the other's position. On occasion, you may help to resolve differences of opinion, particularly those which are based on misinformation or selective information.

In other words, the committees and groups are not decision-making bodies. As now envisaged, the Department will continue to carry out the instructions of its Minister, and continue to make the design decisions about road planning. Neither you nor the community will make design decisions. You help others to have a voice; you don't advocate your own point of view.

Your understanding and acceptance of your intermediary role is therefore important to the success of the consultative process. If you perceive your task as that of speaking for the community, or advocating a particular point of view, then you will undermine the consultative process. If you understand the importance of

taking the role of intermediary, facilitating communication between Department and community, the process is likely to be effective.

Those of you who are used to the common adversarial processes may be tempted to behave in a similar way on committees and groups. If so, the consultative process will again be undermined.

The temptation is understandable. People who are willing to serve on such committees tend to be energetic, and used to positions of leadership. Their experience has often taught them, that if you want something done well you do it yourself, or control the way others do it.

“You might summarise your role as that of intermediary. You act to bring about effective communication between the community and the Department of Transport.”

The challenge is for you to find ways of using your energy and leadership in different ways. In fact, to judge from past experience of consultative processes, you will rise to the challenge when you sufficiently understand it. You will then direct your attention towards involving and helping others rather than controlling others or doing it yourselves.

The consequence of this approach to leadership is that you will do very little hands-on consultation or decision-making. This is, in fact, an important form of leadership: some would say, the leadership style of the future. You will help identify the people affected; you will find ways of involving them directly in the process; and you will maintain the process to enable the community to have a voice, rather than speaking on behalf of the community.

If you are willing to take on this role, the strength of your own views is not an issue. People who are active in lobby groups and the like are often people who display a community concern, and organising skills, which are valuable in creating genuine consultation.

The composition and formation of local committees

To help set up effective committees, a two-step process is being used. It optimises the responsibility and involvement of the community in selecting the people who will guide the consultative process. The steps are ...

- In their initial contact with the community, facilitators ask community members to identify people who meet certain criteria. They are well known and active in the community. Most importantly, they have sufficient breadth of vision to act for the community as a whole rather than pursuing the outcomes they themselves would prefer.

From this identified list of people, an interim committee is set up. This committee ideally is a microcosm of the community, has good local knowledge, and consists of people who are well known.

- The interim committee is then responsible for helping the community as a whole to set up the more permanent committee. It, too, is a microcosm of the community as a whole.

This will mostly be done by community election at a meeting convened for the purpose, though there are other ways of doing this. A later section on *meetings* sets out some of the ways this can be done.

In some areas the consultative committees may exist for a considerable time. Many traffic projects are of long duration, and in some areas there may be more than one project. There are advantages in replacing half of the consultative committee every year or so. This reduces the burden on any one committee member, and spreads ownership and involvement more widely through the community. It also helps to prevent the committee slowly becoming distanced from the community they serve, a common problem otherwise.

In addition, before you begin operation, you will be provided with guidance on managing your own meetings, and setting up consultative processes.

For projects too large or diverse to be served by only one local committee, you will also form a *project coordinating committee*. This will be formed primarily from members of the local consultative committees. It will serve to keep you informed of developments in other areas of the project.

The role of the facilitator

There are temptations and challenges for the facilitators, too.³ On the one hand, it is important that interim committee and consultative committee members understand the aims of the program and their roles within it. It is an important responsibility of the facilitators to convey this. On the other hand, they must do so in ways which do not undermine the autonomy of the consultative committee members, who remain the best people to determine their own operation.

The committees take a *process* role: they set up and guide processes within which community members have a voice. The facilitators are at an even further remove from the actual discussions: their task is to *assist* the committees to play their role effectively without controlling how they do so.

It is easy for a facilitator to exert influence by claiming to be an expert or a holder of special knowledge. The challenge for the facilitators lies in the way they share their expertise. They have skills and understanding which are rare, and valuable to committee members. But these skills are constructive only when they are used to guide the process, not to influence the actual plans and decisions of the committees. The facilitators role is to be a resource, in such a way that committee members too feel resourceful in *their* role.

3. In broad terms, a facilitator is someone who helps to guide people through a process in such a way that the people themselves reach decisions, or set goals, or the like. The detailed information, the goals, the identification of problems, the developing of solutions, the plans ... all of these are from the group members alone, and not from the facilitator. The facilitator helps to make the processes used more productive and more satisfying.

Chapter 4: Guiding the consultative process

When the local area consultative committees are formed, your task as members is to respond to emerging issues. You do so by involving the “stakeholders” in a consultative process. A stakeholder is anyone likely to be affected by an issue, or by how it is approached; that is, as the name implies, someone who holds a “stake” in an issue. This section describes the types of consultation required by different issues, and sets out some general guidelines for identifying and involving stakeholders.

Initially, you may expect an upsurge of activity as people take the opportunity to voice their opinions. When this initial activity has settled down, you can probably anticipate that most issues will arise in one of two ways ...

- The department will indicate to you that certain road design is being considered. It may also indicate the design options currently under consideration. “Your task ... is to respond to emerging issues. You do so by involving the ‘stakeholders’ in a consultative process.”
- A concerned local citizen, or group of citizens, will raise an issue. This may most commonly be about safety.

There may also be other people or bodies who might occasionally trigger a need for consultation, either through the Department or directly. No matter how the issue is raised, it will be your role to guide the consultative process to deal with it.

Guiding the consultative process

Your task in guiding the consultative process can be described as that of finding the answers to a number of important questions. In the order in which they are considered, they are ...

What is the issue? At this initial point you do not need a precise definition of the issue. That emerges more fully from the consultative process. Unless you sufficiently understand what the issue is, however, the stakeholders may be hard to identify. You need to know enough about the issue so that you can work out who is likely to be affected. (You may change your mind about your answer to this question later; that is often to be expected.)

What is the purpose of the consultative process? That is, what outcomes are required? Some types of issue primarily require information to be channelled from community to Department, others from Department to community. Others require both. In some instances, the process is intended to provide people with an opportunity to understand a point of view not previously considered, and perhaps even to arrive at some collective appreciation of the alternatives. (This is taken up further below.)

In brief, you need to be clear about the primary purpose of the consultation. You can then select the most appropriate and efficient method.

Who are the stakeholders? Who are the people who are affected in any way by the issue as it is, or by the options for dealing with it, or by the way the options are implemented? These are the people whom you involve in the consultative process.

The detailed sections in Part 3 include a section on stakeholder analysis, for addressing this issue.

What process can be used to involve the stakeholders and achieve the purpose? The answer to this question has to take into account both the stakeholders, and the type of issue. At this step, you choose or design a consultative process which will secure the widest possible involvement of the stakeholders, and achieve the purpose of informing community, or Department, or both.

Some types of processes for dealing with different types of issues and different numbers of stakeholders are described later.

The local area consultative committee may not always be the most appropriate body to deal with such issues.

Temporary local working parties

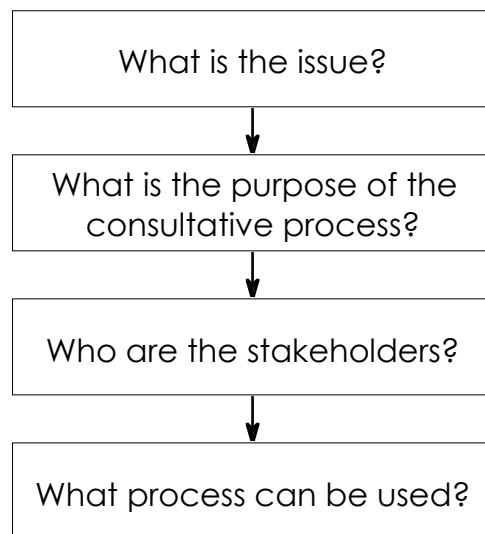
Where the issue is localised, there may be some advantage in setting up a working party composed of people who have a direct stake in it. This can be a small and temporary working party with a clear brief. When the issue is resolved, the working party dissolves.

It is usually important for a member of the local consultative committee to be on the temporary working party. This ensures that the committee is kept informed of developments. I recommend, however, that you do not become involved in the discussion of the working party unless you are also a stakeholder in the issue.

The use of temporary working parties serves the purpose of spreading involvement in and ownership of the consultative process more widely. In addition, it frees up the consultative committee for wider issues. It also acts as a training ground for people who may later become members of the consultative committee.

Types of issues

In deciding the process to be used, it is helpful to think of an issue as falling primarily into one or another of four categories ...



Information to the community. Those where information is to be conveyed to the community or some group of stakeholders within it: that is, disseminating information.

For example, the Department might wish to notify the community about the timetable for acting on decisions already taken. Or the community may wish to know what the long-term plans of the Department are.

Information from the community. Those where the primary task is to gather information from the community or some group of stakeholders within it: that is, collecting information.

For example, the Department might wish to know the issues which the community regards as of the highest priority. Or the community may wish to bring some attitude to the notice of the Department.

Information exchange. Those where there is to be an exchange of information between Department and community, or between two other groups of stakeholders: that is, exchanging information.

This may arise often. For example, the Department might advise the community of some design options, and seek a response. Or the community might raise an issue, and require a reply from the Department.

Developing agreement. Those where it is hoped that an exchange of information may lead to agreement which did not previously exist, or where some change of attitude or position may result: that is, resolving differences.

For example, different groups of stakeholders might each prefer an option which disadvantaged the other group. Or, through misunderstanding or mistrust, the Department and community activists might misunderstand each others' motives.

Of these, *exchanging information* and *developing agreement* will usually be the most valuable and appropriate. There will be occasions, however, when a one-way information flow is all that is required. This will most often occur as an interim measure, or a short-term stop-gap.

These categories are, to some extent, artificial. For example, *you can't get or give information without having some influence on attitudes, or at least producing some reaction*. Further, you can use many of the methods we later describe in more than one category. The following paragraphs, however, will serve you as an initial guide to making a choice. You can then draw on the more detailed descriptions in the Part 3 to choose and plan the process you will use.

Disseminating information

When the main purpose of a consultative activity is to inform the community, the use of mass media or print media is usually indicated. The more detailed the information, the more the benefit of using something relatively permanent, like print, rather than something impermanent like radio or face-to-face contact.

A combination of several media usually achieves better results than any one in isolation. Some examples follow. For all of these, it is a good idea to include a name and telephone number of a contact person for those who wish to follow it up in greater detail.

The list which follows is not exhaustive, and local committee will be able to develop their own alternatives to some of these ...

Advertisements or feature articles in the local press. Newspapers which deal specifically with the geographical area affected are often more appropriate than state-wide publications.

They are also sometimes willing, with sufficient notice, to carry a feature article. This is reasonably effective, and quite economical of effort. Features are proba-

bly more likely to be read than advertisements. Some newspapers are more likely to carry features for someone who has taken out an advertisement than someone who hasn't.

Direct contact with the editor is likely to be more effective than merely issuing a press release. It is worth building and maintaining a good working relationship with the editor of the local newspaper: when editors understand the aim of the consultative process, they are almost always helpful and cooperative.

It has been our⁴ experience that the local press, too, will often take an article you write without wanting to change it.

Letter box drops. Flyers which have attention-getting headlines or graphics, but contain enough text to explain the situation well, can be distributed in letter boxes in the “catchment area” for the issue.

Schools. The same flyers which are prepared for letterbox drops can be distributed to local schools. Some schools may also be interested in involving their pupils in project work; this makes it more likely that the parents will actually get to hear about it.

Notices in shop windows and similar situations. Colourful and informative posters in places where many people pass can be a useful way of reaching the community. A combination of eye-catching headline or illustration and more detailed text is again often appropriate.

Non-print media. Of the non-print media, radio can be an effective vehicle if there is a local radio station. Some stations carry messages of community interest without charge, as a community service. Because of the impermanence of speech, it is not wise to depend only upon non-print media for factual material.

4. In this instance, the other half of the “our” is Tim Dalmau.

Collecting information

In collecting information, there is often reliance upon people responding to advertisements. This tends to achieve the greatest response from the vocal minority; it is unlikely to provide you with accurate information about the attitudes of the community as a whole. Instead, activities which contact all stakeholders, or a representative group of them, generally yield more accurate and reliable information. They also offer other advantages.

The two methods in common use are interviews, and surveys. For some purposes, using a number of representative small groups can gain many of the advantages of interviews and surveys. When time and resources are limited, very small samples may work well if they are set up as panels or juries.

“Activities which contact all stakeholders, or a representative group of them, generally yield more accurate and reliable information.”

When the required information is about community aspirations or community priorities, search can be a useful technique. It is described in Part 3, and briefly under methods for exchanging information.

Other methods are also described in some detail in Part 3. In summary form, the methods are ...

Interviews. Interviews can be structured or unstructured. In structured interviews you ask pre-planned questions in a predetermined order. In unstructured interviews you let the questions you ask be guided by what the person has already said. Structured interviews are in effect a survey in which people reply to an interviewer rather than writing down their responses. More people respond to interviews than to written surveys, giving a more accurate result; but the cost is greater, often much greater, in time and expense. Unstructured inter-

views can be effective in gaining information when you don't know enough to be able to ask the right questions, but at even greater cost.

As an alternative, you can combine structure and open questions: the interviewing can use a step-by-step process, but leave the questions very general and open-ended. Such interviews gain the rich data of open-ended interviews. The much smaller (and therefore less costly) samples still provide quite reliable data. A version of structured-process interviews is described later as *convergent interviewing*.

Small-group surveys. In marketing research, use is often made of a group interview. There are small-group survey techniques which use a similar approach.

Small groups can offer a number of advantages over individual interviews. Different people raise different topics, but all people have a chance to comment on all topics. Less interviewer time is required to contact a particular number of people. On the other hand, it requires a little more skill on the part of the interviewer.

A systematic approach to small-group surveys is known as *group feedback analysis*. A version of it is described in a later section.

Written surveys. The effective use of surveys requires more expertise than you might imagine. To ask clear questions which do not bias the answer is difficult. So is interpretation of the results. Often, so few people respond that they form a very unrepresentative sample of the community.

Against this, surveys can be a very economical way of collecting a lot of information. If you have access to the required expertise, and can achieve a good response rate, they are worth considering.

In many instances group feedback analysis will allow you to achieve the same ends while avoiding many of the problems.

Panels and juries. The main features of panels or juries are that they are chosen to speak as individuals while representing the community as a whole, and they are asked to function as a jury on behalf of the whole community. One effect of this is often that they take their community role with great earnestness.⁵

There are several ways of combining juries with some of the other methods of giving and getting information. The jury can then assist by helping to interpret the information, and can react to the interpretation others place on it. (In this use, the jury is sometimes called a “reference group”).

Exchanging information

For exchanging information, a combination of the methods already mentioned may serve you well. For example, if the Department wishes to be informed of community views on several design options, you might use print media to spread the detailed information. One of the information collection methods might then allow you to gather community responses.

As an alternative, a number of styles of meeting can be used. Two in particular have functioned well in community consultation: neighbourhood meetings, and search workshops.

Neighbourhood meetings. There is a detailed description in Part 3. The present description is, accordingly, brief: too brief to convey the real effectiveness of neighbourhood meetings. They are, however, a very involving way of

5. I have no first-hand experience in the use of panels and juries. This description depends greatly on information I gleaned in conversation with Alan Davies, formerly of the Centre for Continuing Education at Australian National University, and now with the University of New England (Northern Rivers) at Lismore. There is also a collection of papers on juries by Fred Emery in Merrilyn Emery, ed. (1989), *Participative processes for participative democracy*, Canberra: Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University.

disseminating and collecting information. Extremely good response rates have been achieved in some consultation exercises. In fact, neighbourhood meetings have achieved better response rates than any other method: sometimes between 60 and 70 per cent of those approached take part.

To conduct neighbourhood meetings, compile a list of all of the stakeholders. Then approach some proportion of them directly, and invite them to hold a meeting in their home. To this they invite other stakeholders who live near them. Give enough guidance that the invited hosts are confident enough to agree to help.

When very high community involvement is the goal, as it is here, neighbourhood meetings are recommended as the method of choice.

Search workshops. A search workshop, as mentioned already, also serves usefully as an information-collection method for some purposes. It is described here, however, for its ability to disseminate *and* collect information. You can also use it as a useful catalyst in generating community interest and involvement in a major project where priorities are uncertain, but views are not extremely polarised. (A skilled facilitator may be able to use it where there is polarisation.)

Search operates by asking participants to define an ideal future. After taking other information, they then revise this ideal, and use it as a starting point for developing more detailed action plans.

"When very high community involvement is the goal, as it is here, neighbourhood meetings are recommended as the method of choice."

You can give other information to participants during the mid phases of the search. They can then be invited to revise or add to their ideal to take account of the information.

Resolving differences

Most of the processes so far described are reasonably robust, even in the hands of people without a great deal of experience. Processes for resolving differences need to be managed with rather more skill. Intergroup conflict resolution is such a process. Delphi is another.

Here are brief descriptions (detailed descriptions follow later) ...

Intergroup conflict resolution. This is most suitable for issues where there are few stakeholders, and they are polarised into two main camps. It can also be used where larger numbers of stakeholders exist, but two (or occasionally more) groups of key stakeholders are most influential in deciding community views.

Briefly described, intergroup conflict resolution encourages each group to state its own view clearly and specifically. At the same time, people listen carefully. They place themselves “in the shoes of” the other group, so coming to understand issues fully, from the other point of view. Because there is an appreciation of each other’s view, a new and more creative third position often emerges.

Even where both parties maintain their earlier position, if the process is managed well it usually improves relationships. Understanding each other’s position, people are less likely to attribute malice to other groups.

Face-to-face delphi. Delphi is most commonly used with a panel of experts who communicate only by mail. Its usual outcome is that the experts on the panel increase their agreement as they learn more information from each other. It depends upon a cyclic process. Panelists are asked to respond several times. At each cycle they are asked either to adjust their opinion in the direction of a consensus, or to provide information to explain their position.

A face-to-face delphi uses a similar process. The panelists, however, meet; and they are usually organised into like groups instead of acting as individuals. It is

important to manage the process well, or it breaks down into a vigorous debate without generating agreement.

You also have as one of your responsibilities the maintenance of local involvement. This is a task importance enough to warrant separate attention.

Maintaining involvement

One recurring difficulty with community consultation programs is to maintain involvement and energy over medium and long periods of time. It is not difficult, provided some conditions are met, to generate initial enthusiasm and involvement. Maintaining it demands special attention.

The processes you will use generate more ownership and involvement than many processes would. Even here, though, maintenance in the longer term will require a special effort.

Some of the strategies which may help you to achieve this are as follows ...

Realistic expectations. Try to have realistic expectations. Be clear about your goals, and about the goals of other committees or working parties which you set up or join. Try to understand the constraints within which the goals are to be achieved. Unmet expectations are one of the major causes of a loss of morale and membership: satisfaction is usually more a matter of met or unmet expectations than anything else.

Temporary working parties. You will develop more local ownership and involvement if you use local working parties for as much of the work as possible. Except where global and long-term issues are involved, it is usually better to set

up a local and temporary working party of direct stakeholders than to attempt to do the consultation yourself.

It is important, however, that you coordinate this work, and stay informed about it. To this end, it is highly desirable that one of you is a member on any working party formed. In the interests of local ownership, it is also desirable that you do not take a typical "chair" role.

"You will develop more local ownership and involvement if you use local working parties for as much of the work as possible."

If you have process skills, then a role of process facilitation can be extremely valuable to the working party. (In such a role, you guide the process, but do not offer or argue for any of the issues or options which are discussed.)

Facilitated meetings. The use of traditional meeting procedures is a turn-off for most people. If meetings are facilitated, they are more enjoyable, and more effective as well. If they are focussed on specific issues, and consensual in style, they are further improved.

It is also useful to meet only as often, and for as long, as your task requires (though occasional social occasions are also valuable).

Team building. Many of the satisfactions of community work are to be found in the quality relationships which are formed, and the worthwhile nature of the work. This can be enhanced by providing each local committee with relationship building activities, and by ensuring that all involved are kept informed about the wider events which are taking place.

Community interest. Maintaining community interest also helps. Your job will appear more worthwhile if you have the interest of an informed and involved community. You can use both mass media and face-to-face contact to achieve this. (This also helps to ensure that when you need help, it is available.)

An important trap deserves mention here. You may be tempted to use mass media to *publicise plans*. It is better resisted — plans arouse expectations. For reasons already mentioned, if those expectations are not met, dissatisfaction or cynicism result.

The recommended procedure is: Use more focussed methods to inform direct stakeholders about plans, to provide them with the maximum opportunity and encouragement to become involved. Use mass media to inform the wider community about *what has already been achieved*.

Rotation. A slow rotation of community members through the local area committees is highly desirable. No matter how much “of the community” you are initially, you risk becoming distanced despite your best efforts. If half of you retire and are replaced every six to twelve months, a balance between continuity and renewal is achieved. Rotation also lightens your workload: you will find more people are willing to become involved if it is for a finite time.

“The use of traditional meeting procedures is a turn-off for most people.”

Planning for continuity. You will find it worthwhile to devote effort to maintaining continuity. One way of doing this may be to set up a working party with this as its specific responsibility.

There are a number of tasks such a working party can be given. It can identify and recruit community members with the potential to help with community activities. Perhaps it could maintain a register of community members and their interests and skills. You can give the responsibility for managing the rotation of the local committees to such a committee.

Part 2

Creating the consultative structure

This part⁶ of the document is addressed primarily to the members of the interim committees, whose job it is to set up the local area consultative committees.

6. This part incorporates an earlier document, unfortunately titled *A process for community consultation*. A more appropriate title would have been *Setting up consultative structures*.

Chapter 5: A process for setting up the consultative committees

This section describes a process which can be used for setting up a structure for community consultation in general, and consultation associated with road or transport planning in particular.

The section first provides a minimum of background to the process description. It then documents the process which may be used to set up the local area consultative committees.

Fundamental issues

This design assumes that there are many factors with the potential to affect the success of the community consultation. The following are paramount ...

- Most important is the composition of the members of the local committees, for they ultimately determine the quality of the consultation.

This is a matter of getting the right people onto the local committees.

- Next most important is the community's perception of the objectivity and trustworthiness of the process.

To achieve this requires that the community recognises that the consultation is genuine, and intended for the benefit of all.

- Third most important is the perception of these committees of their role, and the processes and methods of operation they adopt.

This requires that committee members are clear about their responsibilities to the local community.

- Fourth in importance is the information flow between the various interested parties, and the structures and relationships which allow this to happen.
-

That is, the people involved are able to approach and be approached by all involved.

If any of these are not achieved successfully, we believe it is no exaggeration to say that the entire program could be jeopardised.

The designed structure, and the following process for creating it, are based on these assumptions.

Process

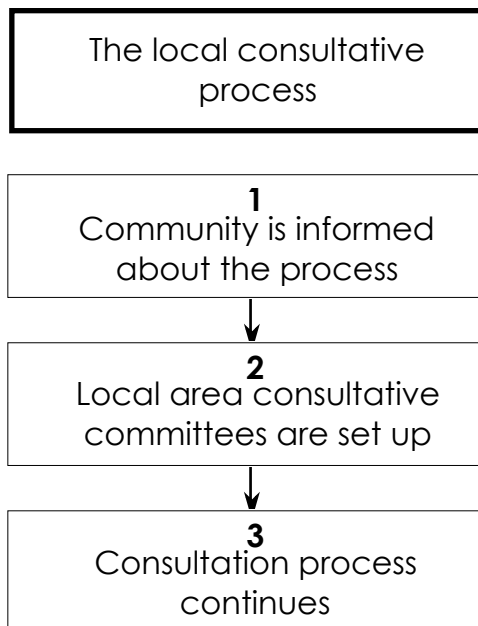
This description represents one of many ways in which the consultative structure might be implemented. It is not intended to be followed slavishly: it may need adjustment to deal with local conditions and especially with time constraints. It will, however, give a broad overview of the style of process to be used.

There are three main stages to the process, shown in the accompanying diagram. It is briefly described in overview immediately below, and later in more detail ...

- 1 The community is informed about the consultative process.

This is done by announcements in the mass media, interviewing in local areas by the consultants, and other means. As part of this process, community members will be notified how they can express interest in being involved in some way in the process.

- 2 Local area consultative committees are set up.



These committees are selected by people from within the local community, and not by the Department or the consulting team.

- 3 These local area committees are then responsible for consultation between Department and community.

On different occasions they may use a variety of methods to do this: by calling public meetings; by arranging for announcements to be made in local papers and other mass media; by letter; and by face-to-face and telephone contact with those members of a community most directly involved in a particular aspect of design.

When the local area committees are formed, mass media may be used to inform the local community how to contact them.

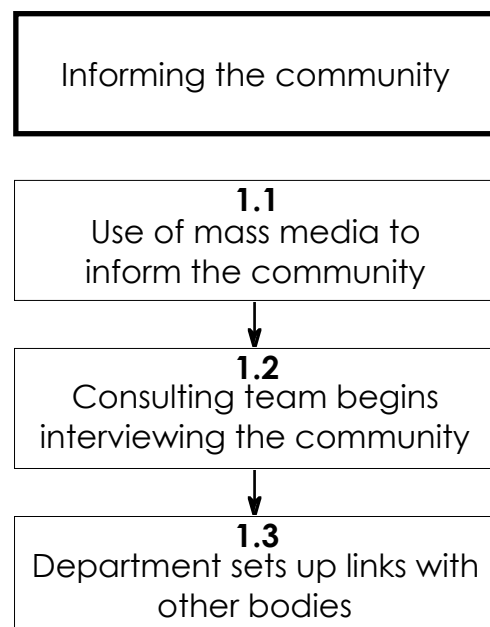
These stages are now described in more detail.

1 Informing the local community

There are three aspects to this; they proceed at the same time.

The **first** of them uses the mass media.

The purpose is to ensure that all community members hear about the consultative process, and know whom to contact. This might use such methods as advertisements in local newspapers, announcements on radio and television, press releases to obtain interviews with Departmental spokespersons, notices to schools and in local shops, letter-box drops of informative brochures, and the like. (The material in Part 1 on disseminating information is relevant.)



The announcements invite interested people to contact the Department; these people can then be informed about later stages of the consultative process. The intention is that anyone likely to be interested is informed, and invited to make contact.

I expect that Departmental officers will deal with the initial concerns of such people. I expect that these people will have queries about such matters as the proposed extent of works and the specific impact of the proposed route on the enquirer. If Departmental officers respond with empathy and sensitivity to these enquiries, they can make an important contribution to the trust and credibility of the program and of the committees associated with it.

Second, at the same time, members of the consulting team move into the community to conduct interviews. They begin by contacting local citizens who are known to have a somewhat high profile, and have shown interest in the particular traffic route.

Third, the Department initiates relationships, or maintains existing working relationships, with individuals or groups actively involved or interested in or able to influence the outcomes of road planning. Invitations are issued to people to involve themselves in the appropriate committee or group.

The process will allow for a range of interest on the part of those who respond to any of these invitations. Some may want only to be informed of developments when they become salient; others will expect to be active participants in the program as a whole. I suggest that the Department develop a “Contact list” on which people and their desired involvement can be recorded.

Use of the mass media is important in informing community members. However, it is often of little use in actually *involving* people in consultation. Those who respond to mass media often have strong opinions. The operation of the consultative process may therefore be undermined unless the involvement of the silent majority is obtained. There is otherwise a lack of valid and relevant infor-

mation, and encouragement of polarised views. It is face-to-face contact which is most likely to secure the involvement of the “ordinary citizen”.

In short, use the mass media to inform the community at large and obtain some community involvement. But then follow up with face-to-face or telephone contact. Many community members make the decision to become involved when someone approaches directly. In other community consultation processes it has been a combination of mass media and interviewing which has obtained the best community response.

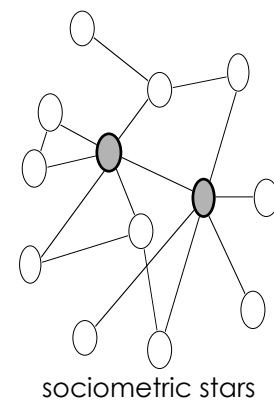
Other purposes of the interviews include the following ...

- To increase the number of people in the community who are informed, through face-to-face interviews, of the consultation which is to take place. This helps to reduce erroneous information carried on the local grapevine.
- To identify the networks in the community: that is, to identify those people who are sufficiently well-known to be a source of information, and easy to contact. Within any community there are people who have more than the usual number of contacts with other people. They are thus often better informed about community affairs, and more likely to be contacted by anyone with community concerns.

“It is face-to-face contact which is most likely to secure the involvement of the ‘ordinary citizen’.”

The people we will identify are people with many links to other individuals in the community (see diagram) — they are sometimes known as “sociometric stars”. To identify them, interviewers may say something like ...

“We are trying to identify community members who are well-enough known to be easy to contact, and have sufficient breadth of vision to act for the com-



munity as a whole rather than push their own barrow. Who in the local area do you know, or know of, who fits this description.”

Through them, information can be conveyed to and from the community at large. Their support for the activity is also likely to increase the support from other community members.

- To identify any communities of interest which cross the boundaries of the local areas along the route. This information will emerge from questions about the friendship networks of those interviewed.
- To identify community people who have an interest in community consultation, and who have the breadth of vision to act for the community as a whole rather than the groups from which they are drawn. These are the people who can serve the most valuable role on the local committees (or in other venues set up from time to time by the committees).
- To build up a knowledge of local characteristics. This can later be used to check that committees, public meetings and the like are sufficiently representative of the community as a whole.

Each person interviewed is asked to name other people who are well-known in the community, have a particular interest in the traffic route, and are likely to be able to act for the community as a whole. Those people whose names are mentioned with approval across different social groupings and interest groups are then approached, and invited to become involved. By the time an interviewer has carried out four or five interviews, the community networks and the people most active in them are usually known.

The consultants who carry out this initial contact work set the climate for the consultative process generally. Amongst their many important functions are the following ...

- Gathering accurate data.
 - Building trust and credibility.
 - Responding with empathy to people’s fears and concerns.
-

- Being sensitive to potential misinformation, and putting people in touch with those who can provide more accurate information.

It is useful if they distribute information to those they contact; and in turn encourage those they talk to to contact others in their immediate neighbourhood.

The process by which an effective local committee comes into being is most effectively a process of *self-selection*. The way in which consultants describe the interim committee and its members has an important influence on the perceptions and understanding of those who might or might not otherwise seek to be nominated.

Similar comments apply to the way in which the interim committee describes committee roles to potential members of the local area consultative committees.

In some circles it is usual to talk about “servant leadership”. That phrase has particular meaning in this context — the committee members are truly at the service of their local community.

2 Setting up local committees

It is important that the local committees are of, by and for the community as a whole. It is also important that the community recognises this. The following process is designed to secure this outcome (the diagram provides a summary).

After initial interviews, about three well-known members of the local community are invited to form an interim committee. Their task is to call a meeting at which the Local area consultative committees can be elected by the community members. Our intention is to choose people who fit the same criteria as those listed for the interim committees, and to encourage them to regard their task as completed when the best possible local committee is set up.

The members of the interim committee are eligible for nomination and election to the Local area consultative committee. In fact, it helps to provide continuity if one or two of them continue.

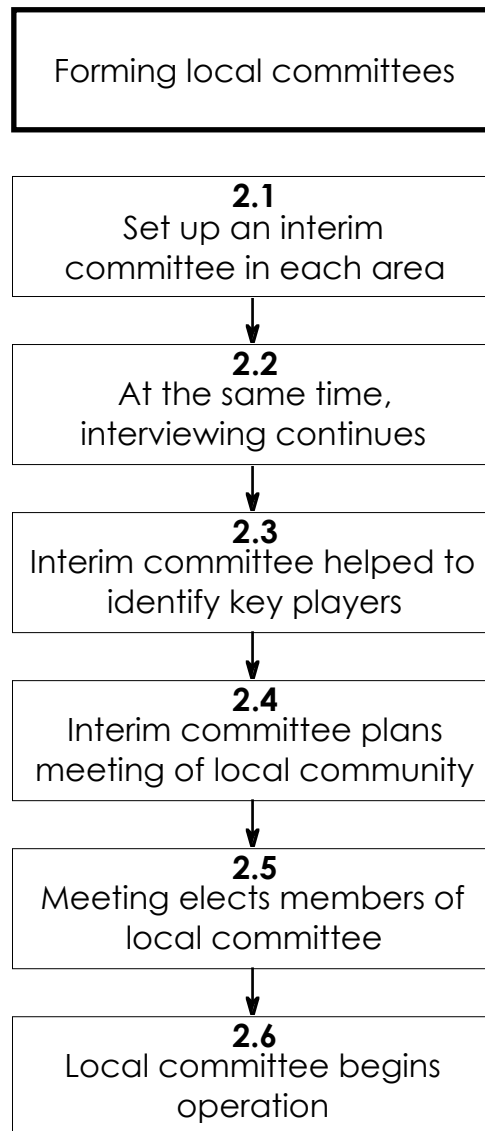
The external consulting team helps the interim committee to identify those people to invite to the public meeting. This is to ensure that the meeting is sufficiently representative. The recommended procedure is ...

2.4.1 Local media are used to advertise the meeting, and invite people to express interest in attending.

2.4.2 Those expressing interest are asked to indicate age, sex, occupation, address (to estimate proximity to the route), length of time in the area, and previous involvement in groups associated with the design of the route.

2.4.3 The interim committee checks that those expressing interest do not contain a preponderance of certain types of community member. They also check the demographic data against those known for the area, to ensure that the meeting will be sufficiently representative.

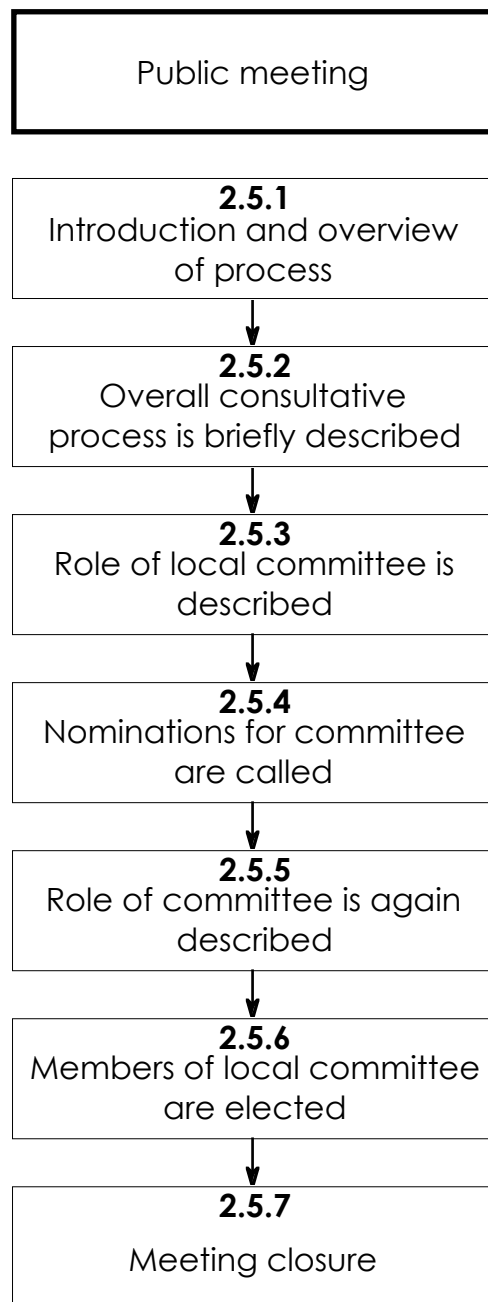
2.4.4 Where there are doubts about the representativeness, the interim committee contacts people from groups which are under-represented, this is to let them know that they risk being inadequately represented at the meeting. (It is also very important that anyone who wishes to attend is invited.)



At the same time, the working party and consulting team ensure that there are enough suitable people for the local committee who will be at the meeting, and will accept if nominated. This is done only to ensure wide enough representation.

The meeting is run by the working party, with facilitation help from the consulting team. The meeting (summarised in the diagram) is structured as follows ...

- 1 The working party members introduce themselves, describe the purpose of the meeting, and outline the process to be followed. In particular, they make clear that *it is a meeting to describe the consultative processes, not to canvass issues about road design*. They also explain the role of the facilitators provided by the consulting team.
- 2 A brief description of the consultative processes is given. The video may be shown at this point.
- 3 The role of the Local area consultative committee is described to those attending, so that accurate expectations are created. This role is summarised in Box 1.



Information is also given to allow people to make an informed decision about their involvement: the expected time commitments are described, together with details of the support available, and compensation for approved out-of-pocket expenses.

“It is a meeting to describe the consultative processes, not to canvass issues about road design.”

(The simplest way to handle expenses is to describe to the Department of Transport officer what is needed, and ask her or him to arrange it and carry the expense.)

In particular, it is made clear that the local committees are not decision-making bodies. The local committees are *not* being asked to make decisions about what is good for the community in road planning. Their task is to act as intermediaries between the Department and the community, and a point of contact for both Departmental officers and community members. The importance of them being able to act for the good of the entire community, local and beyond, is strongly emphasised.

A sample of the instructions given to Working party members, and intending local committee members, is given as Box 2.

- 4 The criteria for selection of the individual committee members are described to those attending. The people we wish to nominate themselves for the committee, or to be nominated by others ...
 - above all, act for the community as a whole rather than advocating personal or sectional interests;
 - are people with wide contacts within the local community;
 - listen effectively, can maintain neutrality over polarised issues, and are willing to understand the needs and perceptions and perspectives of other people;
 - are accessible to members of the community who have an opinion to offer;
 - demonstrate interest in and agreement with the proposed consultative process.
-

Box 1: Role of the LACC

Briefly, the role of the local area consultative committees (LACCs) is to act as an intermediary between the community and the Department through the Project coordinating committee on matters relating to the relevant local section or area.

To do this, the LACCs collect information and opinions from the community and pass this to the Department. It may be, for example, that the final details of road alignment, within predetermined limits, may be adjustable to take account of local preferences. Departmental decisions about access to routes, both from feeder roads and from properties, may also be able to be adjusted in the light of community views. Information about such issues is passed to Departmental officers to take into account as part of the design process.

LACCs also inform the community about Departmental plans.

When more specific issues are discussed, LACCs may request meetings between Departmental officers and those community members who have the most direct stake in the issues.

LACCs are not decision-making bodies, but intermediaries between Department and community. Design still remains the responsibility of the Department. To complete necessary work, the Department will balance the broad range of community attitudes and preferences, and make decisions based on the full range of issues. In its design decisions the Department will also draw on road planning it has carried out in previous years, and long term plans which will arise out of such programs as the South East Queensland Public Transport Study and the Freight Study.

In addition, the committee as a whole is to satisfy a further criterion. It is desirable that those people nominated and selected are accessible to all interest groups in the community ...

- between them, are drawn from as wide a variety of backgrounds; in fact, the final committee ideally should be like the community in microcosm;
- 5 Nominations for committee membership are called from the floor. (Alternatively, prior nominations might be requested.)
 - 6 Those attending the meeting are once again reminded of the qualities expected of a local committee member. The members of the local area con-

Box 2: Sample instructions to local committees

“That you have been chosen for this committee suggests that you are people who are known to be energetic, and used to exercising leadership. It’s likely that you put a lot of yourself into everything you do. It may also be that you have decided that, if you want something done well, you do it yourself. The challenge of this position is to explore other ways of providing leadership.

“The greater the extent that you can involve other people in the consultative process, the greater the extent that you encourage them in turn to involve others, the more valuable and long-lasting the consultative process can be.

“What you are being asked to do is to devote your usual energy and initiative; and to direct it towards involving others, and engaging them in consideration of the issues.

“What we are doing here is changing the way a Government and its electorate relate to one another. How you go about this has implications for the future of community consultation, and for your own learning. The benefits to the community, and for that matter to the government, can be substantial. This is the activity we are asking you to facilitate.”

sultative committee are elected by confidential ballot, with a local community members chosen as returning officer. A committee of about six to eight people is appropriate.

Note: That the committee is a microcosm of the community is desirable. *What is more important is that the committee members enthusiastically adopt the philosophy of the widest possible involvement of the community as a whole, and the use of collaborative and participative procedures.*

Alternatively, the members of the initial local committee may be chosen by random selection — see the section on juries and panels. In that event those not selected form the reserve list, which allows rotation of local committee members.

Sometimes there are difficulties in getting enough of the right people for the local area consultative committee. This may happen, for example, if time has been too short for proper community diagnosis. On other occasions you may be aware of a danger that the meeting is not sufficiently representative,

or that insufficient suitable people are available for local committee membership. In that event, half of the committee might be elected, and given authority to co-opt the other half. In this event, consultants brief the elected members on the selection criteria.

The composition and orientation of the committee are crucially important. If there are any doubts about the composition of the local committee, I recommend this procedure.

That the committee is a microcosm of the community is desirable. *What is more important is that the committee members enthusiastically adopt the philosophy of the widest possible involvement of the community as a whole, and the use of collaborative and participative procedures.*

- 7 The new committee members meet briefly to plan their first meeting.

While this is happening, other people attending are invited to record their names, addresses and telephone numbers. This is with a view to being contacted about future involvement in the consultation process. They may also be asked to record the extent of their interest, and any suggestions they have for improving the conduct of future meetings.

Finally, those attending are asked to talk about the meeting and the committee in their own neighbourhood. This spreads involvement more widely.

I have not described in detail the preliminaries to calling the public meetings, as they are dependent on local conditions and available time. For example, where time and conditions permit, a number of neighbourhood meetings might be held to secure wider involvement of the community. These provide the working party with a useful check on their planning for the public meeting, as well as offering a forum where Departmental officers can become better known to the community.

Stages 1 and 2 of the exercise (that is informing the local communities and setting up the local area consultative committees) might be conducted comfortably in about 10 to 12 weeks. Where greater urgency exists, a seven to eight week time frame may be manageable by drawing on additional consulting help. *It is so*

important that the right people are selected for the Local area consultative committees that we recommend against shorter time frames than this.

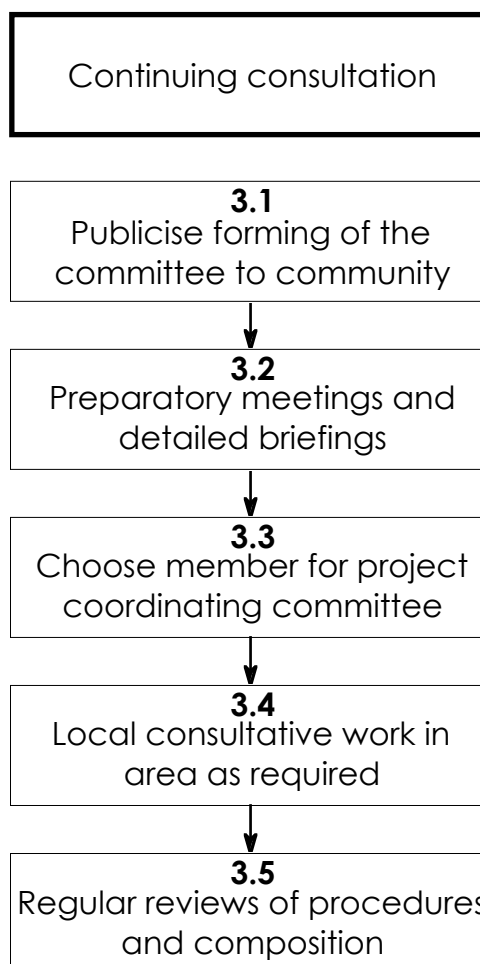
At the same time, the early activities will almost certainly raise community expectations. *The best time frame is the shortest time frame which will allow effective consultative structures to be set in place.* Achieving the right balance between the shortest possible time and the best possible committee requires thought and effort.

3 The consultative process continues

Once the committees are formed, they act to maintain consultation between the local community and the Department. However, it is important that they function on behalf of the community as a whole (including the wider community). Further, it is beneficial for them to make use of effective meeting and consultation techniques. There are two aspects to this process, one external and one internal ...

3.1 This consists of processes to do with the committee's relationships with the local community. As soon as the committee is formed, seek publicity within the local community. This is to inform the local community ...

- who is on the committee, and how they may be contacted; and
- what initial activities, if any, are planned for the local community.



3.2 This concerns the internal workings of the committee. At the initial meetings of the local committee, the external consulting team provides help in getting the committee started effectively. The issues to be addressed at the initial meetings are covered in the substeps which follow ...

3.2.1 A detailed briefing on the role of the committee and its relationship with other committees and groups.

It is desirable that Departmental officers attend this part of the meeting, to ensure that the brief is accurate, and to familiarise the committee with some members of the Department.

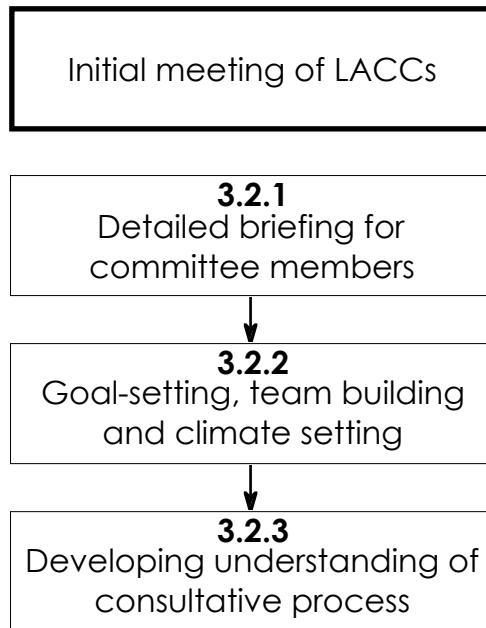
3.2.2 The committee is taken through a set of activities to establish good relationships and procedures. In particular, attention is given to ...

- establishing clear and agreed goals;
- developing good working relationships between the various members of the committee, and between the committee and its regular facilitators;
- devising meeting and other procedures which are both efficient and satisfying (“climate-setting”).

3.2.3 Committee members are given sufficient information to allow them to develop an understanding of the consultative structure, and the processes they can use to maximise community involvement.

Either here or later, it may be useful to provide them with some skills for community consultation work.

The committees will continue to have access to consulting help. The Department of Transport will act to arrange facilitators when the local committees



have been formed. For important and difficult consultative activities, the independent consulting team may be used.

The role of the facilitators is to conduct the initial sessions, and to be available for other facilitation work as required. When the local committee has been established, it will be able to conduct most of its meetings without facilitation.

Facilitators from the consultancy team will advise on the design of any large-group meetings which are held in the community as part of the consultative process.

- 3.3 For each project involving more than one local committee, a project coordinating committee will be set up. The purpose of this committee is to ensure that local committees are able to benefit from each other's experience, and that they do not act at cross purposes. Coordination among the local committees, and between them and the Project coordination committee, is achieved by having a member of each local committee on the project coordination committee.

I recommend strongly that someone other than the representative on the project coordination committee acts as chair of that committee, and of the local committee.

- 3.4 Local consultative work will be pursued as it arises. This has been described in Part 1 of the document; appropriate methods are given in Part 3.
-

Part 3

The consultative methods

This third part of the document lists some actual methods which can be used for community consultation.

You will notice some recurring themes ...

- Where feasible, an attempt is made either to involve as many people as possible. Where time or resources prevent this, steps are taken to ensure that those involved represent the community in microcosm.
- Those involved are encouraged to speak as individuals, acting for the benefit of *all* the stakeholders. They are not involved as “representatives”, and are not answerable to interest groups, or other groups of stakeholders.
- A common procedure is to use a process which is quite structured. As far as possible, the actual goals set or information exchanged or questions asked are determined by the community, not by the organisers.
- The procedures used are collaborative (win/win).

The methods described are: action planning; convergent interviewing; face-to-face delphi; group feedback analysis; intergroup conflict resolution; juries and

panels; meetings for committees; meetings for consultation; neighbourhood meetings; “option 1½”; search; stakeholder analysis; and survey feedback.

The way in which the committees manage their own meetings is also important, though it is covered here (in Part 3) only briefly. I expect that you will avail yourselves of facilitation from the consultancy team for important or difficult meetings.

You will also be taught to facilitate your own meetings. There is documentation which can be used as a guide. Each local consultative committee along Route 20, and the one for Cavendish Road, will be provided with a copy of *Helping groups to be effective*. A book by Doyle and Straus is also useful.⁷

Some guidelines which are also useful in all meeting-based procedures are listed below.

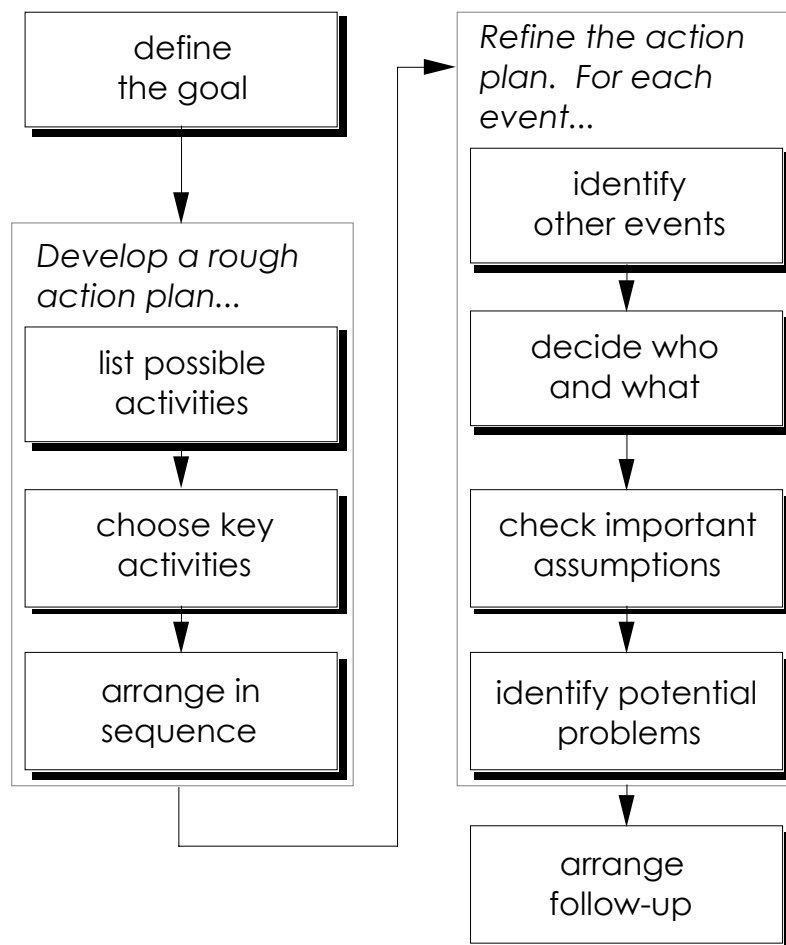
Preliminary group guidelines

People taking part in an exercise will usually agree to abide by a simple set of groundrules suggested to them. I suggest the following ...

1. Anyone affected by a problem or its likely solution, or by a likely decision, is a member of (or at least feel represented on) the problem-solving or decision-making group (or: People make their own decisions.);
2. Problems are stated as goals mutually acceptable to all those affected, and without implying blame (or: State problems as common goals.);
3. Developing solutions is postponed until the problems they are an attempt to solve are thoroughly analyzed and well understood by all concerned (or: Problem first, then solution).

7. *How to make meetings work: the new interaction method* (New York: Jove Books, 1976).

Chapter 6: Action planning



This is a process⁸ to develop specific plans of action. It can be used by committee members to plan any of the methods described here. It may also be useful for engaging other groups in planning activities.

Steps 1 to 4 allow you to put together a rough action plan. This plan is then refined in the steps from 5 onwards. The result is a dual action plan, which specifies in detail how to achieve the agreed goal, and how to monitor progress towards it.

1 *Goal*

Define the goal that you hope to achieve with your action plan.

Note: it is best that you define it as a goal for yourself. Suppose you want the Government to provide more funds for safety education. A suitable goal might be “For us to convey to the government the advantages of providing more funds for safety education ...”.

Write this goal at the top of a piece of butcher paper.

2 *Possible activities*

Individually:

On your own, without talking to others, each make a private list of activities that might have to be carried out to achieve that goal.

As a group:

On the piece of chart paper, and working from your individual lists, make a group list of the activities.

Include any other ideas that occur to you while the list is being prepared.

3 *Key activities*

8. This description is modified and abbreviated from *Helping groups to be effective* (Chapel Hill: Interchange, 1987). Some of the steps incorporate methods used in potential problem analysis; see B. Kepner and C. Tregoe (1980), *The new rational manager*, Princeton Research Press.

Decide which of these event are most important in achieving the goal — which events must take place if the goal is to be achieved.

These will be called “key events” in the rest of this description.

4 *Event track*

Fix several pieces of chart paper together horizontally to give you plenty of width. Alternatively, use the end of a newsprint roll (often available from newspaper publishers at a reasonable cost).

Draw an “event track” or time line. Label the start “now”, and the end with your goal ...

now —————→ goal

Write in on this event track the key events, in the order in which they would have to occur to be effective.

The simplest way of doing this is ...

- Start with the most important key event, and locate it on the event track. You can use just a few words to describe it at this stage.
- Then take the next most important key event. Locate it at an appropriate point relative to the first key event.
- And so on ...

Events may sometimes have to be written in several different places. For example some events will be written twice: once for planning and then a second time when the plan is carried out.

From here, each step is applied to each event in turn. For each event ...

5 *Other events*

Identify any other events which would have to occur before it could be done.

Add these other events both to your list, and your event track.

6 *Who and what*

When you have all events fitted on the event track, take each in turn and plan ...

- who does it;
- what is to be achieved; and
- (if relevant) by when it is to be completed.

You may at this stage want to break up some of the more complex events into a sequence of events

It is better if the “who” is someone present, or you have checked that the person is willing to do it.

The following steps are a set of check questions. They help you refine your plans further. In a very complex action plan, you may need to develop separate action plans for different stages of the event track.

For each key event in turn ...

7 *Assumptions*

“What assumptions have we made in compiling this action plan?”

Decide who will do what by when to check that assumption as part of the action plan.

Common assumptions which may need checking include ...

- Assumptions about the attitudes of people. You may need to include actions to check their attitudes.
- Assumptions about resources. You may need to include actions to ensure that the resources are available.

Important resources include time, money, people, and the skills of the people affected.

- Assumptions about coordination. Decide which pieces have to be finished before another piece begins, and who will check that it has been done.

8 *Potential problems*

“If we do it this way, what could go wrong?”

Decide if the potential errors are serious enough, and probable enough, to do something about.

“What could we do to remove those potential problems?”

Decide who can do what by when to remove the potential problems. Add this to the event track

“What contingency plan could we use to deal with the problem if it still arose?”

If the problem is severe enough, develop a contingency plan and add it to the event track.

“How will we know when something still goes wrong?”

Decide who will do what to monitor progress with the action plan.

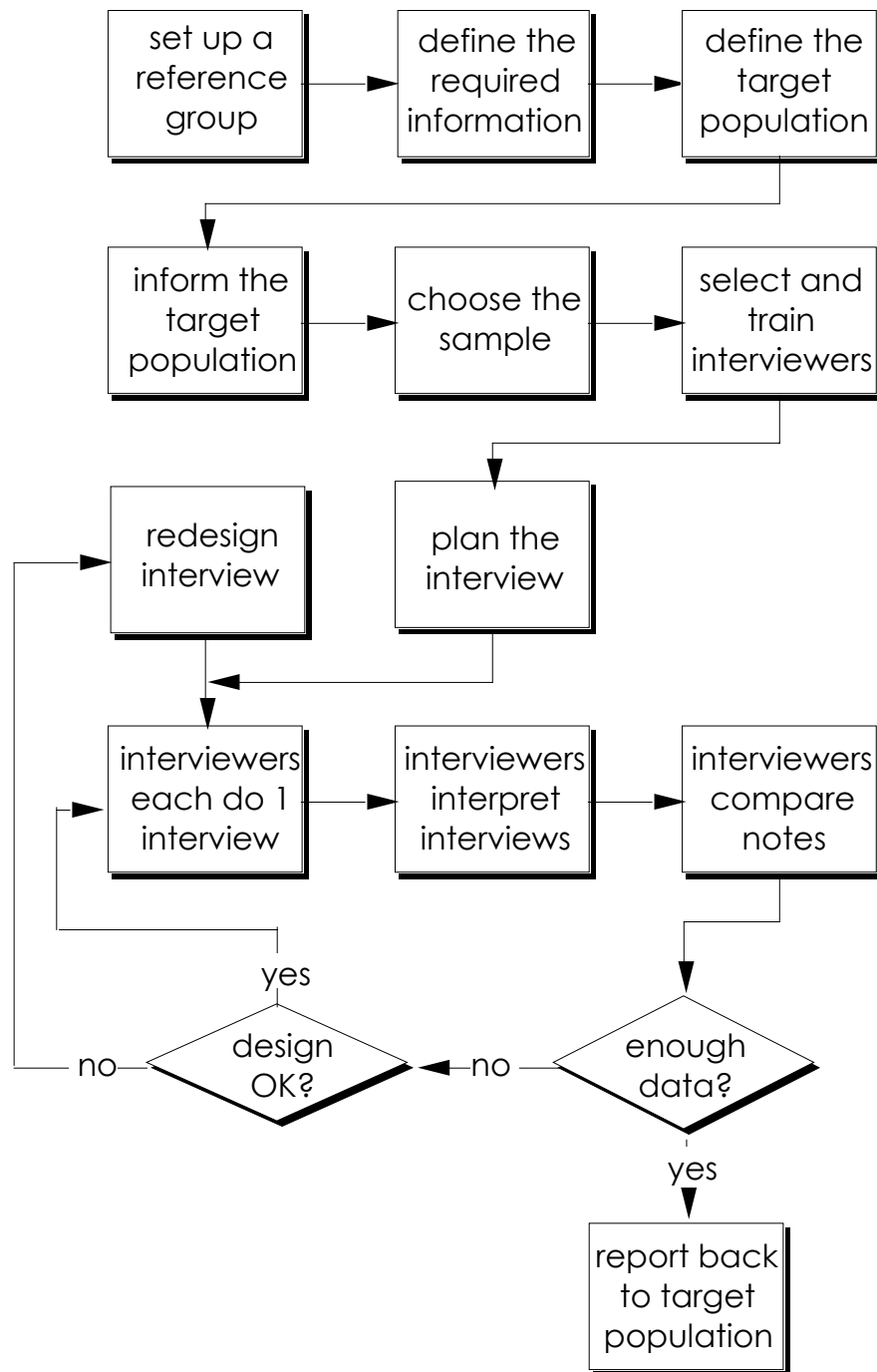
9 *Follow-up*

Plans almost never work as intended. For all but the simplest of action plans you may need to change your mind in the light of later surprises.

Therefore, add to the action plan some provision for regular follow up — who will notify whom of the follow up meetings, and by when?

From time to time, it is also useful to review if the planned goals are still appropriate, taking into account any changes in the situation since the plans were developed.

Chapter 7: Convergent interviewing



Convergent interviewing is a technique you can use to gather information. Although it has many uses, it is most valuable when you are in some doubt about the information which is to be collected.

Also, if you intend to use surveys to collect information, convergent interviewing can help you to decide what questions to ask in the survey.

You could summarise convergent interviewing as follows, with only a little over-simplification: Put the person at ease. Then ask a single, broad question. Then keep the person talking for as long as you can, about 1 to 1¼ hours. Then and only then ask any specific questions.

Convergent interviewing combines some of the key advantages of both unstructured and structured interviews. Unstructured interviews (without specific questions) collect broad information, but which can be hard to interpret.

"Ask a single, broad question. Then keep the person talking for as long as you can, about 1 to 1¼ hours."

Structured interviews (conducted like a face-to-face survey) collect information efficiently, but at the risk of omitting some important information.

Convergent interviewing achieves its result by leaving the *content* unstructured: you don't ask only a series of pre-determined questions. The information is therefore determined by the person being interviewed. The *process*, however, is tightly structured. You analyse the information systematically. You use only relevant information from earlier stages in subsequent stages. The systematic approach extends to sampling, data collection, and particularly interpretation. This helps to improve efficiency and reduce bias.

Detailed description

A typical program of convergent interviewing might move through the following steps.⁹

1 *Reference group*

A reference group is a group of people drawn from the community, and chosen to provide guidance in community matters. In community consultation, you can probably fill this role yourself, perhaps with additional people co-opted to fill any gaps in your knowledge. If so, a separate reference group may not be needed.

If you need a reference group, and have not already obtained one, do so. (See also the chapter on “Juries and panels”.)

2 *Define the information*

Define the nature of the information to be collected, at first in very general terms.

One of the difficulties with almost all data collection is this ... sometimes you don't realize the questions you should have asked until after you collect the data. What is worse, sometimes you don't ever realize that you asked the wrong questions. The open-ended nature of convergent interviewing helps to avoid this.

You need ask only the questions that are needed to define the next step. Your initial question may even be as broad as “What is relevant to making this the best possible community to live in?” or “What are the most pressing issues in this community?”

3 *Target population*

Define the target population. This may consist of all the stakeholders, or only the local stakeholders. (For the purposes of local consultation, it will

9. This description is modified from Tim Dalmau, Bob Dick and Phill Boas, *Getting to change*, Canberra: Work Organisation Branch, Department of Industrial Relations. That in turn was condensed from the document *Convergent interviewing*, Chapel Hill: Interchange, 1990, which provides much more detail.

most often consist of local stakeholders; other committees may be able to provide you with information about non-local stakeholders.)

4 *Inform the stakeholders*

Let the target population and other interested parties know what is happening. Be clear and explicit about why you are doing it, as people are otherwise quick to attribute sinister motives to you.

5 *Sample*

Choose the sample. If you are sure you have enough information about the community to select the sample, do it yourself. Perhaps you can co-opt others for the occasion, to help you. Otherwise, use a reference group.

Decide the person “most representative” of the population. She will be the first person interviewed. Then nominate the person “next most representative, but in other respects as unlike the first person as possible”; then the person “next most representative, but unlike the first two” ... And so on. This sounds “fuzzy”; but in practice most people use it quite easily.

On some occasions, especially in urban settings, you may lack the information to select a sample. If so, you can choose people at random from the electoral role.

6 *Select and train interviewers*

You may decide to do the interviewing yourself. Alternatively, and in keeping with the emphasis on participation, it is appropriate if local community members are used. If so, choose and train the interviewers.

The technique works best if interviewers work in pairs. It can be used cautiously by single interviewers, at the cost of a possible increase in interviewer bias.

7 *Plan the interview*

There are two parts to this ...

- (a) Decide the opening question. Define the approximate topic without leading the person being interviewed in any particular direction.

Think of it as almost a “content-free” question. It does not so much define the content of the answer as start the interview. In this way, you don’t predetermine the answers by the questions you ask. You may occasionally decide to save time by asking more precise questions, though this may bias the information you get.

A typical opening question might be ...

“What do you like most, and least, about living in Coorparoo?” or, slightly narrower, “... about travelling in the western suburbs?”

- (b) Determine any probe questions for specific information. Probe questions may be used when you already have some specific questions to which you want answers. The probe questions for later interviews are used to clarify uncertainties arising from earlier interviews — see below.

Step 7 is the beginning of a recurring cycle which is the heart of the technique.

8 *Conduct the interviews*

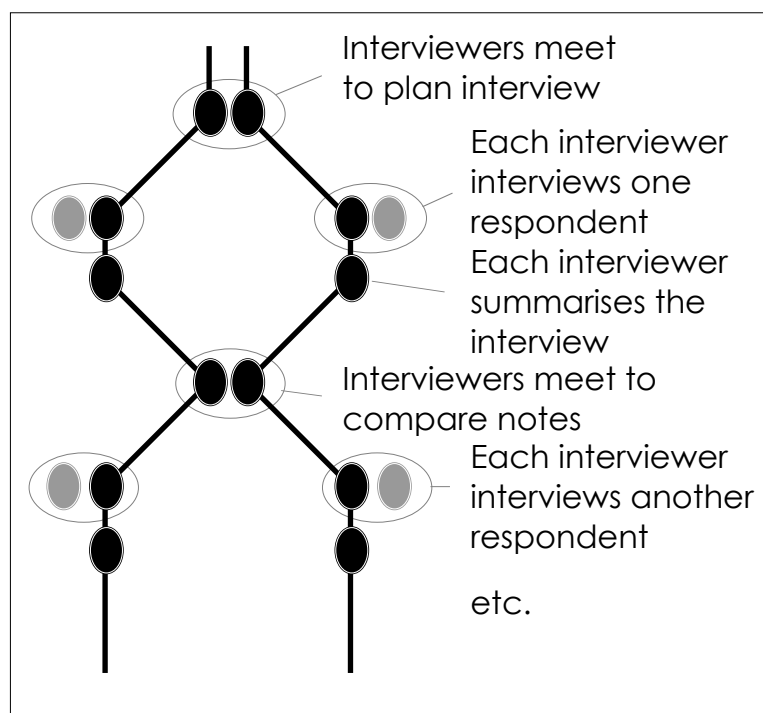
This description assumes that you are working in pairs for the interviewing.

Each of you conducts an interview with a different member of the sample (see diagram below). The sample is drawn on in the same order as it was compiled. The early interviews are therefore between the people who are least alike. Agreement which arises under these conditions is agreement indeed.

If you can work without taking notes, the greater eye contact and attention build earlier and better rapport. However, some interviewers find it hard to recall the information unless they take notes. So if you are a relative novice, you may feel more confident if you have notes to aid your recall.

A compromise is to use a tape recorder. I prefer not to, as it doubles the time taken — once to conduct the interview, and once to play it back. Some people, too, may be less frank with a recorder present (though most seem to adjust reasonably quickly to its presence).

The interview follows a number of more or less distinct stages.



- (a) Set the person being interviewed at ease; try to give the person all of your attention. Introduce yourself, explain the purpose of the interview, and generally try to establish a person-to-person relationship. Explain (though only if it is true) that the information will be anonymous, and will be reported in ways which conceal the identity of individual people. *Indicate clearly what use will be made of the information.*
- (b) Ask the opening question.
- (c) Keep the person talking, typically for about 1 to 1¼ hours. The length of the interview is an important feature of the technique. Until you develop some experience you may find it hard to maintain an interview for this time; at first, 45 minutes may be more realistic.

The questions during this part of the interview are best kept as content-free as possible. You can then be assured that the content was determined by the person interviewed, not by the questions you asked. If you maintain rapport, you will find that few questions may be needed.

- (d) Invite a summary. If you have been keeping a mental note of the key issues, this gives you a chance to check your own impressions.
- (e) Follow up on doubtful or ambiguous issues.
- (f) Ask any probe questions not already answered by what the person has said.

Probes are not always used in the first interviews, though they are always included in later interviews. The number of probe questions typically increases from interview to interview. You can also include probe questions on any doubtful part of the design, for example the sampling.

9 *Individually interpret your interview*

Working alone, interpret the information so far collected. Record this interpretation in writing. In the early interviews, the report might consist of between half a page and a page of handwriting. Note form is all that you need.

Your report takes into account both the interview just completed, and any previous interviews. It thus becomes more elaborate over the course of the interview program. By the end of the series of interviews it may consist of two or three pages, or even more.

10 *Compare interviews*

Compare notes with the other interviewer. Give particular attention only to information which occurs in more than one report. Such information must logically be one or the other of two types: in agreement or in disagreement.

Devise a probe question which identifies how widely the phenomenon occurs. Test apparent agreements; seek explanation of apparent disagreements ...

- When your reports agree, *test the agreement* by attempting to find out if it is ever untrue, and if so, under what conditions. For example, suppose in a program two people have both reported that traffic volume at a certain intersection is a problem. A probe question might ask "On which occasions is traffic volume not a problem?"
-

- When your reports disagree, seek to *explain the discrepancy*. Suppose that one person has said that the community wants greater use of traffic calming, and another has said they do not. A probe question would seek to determine the conditions under people desire it. “To what extent do local people favour traffic calming? ... What distinguishes those who want it from those who do not? In your opinion, when is traffic calming desirable, and when isn’t it.”

11 *Review the process*

If necessary in the light of the interviews so far, modify the approach used. For instance, change the sample, or provide follow up training for interviewers, or change the interview design and the probes.

12 *Recycle*

Return to Step 8 to recycle. This is the central cycle of the technique. Continue to do so until two succeeding interviews have added no significant information. Then move on to the next step.

13 *Report*

Compile a combined report and decide the next thing to be done.

As you can see, each interview starts broadly and generally. It becomes more specific over its duration. You keep the most specific probes until the very end. Similarly, you develop the information base and the interpretation of it gradually, from interview to interview. At each cycle, the only essential information is that required to decide the next cycle.

Keeping the interviewee talking

An important part of the technique is being able to keep someone talking for an extended period of time. Remember that the purpose is to keep them talking without leading them. If all information is freely volunteered you have some assurance that it isn’t determined by the questions you asked. The effect to aim

for is a “content-free” question or something similar. Some methods include the following.

- The so-called pregnant pause, where you smile sweetly and say nothing. This is obviously content-free. It can be quite effective provided the only thing pregnant about it is your own expectant expression. Overdoing it may succeed only in making you and the other person uncomfortable.
- Friendly, encouraging, but otherwise non-committal noises such as “mmm?”, “uh-huh?” and the like. Similar gestures — smiles, nods, and the like. This too can provoke discomfort if overused.
- Requests for more specific information: “Could you give me an example?”;
- Repeating back a key word or phrase, or the last word or phrase: “Accident?”. This is very effective if not overused.
- Returning to earlier business which was passed over at the time: “You mentioned public transport ...”.

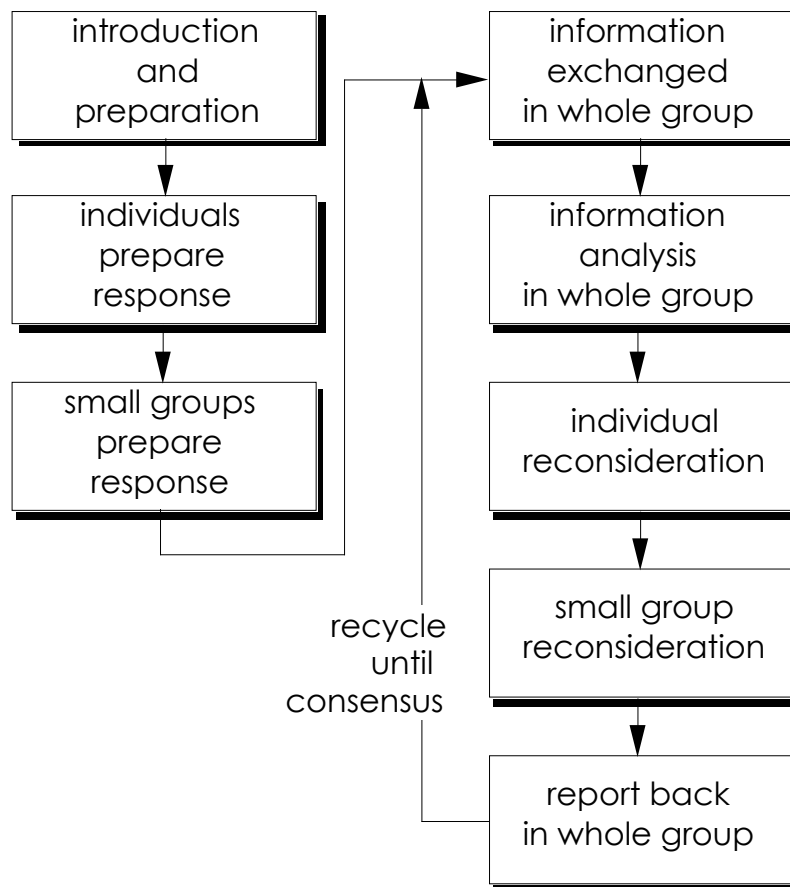
All of these techniques work better if you have been able to develop and maintain good rapport.

Opening question

The opening question is also important to the success of the technique. Some care in choosing it is warranted.

Suppose the end goal of the program were to improve community satisfaction with road planning. A suitable opening question is one to get people talking about the strengths and weaknesses of current design; preferably, you won't wish to define the particular topic more closely than that. Examples: “What do you like most and what do you like least about travelling in these suburbs?” “What are the particular strengths and weaknesses of road planning in these suburbs?”

Chapter 8: Face-to-face delphi



Delphi is a technique for generating agreement out of disagreement. It functions by encouraging people to exchange information without debate, and to be willing to change their mind in the light of new information.

It is usually done by mail; this removes much of the need for people to be defensive, and makes agreement easier to achieve.

A face-to-face delphi, on the other hand, offers you considerable economy of time compared to a mail delphi. You can run it in a single half-day or day (or even less), instead of being spread out over several weeks or months. It allows complex and unquantifiable issues to be addressed relatively easily. It doesn't require as much ability from the organiser to understand and be able to summarise the information presented.

These advantages arise because it *is* face-to-face. The disadvantage is that you do need a *substantial* level of facilitation skills, and experience in large-group conflict resolution. I would advise against running a delphi face-to-face unless you have a facilitator who is highly skilled in large-group facilitation, with good communication and conflict resolution skills as part of her repertoire.

Here is a summary description of the process.¹⁰ A more detailed consideration of some of the issues appears later.

1. *Introduction.* Outline the information to be collected or the decision to be made. Then explain the process, and encourage both honesty and respect for other people.
2. *Individual work.* Each person works alone to respond to a question which defines the required information. At this stage, only a response is required, not an argument or justification.

10. Based on the description in my *Helping groups to be effective: skills, processes and concepts for group facilitation*, Chapel Hill: Interchange, 1987.

3. *Small group information collection.* Participants collect together in groups with people from a similar background. They prepare a group list of information, arranged in order of importance.

The use of groups of *similar* people makes it likely that information important to a particular category of participant will reach the whole-group list. Otherwise, minority information tends to be ignored.

The small group also gives individuals a chance to rehearse their arguments before revealing them in the riskier environment of the large group.

4. *Whole group information collection.* Gather the important items from each group on newsprint. To do this, ask each group in turn to contribute the one most important item which is on their group list but not yet on the plenary list. Go round the groups several times, to capture all of the important information.

If it is numerical information, each will typically provide a single estimate.

5. *Whole group information analysis.* A voting procedure (in which participants have multiple votes) is used to rank the items from most to least important. A natural cut-off point is chosen between items with high scores, and those with low scores.
6. *Individual reconsideration.* Each person considers what changes she wishes to make to the group list in the light of the plenary list.
7. *Small group reconsideration.* Small groups compare the list of top items on the group list to those on the plenary list. Where the group list differs from the plenary list, the group has two options — change its list to conform to the plenary list; or develop evidence for changing the plenary list more in the direction of the group list.

This is done as follows. The group adds to its list those items from the plenary list which were previously omitted, but it is now prepared to accept. It prepares a brief report supporting any of the items from its list which it believes should be added to the plenary list.

This is important: The group spokesperson is to *present evidence* which her group thinks that others may have overlooked. The intention is *not to persuade others* to the group's point of view.

Each group writes its revised list on one sheet of newsprint, and its evidence (in note form) on another.

8. *Whole-group report back.* Groups report back. Their revised lists are displayed without comment. Each group in turn displays its sheet of evidence and speaks briefly to it. Manage the process by drawing immediate attention to any persuasion or advocacy.

Each group report is followed by a brief session of questions. These must be questions *for clarification only*, and not debate or argument.

Steps 5 to 8 form the loop of the cyclic process. Cycling can continue until consensus emerges or the available time is exhausted.

If the process is managed well enough this can yield good results in quite a short time. You might use it, for example, as a more rigorous substitute for the focus groups, or group interviews.¹¹ As with many such processes, the interpretation of information is done by the participants rather than by the facilitator. This makes it particularly suitable for qualitative information.

As mentioned earlier, you can see that the task process is not all that different from the more usual variety of delphi. The relationship aspects, however, are very different.

11. See for example A. Hedges (1985), Group interviewing, in R. Walker, ed, *Applied qualitative research*, cited above.

Managing relationships in a face-to-face delphi

A face-to-face delphi does require skilled facilitation. This can be done by managing the pressures to conformity and individuality in such a way that they are constructive rather than destructive.

An important part of this is the introduction you provide, and the effects of the very early stages of the activity. Some initial relationship-building or “ice-breaking” is useful. (One of the most powerful I have used is the “personal history trip”¹² described in other documents, and briefly described in the chapter on meetings for committees.) So are initial instructions which encourage people to exchange information in such a way that ...

- they are as *clear and informative* as they can be; but ...
- they don't paint themselves into a corner; that is, they are willing to *let go* of their own position in the light of new information;
- throughout, they *respect* other people as people; and ...
- that in any information exchange they concentrate on *informing rather than persuading*.

To this end, your initial instructions to the group might go something like this ...

“It is absolutely essential to the process that you speak out about your own point of view. It is extremely helpful if you do that in such a way that you don't back yourself into a corner, and that you treat people with respect even while you are challenging their views.

“The purpose of the activity is to learn from one another. We can make more informed decisions based on more and better information than any one of us is likely to bring to this activity.

12. For example in B. Dick and T. Dalmau (1988), *To tame a unicorn: recipes for cultural intervention*, Chapel Hill: Interchange.

“From time to time during the activity you will be asked to report your own view, or that of a small group. It will help if you recall at these times that the purpose of your report is to *inform, not persuade*. Our intention is not to have one view prevail, but to arrive collectively at a view that is better than any of the individual perceptions we bring with us.”

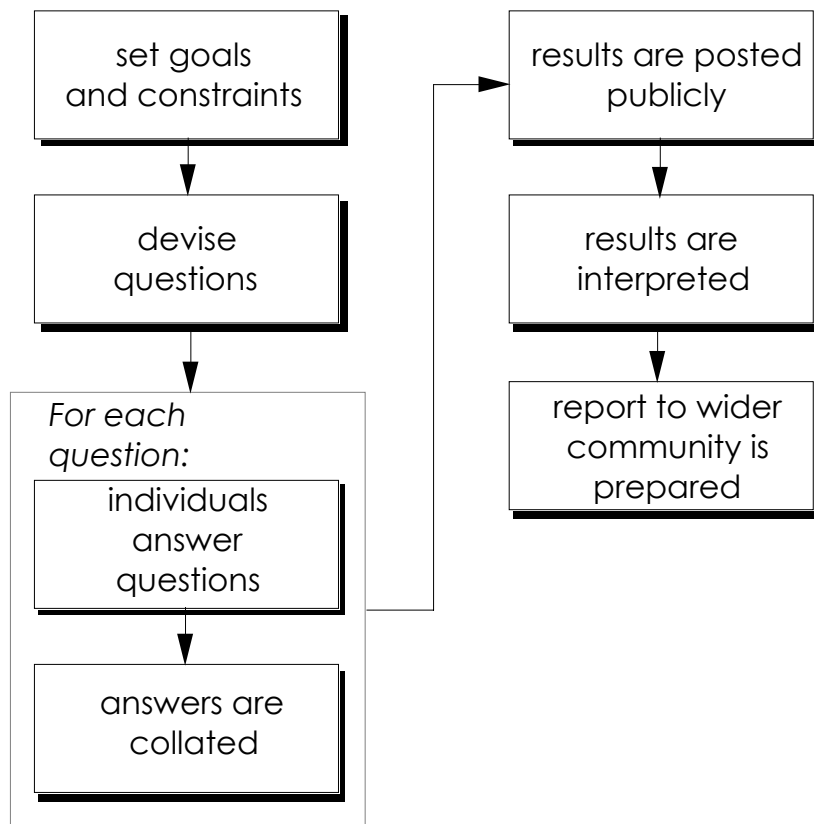
It doesn't hurt to have a summary chart or overhead visible throughout the activity, perhaps a summary in this form ...

- Be clear and honest
- Be willing to let go
- Respect the person
- Inform rather than persuade

The purpose of these interventions is to encourage a combination of honesty and concern for others. Ask participants to be direct and open, but also to be specific and to respect others' opinions. The outcome might be described as constructive and manageable conflict.

Destructive conflict may still emerge at times between groups. If it does, you can switch to the use of conflict management processes.

Chapter 9: Group feedback analysis



Group feedback analysis,¹³ or GFA, is a small-group alternative to survey feedback (described in another chapter). Information is collected from and interpreted by a varied small group in a single session. The small group may also devise the questions before answering them.

It is also an interactive procedure; you collect the data in a dialogue with informants. It therefore offers you a more robust alternative to survey feedback, and in a form which can be used by people with relatively little experience.

When to use group feedback analysis

GFA is likely to be an appropriate technique where small-group information collection is called for. It is suitable for use with numbers of people between about six and about twelve (more with skilled facilitation).

The best group is one which is a microcosm of the community. It may be chosen in the same manner as a sample for convergent interviewing (described in an earlier chapter), or it may be randomly selected as a reference group or jury.

Before you use GFA with a particular group, check that these preconditions have been met ...

- the group is sufficiently representative;
- there is agreement on goals; and
- group members understand what constraints apply.

13. Devised by Frank A. Heller. See his Group feedback analysis as a method of action research, In AW Clark, *Experimenting with organisational life the action research approach*, Plenum, NY., 1976. The process described here is a substantial modification of Heller's procedure; for Heller, the main emphasis was on the research component of action research, while the present description gives more emphasis to the action. This description was summarised and amended from T. Dalmau, B. Dick and P. Boas, *Getting to change*, Canberra: Work Organisation Branch, Department of Industrial Relations, 1989. In turn, that was based on *Small group diagnosis*, Chapel Hill: Interchange, mimeo.

Unless you are a skilled facilitator, GFA is not advised if there are serious unresolved conflicts within the group. It may also be unproductive if the information you want is unrelated to the issues of most concern to group members.

The procedure is written for use by a group without consulting help. A member of the group can fill the role of facilitator. If you have an experienced facilitator you may wish to alter the procedure accordingly.

Facilitator preparation

In some settings the duties of the facilitator may be shared amongst different group members. For the present description, however, I will assume you are the facilitator.

Your main function as facilitator is to guide the group through the exercise. The purpose is to achieve an end result ...

- which is one that the group have reached by themselves,
- and which reflects their real views.

For this to happen, each member of the group must feel able to contribute her views safely. It is also important for group members to listen to one another (or a genuine group consensus cannot emerge), and to communicate cooperatively rather than competitively.

Here is a useful frame of mind for you to adopt: regard your task as helping the group to generate its own information while it takes responsibility for its own effectiveness in doing so.

The process

There now follows a description of the steps involved. For many purposes you may want to precede the steps below with a definition of goals and constraints. A shortened and modified version of search might be used for this purpose. The

constraints may be defined by someone speaking on behalf of the wider community, or perhaps some umbrella body such as the South East Queensland Passenger Transport Study (SEPTS).

Here is the process ...

1 *Developing questions*

You can develop the questions yourself, as is usually done with research-oriented versions of GFA. But if so, there is some preliminary work to be done, perhaps using convergent interviewing. In the procedure described below, the group itself decides the questions.

During both this procedure and the later collection of responses, you use cards to allow group members to remain anonymous. Standard 125mm x 75mm (5" x 3") system cards such as those used in office filing systems are small and convenient.

- 1.1 Ask group members to develop, individually and without discussion, two or three questions which would secure the required information from the group. Ask them to phrase these questions in such a way that they can be answered on a seven-point scale, ranging from highly favourable (7) to highly unfavourable (1).

You can suggest that in the first instance they begin questions with "To what extent ..." or "How much ..." or "How well ...". This increases the likelihood that questions will be able to be answered on the scale.

- 1.2 If the exercise is being done with a large group, this step may be done with small groups of three or so, so that the list of questions is not too large for easy collation. Otherwise it can be done by individuals. Each individual (or group) writes two or three questions on cards, one question to a card. These cards are then passed face down to the front of the room.

2 *Collation*

You can collate the questions with the group watching. It is usually better, however, if the group is responsible for collation.

- 2.1 Ask the group to nominate two or three of their members to group the questions into a smaller number (between ten and twenty). A *representative* sub-group is suitable, chosen from the quieter members of the group (they often have a more accurate perception of the situation).
- 2.2 Collation can be done conveniently on a large table placed near the front of the room, with room for other group members to gather around it.
- 2.3 The collators begin by looking for *questions which would obtain the same information*. When such a pair of questions is found, it is placed on a separate cleared part of the table. Other questions are then found which also ask for the same information, or information which is very closely related.

Questions are grouped only where they serve the same function, and not because they are about related topics or have similar wording.

- 2.4 The collators then choose from each group of questions one which captures the theme, and which can be answered on the scale used. If the best question is one which would attract a “yes/no” answer, it can often be converted by adding “To what extent” to the beginning of it.
- 2.5 The questions are written up on a chalkboard or piece of butcher paper. Space is left at the right for measures of average and spread.
- 2.6 At the end of the questions are added a number of open-ended questions to be answered with a few words or a sentence. These are “catch-all” questions to capture information not covered by the more specific questions.

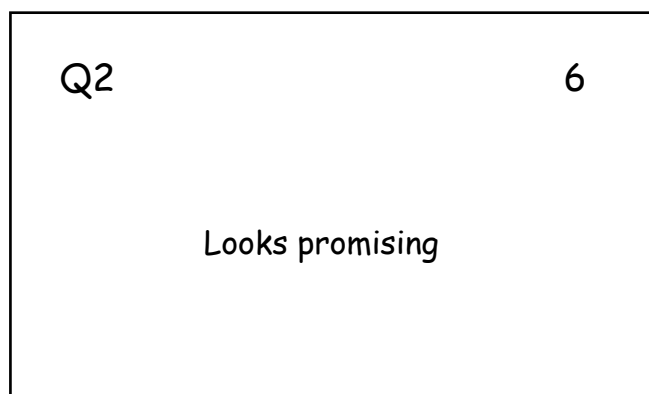
The wording depends upon the type of information being sought. As an example, suppose the GFA is being used to gather reactions to a proposal. The following questions might then be useful ...

- a Write down the three major strengths of the proposal.
 - b Write down the three major weaknesses of the proposal.
 - c Write down the two or three specific changes which you think would do the most to increase the usefulness of the proposal.
-

3 *Answering the questions*

Group members answer questions individually. Summaries are then written up and used as the basis for the later discussion. (The summaries are not written up until all questions are answered; otherwise the responses to the earlier questions may influence the later responses.) In more detail ...

- 3.1 Read out the first (or next) question to the group. Group members each take a 125mm x 75mm card. In the top left hand corner they write the question number preceded by “Q” (otherwise someone will confuse left and right, and there will be problems). In the top right hand corner they write their response to that question. If reasons for the response are also to be collected, these can be written below. The card then resembles the illustration below.
- 3.2 The cards are collected face-down by one of the collators, and given to a second collator who compiles the summaries. (The collators also record their own responses on cards. So does the facilitator if she is a member of the group.)



- 3.3 The second collator sorts the card into rank order, with all the “1” responses first, then the “2” responses, and so on. The cards are sorted into two equal piles; and each of those piles is itself further divided into two.

The middle card (or the average of the middle two cards) provides an average (technically, the “median”). The difference between the quar-

ter and three-quarter marks gives a measure of the spread (technically, the “interquartile range”) —

Original order
3 5 3 7 1 3 5 5 4 2 3 2 4

Arranged in rank order
1 2 2 3 3 3 3 4 4 5 5 5 6

Sorted into four equal stacks
1 2 2 3 3 3 3 4 4 5 5 5 6
Q1=2.5 Mdn=3 Q3=5

The median is 3 (the midpoint)
The interquartile range = $5 - 2.5 = 2.5$

The procedure of step 2 is then repeated for each of the scaled questions. For the open-ended questions, the responses are recorded one to a card. They can be collated on the same table used to prepare the questions, and a summary of the main themes recorded.

4 *Preparation for the discussion*

This and the following steps form the core of the procedure. Group members use their previous responses as a means of knowing if there is close to a group consensus on some items. They reach agreement on a summary statement of the views of their group.

In the interests of free and open discussion, it is better if this part of the procedure is conducted with the understanding that it is confidential. The task of deciding finally what will be communicated to others outside the group is then left to become a separate exercise.

In more detail ...

- 4.1 The facilitator suggests that the rest of the discussion might be anonymous and confidential.

The facilitator reminds group members that they are using a collaborative process. Their goal is to understand and communicate the view or views of the community as a whole.

During the discussion which follows *any points made are written up on a second sheet of butcher paper*. This written record, like the discussion, is confidential.

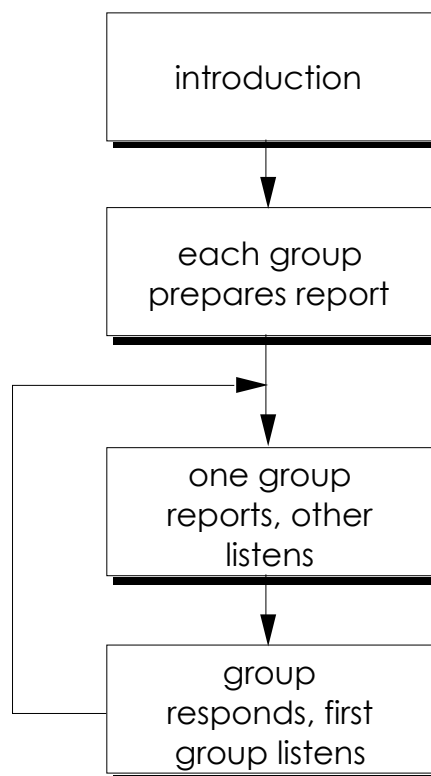
- 4.2 The items are worked through in an order determined by their average, from most negative to most positive. For each, group members are given individual thinking time to prepare their interpretation of the results. These are then compared. Either a consensus is identified, or several views are recorded for reporting.

5 *The report*

All information so far generated and recorded is private information: confidential to the group. The final session of the procedure is used to develop public information, or information which can go outside the group. In more detail ...

- 5.1 Taking each agenda item in turn, group members decide if they want to communicate it to others. If they do, they then agree on the wording with which it can be communicated. This can often be done most easily by editing the summary developed when the item was first discussed. When a final wording is agreed on it can be transferred to an appropriate action sheet.
-

Chapter 10: Intergroup conflict resolution



Intergroup conflict resolution is a process by which two groups gain at least a better understanding of each other, and a better relationship. It often leads also to agreement on a third position, which is frequently more creative than either of the original positions of the group.

It is a method ¹⁴ for experienced facilitators. Its use is indicated when there are two groups with differing views, and you suspect that many of their differences arise out of mutual misunderstanding. If there are more than two groups, or if the differences are very complex, a face-to-face delphi may be more effective. If there are two groups, and the differences are about desired approaches, option 1½ may be appropriate.

The procedure described below will be more effective if you have had a chance to meet the two groups separately before they come together. It is important at least that you have from each of them a commitment ...

- that they want the situation to improve;
- that they are willing to meet others half-way to achieve an improvement (this condition is not necessary for highly experienced facilitators);
- that they will not abandon the process during the first session (sometimes it gets worse before it gets better);
- that they accept your responsibility to manage the process, and will cooperate in helping you to make it work.

The procedure is as follows ...

1 *Introduction*

The facilitator explains the procedure, and reminds the groups of the commitments they gave previously.

14. The process described here is modified from one in *Frameworks for effective third party conflict resolution* (Chapel Hill: Interchange, 1990), a document which describes an interpersonal (rather than intergroup) conflict resolution process.

2 Preparation

Each group is asked to prepare, on butcher paper, its own description of the situation. The exact instructions depend upon the differences between the groups.

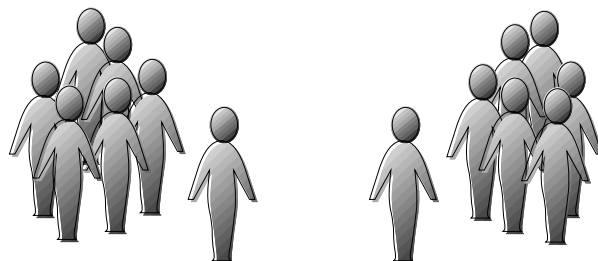
If the main issue is suspicion, for example, each group might describe itself and the other group. If it is dissatisfaction with each other's behaviour, each might prepare a list of what different behaviour they would prefer. If it is differences in perception, each might prepare a description of its own perception, and their assumptions about the perceptions of the other group.

In any event, this is most effectively done in three stages ...

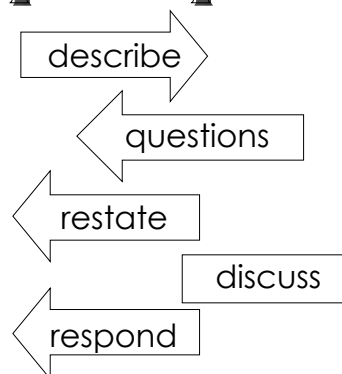
- 2.1 each group member individually prepares and lists her own views;
- 2.2 these are collected into a group view;
- 2.3 the group chooses and briefs one of its members as spokesperson, while preparing a summary on butcher paper of its views.

3 Exchange

The groups come together to exchange and examine their view of themselves and the other group. In more detail ...



- 3.1 You explain that *the only task is to understand each other's perception, not to debate the issue.*
- 3.2 One group spokesperson posts her group's butcher paper on



the wall, and speaks to it. Other members of the same group may then briefly add to her description.

- 3.3 Any member of the other group may ask questions of the first group's spokesperson, but for clarification only. It is important that you *challenge any questions which are deliberately difficult, or deliberately "clever", or seem intended to imply that the first group's account is inaccurate.*
- 3.4 The spokesperson for the second group describes, in her own words, the perception which she thinks the first group presented. She continues this until the first group are satisfied that she understands the point of view as so far expressed.
- 3.5 Other members of the second group may discuss with their own spokesperson what is meant.
- 3.6 The spokesperson for the second group then responds to the first group's perception. She may ask for ten minutes time out, if she wishes, to be briefed by her group.

Discussion alternates between the two groups until all present are satisfied that the second group understands the first group's position

- 3.7 The two groups reverse roles, with the second group's spokesperson presenting its perception, and the first group responding. This repeats steps 3.1 to 3.6.

This third step may appear complex. If so, it may help to keep in mind that it is two processes in one. One process is for the interchange of information between the two groups. As a procedure for two individuals, it may be summarised as follows ...

Person A describes her position, while ...

Person B listens and tries to understand

Person B asks questions for clarification

Person B restates what A has said, in her own words

Person B responds, while ...

Person B listens and tries to understand

Person A asks questions for clarification

Person A restates what B has said, in her own words

... and so on

Superimposed on this is a process whereby a member of each group acts as spokesperson for the group. There must be enough opportunity for the group to brief the spokesperson, and for other group members to comment on what the spokesperson has said.

- 4 The groups prepare proposals for improving their relationship, or working more effectively together, or whatever would be a resolution of their situation. The procedures of step 3 are then repeated until the two groups agree on further actions, or agree to differ.

This description is not given in sufficient detail for an inexperienced facilitator to use it. If necessary, you may wish to obtain and study a more detailed description of conflict resolution methods.¹⁵

15. Many of the processes in Helena Cornelius and Shoshana Faire (1989), *Everyone can win: how to resolve conflict*, Brookvale, NSW: Simon and Schuster, can be used in intergroup situations.

Chapter 11: Juries and panels

Juries¹⁶ (or “panels”) consist of groups of people chosen from the community of stakeholders by random selection. The selection can be random from the whole population of stakeholders, or random within defined groupings of people (“strata”).

The key advantage for the use of juries is that the selection cannot be influenced by lobbying, political favours, or other deals. Each of the eligible stakeholders is as likely to be selected as any other.

This achieves an outcome which is more participative than representative, in that the members of the panel are there as individuals; each one is free to speak for herself. It also appears that because people are chosen at random, they are more likely to regard their responsibilities as to the community — something like a civic duty.

Here, as examples, are some of the ways in which juries can be set up ...

Random selection. Panelists are chosen by random selection from the whole community of stakeholders. The commonest method for identifying stakeholders is from electoral rolls (though this omits those not of voting age).

Stratified random selection. Panelists are chosen by random selection from the various strata or identifiable interest groups within the community of stakeholders. The different strata within the community are first determined. People are then drawn from each strata by random selection.

16. As mentioned earlier, I have little first hand knowledge of the use of juries, except for the random selection of hosts for neighbourhood meetings. Substantial parts of this description depend upon conversations with Alan Davies of the University of New England, Northern Rivers (formerly of the Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University), and the written work of Fred Emery, for example in Merylyn Emery, ed. (1989), *Participative design for participative democracy*, Canberra: Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University.

The number drawn from each stratum may be in rough proportion to the numbers in the community as a whole; or they may be chosen to give the broadest range of panelists within a manageable number. As the processes are consensual, this need not be an issue.

Random selection from a list of eligible people. Panelists are chosen from a list of those who are “eligible”, where eligibility is determined in some way by the members of the interest group to which the members belong.

To form the list, interest groups are identified. Each is then asked to provide a list of people who meet certain criteria. For present purposes, these might be the same criteria as those listed for members of local area consultative committees.

A number of uses for juries suggests itself. The suggestions which follow are intended merely as examples ...

- An interim committee, or a meeting of local stakeholders, may nominate many more people for positions on the local area consultative committee than there are positions. As an alternative to election, the members of the first local committee might be chosen by random selection. Those not selected might then be eligible to rotate on to the committee after some time.

There are several advantages in having a slow rotation of the local committees. Involvement and ownership is spread more widely. So is the workload. The local committee is less likely to come to be seen as an élite, distanced from the community. The rotation might consist of half of the members every six months.

- From time to time, a quick response may be required to a proposed option (from the Department of Transport or elsewhere), for example as a pilot to a more extensive study. A randomly selected panel might provide the vehicle for such a quick response.
-

There are a number of ways of guarding against the risk of a very unrepresentative panel. For example, two panels might be formed and their responses compared. Alternatively, the meetings with the panel might be spaced apart, and the panel members given time to check their views with some of the local community in between meetings.

- Intergroup conflict resolution, a face-to-face delphi, and search, are described elsewhere in this document as collaborative procedures useful in community consultation. On occasion, the body of stakeholders may be too large for effective involvement of more than a small number. Panels could be chosen, either from the stakeholders as a whole, or from groups within the stakeholders. Collaborative procedures can then be used to achieve mutually-satisfactory agreement between the panel members (or between the panels, if there are several).

This would require follow-up to inform the wider community of the results of the process. Prior notification of the process to the community can be expected to increase the acceptance of the results of the process.

- In a number of consultative techniques, reference groups are used. A reference group is a group chosen to be a microcosm of the community, and so to act on behalf of the community as a whole. (Reference groups are not intended to substitute for community involvement, but to be an intermediate step enabling community involvement. The interim committees, for example, might be regarded as reference groups.)

Randomly-selected juries form an alternative to reference groups chosen by other means.

Chapter 12: Meetings for committees

This section present a very brief outline of some ways ¹⁷ in which a committee's own meetings can be kept efficient, effective and enjoyable. In keeping with the overall aim of the consultative program, these meetings too are collaborative and participative. I first describe the style of the meeting in the form of a set of guidelines. Some specific suggestions for running meetings are then offered.

This section, and in fact the document as a whole, is intended primarily for the local area consultative committees. The same approach can be used for meetings of other committees too, however. The members of the local consultative committees may have, or acquire, some skills at meeting facilitation. If so, they may be able to play a valuable role as facilitators on temporary or other local working parties which they may set up.

Preliminaries

At the formation of any group or committee, it is useful to deal with three issues before proceeding. They are ...

Relationships

If you have quality relationships with all of the other people on the group or committee, the committee work is much more enjoyable and productive for you. Good relationships mean better attendance, higher involvement, and more continuity for the committee or group. In addition, people with effective relationships find it easier to work well together.

17. The material in this section is consistent with that in the book *Helping groups to be effective* (Chapel Hill: Interchange, 1987), which may be used as a resource book.

All else being equal, groups and committees provide more enjoyment and productivity for their members if people can relate to each other as both friends and colleagues.

Many techniques are available for building better relationships; they are often called team-building. If time is short, processes for climate setting and goal setting can be chosen in such a way that relationships are developed at the same time. If there is time for actual relationship-building activities, the following works well and is economical of time.¹⁸ Here is a brief description ...

1 *Individual preparation*

Identify turning points. Think back over your life so far, working backwards from the present. Identify any “turning points” — events or people (or both) which led you to change your attitude towards yourself, or people, or the work, or the world. Try to put together a list of about six or seven.

Prepare. When you have a list of six or so, choose three (or if time is short, two) that you are willing to talk about. For each of the three (or two), prepare three pieces of information ...

- a A brief description
- b A brief account of its meaning to you at the time: why was it important or significant in any way, or what was the change which it triggered
- c A brief account of its meaning to you now. What is it about you, now, which you owe in some way to that turning point.

I suggest you prepare your material only in “key point” form, as a reminder of what you want to say. In that way you will be able to tell the story of the turning points in conversation with others, rather than reading a prepared script.

18. Known as a “personal history trip”, it is described in Bob Dick and Tim Dalmau (1990), *To tame a unicorn: recipes for cultural intervention*, Chapel Hill: Interchange.

2 *Telling your stories*

Arrange the seating so that you are comfortable, and you can see and hear each other easily.

Each tell one of your stories about a turning point. While someone else is talking, try to give her *all* of your attention.

Rotate three (or two) times around the circle, until all the stories are told.

Process

Agreement on the type of process to be used also can do much to improve effectiveness and satisfaction. A facilitated meeting which functions as a collaborative and task-oriented activity works more effectively for present purposes than one which operates using rules of debate or the like.

There are processes for agreeing on process, sometimes described as climate setting.¹⁹ Using them, a group agrees on what might be called its “operating style”. Alternatively, the group can adopt a set of groundrules taken from some other source. Here is a sample ...

- agree on and pursue common goals
- share time and decisions
- attend to others and listen for understanding
- build on ideas
- reveal assumptions and motives before acting on them²⁰
- all take responsibility for the group’s effectiveness

19. One is described in *Helping groups ...* (referenced above). The groundrules given are taken from the same source.

20. This is often phrased “be open and honest”. The form given here is more achievable in practice, and helps you to decide what part of the truth to tell when there isn’t time to tell the whole truth. It is based on evidence which suggests that it is the incorrect motives which people attribute to each other which often does the most to damage relationships — see for example Argyris, C. and Schön, D.A. (1974), *Theory in practice: increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco, Ca.: Jossey-Bass.

Goals

Determine the overall goals of the group or committee. For this purpose, you can use a shortened modification for what is described in another chapter of this document as “search”.

Search has the advantage that it also assists in developing more effective relationships.

These same issues require addressing whenever there is a change of membership on the committee.

Conducting a meeting

If you follow the suggestions below, you will find your meetings will be effective. None of the guidelines (or groundrules) are beyond the skills of a typical group. However, this style of meeting is so different to what people know that it may at first seem strange to be doing things this way.

In fact, the hardest part of it is being prepared to start it, both initially and at the beginning of each meeting. You may otherwise lapse into traditional meeting styles, which are neither collaborative nor problem-solving in many instances.

Here, very briefly, are the most important aspects of meetings run on collaborative and problem-solving lines ...

Pay attention to the preliminaries. At the start of each meeting, pay some attention to each of the preliminary activities already suggested for the initial activities of the group: taking time to re-establish relationships, agreeing on the goals of the meeting, agreeing on the process to be used.

Relationship building is important if there are any guests at the meeting. It is good for their comfort and yours to take a little time in brief introductions.

Appoint a facilitator. For important meetings, use an outside facilitator. In general, the greater the number of participants, the greater the contention and the less the time available, the more skill and experience your facilitator will need.

The facilitator can be one of the independent consulting team, or a resource person from the Department of Transport, or perhaps a suitably-skilled member of one of the other committees.

At other meetings, take turns in facilitating the process. You do this by guiding people through the type of process suggested here, and drawing their attention to any breach of the agreed groundrules.

The role of the facilitator is to manage the *process* only. *That is, it is no part of your task to offer, or argue for, or comment on, any of the goals which are being pursued or the topics which are being discussed.*

Match the facilitator to the difficulty of the task and the importance of the meeting — see the Box 3 below.

Box 3: Facilitation required

For simple meetings, only a few participants, no contentious issues, and enough time: rotate the role of facilitator amongst the members of your committee

For meetings where there are contentious issues, or time is urgent, or the outcomes are more than usually important: obtain the services of a facilitator from outside. It may be a volunteer facilitator from the community, or someone from another committee. A moderate level of skill and experience is useful.

For crucial meetings, large numbers, or where agreement is to be derived from disagreement: obtain the services of a skilled and experienced facilitator. The more adverse the conditions, the greater the need for skill and experience.

All of this works better if you don't just leave it to the facilitator. It is better if everyone tries to keep meeting on track, productive and enjoyable.

Work to butcher paper. Post butcher paper on the wall where everyone can see it. As information is offered, it can be written up where it becomes public property. In other words, the butcher paper becomes a sort of “group memory”, to use a phrase from Doyle and Straus.²¹

If you label each sheet with the goal or subgoal you are pursuing at the time, the butcher paper can also be a convenient record.

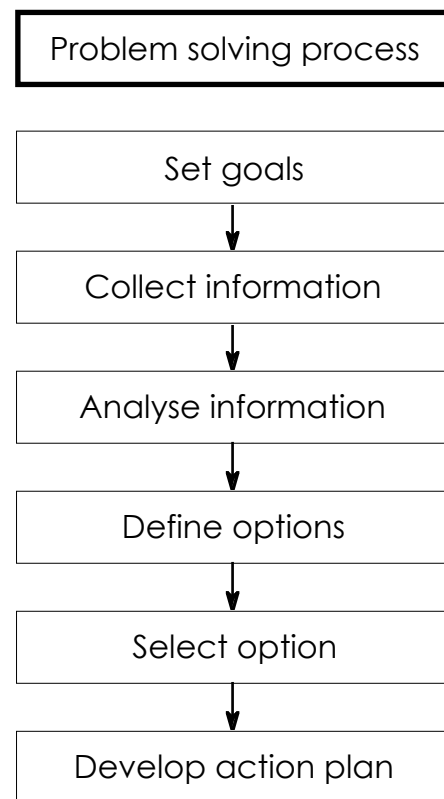
21. Doyle, M. and Straus, D. (1976), *How to make meetings work*, New York: Playboy.

Arrange the work in stages. Keep a clear distinction between the different phases of effective problem-solving or planning: setting goals, collecting information, analysing the information, identifying the options, choosing the favoured option, developing a detailed plan of action. (A process for action planning is included as the first section of Part 3.)

Match the process to the importance of the task. For simple decisions, or where time is the issue, a vote can be a convenient decision-making method. In general, however, majority-vote decision-making leads in time to adversarial behaviour. Try a straw vote, to check if there is agreement. If there isn't, exchange more information; try to do it to inform, not to persuade. If there is strong disagreement, try using Option 1½ (described later), or ask for help from a facilitator.

There is material in the next chapter on choice of processes for meetings of different sizes.

Have brief and regular reviews. Review your own process from time to time. Set aside ten minutes every few meetings to ask: "How are we managing our own process?" and "What could we do to help ourselves to be more productive and enjoy our work more?"



Chapter 13: Meetings for consultation

For many purposes, meetings can be an effective and economical method. They can be used, for example, to give or get information to the community. They are one of the most effective way of electing the members of a local area consultative committee.

There are also specific forms of meeting, including search and face-to-face delphi. These are described elsewhere in this document. The general approach for planning and calling a meeting is described here. The present descriptions can therefore be regarded as a supplement to such descriptions as those for search and delphi, as well as those for setting up local area consultative committees.

Neighbourhood meetings, which are rather different in style and planning, are also separately discussed.

Describing the meeting

You may have noticed that the term “public meeting” has been avoided here. There are a number of reasons for this, but two in particular ...

- A public meeting is one where the meeting is widely advertised, and anyone who wishes to come turns up on the day or evening.

This leaves you at risk of finding that those who attend are not at all representative of the community as a whole. Even worse, it may be unrepresentative, and you may not realise this; you may base your further actions on information which is selective or biased.

The process described here is designed to increase the likelihood that those attending the meeting will be drawn from all interest groups in the community.

- People have expectations of how public meetings will be run. Those expectations may well be more suited to adversarial and representative processes, instead of the non-adversarial and participative processes which are being used in the community consultation. It is an advantage if you can avoid raising expectation which will not be met.

To this end, this chapter gives attention to explaining the meeting process, and obtaining the cooperation of those attending.

Choosing the meeting style

There is material in Part 1 of this document which suggests some of the procedures which can be chosen to suit different purposes. You will find this useful in helping you to choose the consultative process to be used. When it is a meeting, the number of participants has an important influence on its style, and the needs for facilitation. The table at the end of the section summarises the sub-types.

(This is a general guide only: there are many exceptions to this.)

Planning the meeting

Among the decisions to be made are some which are obvious ...

- What is the purpose of the meeting?

If you were to come to a meeting *as a participant*, you would hope that certain decisions would emerge from the meeting. For example, you would hope that the meeting would support traffic calming, or support upgrading the traffic carrying capacity of a portion of the road, or the like.

Your role, however, is different. In this instance it is that of *meeting designer*. Your task is to design a meeting which, for example, ...

- attracts the appropriate participants;
 - helps them to exchange and understand the relevant information; and
 - guides them through a productive and enjoyable process.
-

Consider this now in terms of *outcomes* — the end results of the meeting. For a participant, the outcomes are *content* outcomes. They take the form of understanding, or decisions, or a chance to provide information to the Department, ..., or the like.

As meeting designer, your outcomes are *process* outcomes.

The question to ask yourself is: “Which process will best aid the goals of community consulta-

tion?” In brief, your task is to design a meeting which will obtain the best possible involvement, and the most satisfying outcome, for as many of the stakeholders as possible.

“Your task is to design a meeting which will obtain the best possible involvement, and the most satisfying outcome for as many of the stakeholders as possible.”

The following material is written as if there were a simple set of questions to be answered. And it is true that your answers to the earlier questions feed into your answers to the later questions. Unfortunately, it is also true that your answers to the later questions will lead you to change your mind about your answers to the earlier questions. It is a cyclic process. I urge you to treat your first answers as tentative, something like a “first approximation” to the eventual answers.

- How many people do you wish or expect to attend? (See also “Stakeholder analysis” in a later section.)

This is partly a matter of having those at the meeting sufficiently representative of the community as a whole. For some purposes, it is helpful for a reasonably large proportion of the stakeholders to attend, or at least most of the opinion leaders in the major interest groups of stakeholders.

Although this is not the place to deal with it in detail, it is important that participants do not come “as representatives”.

- How much lead time do you require to publicise and prepare for the meeting? (This has to include the lead time which intending participants will require.)
-

As you have to choose and book a venue ahead of time, inaccurate predictions of the required lead time can cause later embarrassment.

- What will be the agenda *and process* for the day?

At the end of this section, you will find material on the styles of process which suit meetings with different numbers of participants. An earlier section, in Part 1, provides an overview of different types of process for different purposes.

In the interests of creating realistic expectations, it is desirable that you communicate the intended outcomes, and the process to be used, in your publicity for the meeting. It is important to repeat this at the start of the meeting.

- What resources will you need?

These fall into four major categories ...

- (a) Roles and people.
- (b) Venue.
- (c) Resources for getting quality information to and/or from the group, such as butcher paper, briefing notes and the like.
- (d) Materials and resources for comfort, hygiene and the like.

A checklist is included at the end of this chapter.

- *Have a mental rehearsal.* Gather a few friends, and imagine the whole exercise in as much detail as possible from start to finish.

(For a complex meeting, you may wish to use the technique for action planning to develop your plan for the meeting.)

Preparing for electoral meetings

If the meeting is one to elect the members of a committee or group, there is also some other preparation to be done. This may arise, for example, if the interim committees use a meeting for the community to elect the members of the local area consultative committee.

The preparation consists of ensuring that enough of those people likely to be nominated are present, and have already indicated their willingness to accept. You may otherwise finish up with a last-minute default committee, because people who would have been effective committee members were not present.

I am most definitely not suggesting that you lobby for particular outcomes. If you do that, you will undermine the credibility of yourself and the process as a whole.

Part 2 describes the process in more detail.

Publicising the meeting

In whole-community activities, the best results have been achieved through the use of both mass media and face-to-face or telephone contact. It seems that, unless there is prior mass media coverage, telephone and face-to-face contact is less effective. But many people finally make the decision to attend only when they are approached personally. The mass media, it appears, informs the people; the contact triggers the decision to attend.

Advertisements and feature articles in the local press are valuable. For localised issues, letter-box drops can work well. A variety of mass media used together seem to work better than any one of them alone.

On other occasions it is possible to identify the local stakeholders through existing organisations and clubs and the like in the area. Use personalised letters, with telephone or face-to-face follow-up. (Beware: if this is not done with care, it can result in people coming in the role of spokespeople for the group they are drawn from, and undermining the participative and consensual process which is intended.)

The wording of advertisements, and letters to clubs and organisations and the like, can be important. It is therefore given a subsection to itself, below.

The wording of invitations and announcements

Announcements and invitations can be important in creating expectation in the minds of those attending. The most important expectations seem to be about ...

- The purpose of the meeting. Who called it, with what motives and intended outcomes?
- The form and style of the process to be used. Unless you do something about it, people will arrive expecting to listen to a series of speakers, and perhaps have a chance to ask questions.

It helps to give them information about such things as the numbers expected, the main steps of the process to be used, how formal or informal. They will also want to be warned if any preparation or thought is required beforehand.

You can often prepare appropriate material by imagining the questions *you* would have if you were invited to a meeting.

For reasons already mentioned, it is preferable not to advertise it as a “public” meeting. Instead, the result to aim for is one where everyone who wishes to attend can do so, but where a condition for attendance is that they first

contact you for an invitation. This gives you information on likely numbers. It also provides you with an indication of the representativeness of the group. If some important stakeholder group is not included, you can make direct contact with them.

“It is important that people come along as citizens, able to speak for themselves, willing to take account of information from the whole community, and willing to act for the benefit of the community as a whole.”

It is important that people come along as citizens, able to speak for themselves, willing to take account of information from the whole community, and willing to act for the benefit of the community as a whole. There have been some unfortunate incidents where people came to a meeting thinking they were expected to represent the views of a particular group. This usually results in unconstructive debate.

This is especially important when people are invited through organisations and other groups. This is where the temptation is particularly strong for people to come “as representatives”, expecting to get the best they can for their own group. In such instances, you can write to the president or chairperson or secretary. Instead of inviting *them*, however, you can ask them to nominate someone who “has enough breadth of vision to be eager to act for the benefit of the community as a whole, rather than argue for a particular view”.

Running the meeting

For most styles of meeting, latecomers are a potential problem. One easy way of allowing for this is to provide refreshments (not including alcohol) at the beginning of the meeting. As they arrive, people can register, help themselves to refreshments, and circulate to talk to friends. (You can usefully invite them, too, to introduce themselves to those they don't know.)

Depending on the length of the meeting, tardiness varies. For a whole-day meeting (such as a search), almost everyone will be there about 20 minutes after the announced starting time. You can then start without interruption. Otherwise you risk some people missing the important early stages of the meeting.

When the official part of the meeting begins, provide a clear and *brief* introduction ...

- Explain the purpose of the meeting, and your motives in deciding to hold it. You can describe the purpose in terms of the outcomes ...

“By the end of the meeting we will have set up a local area consultative committee. This committee will be a microcosm of the whole community. It will consist of people who are able to involve the community as a whole, not speak on behalf of the community, or argue for their own points of view.”

It is dangerous to assume that everyone there understands the place of the meeting in the wider scheme of things. You may have to say something, preferably very briefly, of the history and background.

- Explain the agenda for the meeting, in step by step form, together with the intended timing. Be generous in your estimates of time: it is better to send people home earlier than they expect rather than later.
- Introduce the facilitator, and turn the meeting over to her. Large meetings are best facilitated by someone with substantial experience of non-adversarial gatherings.

Keep speeches to the absolute minimum. It is desirable that there are few, and they are extremely brief. It is even better if there are none.

After the meeting

You can improve your skill at conducting meetings by reviewing each meeting after its conclusion. In particular, which of your outcomes were achieved, and which required some adjustments on the run? How could you have done it differently, the better to achieve the outcomes, and with economy and enjoyment?

Some meetings generate their own outcomes; for examples, there may have been decisions to be made, or information to be collected. After such meetings, all you may have to do for follow-up is convey the outcomes to appropriate people.

Other meetings (such as “search”) create the *potential* for outcomes. They are valuable as catalysts; but without follow-up they achieve little. (In fact, by raising unmet expectations, they may even do harm.) For such meetings, it is useful ...

- to plan the follow-up as part of the meeting;
 - to give participants clear expectations of *their* future involvement; and
 - to make sure it happens.
-

Meetings to elect committees

There are some special cautions when meetings are being used to elect committee members. A procedure which can be expected to work well is ...

- 1 Explain the purpose of the committee, and the way it will operate.
- 2 Describe the qualities and role of the committee members.
- 3 Call for nominations for possible members.

Then, if there are more nominations than positions ...

- 4 Repeat the descriptions of the purpose of the committee, and the qualities of its members.
- 5 Ask for volunteers to act as returning officers.
- 6 Conduct a secret ballot.
- 7 Have the returning officers declare the results.

If you have any reason to believe that there will be too few people interested, or that there will be active lobbying for particular points of view, elect only half of the committee. They can then be given power to co-opt the remaining half when they understand their role fully.

More is said about this in Part 2.

Partial checklist of meeting resources

(These are arranged in the four categories mentioned earlier)

Roles and people

Facilitators? Small group helpers?

Lists to record names and addresses of those attending, for follow up

continued ...

Partial checklist of meeting resources (continued)

Invited speakers? Guests? "Experts"?

Helpers for the various tasks to be done? ...

Name tags, briefing sheets for participants, etc?

Venue

Main venue? Rooms for small group work? Somewhere to post the reams of butcher paper which may be generated?

Lighting? Heating? Ventilation? (some ventilation systems wreak havoc on butcher paper)

Resources for gathering information, etc.

Butcher paper, felt pens, masking tape?

Something to fix the butcher paper to (some venue caretakers won't allow you to tape it to the wall, even though proper masking tape leaves no mark on almost all painted surfaces)

Whiteboards, whiteboard pens?

Pens, paper?

Agenda lists? Prompt sheets? Briefing sheets? Survey forms?

A public address system

Note paper and writing implements

Comfort and hygiene

Toilets?

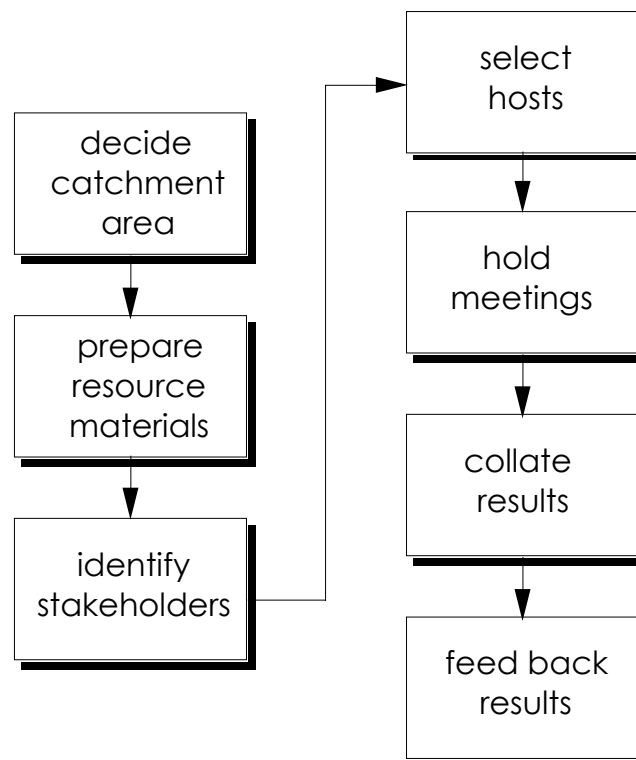
Refreshments? (It is often useful to have non-alcoholic drinks available throughout the meeting if it is of any length.)

Chairs? For some purposes, tables? (For most meetings, it is better to do without tables.)

The effect of number of participants on meeting style ²²	
Size	Description
	Below 12 participants, normal conversational skills are almost adequate for information exchange. People may actually resent structure or facilitation, though they augment effectiveness
5-6	Conversational. Groundrules (see Part 1) may be useful, but beyond this there may be little need for structure or facilitation
6-12	Structured informal. If the group contains people with process skills, and the issues are not contentious, a facilitator may not be required. A facilitator (perhaps a novice with the help of some briefing) may be safer. Some agreement on groundrules and the overall process to be followed are highly desirable
	Above 12 participants, decision making and effective communication become almost impossible without structure and facilitation. The need for skilled facilitation increases with increasing numbers
12-20	Structure and facilitation are almost necessary, and at least highly desirable.
20-35	A novice facilitator may be able to use a sound process (one which is reasonably fail-safe); or a skilled facilitator may be able to manage a semi-structured meeting (or at least one where the structure is not intrusive). But this size is at the margin of what can be done without elaborate and careful design.
30-100	A skilled facilitator, a good process, an issue which is not too contentious, and adequate time. If these conditions are met, it may be manageable. If it falls to pieces, it may do so spectacularly
100+	You are in deep trouble, and need some highly skilled assistance from more than one facilitator.

22. Thanks to Alf Lizzio for his help with compiling this table.

Chapter 14: Neighbourhood meetings



Neighbourhood meetings²³ are semi-informal meetings of a small group of neighbours. They are hosted by one of the neighbours, who has been approached and briefed on the task for the meeting.

These meetings provide an approach which can achieve real participation for a very high proportion of the stakeholder community. It can also generate high levels of involvement, and often identify “quiet achievers” who are a valuable addition to the committees and other mechanisms set up.

If the purpose of the activity is to collect or exchange information, and time and resources permit, this is the preferred option for community consultation. It generates levels of community involvement well beyond most other methods. By attracting a wider range of community members, it yields less biased information. Further, a high proportion of the community are more directly involved as the hosts of the neighbourhood meetings.

The use of resources is actually low for the involvement produced. It is much less expensive of money and other resources, for example, than group interviews would take to reach the same number of people. Most of the expense comes about from the high response rate: in some communities more than 60 per cent of people respond.

The overall rationale

The underlying rationale is that some proportion of the local stakeholders are approached directly, or by mail or telephone. They are asked to invite other stakeholders to a small meeting held in their home.

Prior to their meeting, they are provided with butcher paper, felt pens, and a brief description of how a meeting can be run. For more elaborate versions, they

23. I am indebted to my friends at the Centre for Continuing Education, especially Alan Davies, for information about some of the details of this approach.

may be invited to attend a prior meeting which explains the purpose and outlines a process.

It is usual to encourage the hosts to run the first part of the meeting as an open-ended discussion. The second part then seeks answers to more specific questions. Key points arising in both early and late discussions are written on butcher paper, which is returned to the organisers.

"If the purpose of the activity is to collect or exchange information, and time and resources permit, this is the preferred option for community consultation. It generates levels of community involvement well beyond most other methods."

Most of the remainder of this section describes in some detail how neighbourhood meetings might actually be set up.

Neighbourhood meetings in detail

This description is intended as one example of the way in which neighbourhood meetings might be organised. Many variations are possible. Here is the example in step-by-step form ...

1 Decide the catchment area

Decide the catchment area appropriate to the issue. In some situations it might be the entire zone. In others, it might consist of a certain number of blocks around the part of Route 20 under consideration, with perhaps sparser representation elsewhere in the zone.

2 Prepare resource materials

To speed up the process, this can take place at the same time as the following two steps. Assemble the butcher paper, felt pens, and other material required for the neighbourhood meetings.

You might decide to run some small meetings yourself, to gauge the reactions of local stakeholders. This can then be videotaped. The edited video-

tape then provides a useful briefing device both for the hosts and their guests.²⁴

In any event, you will want to provide on paper a brief and clear account of how a neighbourhood meeting can be run.

If the meetings are being used for an exchange of information, you will also require other briefing materials for the information to be given.

3 *Identify the stakeholders within the catchment area*

Provided your interest is with people of voting age, this is often most easily done from electoral rolls. Those people on the electoral roll, and within the catchment area, are identified.

On the other hand, if an issue is extremely limited and local, door-knocking may yield better results.

Note that the method identifies local stakeholders only. Neighbourhood meetings, at least in their usual form, do not involve stakeholders from areas outside the catchment area. You may want to include in your briefing information some details of the attitudes of non-local stakeholders. (There are also more elaborate possibilities which I will not go into here.)

4 *Select the hosts*

Decide the proportion of stakeholders you will approach as hosts. To do this, you have to make some estimates of response rate, and decide the best size for the meeting. Let's assume an overall response rate of about 50 per cent, as the higher response rates were obtained in more cohesive communities than Brisbane. For an eventual meeting size of about 8 (1 host and 7 guests), approaching about 8 per cent of the people on the list is appropriate.

When some neighbourhood meetings have been held, we will be in a position to estimate response rates more accurately.

(5 *Optionally, provide a briefing session for hosts*)

24. When I was in Canberra on study leave in 1984, I assisted Alan Davies with some community consultation in a school community in Canberra. This helped me greatly to understand the process for organising and holding neighbourhood meetings.

This is most effective when the interest is highly localised, and volunteer hosts can be used. It is more easily done for an identifiable group of stakeholders (such as parents with children at a particular school) than for more dispersed people; but it may be feasible for very local proposed changes in road design.

An effective way of running a briefing meeting is for the hosts to take part in a neighbourhood meeting run by facilitators (or skilled local people who were approached and instructed for the purpose). An overall explanation is given first. Those present then break up into groups of 8 to 12 (facilitators can presumably handle larger groups than might otherwise be desirable). A neighbourhood meeting is held. All participants reconvene to raise questions and discuss the process.

6 *The meetings are held*

A description of a typical meeting is given later.

7 *Collate the results*

To ensure community ownership of the results, this is best done with help from some of the hosts or other community members. If the information is to be conveyed to the Department of Transport (as will often be the case), it will be helpful to have one or two Departmental officers present as observers.

Hosts send in the replies from the neighbourhood meetings on butcher paper. These replies are combined, and the number of meetings recording each of them is noted. It is often useful to prepare a typed list in order of priority: that is, with the most often mentioned items at the top of the list.

If you can do so without colouring the results, it is also a good idea to provide a one- or two-paragraph summary of the main responses.

8 *Feed the results back to the community and the Department*

In all community consultation, your relationship with the community is your most valuable asset. This will be maintained more effectively if you always provide prompt and accurate feedback to anyone taking part in any consultation activity.

It also provides a check on your interpretation of the results.

At the same time, a preliminary report to the Department can be provided.

9 *Final report to community and Department*

If necessary, revise the results in the light of the reaction from the community. Circulate the revised report, perhaps in the form of a feature article in the local newspaper; the editor may permit you to write it, to ensure accuracy. Send a copy of the report to other stakeholders, such as the Department of Transport.

A typical meeting

A typical arrangement might be as follows. Again, this is just one example of how it might be done. You will of course modify this process to suit the actual situation ...

6 *The meetings are held*

6.01 *Greeting guests.* To allow for latecomers, the first 15 minutes is treated as an informal gathering. Guests are served with coffee (not alcohol) and perhaps nibbles when they arrive.

6.02 *Opening the meeting.* The meeting is opened. It is kept informal, but butcher paper is taped up in a prominent position, and the host is encouraged to stick reasonably close to the agenda.

The purpose of the meeting, and the agenda, are explained. So is the use of butcher paper, and the overall timing for the evening. Guests are invited to help in staying close to the agenda and timetable.

The uses to be made of the resulting information are clearly described. The reasons for using neighbourhood meetings are explained. It helps if the host very briefly explains her motives for being host.

If there is to be a later provision of information, or a visitor from elsewhere, it is important to say so at this point. Guests may otherwise suspect some ulterior motives.

6.03 *Introductions.* Each guest is asked to introduce herself in not more than one or two sentences. (For example: What you prefer to be called, and something about yourself as a person.) It can be helpful for the host to begin, thus modelling a brief and personal introduction.

6.04 *Thinking time.* Guest are given about five minutes, without discussion, to collect their thoughts. They are encouraged to take notes if they wish to do so.

6.05 *Open discussion.* An open discussion is held: people are asked for their points of view on the issue being discussed. The host encourages short speeches by asking for regular six-word summaries to record on the butcher paper. Views are sought from those who might not otherwise have a chance to speak.

When people differ, the host thanks them for their frankness, states that it isn't necessary to reach agreement, and asks for a way of recording all views on the butcher paper.

At the appointed time, cut short the open discussion and move on to the next phase.

6.06 *Possible input.* If there is to be an input of information, or comments from another guest, or the like, there is a choice. It may be done now, or after the more specific questions have been answered.

Here is a rough rule of thumb ... If the information is required for people to answer the specific questions, introduce it now. Otherwise, leave it until later. Your intention is not to distort people's reactions.

6.07 *Specific questions.* The host announces the number of specific questions, and the time therefore available for each. The guests discuss each question in turn. About one or two minutes before it is time to move on to the next question, the host asks something like "What can I write down which will capture faithfully all of the points of view which have been expressed?".

The answers to each question are captured briefly and legibly on butcher paper.

- 6.08 *Possible input or visitor.* If there is to be an input of information or a visitor after the detailed discussion, it occurs now.
- 6.09 *Revision of lists.* Guests may wish to add to, or revise, their ideas in the light of the extra information. If so, they are given a few minutes to capture any additions or variations on butcher paper.
- 6.10 *Closure.* The host thanks guests (and visitors, if any) and closes the official meeting. She indicates when the feedback of results is expected, and how it will be done.

Many guests, if invited, will take the chance to continue an informal conversation for some while afterwards.

Variations

A number of variations suggest themselves ...

- If the neighbourhood meetings are staged over some weeks, the results of the early meetings can be fed into the later meetings for a reaction.

If so, I strongly recommend that this is done part way through a meeting. It is important that people have a chance to voice their own opinions before they hear the results of other meetings.

- Instead of choosing the hosts at random, you might call a local meeting. Those attending might be asked to volunteer for the task.

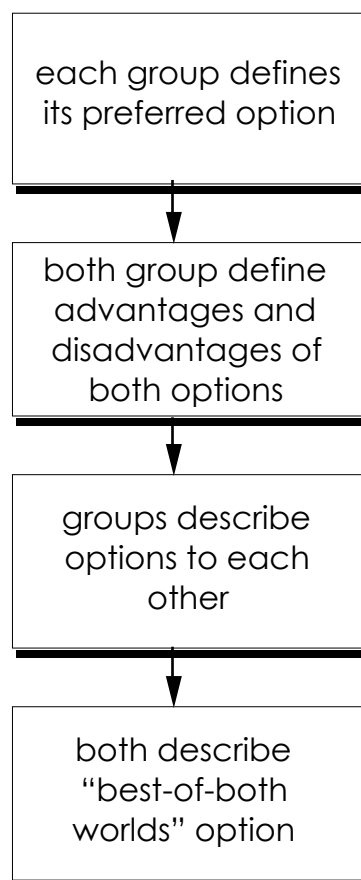
This does sacrifice one feature of the selection at random. When people are selected randomly, they seem to find it easier to act for the community as a whole rather than pursue their own vested interests. However, this is a matter of how well briefed they are. Most people respond well to a clear invitation to use their energies to involve others rather than to work for a particular outcome.

- Meetings might be attended by Departmental officers, for example, or stakeholders from beyond the local area. In most instances, this is best done by asking them to arrive at some point during the meeting, and to remain as
-

observers until invited to comment or respond to questions. The participation of the locals may otherwise be inhibited.

- Neighbourhood meetings might be combined with other consultative methods. For example, if text media such as newspapers are used to notify people of some event, neighbourhood meetings might be used to collect information on reactions to the event.

Chapter 15: Option 1½



Option 1½ is a useful technique for encouraging two groups to collaborate in combining their different preferred options into a best-of-both-worlds combination. It is included here because it is a



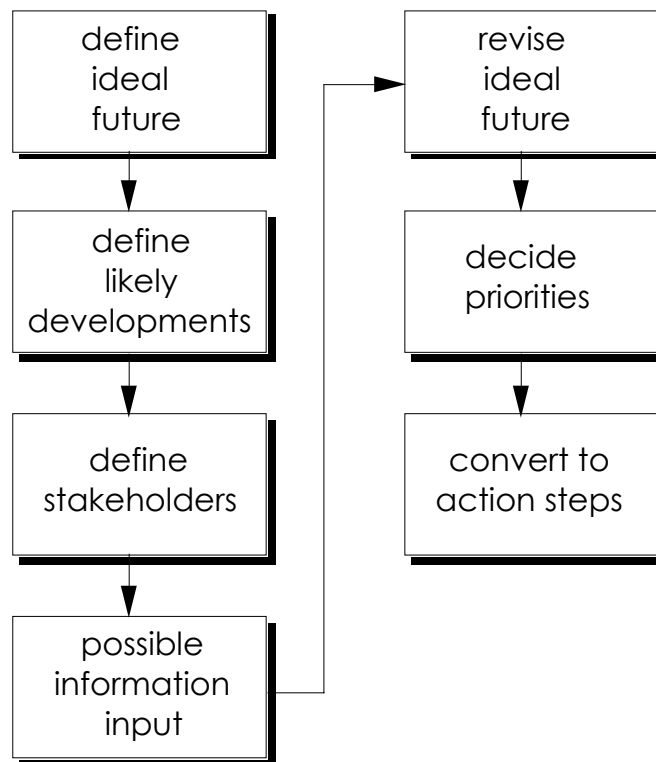
simple and easily-used safety net which you can fall back on when consensual processes threaten to break down. It also illustrates quite well the nature of processes for generating agreement out of disagreement.

Assuming that there are two groups, each with a different point of view, the procedure is as follows ...

- 1 Each group separately defines its preferred option, and documents it on butcher paper.
- 2 The groups come together, and each describes its preferred option as clearly as possible to the other group. The processes used to exchange information in intergroup conflict resolution can be used. Groups are instructed to *“inform, not persuade”*.
- 3 Working as a single large group, the participants list the advantages and disadvantages of the first option.
- 4 They now do the same for the second option.
- 5 Still working as a large group, they try to devise a third option which combines most of the advantages of both while avoiding most of the disadvantages.

In a large group, you may instead break them up into smaller groups to devise as many combined options as they can. It is important that each small group is comprised of equal numbers of people from each of the prior groups. Finally, the whole group selects the best of all the options offered.

Chapter 16: Search



Search²⁵ is a technique which enables large numbers of people to work cooperatively together for planning purposes. It is therefore sometimes appropriate for use in the early stages of a consultative activity, or where it is useful to determine overall community priorities. It is capable of generating more agreement than you would expect, though it may not be entirely effective if the community is highly polarised over an issue.

The agreement arises for two main reasons. First, in a brief search such as that described here, people are encouraged to try to identify agreements, and not to pursue disagreements. There isn't time for more than this in a brief search. Second, participants define a future ideal; and it happens that people are in more agreement about their ideals than they are about how to achieve them. People can usually identify enough agreed goals that they are willing to devote effort to achieving them.

As a result, search can often catalyse a community into action by identifying those areas where common action is beneficial for all.

You can amplify this catalysing effect by encouraging those attending the search to talk to, and involve, their friends and neighbours.

Choosing search

Search is therefore indicated when there is sufficient agreement to generate collective action. It is ideally suited for use when the target group is large in number and it is possible to get them all together in the same place at the same time. (One-day searches have been run in Queensland with up to 110 people at a time, usually with good results.)

25. Search was initially developed as a technique primarily at the Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, by Fred Emery and his colleagues. See Merrilyn Emery (Ed.), *Searching*, Canberra: Centre for Continuing Education, 1984.

Search functions primarily as a way of collecting information from the community. In addition it can be used to bring about a constructive exchange of information. In this case, information is fed into the search at about the midpoint, and people then take the information into account.

Planning for a search

Many of the steps in the overall process are similar to those for community meetings generally, and were described in an earlier chapter. They are described here in outline form only. The important features are ...

- Print media and direct contact are both used. The print media inform people; the contact is usually what triggers a decision to attend.
- People may ask for an invitation to attend. All who ask are invited. They are asked to provide details which allow the consultative committee to identify missing stakeholders, and recruit them.
- When people are invited through organisations or other groups, it is made clear that they come as community-minded individuals, not as representatives of the group they are drawn from.

One design for a search workshop, suitable for about a day or a little more, is given below. A detailed workbook is available.²⁶

Typical design for search

Search is usually conducted using a workshop format. The workshop is given the task of identifying likely future developments in the community's environment, desirable future achievements, and ways of bringing those achievements about in broad terms.

In the design used here there are seven broad phases to a search workshop. (There can be an eighth phase where detailed action is planned.)

26. *Search*, Chapel Hill: Interchange, 1989..

Here are the seven phases ...

- 1 An ideal future for the organisation is defined.
- 2 Probable future developments in society are identified.
- 3 Stakeholders are identified.
- 4 There may be an input of information.
- 5 The future vision is modified to take account of steps 2, 3 and 4.
- 6 The elements of the vision are arranged in order of priority.
- 7 Ways of achieving the vision are identified.

It is at step 4 that outside information can be fed into the process.

At most steps, people work through a three-stage process. There is individual work, noting down ideas in space provided in the workbook. A small group then collates these ideas and arranges them in order of priority. Finally, a whole-group list is compiled.

Just as the participants as a whole duplicate the wider community in microcosm, so does each small group. In that way, there is usually substantial agreement between one group and another. High degrees of consensus usually result. It also helps if these small groups are facilitated, for example by locals who are willing to take a process role.

Timing

Although search is a little rushed in a day, it can be done. If numbers are large, skilled facilitation may be desirable. It also helps if ...

- participants are urged to act for the stakeholders as a whole, not argue for their own preferred outcomes; and
 - each participant is issued with a detailed workbook which guides her through the process.
-

Stakeholder analysis²⁷ is a method for helping a group to pool, and make better use of, what it already knows about stakeholders. The group can then use the pooled information to decide how to approach each of the stakeholders.

Here is a step-by-step description ...

- 1 Determine the goals of the change, and write them up at the top of a sheet of butcher paper.
- 2 List the stakeholders: those people who have a “stake” in what is to be done or how it is to be done.

In some instances this may consist of classes or types of stakeholder (for example, local business). On other occasions it may be specific people (for example, the Minister of Transport).

For steps 3 to 6, complete the activity for each stakeholder at a time ...

- 3 List your pooled best guess as to the *attitude* of the stakeholder, for example you might use a scale ranging from ++ (highly in favour) to -- (highly opposed).
- 4 Immediately after this, write your *confidence* in the previous estimate. You might use this scale ...
 - 0 Confident. An easy estimate based on clear and full information
 - ? Some doubt. Most information was probably available and easy to interpret, though there is a possibility some is unknown.
 - ?? Considerable doubt. It is known that there is missing or fuzzy information.
 - ??? Wild guess. Little was known: this was the best possible guess under the circumstances.
- 5 In the next column write your pooled estimate of how much influence the stakeholder has. A convenient rating scale is ...

27. I learned this version of stakeholder analysis from David Napoli, of Alcoa (WA). He tells me it was devised by Richard Beckhard.

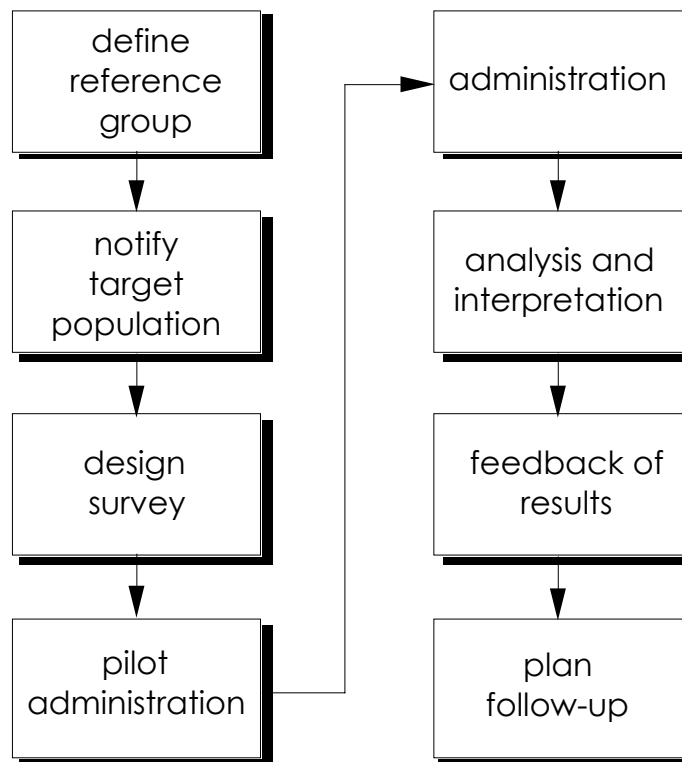
- H High. The person has power of veto. If she decides it won't happen, it won't.
- M Medium. You might conceivably carry through a change against opposition from this person, though it would be difficult.
- L Low. This person is unlikely to have much influence on the outcome.
- 6 Immediately after, write your confidence in this guess, as before.
- 7 Decide which stakeholders it is most important for you to involve, who will approach them, and how to do so.

Question marks, particularly "???" or "????", indicate that you need more information. Decide how you are going to get it.

The stakeholders who require the most sensitive approach are those with high or medium influence, and who are opposed.

Note: Community consultation is intended to be a collaborative and participative exercise. That someone has no influence is not any reason to omit them from involvement.

Chapter 18: Survey feedback



Survey feedback²⁸ is a form of written survey in which the feedback of results to respondents forms an important part of the process. The data are interpreted roughly for feedback, and then interpreted in greater depth by those taking part. The interpretation is then used as the basis for further work or planning.

It is included here mainly because it is such a common technique. However, its apparent ease of use conceals a number of important traps and disadvantages. I would normally use it only when the advantages are compelling. Group feedback analysis can usually achieve the same purpose more effectively, with only a little extra cost.

If survey feedback is used, it is often most effectively preceded by unstructured or convergent interviewing. The questions as well as the answers then arise from the community.

The approach described here assumes that you will use a carefully prepared sample, or try to approach all the stakeholders. For some purposes it is possible to use media to ask questions, and rely on volunteer responses. But this gives you no real check on the representativeness of those responding. I suggest that you use this only when you have other independent checks on the validity of the data. In a non-random sample, those responding tend to be those with more polarised views, or who are better organised.

Purposes of survey feedback

The aims of a survey typically include the following ...

- To learn what people think and feel about their community, some aspect of it, or some event or possibility which affects it.
- To identify the problems and concerns that community members have.

28. This description is abbreviated and modified from Bob Dick and Hollis Peter, *Changing attitudes to work in the Brisbane Mail Exchange*, St. Lucia: Organisational Studies Group, Departments of Management and Psychology, University of Queensland, 1977.

- Occasionally, to understand the relationships between various attitudes and behaviours. In this form it is likely to be part of some research program, for instance to identify the likely sources of different points of view in the community.

The feedback stage, an essential part of participative surveys, differentiates survey feedback from some other survey techniques. Its aims are ...

- To allow members of the community to understand better their situation as it is now.
- To provide factual information which can be used for diagnostic purposes and to design corrective action.
- To permit and encourage local participation in the consultative process.

Advantages

Survey feedback is most likely to be useful when ...

- the data are numerical;
- are relevant to a fixed set of questions;
- are about attitudes; and
- are collected from a large number of people.

It may also be appropriate for such purposes as the following ...

- initiating an overall program, particularly amongst geographically dispersed stakeholders; for example, it could be used to supplement local activities using search or neighbourhood meetings.
 - collecting information for comparative analysis or where sophisticated statistical methods are to be used;
 - (used recurrently) for tracking attitudes over time.
-

Disadvantages

Some of the disadvantages are almost unavoidably characteristic of surveys as such.

- Analysis and interpretation of survey data is still a skilled exercise, part art and only part science. If rash decisions are not to be made it is often necessary to call on other data to help in interpretation.
- Surveys attach numbers to attitudes, often numbers with many decimal points after them. This can add a spurious air of accuracy to things which are of their nature hard to quantify accurately.
- Technical expertise in survey analysis and feedback may have to be imported from outside the community. This can water down local ownership.
- As with any one-stage method of data collection it is hard to know which questions to ask until all the answers are available.

Other disadvantages arise more from the scope of the survey.

- People will often respond by wondering “What are they up to this time?”. When a large part of a community is being approached at one time, the sum total of distrust can be considerable.
- It is very hard for surveys to be done in any sort of low-key fashion. They tend to be clearly identified as the start of major programs. If the raised expectations cannot be met, a survey may leave you worse off than if you had done nothing.

Perhaps other methods lack credibility. Or comparative data may be required. Or it may be important for all or almost all of the community to be covered, and there may be some reason why neighbourhood meetings and group feedback analysis are difficult. If so, use survey feedback; and do so with caution.

Some design options

Should you wish to use survey feedback, here are some variations to help you choose your approach.

Sampling

One of the main advantages of the survey is its credibility compared to some other means of collecting information. This depends upon securing a high response rate, however, which is often difficult.

On those occasions when survey feedback is an appropriate tool, a large sample (or a 100 per cent sample) is probably indicated. It is then worth striving for a high response rate.

Length

The length of the survey influences the enthusiasm of those who answer it: longer surveys are less well answered. As the length grows beyond about one hundred items, the number of careless responses increases. There are also technical reasons why lengthy questionnaires may yield less accurate results from some of the statistical techniques used for analysis.

Type of question

Questions can be answered on a numerical scale, or by responding to open-ended questions with a word, phrase or sentence. Scaled questions are easier to collate and to analyse, and are far superior to open-ended questions if complex analyses are to be used. On the other hand, open-ended questions often provide richer data.

The best compromise is often to use both scaled and open-ended questions within the one questionnaire. The scaled questions can be easily analysed and summarised. The open-ended questions provide a useful additional source of

information to aid in interpreting the scaled responses. They also allow you to collect information when you don't know enough to ask a precise question.

Main sequence of events

The following description lists in turn the key events in a typical survey feedback program up to (but not including) action planning.

1 *Reference group*

If it has not already been done, set up a reference group. This group, chosen to be the community in microcosm, helps frame the questions and interpret the results.

2 *Notification*

People in the catchment area are given prior notice. The text media are the best vehicle, preferably more than one. Include information on ...

- the aims of the survey program; and
- the method by which any person can find out more about the survey and her likely part in it.

3 *Design*

Determine which questions are to be asked. This may need preliminary interviewing, meetings of the reference group to identify major issues, and other preliminary information collection.

The actual wording of the questions is the next step. It is best left to someone who has some experience in the design and use of survey questionnaires, someone with technical expertise in this field. Those who are to do the analysis of the data, probably by computer, will also need to be consulted if they are not already part of the consultative committee.

4 *Pilot administration*

First check with the reference group on any local word usage which those compiling the questionnaire may not have taken into account. Then administer the draft questionnaire to a representative cross-section of local stake-

holders (about a dozen, perhaps). Invite them to be very “nit-picky”. Interview them to uncover any difficulty they may have had in answering it. Where previously tried questions have been used, the pilot run may with some risk be omitted. A check by a group with local knowledge is still advisable.

5 *Administration*

Only now, after this considerable amount of groundwork, can the questionnaire proceed. Questionnaires are distributed to the entire local population, or the chosen sample.

Those not returning questionnaires within about four days are contacted, usually by mail, and invited to respond; an extra questionnaire is enclosed. A further reminder, preferably by phone or face-to-face, is given after about ten days.

Categorise each questionnaire: returned before the first reminder, after the first reminder, and after the second reminder. (This helps in later analysis. If there are few differences between the three categories, this may mean you can have some trust in the results even when the response rate is not high.)

6 *Analysis*

The data, once collected, can be analysed. There are a number of different options open to you at this stage, depending partly on the resources available. A direct collation of the results is adequate for some purposes.

There are some powerful data-processing techniques available for survey analysis. Wisely used, they can greatly improve the usefulness and meaningfulness of the survey.

7 *Interpretation*

After initial analysis of the results, interpretation is needed. An analysis may show a mean of, say, 3.5 and a standard deviation of 1.1; this may not by itself mean very much.

Interpretation is best done by a reference group or jury, guided by someone with expertise in the use of surveys. Where the advisor can suggest a

number of possible interpretations of the results, the slice group will often be able to choose one of these as most likely, or to provide the advisor with additional information which can help in interpretation.

8 *Feedback*

This is of itself an important part of a survey feedback program. It is often an advantage to develop three tiers of analysis, with three corresponding feedback options.

- The first such analysis might not go much beyond means (or some other average) and standard deviations (or some other measure of the amount of spread within the answers to each question). It is circulated very widely and quickly through the community, preferably by mail to everyone who took part. The accompanying letter can explain when the second-phase results will be available, and how to obtain them.
- The second stage of analysis may provide breakdowns of the results. It may do this, for example, by giving averages and spreads for different categories of stakeholders. It may also make some use of answers to open-ended questions, if any. It can be publicised by a feature article in the local press, if the editor is cooperative.
- If desired, a third level of feedback may then make use of some of the more sophisticated techniques for data analysis. These are likely to include correlational analysis, to indicate which attitudes are closely related. Going beyond this, and building on it, are methods which can be used to develop an overall picture of the attitudes of the community.²⁹

9 *Follow up*

After feedback comes the stage of the exercise which is the justification for all the effort which precedes it: improvement planning.

29. For example these can include such multivariate techniques as factor analysis, cluster analysis, causal path analysis, or some of the multi-dimensional scaling techniques.

There is a strong temptation at this stage for the consultative committee to do the planning, based on the survey results. But to do this is to undermine the consultative process.

A more constructive approach is to analyse the results, and then set up consultative processes (such as local working parties) around the priority issues.

