



Sector-Level Sustainability Reporting

Design and Management of Stakeholder Consultation Meetings

Supplementary Information

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Design of Stakeholder Consultation Meetings

The following is a précis from Sd3 guidance on how to conduct stakeholder dialogue in Sector-level reporting. It represents good practice for certain situations and is a template to be adapted to particular situations, such as the SMMT's work.

Interviewers

1. Usually, it is recommended that a neutral third party carries out interviews. It is easier for a third party to be open to views expressed by stakeholders, to be credible and to be non-judgemental. Many stakeholders will only speak freely to a neutral third party, where their views will not be directly attributable to them. This is the most important technique to develop openness.
2. If no neutral party is available then interviewers in the reporting organisation should have experience of qualitative interviews. At the very least, they need to be able to:
 - Ask open-ended questions
 - Be non-judgemental
 - Listen and encourage other people to speak
 - Take a friendly and relaxed approach.

Preparation

3. Send out a letter explaining the reasons and objectives of the consultation and stressing that the reporting organisation e.g. your trade body wants to hear and understand the concerns of their stakeholders.
4. Invite stakeholders to have a look at last year's Report (if available) and to think about what else they would like the sector to report on. Send it to them with the letter.
5. Send the questionnaire out first and ask the stakeholders to complete it BEFORE they come to the meeting. Explain that the aim of the meeting is (a) to discuss their responses and (b) to hear their opinion of the questionnaire itself, with a view to amending it before sending it out to a larger group of stakeholders.

The Interviews

6. Arrange the meeting room so that people are seated in a non-hierarchical and non-adversarial manner. Preferably in a circle or round a table. Try to avoid sitting people on opposite sides of a desk. Avoid emphasising 'us' and 'them'.



7. The best way to encourage openness is for the interviewer to be as open and transparent as possible. A good way to do this is for the interviewer to do an introductory preamble at the beginning. In this s/he should:
 - Clearly tell the stakeholders why they are there
 - Clearly tell the stakeholders the objectives of the consultation
 - Stress that s/he is coming to the consultation in the spirit of openness and that s/he wants to understand their concerns so that the sector can respond to them in the most appropriate way
 - If relevant, point out what the meeting is NOT going to do
 - Set out how s/he would like to structure the meeting, including the timing for different parts and the end time.
 - Ask the stakeholders if they agree with this structure. If not, ask what they want to change and try to agree a new structure and timing. (This part is very important and will make time management much easier. If everyone has agreed at the beginning, then the interviewer has a mandate to move things along if time is running short. Eg. *'We all agreed to spend 15 minutes on this, so I think it's time now to move on to the next point...'*)

8. In this type of meeting it is very important that the stakeholders feel that they have been HEARD. If they don't they will keep coming back to the same old points and make it difficult to progress. For this reason it is important for the interviewer to make it VERY clear that s/he has **heard and recorded** the point. This does not mean that they necessarily agree with it. The aim of the meeting is to understand their view, not to reach consensus. Remembering this will help keep controversy to a minimum.
Tips:
 - Don't argue or disagree
 - Try to repeat back the point to the stakeholder. *'So is your point that...'*, *'Are you saying that...'*
 - Write all points down, even the ones you think are stupid. (If people come back to the same points again and again, you can politely say that you've already got that written down and can we now move on...)

9. Structure the meeting so that the stakeholders can get the burning issues off their chests first. So straight after the preamble ask them what their major concerns are or what the most important things to report on are. Encourage them to talk about these in greater depth and try to probe deeper. Where do these concerns come from? What are the underlying issues?

10. Only after this should you turn to the questionnaire and discuss the results **that they have already filled in**. Start with the issues that they have marked as the most important (if these have not already been discussed) and asking them why they find these issues the most critical. Perhaps ask them to give examples of how it effects them. Then look at



the indicators for that issue and ask them why they think it is the most appropriate. You need questions such as:

- 'why...?'
- 'how...?'
- 'tell me more about...'
- 'what did you have in mind when you wrote this...?'

11. Then do the same with the issues marked as the second most important. And if time, onto those marked third most important.

12. After this you could directly ask their views on the questionnaire.

- Are there things to add or remove?
- Do they have comments on the style?
- Did it enable them to record all the points they wanted to?
- Did they feel it was biased in any way?

13. To end with, thank them and invite them to feel free to write to you with any further thoughts they have after the meeting. (It is fairly unlikely that they will, but it will make them feel that you are open and want to hear what their views.)

Summary Structure of Interview

Preamble	reasons and objectives of meeting Spirit of openness and understanding Structure and timing
A: Discussion of main concerns	Listen and encourage them to speak Write down their concerns
B: Discussion of questionnaire results	Starting with most important <i>Why..? How..? Tell me about...?</i>
C: Discussion about the q'nnaire itself.	Things to add or remove Clarity and bias Style