Planning & Managing Consultations

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METROPOLITAN POLICE
Working for a safer London

dialoguebydesign

Planning and Managing Consultations

Part 1: Introduction

1.1 What is this document for?

The purpose of this document is to make your job easier.

It sets out in clear and practical language the purposes of public consultation by the MPS and how to do it effectively and efficiently.

Why should we bother with public consultation at all?

Because we need the public's support to achieve our goal of making London a safer place for its inhabitants. Public consultation is how we ensure that what we do enjoys and retains the support of the people we serve.

Don't we consult a lot already?

Yes, we do - the MPS as a whole is a consultative organisation, and both officers and police staff tend to operate in a consultative manner. Talking to the public is something we all take for granted.

But there are two aspects of it we don't always get right. First, even when our dialogue with the public occurs as part of a formal consultative process, we are not good at telling people who have participated in consultation exercises what has happened as a result of their contributions. Secondly, what they tell us does not always feed through into policy and practice.

We have to remedy both these shortcomings, particularly if programmes like Safer Neighbourhoods, in which consultation and engagement play a crucial role, are to succeed. So the primary purpose of this document is to make our consultation processes work better.

It is divided into four parts.

The rest of this part, Part 1, introduces the context in which consultation takes place and defines the terms we will be using throughout the document.

Part 2 describes the purposes and principles of consultation that we should always bear in mind, and addresses some of the myths and fears that make people reluctant to consult.

Part 3 helps you plan and sets out a systematic, step-by-step process to designing and delivering consultation processes.

Part 4 provides information on how to identify stakeholders and the pros and cons of different consultation methods.

Finally, we should regard this document as a work in progress: please provide feedback on how it could be made more useful to you.

1.2 Context

Before we go any further, let's put this document into its proper context.

MPA

The MPA has the legislative lead on consultation. To facilitate this they published a draft strategy and action plan in November 2002. This incorporated many of the recommendations made in the MPA/MPS Best Value Review of Consultation and the GLA family review of Consultation.

For example, the action plan recommended the setting up of a MPS Strategic Consultation Unit aligned to the MPS Corporate Planning Group to coordinate consultation within the MPS. MPA Community Consultation Co-ordinators were funded and put in place to develop, co-ordinate and support existing local consultation mechanisms.

HMIC Best Value Review Inspection of Consultation (2002)

The recommendations made in the MPA/MPS Best Value Review of Consultation were endorsed in the HMIC Best Value Review Inspection of Consultation (2002).

The implementation of these and other recommendations is ongoing. For example the MPS has taken the lead in carrying forward the work of the draft strategy and is currently working on a 'Consultation Strategy Statement' that will set a framework for all the consultation activity that is ongoing within the MPS. The overarching objective of the strategy is *"to make the best decisions for Londoners through effective engagement with Londoners".*

To achieve this the draft strategy contains six strands, each with a specific goal:

1. Building a Consultation Community: *"Identifying stakeholders including 'hard-to-hear' groups. Managing stakeholder relationships and build up-to-date stakeholder database."*
2. Ensuring Effective Dialogue: *"Effective planning and implementation of a variety of consultation styles with stakeholders, using methods that make it easy for stakeholders to contribute having regard to the status of stakeholders and other defined criteria."*
3. Analysing Results: *"Consultation responses subjected to rigorous analysis, having regard to the status of stakeholders and other defined criteria."*
4. Influencing Decisions: *"Producing a final submission to decision makers by rationalising consultation responses, integrating this input with the full decision-making processes and recording the output."*
5. Giving Feedback: *"Meaningful feedback compiled and published from all consultation activities, showing respondents, stakeholders, Londoner's and MPS staff, how their contributions have been considered in appropriate decision making processes."*

6. Co-ordinating Activity: *“Design and manage a series of consultation processes to inform key decisions, co-ordinated to minimise inconvenience to stakeholders and avoid confusion.”*

Crime and Disorder Act

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 imposes a duty on each London Borough Authority (with which the MPS has a duty to co-operate) to formulate a Crime and Disorder strategy for each Borough. The Police Act 2002 strengthens this arrangement and makes the MPS a joint partner. CDRPs have been one of the main conduits through which local consultation takes place within the MPS.

Safer Neighbourhoods

Safer Neighbourhoods is the policing style that will identify local priorities through consultation and deliver reassurance to Londoners. Teams of officers are being dedicated to specific neighbourhoods to provide this policing presence and the officers will not be abstracted for other duties. Safer Neighbourhoods teams will be tackling the issues identified by consultation with the local communities they are policing. They will also be working in partnership with local authorities to ensure other issues that affect the public's feeling of safety and security are tackled. Partnership working is a key part of Safer Neighbourhoods and the community will determine local priorities.

This will be done by working closely with local authorities, community groups, housing associations and other such organisations, and also undertaking a variety of methods of consultation with the public.

1.3 Definitions of terms

Consultation, like every other field, has its own language and jargon. These are the words used in this document that need defining**:**

Consultation a process providing effective ways for citizens, service users and stakeholders to understand and influence decisions and policies that affect them.

Engagement an umbrella term describing any process that seeks an ongoing dialogue with the public, building shared knowledge of strategic London issues, and wider participation in shared solutions and decisions. ***Community engagement*** indicates a process focused on getting people in a particular community to talk to us about resolving the problems that affect it.

Participation a process in which stakeholders have some control of the process, the agenda, and the decisions. Participative processes differ from consultation processes in that they involve the participants more deeply, they tend to involve the same people through several stages, and the results are more transparent.

Stakeholder a person or organisation perceiving themselves to have a stake in something; mostly used here in reference to organised and representative interest groups across all sectors of London's communities. These include business and academic institutions, the voluntary sector, London boroughs, and community groups.

Finally, the terms ***Citizens*** and ***Londoners*** are used to describe people who live, work, study or run businesses in London, visitors to London, commuters into London, and organisations located here.

Warning: the field of public engagement, consultation and participation is evolving rapidly at the moment. You should always check the meanings of the terms being used to avoid misunderstandings.

2. Consultation and engagement: purposes and principles

2.1 Purposes

The overall purpose of consultation by the MPS is

> to listen, inform, exchange and respond appropriately in order to ensure that the overall service delivered reflects expectations, is perceived as fair, open and accountable and builds public confidence in the MPS.

Used properly, consultation will enable us to make the best decisions for Londoners through effective engagement with Londoners.

The role of these guidelines is to help you to make the three critical decisions that will enable these purposes to be achieved:

- what purpose a consultation has;
- who needs to be consulted; and therefore
- what form the consultation should take.

These guidelines seek to be both thorough, with lots of checklists to help you approach consultation systematically, yet concise enough to be readable and easily useable. They are designed for use in corporate consultations, though many of the principles and techniques will also be relevant in local situations (depending on resources and objectives).

Because the main focus here is on corporate consultations, the main objectives of stakeholder consultation for the MPS are:

- improved public perception of the MPS
- more effective community engagement
- co-ordinated approach to consultation
- more effective use of MPS resources
- increased quality of consultation
- close the gap between community/public expectations and MPS delivery.

Under these broad headings consultation has a number of specific purposes, such as to:

- improve proposals, policy-making and decision-making by seeking early input from stakeholders;
- publicise the MPS's concerns or intentions before final stages in the policy process;
- provide a forum in which to discuss and seek resolution of current or future problems;
- establish the scope for future collaboration and further involvement of stakeholders, and start to build those relationships;
- learn more about the impact of corporate proposals on local conditions;
- promote a wider sense of ownership of proposals and increase their acceptability;
- enable accurate information to be pooled and shared;
- gather ideas and perspectives the MPS may have overlooked;
- demonstrate local accountability and responsiveness;
- identify local issues and priorities via Safer Neighbourhood teams.

From the point of view of our stakeholders, the main objectives of consultation are to:

- provide a means to influence decisions and actions that may affect them;
- help the MPS appreciate the possible impacts of its policies and proposals, especially where these may be experienced by some as divisive, discriminatory or unreasonable;
- enable stakeholders to offer advice, expertise and information to benefit others;
- ensure that minority interests are not overlooked;
- provide insight into the MPS's thinking and activities.

Stakeholder consultation also has a wider purpose in establishing the necessary dialogue among different interest groups that will allow society to find the balances and compromises that will produce a stable and secure society.

The fact that the MPS has a strategic consultation unit, (aligned to DCC2 (5) Corporate Planning), headed up by a strategic consultation manager responsible for coordinating consultations run by the MPS/MPA, reflects the importance attached to it.

2.2 Principles of effective consultation

The process – the *how* – of consultation is as important as the subject matter. The following principles, which apply to all methods of consultation, will help ensure consultation is effective and appropriate:

- **Inclusiveness**: encourage the participation of all stakeholders who have an interest in or who would be affected by a specific decision. Given the nature of our role, this could mean trying to include all Londoners in every consultation, so the ideas about identifying the right stakeholders, in Part 4 of this document, are particularly important.

- **Transparency, openness and clarity**: ensure stakeholders are given all the information they need, tell them where information is lacking or things are uncertain, indicate clearly what they can or cannot influence by contributing, and provide an indication of next steps.

- **Commitment**: show respect for both stakeholders and taxpayers by giving consultation the appropriate priority and resources, and by demonstrating that it is a genuine attempt to understand and incorporate other opinions even when they conflict with the MPS's existing point of view.

- **Accessibility**: provide different ways for people to participate - London is a diverse and multicultural society and it is essential that people from all parts of the community are able to participate in consultations on issues that may affect them.

- **Accountability**: as soon as possible after the end of the consultation period respond to participants with an unambiguous account of how and why their contributions have - or have not – influenced the outcome, and ensure there are routes for follow-up including reporting on final decisions, strategies and/or implementation plans.

- **Responsiveness:** there is little purpose in spending time and money on consultation if there is no willingness to listen to its results. Those doing the consulting must be open to the idea that their existing proposals can be improved (or are wrong), and that they will, if necessary, be amended. Those being consulted must perceive that their voice will be taken seriously, and that things can be changed. If they do not perceive this, they will not participate, the consultation exercise will be regarded as a sham, and it will be harder to involve them the next time their views are needed.

- **Willingness to learn:** all consultation should encourage both the MPS and stakeholders to learn from each other, and this means a style of process that is as interactive and as incremental as possible to build increasing layers of mutual understanding, respect and relationship.

- **Productivity:** the ultimate purpose of all the MPS's activities, including consultation, is to make London safer. How a consultation will do this needs to be set out to encourage stakeholder participation and assure them that the MPS is not wasting either its resources or their time.

2.3 Common myths and fears about consultation

- ***Doesn't consultation draw attention to - or even create - problems?***
  It may draw people's attention to something sooner - but a proper stakeholder consultation exercise is unlikely to be used in a situation that would not attract attention sooner or later anyway.

- ***Why should anyone bother to run a complicated and expensive consultation exercise if they don't <u>have</u> to?***
  Firstly, because involving stakeholders helps to make proposals as good as they can be. It's not just about responding to protests or demands, it's about actively seeking people's views and ideas to improve initial proposals.

Secondly, working with stakeholders helps anticipate future problems and build the skills and relationships necessary to prevent them. In the long run, involving stakeholders should save time, money and a lot of unnecessary headaches.

Finally, consultation is a way to respond to public needs, leading to increased public satisfaction and confidence in the police.

- ***Does it not just bring out the people who shout the loudest?***
  The reason for spending time on stakeholder analysis, and on general preparation of the process, is to ensure that all stakeholders are reached - not just the ones who tend to dominate. Besides, it often turns up potential allies as well as adversaries.

- ***How do I decide when I need to consult?***
  A critical question as unnecessary consultation squanders time, energy, money and the good will of those consulted. The reasons for consulting divide into five broad categories:
  - there is public concern or sensitivity about something, and the likelihood of future conflict if such concerns are not addressed;
  - it will be difficult to implement policy without support from citizens;
  - stakeholder input will improve the quality of the eventual result;
  - statutory requirement to consult (to assist one of the above);
  - as a member of a Safer Neighbourhood team to ensure local priorities are identified.

- ***What happens if there are people of other cultures involved?***
  The more differences of culture there are, whether racial, professional or organisational, the greater the scope for confusion and misunderstanding, and the more important it is to invest time and effort to ensure stakeholders' concerns are properly appreciated.

  Working across cultures may mean additional time and effort, but it is often vital to make that investment.

- ***Won't involving stakeholders just delay everything?***
  It may cause some delays if it turns up unexpected problems, but in most cases it will save time in the long run if it means the MPS is not wasting time later trying to win people round to decisions in which they have had no say.

- ***Can stakeholder consultation resolve direct conflict between outright adversaries?***
  Sometimes, but definitely not always – it depends on the source of dispute. If, for example, disagreement stems from misinformation or partial understanding of proposals, some intense discussion of the issues may resolve it. A good consultation process can also help people to appreciate each other's concerns and perceptions more clearly.

Part 3: Planning and implementing consultation

This part of the document takes you first through preliminary planning, then step-by-step through implementing your consultation process.

3.1 PPPPP for Preliminary Planning

This preliminary planning method is simple but effective.

Remember **PPPPP:**

- **Purpose**: why you are doing it
- **Product:** what is to be produced
- **People:** who is to be consulted
- **Process**: how it is to be done.
- **Pacing**: how to use the time available

The easiest way to use **PPPPP** is to find a good-sized wall and cover it with paper. Down the left hand side write the **PPPPP** headings; along the bottom the expected time line, and create a grid around this structure.

Project Planning Grid

Purpose	
Product	
People	
Process	
Pacing	*Timeline - e.g. January February March April…..*

The grid and the timeline will help you see the relationship of each part of the work to all the others, and to the time frame of the project. Using moveable pieces of paper (Post-It notes are ideal) start itemizing what is involved and when it fits.

If, for example, the purpose is to build trust in a particular community, write that on a note and put it on the **Purpose** line in relation to the timeline. It might be at the end - but maybe you want to build trust in order to make possible a partnership project, for example. So that would enable you to write another note with 'partnership project on it ' - and put it at the end of the **Product** line.

If that partnership requires the involvement of certain people - maybe a community group for example - then you can begin to fill the **People** line as well.

Keep on doing this - identifying different elements of what you wish to achieve, who needs to be involved, and the interim steps, until you have a sense of what you are really trying to achieve. It doesn't have to be perfect - the differences between **Purposes** and **Products**, for example, are often unclear - but it helps make thinking systematic. The lists below may help you do the thinking.

Once the **Purpose**, **Product** and **People** lines are getting clear you can begin to think about the **Process** line. What methods can you use to ensure the right **People** come up with the **Products** you need?

The following prompts may help you think through what you are trying to achieve:

1. **Purpose - why, ultimately, are you doing it? What's the big picture?**
   For example:
   - What issues need to be covered?
   - What problems need to be solved?
   - What concerns need to be addressed?
   - What information needs to be gathered?
   - What information needs to be conveyed?
   - What uncertainties need to be resolved?

2. **Products**
   - What does this consultation process need to achieve?
   - What do you want to have at the end that you do not have at the beginning?
   - A document? An action plan? A new policy?
   - Acceptance of a new policy?
   - Greater awareness or understanding of something?
   - New relationships? Increased trust?
   - Are there any obvious stages along the way to the desired outcomes?
   - Draft agreements? Progress reviews? Apologies for past problems?

3. **People**
   - Who are key participants?
   - Who must be involved if the project is to have external credibility?
   - Who would be creative?
   - Who would be provocative? Who would help it along?
   - Who could represent those who might otherwise be excluded?
   - Who might oppose the project if they are ***not*** included?
   - Who could advise on the process?
   - Who could help with some research?
   - What experts might help?
   - At what stages should who be involved?
   - When should wider public opinion be sought?

4. **Process**
   - **What methods** will enable the **people** to produce the **products** required?
   - What methods will enable the people/community to become involved in the solution?
   - What formal meetings are needed?
   - What facilitated workshops?

- ➢ What public meetings?
- ➢ What surveys?
- ➢ What one-to-one meetings?

5. Pacing

Include:

- ➢ Project deadlines
- ➢ Holidays
- ➢ Internal MPS events
- ➢ Meetings that may influence the process.

Pacing is also important because you will want to ensure that the consultation is done at the most appropriate stage in the process of developing policies or implementing plans. The general principle is 'the earlier the better', but equally, 'better late than never'.

The crucial decision is about what kind of input you require and how this can be taken on board. For example, consulting on a policy document: if you do it too early your objectives and drafting may be too vague for people to be able to comment with sufficient precision; but if you do it too late it may be very difficult to incorporate valuable external input.

Likewise, in a face-to-face meeting people may need something more than a blank sheet of paper to respond to: an outline of the MPS's thinking will give them a framework within which to think – but avoid detailed proposals that may suggest minds are already made up.

Review and revisit

Move your pieces of paper around until each makes sense in relation to both the others and to the time line.

When you have done this, you will have done some of the work required in each of the following eight steps - but go through them anyway.

The combination of **PPPPP** and the **Eight Steps** should help you work from detailed planning of a consultation process, through its systematic implementation, to evaluation of both the results and of the process itself.

3.2 Eight Steps to effective consultation

The **Eight Steps** flesh out the preliminary ideas you identified in **PPPPP**.

Step 1. Identify purpose, people, context and constraints

Purpose: what do you want to have at the end of the consultation?

Think about what you are really trying to achieve. For example:

- a better understanding of the issues among stakeholders
- help and advice from stakeholders, resulting in a better policy/decision;

- information from the stakeholders on the implications, costs and benefits of different policy options;
- demonstrate and improve reputation for accountability and responsiveness;
- prevention of problems later;
- confirmation that your proposals are on the right lines;
- comments and suggestions on alternative proposals / options;
- beginning of a long-term relationship with stakeholders;
- opportunities for joint working e.g. partnership initiatives;
- detailed and carefully considered comments from experts;
- ensure local policy/ priorities are informed by local stakeholders;
- keep local stakeholders engaged and willing to participate in the consultation process.

A clear sense of the purpose will help you decide everything else: from the final type of product you want (from a physical document, for example, to something less tangible, like 'trust' or 'reassurance'), through appropriate methods to use and who to consult, to enabling you to decide at the end whether the process was successful.

Do not try to be over-ambitious. Focus on what is needed for the particular task, but recognise that all consultation exercises have their limitations. They are never a substitute for creative thinking and effective leadership by those whose responsibility it is to make decisions and see they are carried out.

Remember also at this stage to ask yourself what could be in it for the people you are consulting: what benefit will they get from spending time and effort responding to you? How can you add value to the process for them?

Finally, a word of warning. Do not be seduced by the fashion for consultation. Apply a final test before you start. The purpose of the MPS is to protect Londoners and apprehend criminals. Ask yourself: "How will this consultation make London safer or take criminals off the streets?" or "How will this consultation help keep local neighbourhoods safer in the eyes of residents?". If you can't answer convincingly, your time and money would be better spent on something that will meet those purposes.

People: whom do you need to consult?

The first general point to make, when you are trying to identify the right people to involve, is that it is better to involve too many than to miss out some who are crucial. Having said this, a blanket approach is no substitute for careful consideration, as unnecessarily burdening people who don't have an interest on this occasion may prejudice their involvement next time, when they might otherwise have made a valuable contribution.

The following questions usually help to find the right people:

- Who will be affected, positively or negatively, by what is proposed?
- Who might support or opposes any changes to the existing situation?
- Who holds official positions relevant to what is proposed?
- Who is influential on the subject?
- Who runs organisations with relevant interests?

- Who has been involved in any similar issues in the past?

Having said this, bear in mind that stakeholders can be defined as ‘people who perceive they have a stake in something’, and to this extent are self-defining. If somebody thinks they are a stakeholder, who are you to argue with them? Equally, make efforts to go beyond the who usually come forward and try to think of others who may wish to contribute, or whose contribution could be valuable and who could be excluded unless special efforts are made to include them (e.g. minority and special needs groups).

Another excellent way to identify the right people is simply to make a list of the obvious ones and then ask them “who else should be involved?’’ and “how do I contact them?”

Stakeholders are often better placed than we are to know who should be consulted. You do this every time you make a new contact until eventually you don’t hear any new names. Even so, as the list of issues to be addressed becomes public, more stakeholders tend to come out of the woodwork, so you should never close the list.

For a starter you should always consider:
- Staff Associations
- Business communities and trade unions
- Crown Prosecution Service, crown courts, magistrates’ courts, probation service, victim support services, independent custody visiting panels
- Faith groups, religious leaders
- General Practitioners and health groups
- Local Councillors and Members of Parliament
- Local community safety partnerships, Drug Action Teams, Youth Offending Teams
- Other police and emergency services
- Community Police Consultative Groups, sector working groups, neighbourhood watch groups
- Social landlords and housing associations
- Voluntary and community organisations representing specific groups: older people, disabled people, young people, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, minority ethnic people, refugee/asylum seekers, residents/tenants, people without permanent homes.

Then ask yourself:
- What will motivate each group to participate?
- What might prevent them participating?

Answering these questions will clarify what you are trying to do, and the main audiences you are trying to reach, and whether they are likely to be interested. This is the time to examine the practical constraints and wider context.

Options for ensuring inclusion
If it becomes clear that the number of potential participants outstrips the resources available to consult them all to the extent that you would wish, and you want to avoid excluding anyone, there are several options available:
- increase the resources available for consultation;

- use a process that can involve larger numbers at lower costs (e.g. using the Internet or a postal method);
- take a staged approach and involve different people at different stages;
- invite everyone on a 'first come, first served' basis;
- explore which individuals' or groups' interests could be effectively represented by others.

Priority Groups for MPS consultation
Some groups in society have always been adept at influencing decisions. Today's need for more inclusive consultation means making special efforts to engage those groups that are less equipped to participate in traditional consultation methods.

Home Office research, among others, has highlighted the need for consultation activities to actively seek ways of engaging with these groups and communities. The MPA/MPS Best Value review of consultation identified the groups that are generally disengaged from consultation on policing issues. Some have a history of being traditionally discriminated against. The MPA and MPS want to address this and have publicly stated in their Race Equality Schemes that efforts will be made to ensure that the following groups will be consulted and engaged in all consultation carried out whilst ensuring the consultation reflects the demographics of the population:

- Children and young people;
- Minority ethnic communities;
- Disabled people;
- Older people;
- Travellers and people without permanent homes;
- Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and people of transgender;
- Refugees and asylum seekers;
- Faith groups.

Stakeholders with special needs
Identify which stakeholders may need special assistance in order to participate on an equal footing.

For example, what languages should written material be translated into? In some cases it may be appropriate to provide other translations, such as a translation of the key issues or just the invitation to participate, into other languages to encourage other groups to feel their views are welcomed. Don't assume, however, that written translation is always the answer. If there are relatively small numbers of people involved it may be more effective (both in terms of time and quality of engagement) to arrange face-to-face meetings using an interpreter.

You may also need to consider other issues which may prevent people from being involved, such as ensuring physical access to meeting places for people with disabilities, timing meetings to enable parents with small children to attend, holding meetings in different venues to reach certain cultural groups (e.g. religious centres).

Sensitivity and effort are the most important principles here to ensure you consider the needs of those you want to engage with.

Context: what might shape what you do?

Think about what else might affect how you approach a consultation:

- What is the history of the issues you are consulting on?
- How much do people already know about them?
- How sensitive are they?
- If the consultation is in the context of a particular project, at what stage in the project should the consultation be launched?
- What other consultations by the MPS, government departments or others have been, are or will be addressing similar issues or involving the same stakeholders?
- What is the internal approval route for the consultation document, or for final decisions?
- What internal communications mechanisms are needed to ensure MPS staff are kept informed?
- Have you taken on board lessons from previous consultations around this subject?

Constraints: what might limit what you do?

Think about any limitations on what you want to do:
- By when does the consultation process have to be completed?
- Does the time available include holiday periods when people tend to be away?
- What is the budget?
- What other MPS resources are available?
- How much flexibility is there in what you can or cannot do?
- How much internal support is there for this consultation?
- How much interest will there be among potential stakeholders?

Finally, ask yourself again:

- How will this consultation contribute to the safety of Londoners or the apprehension of criminals?

Too much consultation and the resultant 'stakeholder fatigue' means that people may be less willing to be consulted when it is truly necessary – to say nothing of an unnecessary cost for the taxpayer.

Step 2. Choose your method(s)

Once you are clear about the purpose of the consultation, you know whom you wish to consult, and you have noted the factors that may constrain your choices, you are in a position to decide what method(s) of consultation to use.

Assess the different tools and techniques available to you (see Part 4), and decide which of them will best enable you to involve the stakeholders, address the issues and achieve the purposes and products you have decided within the time, budget and other constraints you have identified.

Sometimes the choice of method will be obvious. Most of the time, having answered all the questions above and reminded yourself of the options available to you, you will probably begin by ruling out the consultation methods that are obviously *not* appropriate. For example, if your prime objective is to build better relations with a small group of stakeholders, you will not want to use a questionnaire. Equally, if you want to involve thousands of people you will not want to use focus groups.

Having ruled out the clearly inappropriate, the best advice is then to mull over the options for a day or two, discuss them with colleagues, perhaps do a simple note of - all things considered - the Pros and Cons of each. In this decision-making process there is no substitute for a mixture of creativity and common sense. If resources allow, and there is potential to add value, different options can be thought of as complementary rather than alternatives.

Once you think you know the method of consultation you want to use, work through the following three steps to confirm, amend or develop your choice of method.

Step 3. Reality check

Now is the time to check everything you have done so far. Will your chosen method(s):

- achieve your purposes?
- reach your target audience?
- be achieved within the time and budget you have available?
- produce a response from the stakeholders that you have sufficient resources to manage and, in turn, respond to?

Be ruthless with yourself. It is much easier to re-design the consultation, if you have to, at this stage before you have to spend a lot of time and money.

Also use your imagination. For example, put yourself in the shoes of different stakeholders. If you were they, how would *you* react to getting an invitation to come to a meeting on this issue? Or how would *you* respond to the questionnaire you have drafted? Would *your* immediate reaction be to participate – or to bin it?

Seeing a process through the eyes of the stakeholders is one of the best ways to check how realistic your plans are. Give some of them a call: tell them your plans and ask for their reactions. You could also check on the experiences of others who have adopted this type of approach or consulted on this issue before. What worked? What didn't work? What would they do differently if they had to do it again?

Step 4. Detailed planning and design

Once you have chosen your consultation method you need to do some detailed planning. Clearly the more complex and large scale the consultation, the more time and effort this will take. But even for the smallest consultations it is worth checking off these stages.

Establish a project plan
Include details of:
- timeline
- key dates and actions.

Be realistic about how long things take and always allow more rather than less time for responses. Remember to allow time for translating documents into minority languages where necessary.

If you are asking for written responses to a consultation document, for example, there is a general expectation that people will have at least twelve weeks to respond. On the other hand, if you want people to come to meetings or workshops, a month's notice and a reminder nearer the time may be a good idea.

Talk to the MPS's consultation coordinator (Corporate Planning Group, x61922) from the planning stage onwards, to ensure that the period when you are intending your consultation to be 'live' (in the hands of stakeholders), doesn't coincide with that of other, similar consultations as this might detract from the responses you receive.

Materials, venues, invitations
Decide what materials the stakeholders will need by way of background information and decide how they are to be created and distributed.

- For example, if you are consulting on a written document, ensure the language used is neutral, user-friendly and avoids jargon wherever possible, and where necessary (depending of course on who is being consulted) translated into minority languages and Braille. Breaking a consultation into manageable chunks can help to make it accessible, particularly where specific questions are asked. This will also help when it comes to analysing the responses.

- If your chosen consultation method is an exhibition you will need to put a lot of thought into exactly what form the exhibition should take, how it will provide information to people, and how they in turn can respond to what they see or hear. If an exhibition is to be staffed, as it should be, then those staffing it will need to be briefed on the subject matter so they are aware of the questions they are likely to be asked and how to answer them.

- If you are planning a public meeting or a workshop you will need to hire a suitable venue. Also give serious thought to using an independent facilitator, especially if the meeting is liable to be stormy: it frees you up to put the MPS's point of view without being accused of hijacking the process. Bring in facilitators as early as possible: their job is not just to run the meeting – they can advise on every aspect of its design and what is most likely to make it a success. For example, they can help you decide what information people should have in advance and what it is realistic to achieve in a given amount of time.

- Most consultation methods involving a specific invitation (i.e. probably not public meetings and exhibitions) will require a separate covering letter explaining the consultation process and how the results will be fed back to stakeholders.

Publicity and marketing
One of the toughest aspects of consultation is getting people, first, to realise that it is happening and, second, getting them to respond. If you are sending invitations to specific individuals to get their input on a document, marketing is less of an issue; if they are motivated they will do it.

But getting people to come to a public meeting or an exhibition, for example, requires a marketing exercise and this should be part of the whole planning process. How you market a particular consultation will be determined by whom you want to consult, but the methods are available are those used for marketing anything:

- mail shots;
- leaflet drops;
- advertising in local and national newspapers;
- announcements in the newsletters of interest groups/representative bodies/trade associations.

Unfortunately, there is currently no constantly updated central database containing the names and contact details of every individual and organisation that has ever shown interest in issues covered by the MPS! However there are various stakeholder databases (contact the Strategic Consultation Unit in Corporate Planning Group for advice on this), albeit designed for different reasons. In some cases those included on these databases will be subject to data protection constraints.

Ensure internal awareness as well as external (intranet, cascade brief, posters, flyers, etc) - there may be as much internal as external expertise to be drawn upon. In addition, it is likely that other staff will be asked about the consultation, and it reflects well on the organisation for as many staff as possible to know what is going on so they can respond to key external audiences.

Preparing to respond
If you are running a document-based process, consider how you will deal with the responses you expect to receive (both in quantity and form). For example, decide who is actually going to write and thank those who respond. Those who take the trouble to give you the benefit of their time and energy deserve a rapid and serious acknowledgement of their input. It may also be necessary to ask them how they would like their response to be reported: for example, anonymously, from them as an individual, or as a representative of their organisation.

You may also need to screen responses for issues that are outside the scope of the consultation but which nevertheless need a response. For example, responses to policy papers sometimes include a complaint or a comment about a specific issue that needs to be dealt with separately.

Approval routes
If the consultation involves a written document you need to establish the internal approval route and likely timescale for approval for the consultation and for any final decision-making process. As such consultations are not usually stand-alone processes but a part of

something bigger (e.g. policy development), the approval routes should have been prescribed, for example by a lead ACPO member/Director, at the outset – at the same time as they were established for other elements of the work (e.g. the policy itself or the implementation plan).

Internal communication
Communicate the agreed process to all relevant MPS staff and distribute details of times and places if you want MPS staff to come to particular meetings.

Analysing the results of the consultation
Decide in advance your method for analysing and assessing the results of the consultation (see Step 6 below for the options).

Evaluating the consultation process
Decide how you will evaluate the process of consultation and the criteria you will use for measuring whether it has been a success (relate this back to objectives of consultation), and what methods could be used for the evaluation (e.g. market research of a sample of stakeholders). If you are running meetings, design a written evaluation form, and consider using it to obtain details of other stakeholders who should be involved, or even use it to gather comments that people were unable or unwilling to say during the meeting.

Evaluation does not need to be comprehensive, but it is worth putting a marker down at this stage to allow time for it. In addition, thinking about the evaluation (and how you will know whether it has been a success) can help clarify exactly what you hope to achieve, and so help with planning. See Step 8 below for more ideas about evaluation.

Step 5. Implementation

Finalise materials
Finalise all drafting of documentation, press releases etc and gain relevant approvals, e.g. the Safer Neighbourhoods Sergeant. Ensure that the relevant MPS members are aware of the forthcoming launch. In most cases they will have been made aware of, or even involved in, the drafting of consultation documents, for example, at an earlier stage. Exhibition panels may also require approval for the same reason, and it may be tactful to ask for comments on a proposed agenda for a public meeting.

Co-ordination
Ensure that the consultation co-ordinator is a named point of contact on the documentation/covering letter for comments/complaints from stakeholders on how the consultation process has been managed.

Launch the consultation
A launch event should be regarded as a valuable marketing opportunity. It may even be appropriate to invite key stakeholders: use it as an opportunity to motivate people to get involved.

Monitor feedback

Don't wait for all the responses to come in before you start your analysis. Keep checking that the process is delivering the required outcomes. If it is not, consider what can be done. Would it be possible, for example, to run a series of workshops or an electronic process (both of which can be organised fairly quickly) to supplement the existing process?

Acknowledge responses
Acknowledge feedback and input from stakeholders as soon as possible (certainly within two weeks of receiving their comments or their attendance at a meeting) and repeat the explanation in the covering letter or the original invitation, of how their input will be used and when they can expect to hear the results of the consultation process. A standard letter or even postcard may be sufficient: just ensure people do not feel they have responded into a black hole.

Remember, when the consultation is part of a Safer Neighbourhoods initiative, feedback will form part of the ongoing process to evaluate results and inform the next cycle of consultation.

Check inclusivity
Check the feedback from stakeholders to ensure it includes responses from the hard-to-reach groups identified in Step 1 and, if necessary, take additional steps to ensure their participation. Remember: the range of stakeholders that have responded may be one of your success criteria.

Step 6. Analysis of results

Where the structure of the consultation (e.g. based around a series of specific questions) has steered or focused responses, this makes the analysis much easier. Independent analysis of the findings can sometimes provide a useful additional measure to reassure respondents that the consultation is open and objective. It is the intent that each Borough Intelligence Unit (BRU) will have a dedicated community focus desk comprising of research and analytical skills. It will be their job to gather and analyse community intelligence. At the very least you should pass the results of your consultation on to this desk, and you may find it helpful to involve them in the analysis earlier.

There are two main possibilities as to how responses or input should be analysed:

- responses to consultation are analysed by an individual with expert knowledge of the content, who then makes recommendations on which points should be accepted and which rejected, providing reasons for each.

- a working group performs the same task; such a working group may consist of internal MPS staff, or of independent individuals, or even of a panel of stakeholders convened for the task.

Whichever method is used to analyse the results of a consultation, it should be apparent that they have been assessed on their merits and reasons provided for that assessment.

If you are running a written consultation process, on a policy document for example, it is good practice to keep a full record of all responses (and whether you accepted the points made or not) so you can produce a report on the consultation, as well as a revised version of the document (or whatever) you were consulting on.

Step 7. Responding to stakeholders

In analysing the responses, you will have exercised personal judgement to decide which responses to accept, and which to reject. Whatever your final conclusion on a point of view, it must receive full and fair consideration. Keeping detailed records of why certain proposals and comments were accepted, and others not, will help clarify your own decision-making process.

Ultimately the responsibility for decisions rests with the MPS, not the stakeholders. However, it is essential that the MPS be able to provide a full audit trail of how decisions are made, especially when the issue is controversial.

Reports and response documents
It is good practice to produce a report on consultations that sets out how stakeholders' input has been used and what its impact has been. This document should also explain how specific significant comments made have been accepted – or, if they have not been accepted, on what grounds they have been rejected. It is not usually necessary to address every single comment made by every consultee, but you should be prepared to explain, for example any reasons for rejecting a specific comment, if asked.

Where it is appropriate and possible you should aim to show stakeholders the full extent of opinion received so that they appreciate the entire range of views. If you are reporting details of all responses as they were received, you should also check whether participants want their input attributed, and how they want to be described.

All these points presuppose that the responses are going to be made publicly available. If this is not so then it must be stated in the consultation at the outset.

Acknowledgments and thanks
Send 'thank you' letters and copies of the final consultation report to all participants, and tell them about the next steps in any decision-making process. If you received submissions in a minority language, then thank you letters and responses should also ideally be in that language.

Internal and other reporting
Send copies of the report of the consultation to any other departments or interested parties within the MPS, i.e. where appropriate the local BRU community intelligence desk and externally, and publish on the website.

Step 8. Evaluation

Evaluation does not have to be difficult or time-consuming, but it is essential that it be done - to establish whether you have achieved your original purposes, and to identify any lessons for the future. A simple evaluation should also help in simply recording the basic details of what was done, by whom and what the results were.

The following table provides a basic framework for evaluating MPS consultations. The questions are intended as a guide to stimulate your thinking; it is unlikely you would ever want to use all of them.

	Rationale / explanation	Key questions / issues	Possible criteria for evaluation
Purposes	To check whether what was done achieved the original purpose(s)	What were the original purposes? Were they achieved? If not, why not (e.g. not correct at start, not clear, or process not appropriate to objectives)?	Examples of misunderstanding of objectives by participants Everything worked to the original plan Objectives and plans had to be changed as process developed
Methods and techniques used	To check whether appropriate methods and techniques were used	What methods were used? How were those methods chosen (e.g. with stakeholders)? How were those methods explained (e.g. to stakeholders and MPS managers)?	Types of responses sought were received Ease of operation Methods understood by participants and MPS managers
Responses	To ensure the level and range of responses validates the exercise	How many responses were received? Were responses received from all key stakeholders? What efforts were made to reach relevant but traditionally under-represented groups? How was the spread of response measured? How were responses dealt with? How did you report back on action based on responses?	Levels of inclusivity (i.e. no key stakeholders excluded) Numbers of responses (e.g. 10% response rate on large consultation is good; more is excellent) Participants satisfied with MPS reaction to responses MPS managers aware of MPS actions and how these were agreed
Products	To identify what was produced and organised	What written products were done (e.g. press releases, consultation brief, draft document, questions)? What events were organised (e.g. meeting, workshop, exhibition)? What process was used for analysing and reporting on responses?	Good responses in a form which were easy to analyse Clear progression from initial draft to final version (if document) Internal and/or external report on consultation process and outcomes

Outcomes	To identify what was achieved	What were the results of the exercise? What has changed as a result of the exercise (e.g. immediate or long term, personal or group, organisational, small scale or system change)? What are the lessons for future practice (e.g. what worked well - or less well)? Any specific comments from stakeholders about the process?	Improved MPS policy and/or practice Positive feedback from stakeholders about process and outcomes New relationships Increased trust and understanding of the MPS and its role Willingness of participants to be engaged again

Finally, ask the vital question: How has this consultation made London safer?

Reporting the evaluation externally
Provide details of the evaluation to participants, as appropriate. This may simply be a paragraph in the consultation report, or a separate short report.

Reporting the evaluation internally
Share the evaluation and learning points with other departments. This could be by ensuring that the MPS consultation co-ordinator has details of the findings of the evaluation, so they can use them in devising future guidance or training, or can simply pass them on to other interested staff. Make sure you do use the results of the evaluation, so that future consultations are easier and better.

Part 4: Consultation methods

Choosing consultation methods

A wide range of tools and techniques can be used for stakeholder consultation. These are not mutually exclusive and can where necessary be used in parallel on the same consultation exercise.

The purpose here is to introduce the most common and indicate the pros and cons, and thereby provide some indication of when each should and should not be used. Remember, however, that designing a consultation is like designing anything else: there are no absolute rules and plenty of room for creativity and imagination in how you do it.

Also, given the amount of consultation done nowadays, and what might be called 'consultation fatigue', finding novel and different ways to consult people is essential to maintain response rates.

The most common approaches are:

- consultation paper and request for comments;
- information gathering by questionnaire or even telephone;
- meetings:
  - face-to-face meetings
  - public meetings
  - workshops
  - advisory panels, committees, seminars and forums;
- exhibitions;
- the Internet.

Each technique has pros and cons but you will also want to consider other issues such as:

- the need to stimulate responses;
- how much you want to test new approaches, and lessons from past experiences with similar stakeholders;
- using several methods in parallel or in sequence;
- your own practical constraints (time, cost, staff availability etc).

All these decisions will vitally affect your choice of method and overall planning.

Overall, the key factors in choosing a particular method will depend on:

- the purpose of the consultation;
- the number and nature of the target stakeholders;
- the time available;
- practical considerations and constraints; and
- how controversial the subject matter is and how important it is to resolve conflict and create or strengthen relationships among stakeholders.

Consulting on controversial issues and situations

Situations are controversial when they exhibit more than one or two of the following characteristics:

- many different stakeholders are focusing on many different issues;
- the situation evokes contrasting feelings, values and perceptions;
- the factual information currently available from different sources is contradictory or contested;
- different stakeholders have different cultures, styles, and approaches to the situation;
- there is a recent history of conflict or unresolved problems around the situation;
- there is a high degree of uncertainty around the situation and how it will be resolved;
- relationships among stakeholders are non-existent, poor or deteriorating;
- there is a likelihood of conflict in the future if the situation is not properly addressed.

Where situations are controversial, consultation processes that allow stakeholders to compare their different approaches and to explore each other's interests and priorities are preferable to processes that put the MPS in the position of judge and jury. In these situations the MPS's role is as much to facilitate mutual understanding of different issues and concerns, as it is to reach a final judgement. In the case of Safer Neighbourhoods, public consultation may act as a mediating process that helps to promote mutual understanding among different communities and so contribute to reassurance.

This need not invariably mean using a meeting or workshop format. An electronic process, for example, that enables large numbers of stakeholders to compare different viewpoints may well be an effective way to establish areas of common ground and difference as a prelude to formulating proposals, but it is less able to help people build relationships across serious divisions of opinion.

One point that always needs consideration is whether meetings with stakeholders should be 'open' or 'closed'. Open meetings are transparent and sometimes certain stakeholders will only come if a meeting is to be open; on the other hand, an open meeting can encourage grandstanding and 'speaking to the gallery'. Invitations to closed meetings are often treated with suspicion, but there are circumstances in which stakeholders may welcome the opportunity to speak off the record and indicate where there may be room for compromise – something they could not do in public without alienating their supporters.

If the situation is critical, using an independent third party 'honest broker' or professional mediator may be the best way to decide how to advance the situation.

When <u>not</u> to consult

There are situations in which consultation in any form may do more harm than good:

- when there is no real commitment to it;
- when all the key decisions have already been made and the whole exercise would therefore be a sham;
- where there is no detailed knowledge (e.g. of the areas of conflict on the issues, or of the interests of the stakeholders);
- when there is not enough time; or
- when there are insufficient resources to do the job properly.

Consider the questions to ask

All forms of consultation involve asking questions of stakeholders. The challenge is to find questions that steer between being so general that they are either unanswerable or the answers are not terribly useful, or so specific that they constrain people and produce replies which may or may not be helpful.

The following tips are about asking questions generally, whether they are in written documents or during face-to-face meetings.

- Types of question:
  - ‘closed’ questions get yes or no answers;
  - *what* questions get information;
  - *why* questions get explanations, justifications and rationalisations;
  - *how* questions are best to get people to think through the consequences of their opinions and offer practical solutions;
  - ‘leading’ questions are so framed that the stakeholder feels manipulated into accepting the question’s premise even if he or she does not agree with it. Avoid at all costs.

- Questions can also be used to separate:
  - facts from feelings; causes from effects; arguments from assertions; issues into their component parts;
  - underlying needs and grievances from ‘presenting’ problems.

- Always explain *why* you are asking a question: setting out a dilemma or a number of options for a way forward helps people understand what you want of them.

- Prepare people to hear the question: a short introduction, such as “*I’d just like to ask...*” if it is a meeting or *“A key question is…”* if you are writing can also soften the impact of a tough question.

- Ask people to be specific by providing examples wherever possible or appropriate.

- Encourage participants to join you as problem-solvers by asking questions such as: *“How might this issue be resolved?”* or *“how can we ensure this situation is prevented in future?” and “how can we take this forward?”* and so on.

Consultation methods

Consultation paper and request for comments

The conventional form of corporate consultation within the MPS for policy documents is a written consultation process. A document is sent to ’interested parties’ and they are all asked to comment by a certain date. In some cases written consultation documents have a series of questions to help people frame their responses. In due course a digest or summary of the responses received should be published.

Pros: Straightforward and well understood. Good for getting detailed input on policies and proposals from professional stakeholders where basic assumptions are already known to be shared. The MPS has a Research & Survey Unit who can assist.

Cons: Consultation documents are inevitably based on assumptions that may or may not be shared by stakeholders. If such basic assumptions are not shared, many stakeholders will feel unable to comment or feel that their comments cannot be taken seriously. If large numbers of responses are received, it is often difficult and resource intensive to analyse and use the comments. It is also difficult to provide clear feedback on comments to participants. Not good for getting input from 'ordinary' stakeholders.

Information gathering
Opinion surveys, interviews and questionnaires are all direct and effective ways to gather information about stakeholders' views. They can be useful, providing they reach a wide range of stakeholders so they offer a cross-section of opinion, which is carefully analysed. 'Focus groups' can be an effective research tool but their members are not necessarily stakeholders and therefore the results may not reflect stakeholder opinion.

Pros: They can collect a wide range of views using fairly limited resources of time and money and provide a feel for a situation especially where time and resources are limited.

Cons: These methods only gather information in response to the questions asked: they may miss opinions or concerns that are not asked about. Equally, stakeholders may, intentionally or otherwise, give partial or misleading responses; they may resent the intrusion on their privacy, and they will receive no feedback on their views.

They are also inadequate for resolving polarised situations where stakeholders really need to deal with each other directly; going beyond their existing preconceptions and prejudices. They also do nothing to change or build relationships.

Meetings
Meetings come in all shapes and sizes, so we need some differentiation here.

- **One-to-one meetings.** These involve the MPS (possibly with an independent researcher or independent facilitator) meeting individual stakeholders or groups of stakeholders to discuss the issues.

  Pros: Such meetings enable stakeholders' issues and concerns to be addressed directly, accurate information can be given in direct response to specific questions; and direct communication and personal links can be established.

  Cons: They can soak up large amounts of time and money and they do not provide opportunities for stakeholders to understand others' points of view.

- **Public meetings.** Well-designed public meetings can avoid situations where harassed managers cower behind large tables while angry members of the public hurl abuse. Good design and preparation, ideally in consultation with some of those likely to attend, an experienced and respected chairperson or facilitator (preferably independent), a suitable venue at a suitable time, and invitations to appropriate numbers of appropriate people for the process can all reduce but not eliminate the risks. ‘Game Show’ voting technology can be used to help ensure the meeting is not hijacked by those who are most confident in putting their views across.

Pros: Can be effective in enabling a wide range of views to be aired, questions asked, and answers given where they can be heard by others in the room. They also demonstrate a willingness to talk to a wide audience and face public criticism.

Cons: Large plenary sessions can inhibit many stakeholders, encourage pre-determined statements of position and therefore polarise further differences among stakeholders, discouraging interaction and the exploration of ideas and solutions to problems. It can be hard to make real progress on complex or controversial issues in public meetings.

- **Workshops.** Workshops of one form or another are the staple diet of processes described variously as ‘public participation’ or ‘stakeholder engagement’. Probably the most significant characteristic of such workshops is that the initiators and the stakeholders decide *together* what needs to be discussed and how to do it, and they are aided by independent facilitators who work on behalf of all those involved.

  Pros: Workshops can be one-off events lasting one or two days, or they can be part of a sequence stretching over many months or years; they can achieve results, such as relationship-building, that other processes cannot. Workshops tend to help stakeholders to feel really involved and listened to.

  Cons: Workshop-based processes can be slow, complicated and costly compared with other forms of consultation; ideally they require independent professional design and facilitation; and some control of the process must be surrendered to the stakeholders - so they are not good for simply explaining a pre-determined MPS position.

- **Advisory panels, standing committees, regular forums.** Groups of people, both lay and expert, can be drawn from local communities, civil society organisations, residents' associations etc to advise on the issues faced by stakeholders. Such meetings can be regular, frequent or one-offs.

  Pros: Ideas can be tested and concerns identified before they ever reach the public domain; communication can be made through participants with wider groups of stakeholders; recommendations can be offered on potentially controversial issues in order to prevent unnecessary problems. These methods are good for airing current concerns among people who understand the context and the issues.

  Cons: Tend to rely on an exclusive group of people who may, because they become ‘insiders’, become increasingly divorced from the concerns of ‘ordinary‘

stakeholders. They by definition tend to limit involvement from a wider range of stakeholders.

Exhibitions
The MPS has not, historically, used exhibitions for consultation purposes (though arguable a "Have a Say Day" is a form of exhibition), but many organisations find them very useful as a means of explaining projects and gathering the reactions of those who view them.

Pros: A picture is worth a thousand words: exhibitions enable people to see what you want them to understand, and can be set up in public places such as shopping centres. They are particularly useful for conveying information and involving people who would be inhibited by or unable to attend a public meeting. They can also be useful as one strand of a wider consultation strategy.

Cons: Exhibitions need to be very good to be effective, and they need knowledgeable staff on hand to answer questions, so they tend to be expensive. They may also attract relatively few people unless well advertised or in a public place, and they do not enable stakeholders to air their views or talk to each other, or allow them to receive systematic, high quality feedback.

The Internet
There are a number of techniques for consultation via the Internet:

- stakeholders can gain access to draft or consultation documents (given appropriate publicity),
- people can participate in on-line conferences, e-mail exchanges and electronic forums or,
- an initiator can use specially designed consultation software to enable stakeholders to participate in structured consultations offering a number of iterations with feedback loops.

It is likely that, as public familiarity with the Internet increases, it will become an increasingly effective consultation tool.

Pros: Enables the potential involvement of very large numbers of stakeholders for relatively little cost and can allow all stakeholders to see the comments of all other stakeholders. Comments can be analysed systematically and in an automated and semi automated way. It is also an excellent medium for people who dislike face-to-face contact, or who have English as a second language.

Cons: Internet access, although steadily increasing, will still exclude some stakeholders. Even with access, some people simply prefer traditional communication methods. It is also not always a good medium for building personal relationships among stakeholders.