

Pilot report for the Caerphilly Power to Engage

Introduction

Often “professionals” are tasked with engaging with the public without having the appropriate knowledge & skills to do the job. Some will stick to one tried & tested method without considering whether different methods might work better for particular groups of people. Another common problem is that due to workload or poor practice the results and outcomes of a piece of consultation are not given back those members of the public who took part. The end result can be less than useful information collected, and that those members of the public who were involved do not want to take any more as they feel to quote “what’s the point! Nothing ever happens as a result of these sessions. We wanted to see if providing a short Top Tips sessions would help “professionals” improve the quality engagement happening across the borough and help them understand the importance relationship between planning & preparation and the quality of information and numbers of public who will get involved.

What Type Of Engagement?

A Top Tips course that would give “professionals” a chance to find out more about “effective” engagement and what is required, the range of techniques available and how, the way you say something, can impact on whether people hear what you are saying.

(By professionals we mean those working with older people in either a paid or voluntary role)

What Does Citizen Engagement Mean For This Project?

In terms of this pilot project Citizen Engagement refers to those people who the “professionals” will be involving and consulting with in the future.

What Did We Deliver?

The Policy unit working with the council’s training department did all the necessary planning and organising for two Top Tips sessions to be run. The sessions were divided into 3 parts: Planning an engagement, Doing things differently and How to get your message across. Each of these sessions started with a presentation followed by a practical workshop. The theme of the workshop session was the same for each workshop. The session was a half-day with the opportunity to share and build new contacts with those working in a similar field over lunch.

How Did We Get People Involved In The Process?

Initially we restricted the invitation via email to training to those “professionals” in the borough whose primary role was engagement, with little uptake. Once we broadened out the invitation to Councillors and a range of partners across the borough the uptake improved significantly.

This resulted in a wide range of “professionals” attending the training, which was helpful as it generated a range of discussion, experiences and

approaches that would not have been possible if it had been just one work area.

Who Was Involved

In the Caerphilly County Borough Council's Policy unit, the Consultation Officer, Communities First Research Officer and the Development Officer for Older People, were interested in piloting a Top Tips course that would give "professionals" a chance to find out more about "effective" engagement. The importance of planning, what is required, the range of techniques available and how you use them and finally how the way you say something, can impact on whether people hear what you are saying.

Those attending ranged from, Councillors, planning officers, Communities First Coordinators, Social Services customer services, and community and voluntary groups.

How Much Time Did It Take?

Each session was a half-day. Preparation for the first session took about 4 days shared between 4 officers spread across a month. Following the first session we met to review the evaluation results and to make the appropriate changes in structure needed, which meant the second session, took about 1½ a days.

Was There A Clear Agenda

The Caerphilly County Borough Council Policy Unit team, who under took this pilot project, saw this as an opportunity to support councillors, officers, partnership members and the public, in trying to increase the knowledge and skills of those tasked with engagement in a way that would improve the quality of engagement across the borough. The core agenda was two fold: to give those attending a good but basic overview of what is required to ensure your engagement is effective and to signpost them to further training and resources.

How Much Money Did We Have?

We had £500 budget, which was used for: room bookings, printing and catering.

What Other Resources Were Required?

We needed:

- A room to deliver the training
- Projector, laptop, flip charts and printouts
- An experienced officer to present and facilitate for each of the 3 topics.
- Administration support to deal with booking places on the courses.

Problems encountered

The only real problem was working out the target market. Our initial approach was too limited once the training was opened out to a wider audience the uptake-exceeded demand and we now have a waiting list for the next course.

What Have We Learnt From Our Experiences?

- That there is a demand for this type of training.
- To offer the training a wide range of partners as there are many people not formally tasked with Engagement who occasional have to fulfil this role. These are often the people mist in need of this type of training.
- Many of those regularly running engagement projects are not aware of the wide range of style of engagement that might be more suitable for them to use.
- Adding lunch onto the end of the session meant people had a chance to share experiences and discussed how they might share and support each other.

What Went Well In This Project?

- The range of people attending
- The support of the Policy unit in using experienced in house staff to deliver the training
- The evaluation of both sessions showed people got a lot from them including: new ways of working, understanding to do it properly means taking time to plan, making new contacts and the value of trying methods out within the safety of a workshop session.

What Are The Longer term Outcomes That Have Resulted From This Project?

- The Caerphilly County Borough Council's Policy unit plan to continue to run these top tips sessions are part of the range of support they offer to Councillors, officers and partner organisations.