

Person Centred Consultation

A Support to DFI Member Organisations

What is Person Centred Consultation?

Person Centred Consultation refers to the process through which disability organisations facilitate people with disabilities to become actively and genuinely involved in identifying and defining issues of concern to them in making decisions about factors that affect their lives, and in planning and developing services to meet their needs.

Why is it important to question how we consult with people with disabilities?

In a society that is constantly changing, we, as disability organisations, need to step back and take a fresh look at how we listen to people with disabilities. We need to make sure that their needs are central to the design, delivery and review of services and activities, in order to achieve better outcomes for people with disabilities. In addition, disability organisations have a role to play in influencing current legislation and Government policy by providing feedback that accurately reflects the views and needs of people with disabilities.

The value of meaningful consultation with people with disabilities

- People with disabilities have a role in identifying possible solutions to their felt need.
- People with disabilities have a role in prioritising issues to be addressed by the organisation.
- Real information can be gathered on the opinions, needs and thoughts of people with disabilities and their families.
- New working relationships can be forged across all levels of the organisation.
- An organisation can discover existing and new skills, capacity and passion within their membership.
- As a consequence, people with disabilities can grow in understanding the complexities of managing an organisation and the challenges faced by staff and the Board.

What are the typical concerns that organisations might have?

Ongoing and meaningful consultation can be daunting and here are some of the concerns that organisations may have:

1. Time – in an action oriented environment

All disability organisations are concerned with practical matters, and usually resources and energies are concentrated on delivering services and meeting needs on a day to day basis. It can be difficult to take time out to reflect on how a service is being delivered and to plan effectively for ongoing and meaningful consultation with people with disabilities.

2. Listening – what will they say?

Any group that engages in a consultation process might be nervous about the potential outcomes. If we really ask people what they want, they just might tell us! Maybe we will hear criticism of our past or current performance. Perhaps people with disabilities will have things to say about issues that are important to them, but not really essential to answering our questions?

3. Meaningful involvement of people with disabilities.

If the consultation is to really involve people with disabilities, it cannot just take the form of a once off meeting or questionnaire. We need to listen first, and then involve people with disabilities in developing the response and identifying the next steps.

4. Considering real change

We need to enter the consultation process prepared to make real change. Maybe the consultation will lead us on a path to revising our organisation's mission, or to identifying new and previously unanticipated priorities.

5. Investment required for meaningful consultation with involvement of people with disabilities

If we are to conduct truly effective consultation, and we are ready to reorient our organisation so that it best supports the move towards mainstreaming, we need to plan for the fact that a meaningful consultation process will place extra demands on already over stretched resources.

Engaging with the National Disability Strategy and getting ready for mainstreaming: making time to get it right

It is important for the short and long term future of your organisation to interpret the new policy environment and where it fits within this context. This can be challenging given the time taken up with important day to day functions and activities. The following points should be considered in order to frame person centered consultation within the appropriate policy context:

- Develop an understanding of the National Disability Strategy, 'Towards 2016' and mainstreaming issues – talk to your DFI Support Officer.
- Take the time to reflect on how your organisation is currently placed to embrace these new policy changes.
- Create opportunities within your organisation to reflect on these questions:
 - a) Where are we in relation to these new policies?
 - b) What do we need to do to get our organisation best placed to work well within these new national policy contexts?
 - c) What kind of questions do we need to ask people with disabilities so that we can best respond to their needs in the context of mainstreaming?

Key principles for effective consultation in the new context

Four key principles underpin best practice in consultation in the new context:

- Involving people with disabilities at all stages of the consultation.
- Prioritising planning.
- Engaging in open and active listening.
- Resourcing meaningful participation.

Preparing for action

With support from your DFI Support Officer, and involving all of the voices in your organisation, identify what specific steps you may need to take to ensure your consultation is informed by these best practice principles. Make an action plan that incorporates the following activities:

- What do you need to do to involve people with disabilities from the very beginning?
- What do you need to do to make space and time in your organisation to engage in comprehensive planning that will come from meaningful consultation?

- What preparation, training and support are required for those involved to prepare for open and active listening?
- What financial resources are required for you to do the person centered consultation you are now committed to doing?

Checklist for effective consultation process

- Have you a consultation framework that best meets the needs of your people with disabilities?
- Have you a working group made up of representation from all strands of the organisation to be involved in all stage of the consultation?
- Have you addressed the concerns and fears in your organisation about engaging in person centred consultation?
- Have you agreed what the purpose of the consultation is? What do you need to know?
- Have you identified the resources required to engage in best practice consultation?
- Have you left enough time and provided necessary support for people with disabilities to fully engage with the process?
- Do you have a plan for analysing the information? And agreement on how it will be used to identify priorities and themes for the next strategic plan?
- Do you have a plan to feedback results of the consultation to all of those who engaged?

After the consultation – using the information gathered

The consultation process is part of the lifecycle of good project management in any organisation. Once the information is gathered and analysed, you may also want to collate relevant statistical data, and information from other stakeholders, before engaging in a period of reflection. This information will then provide the basis from which you will agree strategic priorities for the next phase of development.

Practical information

Consultation formats for consideration:

- One-to-one
- Focus group
- Survey: Online/postal/telephone
- Meeting with key stakeholders:
 - Within the disability sector
 - Outside the sector
 - Meetings with staff and volunteers
 - Meeting with Board members

Using the information gathered:

- Collating and using the information gathered/data.
- Putting it together in a short document.
- Organising the information in emerging themes.
- Validating the information by feeding it back to those who were consulted.

How can DFI help?

DFI can help by providing the following advice and practical support:

- One to one support to organisation that want to consult with people with disabilities.
- Contact with other organisations who have already undertaken consultation to share information on 'what works' and 'what doesn't' for them.
- DFI Resource 'Person Centered Consultation – A Guide' and our Pre-Learning Questionnaire available on the DFI website.
- How to do 'Person Centered Consultation' Seminar run by DFI.

DFI Seminar: How to do 'Person Centered Consultation'

This training session will be delivered in a workshop style in DFI. Organisations should take the time to ensure that the most appropriate person in the organisation is the one who attends the training. Learning by doing is a very reliable method for ensuring competency, accuracy and confidence.

To prepare for the training workshop, please complete the pre-learning questionnaire to be found on www.disability-federation.ie or from your Support Officer. It is also helpful if the person attending the workshop has read the DFI Guide to Government Policy on Disability.

www.disability-federation.ie

Person-Centred Consultation - Sample Session Plan

Date: See the DFI website

Time: 10 am to 4 pm

Venue: DFI

Objectives of the workshop:

- To assist organisations to identify their own awareness, knowledge and alignment with current policy and legislation.
- To help identify where to begin the process of consulting people with disabilities and what methodology is appropriate for person centered consultation.
- To support the organisation to capture the needs and aspirations of people with disabilities as a building block to developing services around these needs.

Person-Centred Consultation Sample Agenda

10am -11am	Presentations on Person-Centered Consultation covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creating meaningful participation in consultation: what's involved? ● How to support people with disabilities in the process. ● Models of good practice. ● What can expected outcomes be?
11am – 11.15am	Break
11.15am – 11.30am	Carrying out the Person Centered Consultation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practical session involving all participants.
1pm – 2pm	Lunch
2pm – 2.45pm	Post Consultation – What Now? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analysing the information gathered. ● Writing the report. ● Creating meaningful change. ● Managing unintended consequences.
2.45pm – 3pm	Break
3pm – 4pm	Template samples for organisations implementation plan Evaluation of the day

Contact information

For information and contact details for the DFI Support Officer in your area please contact DFI Head Office at 01-4547978 or look at our website www.disability-federation.ie