



# Designing and running public consultation events

**YOUNG Mi MINDS** **Amplified**  
Transforming participation across young people's mental health

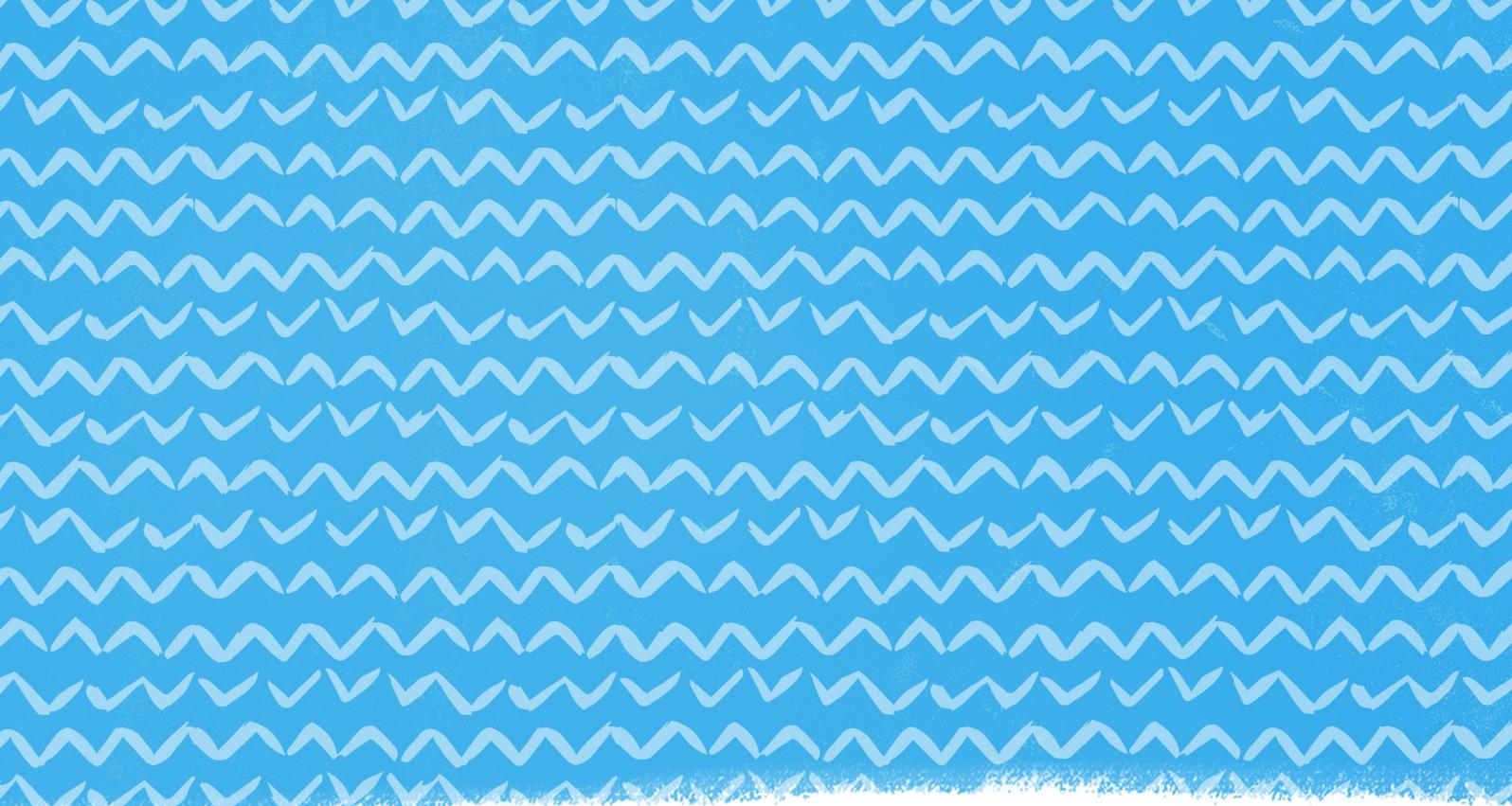


This toolkit was created as part of the [Amplified project](#) run by [YoungMinds](#) and commissioned by [NHS England](#). Amplified is a programme that aims to support the participation of children, young people and their families at every level of the mental health system. We support providers and commissioners to excel in participation by showcasing good practice across the system and promoting access to resources that support in four areas:

- Promoting and championing participation
- Strategic participation of children, young people and their families
- Promoting young people's access to and their voice within services
- Supporting the collaboration of young people and their families in care and treatment.

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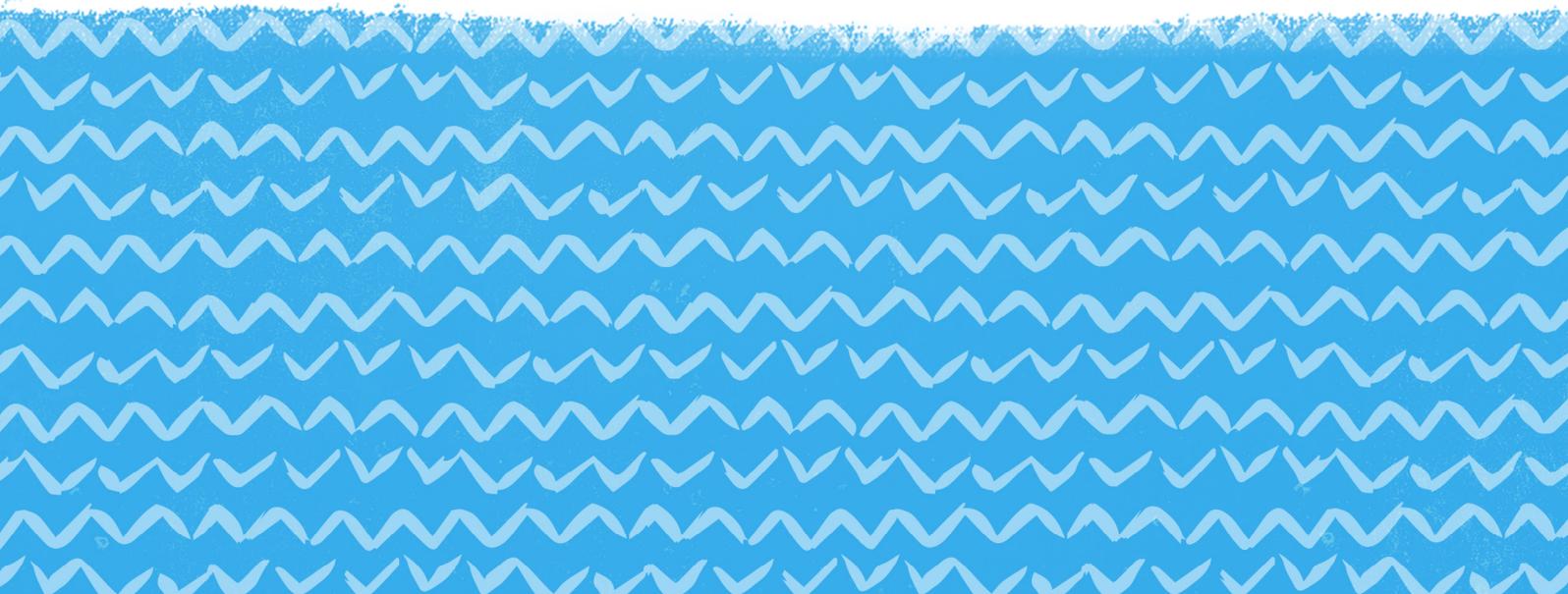
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# Foreword

“At Healthwatch Hillingdon in 2018, as part of our Young Healthwatch volunteering programme, we ran a public consultation with over 200 local young people about health issues that were important to them and how they would like to hear about health services. Our young volunteers led the consultation, speaking to young people participating in National Citizen’s Service and at organised events which ensured they were representative of the local population. The feedback helped inform and shape the work that Young Healthwatch Hillingdon has gone on to do including the review of mental health and wellbeing and sexual health support services for local young people.”

- Kim Markham-Jones, Healthwatch Hillingdon



# What is the purpose of public consultation events?

Well-designed and run public consultation events provide valuable insights from a range of people in your community. They can increase your understanding of how services are perceived by the people you are providing them for. They can support the delivery of the most efficient services possible, by ensuring you meet the needs of those who require them.

Running consultation events within a local area has the potential to generate new ideas, make services part of the community and as a result, reduce the stigma around mental health. A consultation can increase awareness of the support that is available and encourage people to seek help when they need it. It can also support your service to meet its commitments around participation and has the potential to provide you with access to people who would be interested in becoming more involved in supporting and developing your services.

For children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS), a well-run consultation can give both young people and carers an opportunity to talk about their experience of seeking and receiving support. It allows them to let you know what worked and what didn't, and give you ideas about ways that systems could be improved. Many of those who participate are motivated by improving the experience for those who are in a similar position to them and they may have ideas about what would have helped along their journey, often ones that professionals may not have thought of.

A public consultation will require buy in from senior leadership to ensure it is a success. It will need a budget for publicity and running costs, as well as a commitment to implementing change as a result of the insights you collect and providing feedback on these changes to the wider community.

## What do you want to know?

A good starting point is to clearly define the aims of your event. These should fit with your organisational objectives and provide a clear benefit to your participants. Ask yourself what the most

vital questions that you need answering are. These may be related to areas which have already been identified as needing improvement or you may be running the event to identify these areas and understand where improvements need to be made.

It may also be useful to consider how the findings are going to be used when you are developing your objectives. This may help you think about what it is you need to know.

**Running consultation events within a local area has the potential to generate new ideas, make services part of the community and as a result, reduce the stigma around mental health.**

# What is the purpose of public consultation events?

## Who do you need to hear from?

Start by clearly defining who your audience is and keep them in mind throughout the planning process. Think about how the decisions that you make about the event enable everyone who needs to be heard to contribute.

Often when consulting on children and young people's mental health you will be looking to engage with children and young people and parents and carers. Also consider if there is anyone else it is useful to hear from. This could include current care and support staff or representatives of other organisations that support young people, including teachers, social workers or youth workers.

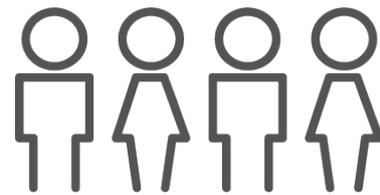
You might want to consider whether you want to hear from:

- Young people and parents who have used child and adolescent mental health services;
- Families who have experienced a child having mental health difficulties, whether or not they accessed services;
- All parents or young people, whether or not they have experienced mental health issues.

The answer to this is likely to depend on what it is you want to know.

## How much influence can people have?

How much influence do the people attending your event have? Is it purely advisory or will decisions be taken as a result of the feedback? Is there anything that cannot be changed or that participants cannot have a say on? If so it's important to be honest about it and explain why this is. Being open about this creates trust with those you are consulting and reduces the likelihood of problems later on when participants realise their suggestions have not been actioned.



# Planning your consultation

The success of your event will rely on the planning process that goes into it. Without this you are unlikely to engage your audience or get the information you need to make meaningful changes to services. It may help to plan the event in collaboration with individuals from the demographics you want to hear from, to gain community buy in from the start and to ensure it is relevant.

Co-designing your event is particularly important when you are trying to engage children and young people. They will be able to let you know if you are asking the right questions and whether what you are planning is likely to engage the young people you want to hear from. They will probably have ideas of their own on how the consultation could be carried out which may make the process more relevant to those who take part.

Once you have decided who you need to hear from, you need to think about how to reach them. Do you want to make your consultation open to anyone who wants to get involved or do you want to approach certain groups you particularly want to hear from? Keeping it open to all means no one is excluded but you may need to consider how you make sure that you include those whose voices don't usually get heard.

## Face-to-face or digital engagement?

One of your first decisions will be whether you want to use face-to-face or digital consultation. Although public consultation is usually thought of as a face-to-face exercise, there are an increasing number of organisations and websites which support a digital approach. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to more communication taking place online and brought these approaches to prominence.

Meeting people face-to-face can create a more personal approach by bringing the community together to discuss the issues of the consultation. There is more opportunity for interaction, to ask questions, listen to others' opinions, build trust and reach a consensus. As a result, the information you collect is likely to be richer and more in-depth. If you decide that face-to-face methods are a better fit for the purposes of your consultation they should only take place when it is safe to do so and circumstances permit.



# Planning your consultation

Getting people to attend an event can make face-to-face more challenging. Finding a time and place that people are able to get to and having the time to be able to commit to your consultation can be hard. As a result, the number of people you are able to hear from can be significantly reduced and those who are able to attend may not be representative of the wider population. You may miss hearing from important voices, including those from marginalised groups and those who could be most affected by the outcome of the consultation. As a result the decisions you make may be based on the loudest voices rather than the needs of the whole community.

Digital engagement can offer a solution to this. If promoted well, it gives you the potential to hear from a larger and more diverse section of your community. This could include people with childcare issues and those with disabilities or reduced ability to travel. If you are consulting with young people, reaching out to them digitally might get a higher response rate. It might also help you to hear from those who do not feel comfortable discussing mental health in a public setting or who lack the confidence to speak in a group.

Digital consultation can also exclude people, particularly those who are older or who do not have access to the internet, but the amount of people this includes is getting smaller. In 2019, 93% of households had access to the internet and 100% of 16-24 year olds said they used the internet daily or almost daily. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that most people are now more confident communicating online. As a result, the use of digital methods may be easier than in the past when young people, parents and carers may have been less familiar with these tools.

Therefore, using digital methods may be less of an issue when consulting on youth mental health, although parents, carers and wider family could find it more of a barrier. You will need to think about those with visual impairments or those who may need adaptations to access information online. Consider the colours you use and how well the content is adapted for self-voicing applications.

You may decide to use a mixed methods approach, combining digital consultation with face-to-face events. These could run at the same time or you could use a staged approach, using digital methods to define priorities, which you then explore in more

depth at a face-to-face event. You could also add a live feed to a face-to-face consultation event to allow people to listen in and submit questions.



# Planning your consultation

## Digital Participation Tools

Digital participation is becoming possible due to the increase in online tools. Although online surveys are commonly used to gather opinions, there are many websites offering a variety of different functions. It is worth exploring what is available to find a tool that works for your purposes. In general some functions you might consider using are:

- Video calls – Most of us have become familiar with tools such as **Zoom**, **Teams** or **Jitsi**, that you can use to facilitate online discussions and webinars, using presentations or other visual information as needed.
- Online whiteboard – Sites such as **Mural** or **Miro** offer ways to work together to input ideas onto a predesigned online space to generate ideas and opinions.
- Discussion forums – These are widely used across the internet for a huge range of topics. They can create discussion but also need very careful monitoring and moderation. You could use social media sites like **Facebook**, business tools such as **Slack** or discussion sites like **Flarum**.
- Proposal comments and feedback – A site like **Consider.it** allows your participants to comment on a proposal using an agree/disagree scale, add comments and up-vote other people's comments if they agree. It also provides visualisation to give an overview of participants' opinions.
- Interactive presentation – You could use a tool like **Poll Everywhere** to conduct real time votes or ask questions during an online meeting or webinar, or you could use it as part of a face-to-face event to gather quick data on the opinions in the room.

The tools suggested here are free to use, or allow you a free trial period so you can decide if they meet your needs. For more options visit

[www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/opinion/digital-tools-participation-where-start](https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/opinion/digital-tools-participation-where-start)



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Internet access – households and individuals, Great Britain: 2019,  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2019>

# Planning your consultation

## How are you going to promote your consultation?

How are you going to make sure the people that you want to hear from know that your event is taking place and that you want to speak to them? Posters or event notices are a good start but you may need a more targeted approach to ensure that all those you want to hear from turn up.

Promoting your event on websites and social media is important, particularly if you are doing any digital consultation. Using community websites as well as those related specifically to your organisation will broaden the potential number and range of participants.

Often the best way to get people to take part will be through individual engagement. Information sent out with appointment letters can be followed up in person during sessions. You need to communicate to people why you want to hear their views and the difference they could make by being part of your consultation. While time consuming, this is a more effective way to get people involved.

One of the simplest ways of engaging with people is to collaborate with another organisation that already has a relationship with those you want to hear from. This has the benefit of providing a pre-existing group of people to consult while also allowing you to use the organisation's expertise to ensure this is done in the best possible way. Organisations you could consider approaching include voluntary organisations, charities, support or participation groups, youth groups, community groups, schools or colleges.

If you are partnering with organisations for your consultation, they may be able to help you promote it, or at least advise you on the best way to get people involved. If you are taking your event to established groups, work with the partner organisation to decide how to explain your event and why you would like their members to be involved.



## How are you going to make it safe?

When you are consulting on a topic as personal as mental health, it is always important to consider how comfortable people feel talking openly about what are often very difficult experiences. In order to get the information you require, people will need to be assured that their experiences will be treated with respect and sensitivity.

In a face-to-face consultation, this will need to be addressed at the start of any discussion or activity by establishing a group agreement about how members will interact, including the creation of a safe environment in which personal information will not be discussed outside of the room. There should also be an option to give an opinion anonymously if people do not feel comfortable discussing it with the group. Establishing a respectful and non-judgemental atmosphere will be essential to ensuring people feel comfortable and confident to speak. It is also useful to establish a time out space where people can go if they have been affected by any of the topics discussed or need to step out for a short while.

It is also important to consider safeguarding, especially where it applies to young people or vulnerable adults. In addition to a venue risk assessment, you will need to obtain consent for any photographs that are taken of the event and ensure there are first aid, and preferably mental health first aid, trained members of staff on site. You will need to consider the process you will follow if anyone makes a disclosure and make sure all staff at the event are aware of this. Make sure there are enough staff present to be able to offer support if it is needed.

# Planning your consultation

If your event is one where you need to register to take part, you could consider asking for young people's emergency contact details. This may deter some people, but it allows you to be able to respond if any issues arise. If you have an open consultation, you have no way of contacting anyone if something happens, but you may get more people involved. If you are partnering with another organisation and staff from that organisation have a better relationship with the people you are consulting then you might agree that they are responsible for any safeguarding procedures, although it is important to establish how this will work before the event.

If you are doing a digital consultation, you will need to consider how you keep your participants safe online. Any online forum will need moderating and will need to be secure, particularly if young people are using it. You will also need to think about how to direct participants to support in case your consultation brings up any difficult emotions or memories.

If you have decided you want to run an in person consultation event, there are a lot of decisions you need to make about what kind of event you want to run. Again, it is important to keep the aims of your consultation central to these decisions to ensure you get the insights you need from participants to inform your decisions going forwards.

You could think about whether it would be best to run one big event or a series of smaller ones with different groups of people. For example you might want to decide whether you want to talk to parents and carers and young people together, or whether it might be better to speak to them separately so they can each have their own open dialogue about their shared experiences. Are there topics that the groups may find hard to talk about if they are consulted together? Do you want to ask the opinion of anyone else involved in young people's lives, such as trusted adults who may have a close but possibly more objective opinion about services?

Are there any groups of people who may need additional support to engage in your consultation? Can this be provided on the day in the form of a sign language translator, hearing loop system, easy read documentation or information translated into other languages? Would it be more inclusive to run a separate session tailored to their needs?

Is there a young person, parent or carer who could co-chair your event? People may feel able to be more open talking to someone who they see as a peer, and this can give the event a more inclusive atmosphere and support it to remain participant focused and jargon free.



# Planning your consultation

## Budget

For your event to be a success, senior leadership will need to support it by providing a budget that covers the full cost of the event(s). As well as venue hire, you will need to consider the cost of providing refreshments, promotion and any promotional materials. You will also need to decide whether you plan to reward participants for engaging in your event, and if so, what form this will take. The reward may range from recognition of their contribution or the opportunity to win a prize, to payment for their time, but you will need to calculate the cost implications for this.

Are you going to cover travel expenses? Could not doing this mean that your event is not accessible to all those you need to hear from? Would you cover the expenses of those, for example with limited mobility, who would not be able to attend if you did not? A well planned budget means your event is able to provide you with the best information to achieve your aims.

## Timing

When is the best time to hold this event to ensure the widest range of people? Keep in mind that young people are in school during the week and parents and carers may have work, childcare or other commitments. You might find that the best time to run it is at the weekend, or in the evening so people are able to attend. If you decide to hold a number of smaller events, or different events for different groups, you could consider running them at different times or finding a time that works for each group.

## Tone

Try to keep the tone of your event optimistic, respectful and non-judgemental. In order to facilitate discussion, use a friendly and informal approach, listening to what they say and using questions to explore their points further. It is important that people feel their input is valued. Professionals need to ensure they do not use jargon when they speak to make sure what they are saying is able to be understood by everyone. Participants could be given a red card to show if anyone uses jargon or other terms they do not understand.

## Venue

Before hiring a venue, it is a good idea to think about the activities you want to run in it to make sure you have the space you need. In general, your venue needs to be as accessible as possible for the people you need to hear from. It needs to be local and have good public transport links. Some possible ideas for venues could include community centres, libraries, schools or colleges.

It is best if your venue is already known to people, or you need to give good directions on how to get there. Consider people with additional needs. Is there anything about the venue that prevents people from taking part in your consultation? If you are partnering with another organisation to support your engagement, do they have a venue that would be appropriate to use or can you take your event to a place where they already meet each group.

# Running a face-to-face consultation

## How are you going to structure your event?

How are you going to keep your audience engaged and make sure you are able to discuss the topics you need to consult on? There are a number of decisions you need to make to help your event take shape.

Social distancing measures as a result of COVID-19 mean face-to-face consultations should only be held when it is safe to do so

- **Structured event or drop-in session?**

Do you want your participants to arrive at a certain time and take part in all the activities you plan, or are you happy if people turn up for as long as they want to, take part in some aspects of the day then leave?

A drop-in event allows people who aren't able to attend for a longer period of time to come for a bit and get their voice heard. This may be more inclusive to some people with additional needs who may find attending a full session too much and mean you hear from people who would not otherwise commit to attending a longer event. This may increase the range of people that take part in your consultation. If this is the case you need to think more about how to get people through the door, including the convenience of the venue and how the event is promoted.

A structured event means people are more likely to attend for the whole event. If you require people to sign up to attend it means you have a better idea of who is there and how representative your participants are. Those who attend are likely to engage on a deeper level with the topics you want to consult on and this may be more beneficial if you are talking about more complex issues.

If your event is more structured you will need to think about how long it lasts, how many breaks you are going to have and when. Providing refreshments, or food if it takes place over meal times is a good way to show you appreciate your

participants' time and keep people engaged during the day.

- **Open or fixed agenda?**

Having an open agenda means you can let the conversation evolve naturally, responding to any issues that come up but it also means that the conversation could go in a different direction than you intended. You need to make sure you are still gathering the insights you need and talking about areas where participants are able to affect change. If you decide to go with this approach you will need skilled facilitators to be able to respond to the issues that come up and ensure you stay on track. Participants may find it helpful to be given discussion prompts prior to, or during the event, to ensure they address the most important topics

If you have a fixed agenda, you are able to ensure that all the areas you want to consult on are covered during the event. You can also structure the sessions in a way which supports the development of participants' knowledge about the topic if it is complicated or requires the communication of specific information. However, the reduced flexibility means you have to make sure you are asking the right questions when you develop the agenda. Those who attend may have other ideas you might not have thought of or have other important points you want to raise. You could decide to have an allocated session in the day for discussion not covered elsewhere to allow time for this and to help keep other sessions focused on your agenda.



# Running a face-to-face consultation

- **Discussion based or activity based?**

Discussion based events can mean you can talk about issues, others can listen and respond to them and you can try to reach a consensus. You will need to think carefully about who is the best person to chair the event. It will need to be someone neutral, with good experience of this type of event. They will need to be able to keep the discussion positive and productive and resolve any conflicts that may arise. They will also need to be able to keep the discussion on track and hear any criticism without reacting defensively to it.

However, a more formal discussion format may exclude some participants. Talking about mental health can be difficult and many people may not feel confident about doing this in a big group. You may also find that running your event with smaller groups means people feel more comfortable expressing their opinions and allows you to get a richer understanding of the range of opinions within your target audience. Each smaller group will require its own facilitator and people may still not feel comfortable talking about their own experiences of mental health with others.

Using a more activity based approach to your consultation can provide a more inclusive way to allow people to have their say. This is particularly effective if you are consulting children and young people but it works for groups of any age. Using activities can allow people to give their opinions about mental health and the services which support them, without them feeling like they need to disclose any personal information about their own experiences.

Using different types of activities and exercises in your consultation may result in more creative responses and ideas, as well as keeping people more engaged. You could choose to run activities for everyone to take part in, either as a large group or in smaller sub-groups, or you could run a number of activities in the same session as an activity carousel.

## What activities could you use?

Using activities in your public consultation event can make it more fun and interactive for those who attend and may prompt some interesting discussions. There are a number of different activities you could use, ranging from quick, easy ones to more in-depth exercises which may require more planning.

You will need to think about what resources you need for each activity and ensure you have these ready before the event. These may include flipchart paper, post-it notes, stickers, pens and felt tips, as well as any written documents. Any documents may require translating or producing for people with additional needs to ensure your event is accessible to everyone. Do you need any technology or equipment for your day to run? If so make sure they are there on the day and have a test run beforehand to make sure everything works.

If you are consulting with different groups, such as parents, young people, or even other professionals, teachers or youth leaders, do you want them to all do the same activities or do you want to use different ones to get different information from each group? It can be helpful to provide fidget toys during the event. These can help people concentrate, reduce stress and keep people engaged. Using creative activities can also help people to interact and engage with the topics in a more open and imaginative way.



# Running a face-to-face consultation

## Sticker voting

Gather your attendees' opinions on a topic by asking them to place a sticker next to an option or along a scale. Parents and young people could have different coloured stickers so you can record differences in their opinions. This method is easy to facilitate, record and analyse and people can add their sticker when they want to so it is more anonymous.

## Red cards

Give participants a red card which they can use if a professional at the event uses jargon or a word that they do not understand.

This is a good way to make sure your event is accessible to everyone.

## Ideal user journey

This is usually a longer exercise. It can be done using people's own experiences or you can ask people to start by creating a character and then think about their ideal user journey through services. This can make it easier for people to talk without having to discuss personal experiences.

At each stage of the journey, through noticing problems, referral, assessment, getting support and preparing to move on, think about the questions and concerns people have, the barriers to engagement and what people need from services.

## Post-it suggestions

Have a wall at your event where people can add post-it notes with opinions or suggestions. You can give them questions to answer or allow them to give their opinion on whatever they want. Again, different groups could have different coloured post-its and this method allows people to give more detailed opinions than sticker voting.

## Car park

Have a 'parking board' where people can anonymously put a question or comment if they don't feel confident to say it in front of a group.

## Where do you stand?

Read participants a statement, then ask them to stand in a position around the room which reflects their opinion. You can take photos of where people stand (subject to permission) and ask people if they would like to explain more about why they are standing where they are.

## My ideal mental health service

Get participants to design their ideal mental health service. You could even get them to draw this as a house or a piece of technology, to encourage people to be more creative.

## Video blogs

You could set up a video booth and get people to create short blogs or answer questions about topics in your consultation.

# Following a public consultation event

## Following a public consultation event

The end of the event is not the end of the public consultation. Once the consultation period or event is over, you need to take time to gather your findings, understand what you have learnt and decide how you are going to use what you have heard to implement meaningful changes to the service you provide. This information also needs to be fed back to both your participants and the wider community so they are aware of the outcomes of the consultation.

## How are you going to collect your findings and analyse your results?

You will need to decide how you are going to record the insights you get from your participants. If it is a discussion you may want to get permission to record it or you could have someone taking notes on what is said. If you break into smaller groups you will need scribes in each group. Alternatively, each group could produce their own record of their conversation if you provide flipchart paper and pens. If you are running activities they may generate their own record such as dot voting charts, post-it notes, pictures or mind maps. Digital participation has the benefit of recording and collating your findings for you which saves you time on this step.

As part of deciding what data you are going to generate, you also need to think about how you are going to analyse it. It is relatively easy to understand the findings from, for example, dot voting. However, sessions involving in-depth discussions or more creative exercises may need to be analysed for themes, common suggestions or areas for improvement. Who is going to do this? Could you involve a young person or carer in this process? How are you going to incorporate conflicting viewpoints in your findings?

Once you have understood the information you have collected from your consultation, who needs to see it? What organisational process is going to be followed to translate your findings into meaningful change? Understanding how your consultation is going to lead to action is important

to establish before an event so you can explain this to participants and ensure that there is senior leadership commitment to acting on your results. Involving participants in a consultation process which does not lead to change is detrimental to people's trust in an organisation and will reduce the likelihood of them wanting to be involved again in the future.

## How are you going to evaluate the success of your event?

It is important to evaluate your event so you can learn what went well and how you could make improvements next time. Evaluation allows you to collect evidence about the ways in which your consultation was beneficial for both the organisation and the people who took part. This could support the decision of senior managers to run further participation events in the future and encourage more people to participate by showing how the input of those who attended has or will influence the way things are done within services.

Evaluation should be considered from the start of the planning process and those evaluating the event should include participants who either helped plan the event or attended it. You could collect feedback from those who attended via a variety of methods. One of the easiest is to ask those who attended to complete a feedback form when they leave, or have feedback forms around the event to complete. If those who attend are required to sign up, you could email them a questionnaire in the days following the event.



# Running a face-to-face consultation

It is also useful to include a way for people to be contacted about the outcomes from the consultation or any future participation opportunities. If your feedback forms are anonymous, you could find another way to do this, such as a separate sign-up sheet.

## How are you going to feedback about the outcomes of your consultation event?

Feeding back to your participants and to the wider community is essential because it allows the public to hold services accountable for the decisions that are made and how their feedback is used. It also ensures that participants feel that their input is valued and they will therefore be more likely to take part in a similar exercise in the future. Without this step, the exercise can feel meaningless.

After you have collected your findings and analysed your results, they will be reviewed by senior leadership to consider how to act on what has been found. Once this stage is complete, it is important to feed back to participants what decisions have been made and how the information that they have provided will be used to shape services going forward. Any evaluation of the day should also be included.

What format is the feedback going to take? The most obvious way is to put together a report or document about what happened and what decisions have been made but there are other mediums you could consider including making a video, poster or website. Is there a young person or carer who wants to be involved in putting the feedback together? Someone who attended the event can bring a personal view of their experience, as well as help decide what is most important to include.

When your consultation involves young people you need to consider how you make your feedback accessible to them. Are you going to create a young people friendly version or are you going to make the whole report accessible to everyone? Either way you will need to create a group of young people who can inform you on how to do this.

How are you doing to distribute your findings? If you have an email list of attendees, you can use this. You should also promote it through social media channels, websites and anywhere else that will get the findings out to as many people as possible. Even those who did not attend may be interested and want to take part next time you run a similar event.







**We hope this guide supports you to run your own public consultation events to ensure the voice of young people and their families are central to your organisation.**

**You can find more information about engagement and running participations events on the YoungMinds Amplified pages: <https://youngminds.org.uk/youngminds-professionals/our-projects/amplified/>**

# YOUNGMINDS

Transforming participation across young people's mental health

Amplified

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[youngminds.org.uk](http://youngminds.org.uk)



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