

BGA CLUB MANAGEMENT GUIDES

Carrying Out a Consultation

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Effective consultation can help to promote transparency, inclusivity, and collaboration in decision-making, as well as ensuring that the needs and preferences of members are taken into account. Done properly it provides insight into the views of the full membership rather than just the vocal minority.

Big vs little consultation

Remember that at each AGM the membership delegates decision making and day-to-day management of the club to the governing body (the Board or Committee, depending on the type of organisation), but there are certain issues that will need to be taken to the membership for decisions. The club's governing document will set out the scope of the Committee's responsibilities, scope and power. The outcome of these big decisions is usually better quality if the Committee have taken time to fully research the issue and context of the question they put to the membership. Consultations help.

Clubs might carry out a consultation as part of their strategic planning process, or as part of project design, and many funders want to see the design of solutions to identified problems have been developed from the point of view of members' needs. They are especially keen on projects where the beneficiaries of the project have been involved in the design. A good quality consultation will demonstrate this evidence to funders.

On the smaller scale, committee members should also be alert to the feedback and information that comes in via conversations and emails, especially if there is a degree of irritation being expressed. Following up with someone who cares deeply enough about the club to bother typing an email, to understand what lies at the root of frustrations can provide significant insight. This needs to be balanced by checking with the wider membership, because sometimes the loudest voices are not representative of the whole. Listen too to the quietest, least represented voices. Many of the following techniques and tools can be used to critically engage with the daily information committees receive.

Principles for good quality consultations

Firstly, a decision needs to be made about what information is needed, the purpose for it, and what question(s) to ask the membership.

Transparency

Be open and honest about the consultation process and how feedback will be used. Members should understand the purpose and scope of the consultation, the timeline, and how they can participate.

Inclusivity

Ensure that all members have the opportunity to participate in the consultation, regardless of their background, age, gender, or ability. Consider using a variety of methods to gather feedback to ensure that everyone has an equal chance to contribute.

Relevance

Ensure that the consultation is relevant and tailored to the needs of the members. Consider what information is necessary to provide context and to help members to understand the issues at hand.

Clarity

Use clear and concise language to explain questions and to communicate findings to members. Avoid using jargon or technical language that could be confusing.

Confidentiality

Ensure that members' privacy is respected and that their feedback is treated confidentially. Communicate clearly how their feedback will be used and any measures taken to protect their personal information.

Consultation methods

This (social research techniques) is a vast topic, so keep it simple by using the principles above, and pick two or more methods. Why more than one? That is to cross check the information coming in and reduce potential for biased results. Empirical research techniques would run a control, but that's impossible to do with a group of humans.

Consider who needs to be consulted to get the best quality information for the problem being examined. For instance, some of the most informed club experts on launchpoint effectiveness are the current users i.e. the people learning to fly at Bronze and below.

Once data have been collected, analyse them and seek patterns. Systems maps can be drawn up too. Anything which helps understand the dynamics in play and where effective solutions could be deployed. For instance, an easy example:

Problem = not everyone gets flown in a day, and the consultation shows that people are irritated with hanging around in the mornings.

Answer = a focus on prompt and spritely beginnings to flying, with a KPI of time of first launch.

Use whatever communication methods and tools are necessary to get the relevant club members engaged so that good quality data and information are available for decision making.

Surveys

An online or paper-based survey can be an effective way to gather feedback from members. The questions should be clear and focused to provide empirical data. Members should also be given the opportunity to provide additional comments if they wish, which will provide context and nuance to answers. Surveys can be used to check information received in other ways, or to get additional information in an area.

Using online tools such as Jotform or Google forms or Microsoft forms makes this easier, but check everyone can access, and make alternative provision (a paper version) where necessary. Survey Monkey has got harder to use in recent years, but search for an online provider that works for your club.

N.B. Check the GDPR aspects of the survey provider and whether they will use respondents' data for any other purpose – for instance, Google is likely to scrape data for other purposes and some members may not engage if Google is involved.

Principles for structuring surveys

By following these principles, surveys can be structured in a way that maximises the quality and relevance of the feedback received from respondents.

1. Use Clear and concise questions: Survey questions should be clear, concise, and easy to understand. Avoid using complex language or technical terms that may

confuse respondents. Use simple language and ensure that each question has a single, specific focus.

2. **Balanced response options:** Provide balanced response options for questions, such as "agree/disagree" or "very satisfied/somewhat satisfied/not satisfied." Avoid leading or biased response options that may influence respondents.
3. **Relevant and specific questions:** Ensure that the questions are relevant and specific to the topic being surveyed. Avoid asking irrelevant questions or those that do not relate to the survey's purpose.
4. **Avoid double barreled questions:** Avoid asking questions that ask more than one thing in the same question. This can confuse respondents and make it difficult to interpret their answers.
5. **Use skip logic:** Use skip logic to ensure that respondents only see questions that are relevant to them. This can help to reduce survey fatigue and improve response rates.
6. **Test the survey:** Before launching the survey, test it with a small group of people to ensure that the questions are clear and that the survey is functioning properly. This can help to identify any issues before the survey is distributed more widely.
7. **Keep it short:** Keep the survey as short as possible while still gathering the necessary information. This can help to increase response rates and reduce survey fatigue.
8. **Do not survey too frequently.**

Interviews

These can be structured, so each one follows the same set of questions, or a relaxed chat.

The aim is to talk to a few people across different cross-sections of the club: age, gender; stage of flying; length of time in club; and so on to get a representative range of views.

Keep them to a decent length, 30-40 minutes is usually plenty.

Focus groups

A focus group involves gathering a small group of members together to discuss a specific topic or issue. This can be a good way to explore complex issues in depth and to gain a better understanding of members' opinions and experiences.

Principles for creating a focus group

By following these principles, focus groups can be structured in a way that maximises the quality and relevance of the feedback received from participants.

These include:

1. **Clearly defined objective:** Have a clear objective for the focus group that outlines the purpose of the group and the specific questions or topics that will be explored.
2. **Target audience:** Identify a target audience that is relevant to the objective of the focus group. The participants should be representative of the broader population or demographic being studied.

3. **Recruitment:** Recruit participants through a variety of channels, such as social media, email, or phone calls, to ensure a diverse group of participants. Consider offering incentives, such as gift cards or cash, to encourage participation.
4. **Facilitation:** Choose a skilled facilitator who is able to manage the group dynamics, keep the discussion on track, and encourage participation from all participants. The facilitator should set out “ground rules” so that participants understand what is expected of them during meetings.
5. **Balanced discussion:** Ensure that the discussion is balanced and that all participants have the opportunity to express their views. Encourage participants to build on each other's ideas and to ask questions of each other.
6. **Confidentiality:** Ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of the participants are respected. Participants should be informed of any recording or note-taking and how their feedback will be used.
7. **Analysis:** Analyse the feedback collected from the focus group and use it to inform decision-making. Look for patterns and themes in the feedback to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement.

Town hall meetings

A town hall meeting is an open forum where members can raise questions and share their views with the club's leadership. This can be a good way to engage with members and to build trust and understanding.

The environment for these meetings can make or break them, so it is worth giving some attention to how the members will feel while they are there. Think about the overall meetings and make time for breaks. Creating opportunities for members to talk and eat together is rarely wasted, and providing catering and a warm place to meet is usually helpful. Better quality decision making happens if people can take their coats off and look like they are staying and committing to joining in with the process.

Principles for town hall meetings

By following these principles, town hall meetings can be structured in a way that encourages active participation, respectful discussion, and productive outcomes.

These include:

1. **Clear agenda:** Have a clear agenda for the meeting that outlines the topics to be discussed and the order in which they will be addressed. Share the agenda with attendees prior to the meeting.
2. **Time management:** Manage time effectively by allocating sufficient time for each topic and ensuring that the meeting stays on track. Consider using a timer to keep each discussion on schedule.
3. **Inclusivity:** Ensure that all attendees have the opportunity to participate in the meeting, regardless of their background, age, gender, or ability. Encourage active participation and ensure that everyone has a chance to speak.
4. **Respectful discussion:** Encourage respectful and constructive discussion by setting ground rules for the meeting. These rules should include guidelines for respectful communication and appropriate behaviour.

5. Active listening: Ensure that attendees actively listen to each other and seek to understand different perspectives. Encourage attendees to summarize or rephrase the views of others to ensure that everyone is on the same page.
6. Follow-up: Follow up on action items and decisions made during the meeting. Ensure that attendees are informed of the outcomes and any next steps.
7. Diversity and inclusion: Ensure that the meeting is designed to be inclusive and to represent diverse perspectives. Consider ways to make the meeting accessible to people with different backgrounds, experiences, and abilities.

When to get an impartial outsider to facilitate town hall meetings?

Bringing in an impartial outsider to facilitate a meeting can help to ensure that the meeting is conducted fairly, objectively, and constructively. However, it is important to consider the context and needs of the group when making this decision, and to ensure that the facilitator has the appropriate skills and expertise to meet those needs.

There are some principles that can help to determine when it may be appropriate to bring in an impartial outsider to facilitate a meeting. These include:

1. Conflict of interest: If there is a potential conflict of interest, it may be advisable to bring in an impartial outsider to ensure that the meeting is conducted fairly and objectively.
2. Emotionally charged topics: If the topic of the meeting is emotionally charged or controversial, an impartial outsider may be able to help manage the discussion and ensure that all viewpoints are heard.
3. Complex issues: If the issues being discussed are complex or technical in nature, an impartial outsider with relevant expertise may be able to provide guidance and clarity.
4. Group dynamics: If there are issues with group dynamics or communication within the group, an impartial outsider may be able to provide an objective perspective and facilitate constructive dialogue.
5. Power dynamics: If there are power imbalances or hierarchies within the group, an impartial outsider can help to level the playing field and ensure that all voices are heard.
6. Lack of facilitation skills: If the group lacks facilitation skills, an impartial outsider with facilitation experience can help to keep the meeting on track, manage time effectively, and ensure that all participants are engaged.

Online forums

An online forum or discussion board can be used to gather feedback from members who may not be able to attend in-person events. This can also be a good way to facilitate ongoing discussions and to build a sense of community within the club.

Principles for an online consultation forum

By following these principles, online consultation forums can be structured in a way that encourages active participation, respectful discussion, and productive outcomes. It is important to ensure that the platform is accessible and inclusive to all participants and that the moderator is able to manage the discussion and encourage participation from all participants.

Principles include:

1. **Clear objective:** Have a clear objective for the online consultation forum that outlines the purpose of the forum and the specific questions or topics that will be explored.
2. **User-friendly platform:** Choose a user-friendly platform that is accessible to all participants, regardless of their technical ability or device. Ensure that the platform is easy to navigate and provides clear instructions for participation.
3. **Moderation:** Have a skilled moderator who is able to manage the discussion, keep the conversation on track, and encourage participation from all participants. Ensure that the moderator is familiar with the topic being discussed.
4. **Inclusivity:** Ensure that the online consultation forum is inclusive and accessible to all participants. Consider providing translation services or closed captioning for participants with hearing or visual impairments.
5. **Timeliness:** Set a clear timeline for the online consultation forum and ensure that all participants are aware of the timeline. Consider sending reminders or notifications to participants to encourage participation.
6. **Transparency:** Ensure that the online consultation forum is transparent and that all participants understand how their feedback will be used. Provide regular updates on the progress of the consultation and the outcomes of the forum.
7. **Security:** Ensure that the online consultation forum is secure and that participants' privacy is protected. Consider using encryption or other security measures to protect the information shared by participants.