

SECTION 3

TECHNIQUES AVAILABLE TO YOU

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The following section presents a detailed description of the consultation techniques available to you. The consultation technique chosen depends on the objectives of the consultation. Four objectives (information gathering, information seeking, information sharing and participatory decision making) were discussed in the previous section 'What is consultation?'

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Focus groups and workshops

Sources –

Text: New South Wales Office on Social Policy. *Resourcing Consultation: A manual to assist consultation by government agencies*. Best Practice Paper 2. Sydney: Social Policy Directorate, 1993: p.8.

Table: New South Wales Office of Rural Communities. *Principles for effective participation in government decisions by rural and remote communities*. Orange: NSW Agriculture, 1997: p.14.

Boxed page: Illawarra Area Health Service. *A guide for working with consumers*. Wollongong, 1997: p.21-22.

Focus groups and workshops

Focus groups and workshops can assist with developing proposals and ideas around specific issues within an informal structure. Focus groups and workshops are particularly well suited to providing opportunities for all participants to contribute to discussion because they generally involve working in small groups. Focus groups often comprise representatives of a specific population or special needs group while workshops generally involve broader participation.

Technique	Comments
<p><i>Focus groups:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-10 people • not highly structured discussion but directed to particular issue or problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allows those not normally attracted to participation to express a view on issues of special concern • provides detailed and pertinent information on how particular community groups are affected • gives personalised attention to potentially affected people • can identify points of conflict before they become polarised and before solutions become advocated • can be used as working group to develop proposals. ◆ can be time consuming ◆ may not be representative of entire community.
<p><i>Workshops:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sub-groups of 8-15 people • structured sessions aimed at producing a plan or program of recommendations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allows local experts or lay specialists to contribute in actual processes of planning • a flexible technique which can be used at all stages of consultation or planning process • can provide a forum for testing alternatives, receiving feedback and refining input. ◆ may appear exclusive.

Note: Advantages = •

Disadvantages = ◆

Why would it be a good idea to run a focus group around an issue?

Focus groups are an excellent way to get a depth of information that cannot be achieved through surveys or written comments. The discussion amongst six to ten people on a particular topic can provide insights that one person cannot hope to be able to have. Different perspectives on an issue can only add to the understanding of what needs to happen to create the solution.

For example if the issue is how to support first time mothers through the first six months of their child's life, then contacting a playgroup, or the Nursing Mothers' Association, the local Community health Nurse and the local antenatal clinic might be options for recruiting people. The participants in the focus group can be asked to come along to help explore the issue fully and discuss possible solutions to the problem. The resulting information can then be used to develop a response to the issue.

How to set up the focus group

Once the issue has been identified, there are a number of ways that consumers can be recruited to the focus group:

1. Identify consumer organisations or groups that relate best to the issue you wish to have discussed.
2. Invite interested people to a focus group via the local paper.
3. Randomly select patients who fit the category of interest, and invite them via a letter to a focus group.

Any correspondence to people about the focus group needs to be clear and should set out a proposed program, the time entailed and what support people may have to attend, i.e. transport and child care.

The program should allow for as much discussion as possible. A two or three hour session would be ample time for a structured discussion. A skilled facilitator assisting the group would allow the health staff involved in

the group to concentrate on listening. The role of the focus group is to get a range of points of view about an issue, and ideas about the strategies for addressing the issue. It is important that the health staff do not try to participate in the discussion by presenting their own point of view or arguing. The role is to listen, not to provide answers.

The group does not have to reach a consensus, or come to a conclusion, nor does the health service have to agree to any proposals. It would be sensible to incorporate the information into an action plan or strategies for further development.

When planning the composition of focus groups it is preferable to place "like with like" based on characteristics that will promote free discussion amongst participants. For example, it may not be appropriate to have a group of men and women discussing domestic violence. Nor would it be appropriate to have both staff and consumers discussing a service.

The number of focus groups that should be conducted and their composition is largely dependent on the topic. Conducting several groups on one topic is more likely to identify common themes, and also highlight differences if the composition of groups varies. Groups of youth may identify common needs for health services; groups of youth and groups of elderly are likely to identify the different needs of these groups.

It is also important to remember there are other forums, with different purposes, to bring groups together. Training in how to run a focus group can be arranged through the IAHS Health Promotion Unit.

Feedback to the participants

The focus group should be written up and the report sent back out to the participants. Channels for their further involvement with the health service could be identified. There will need to be an indication about what will be done with the information, e.g. a review of the service, further research or consultation, included in material to lobby for a service or policy change.

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Advisory committees and task forces

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Text: New South Wales Office on Social Policy. *Resourcing Consultation: A manual to assist consultation by government agencies*. Best Practice Paper 2. Sydney: Social Policy Directorate, 1993: p.9.

Table: New South Wales Office of Rural Communities. *Principles for effective participation in government decisions by rural and remote communities*. Orange: NSW Agriculture, 1997: p.14.

Advisory committees and task forces

Advisory committees and task forces are expertise based bodies constituted around a particular government program, such as Home and Community Care (Department of Community Services); a population group, such as aged persons; or an issue, such as domestic violence. They generally include representatives of relevant government and non government agencies and consumers.

The role of advisory committees and task forces is to provide advice to government on appropriate changes to programs or policy and make recommendations about specific services. Advisory committees operate as an ongoing structure while task forces are generally short term and focus on the development of a specific strategy or program.

Technique	Comments
<p><i>Advisory Committees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • up to 15 members • set up to provide ongoing advice on community views or specialist advice • source of community viewpoints for the agency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides ongoing advice and comment on developing proposals or policies • provides contact point with community and focus for assembling local resources • allows community members to identify and seek measures to resolve persisting local problems • provides an opportunity for community representatives to become familiar with the consultation/planning process • serves secondary function of bringing players together in a policy domain and informing them about agency policies • assists in dealing with multiple interest groups. ◆ significant limits to the role of advisory committees in resolving complex public issues ◆ advisory committees are not elected, and therefore have legitimacy problems claiming to speak for others (have little accountability to the community at large) ◆ may be non-representative of the community ◆ meetings can be time consuming and dominated by members of unequal status, knowledge and expertise ◆ may have difficulty in 'delivering' the interest groups or points of view they are appointed to represent.

Note: Advantages = •

Disadvantages = ◆

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Public meetings and forums

Sources –

Text: New South Wales Office on Social Policy. *Resourcing Consultation: A manual to assist consultation by government agencies*. Best Practice Paper 2. Sydney: Social Policy Directorate, 1993: p.8-9.

Table: New South Wales Office of Rural Communities. *Principles for effective participation in government decisions by rural and remote communities*. Orange: NSW Agriculture, 1997: p.15.

Public meetings and forums

Public meetings provide a means to present information and proposals within a framework that allows for immediate discussion and feedback. Public meetings also allow for the level of public interest in or concern over an issue to be gauged. They are often conducted at a local or regional level and focus on proposals concerning that area.

Public forums generally focus on specific issues with the intention of highlighting problems and developing appropriate strategies. Speakers representing different interests are generally invited to address the forum to express their views. An example of a public forum is the Premier's Forum on Ageing. This is held annually with each forum concentrating on a different issue affecting older persons.

Technique	Comments
<p><i>Public Meeting/Forum:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nominations by existing groups and associations • facilitates the exchange of views. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides existing groups with a more informed and united base from which to lobby authorities and decision-makers • rationalised system of interacting with community groups • brings a wide range of people together • allows people to respond to the proposals or options devised by experts • can contribute to consensus before actions taken. ◆ ability of facilitator crucial to success ◆ 'glossy' presentations can be mis-lead an ill-informed audience.

Note: Advantages = •
 Disadvantages = ◆

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Public inquiries and hearings

Sources –

Text: New South Wales Office on Social Policy. *Resourcing Consultation: A manual to assist consultation by government agencies*. Best Practice Paper 2. Sydney: Social Policy Directorate, 1993: p.7.

Table: New South Wales Office of Rural Communities. *Principles for effective participation in government decisions by rural and remote communities*. Orange: NSW Agriculture, 1997: p.15.

Public inquiries and hearings

Public inquiries and hearings seek to identify and examine the relevant factors and circumstances relating to a particular government decision or policy; their implementation; or the operation of a particular program or agency. Inquiries and hearings are often conducted in response to dissatisfaction or concerns expressed by customers or by members of Parliament.

Technique	Comments
<p><i>Public Inquiries/Hearings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • often used by formal decision making bodies and legislatures to discuss a policy issue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it is common to seek written submission first, and then call public hearings on the basis of the documentation provided. This provides an opportunity to cross examine those who have presented cases, and work through the evidence available • can help decision makers work towards consensus with those affected by a policy choice • tends to increase the legitimacy of analysis and proposals ◆ public hearings tend to favour those with the resources to make a case ◆ tends to be dominated by experts in the field ◆ can over emphasise the viewpoints of 'outspoken' participants.

Note: Advantages = •

Disadvantages = ◆

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Submissions to governments

Sources –

Text: New South Wales Office on Social Policy. *Resourcing Consultation: A manual to assist consultation by government agencies*. Best Practice Paper 2. Sydney: Social Policy Directorate, 1993: p.7.

Table: New South Wales Office of Rural Communities. *Principles for effective participation in government decisions by rural and remote communities*. Orange: NSW Agriculture, 1997: p.16.

Submissions to governments

Governments often call for submissions as part of the process of reviewing or establishing a particular program or service. Customers may be requested to respond to a set of questions or issues. Submissions are also frequently invited on government discussion papers.

Technique	Comments
<p><i>Public submissions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oral or written • generally attract organised groups or individuals with a well defined position. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates commitment to open planning • designed to keep interests informed about the current state of policy development • seeking written submissions is a cost-effective form of consultation • in most cases, written submissions will become part of the public domain, the most tangible evidence of a consultation process • views drawn from submissions may be included in any final report, along with tabulation of arguments for and against particular aspects of the overall policy proposal. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ submissions tend to favour the articulate, and those with sufficient resources to prepare detailed analysis and documentation ◆ those opposed to a proposal are most likely to invest the time and effort required to prepare a submission ◆ written submissions allows for considered, thoughtful and detailed points of view, but it restricts those voices heard in the debate. It is a technique best used in conjunction with other forms of public interaction.

Note: Advantages = •

Disadvantages = ◆

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Polling and surveys

Sources –

Text: New South Wales Office on Social Policy. *Resourcing Consultation: A manual to assist consultation by government agencies*. Best Practice Paper 2. Sydney: Social Policy Directorate, 1993: p.6.

Table: New South Wales Office of Rural Communities. *Principles for effective participation in government decisions by rural and remote communities*. Orange: NSW Agriculture, 1997: p.16-17.

Polling and surveys

Polling and surveys generally aim to collect specific information from a small sample of customers. These techniques are not intended to provide comprehensive data but to provide an indication of customer views.

Technique	Comments
<p>Surveys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • usually involve formal questionnaires • determination of appropriate sample size is both a resource and empirical issue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides hard data to document probable effects of proposal • can gauge the likely public reaction to the proposal. ◆ provides limited opportunities for large numbers of community members to participate in the process ◆ does not allow for the exchange of ideas and discussion ◆ surveys are an expensive way to collect information on habits and attitudes, and are more usually associated with complex policy questions which require extensive consultation or joint decision making.
<p>1. Key informer surveys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10-15 contacts are usually considered an appropriate sample. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • key informers are described as people who may be assumed to have the knowledge and ability to report on social needs • can be inexpensive and quick to survey such people. ◆ key informers tend to overstate a problem for their interest group, and to underestimate the ability of others to sort things out ◆ making contact with a wide array of perspectives can help counter these biases.
<p>2. Client surveys:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • become an important instrument for testing policy effectiveness • client surveys are more likely to be used in service evaluation than in policy framework development • client surveys help managers obtain information from clients about their attitudes and expectations • policies and programs can be reshaped to take client views into account. ◆ carry significant resource and time costs.
<p>3. Citizen surveys:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • as with client surveys, citizen surveys provide detailed and aggregate data on attitudes • particularly valuable source of information when the relevant public is diffuse, unorganised or has no community interests or structures to draw it together • likely to only be the first step in a broader consultation process. ◆ sample sizes for such surveys can vary ◆ citizen input is strictly routinised and controlled ◆ expensive way to collect information.

Note: Advantages = •

Disadvantages = ◆

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Media releases and public displays

Source – New South Wales Office of Rural Communities.
Principles for effective participation in government decisions by rural and remote communities. Orange: NSW Agriculture, 1997: p.17.

Media releases and public displays

Technique	Comments
<p><i>Media releases and public displays:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be aimed at informing, or generating interest and feedback • means of disseminating information to the community • this technique is also designed to elicit feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • publicity can be an important part of policy making, particularly when policy success depends on public implementation • publicity campaigns can be used as precursors to community consultation, by raising public awareness of an issues, or to promote the outcome of a consultation process • opportunity for initiating agency to have direct contact with members of the community • ensures that basic information is provided • community groups are kept informed • provides an opportunity for some groups to contribute who might not otherwise be contacted. ◆ publicity campaigns are not strictly consultation processes, since there is not two-way exchange of information between the government and public ◆ may be costly and ineffective, particularly if community does not perceive the issues as being of high importance ◆ would not reach all groups unless special attention was given to minority groups and targeted groups.

Note: Advantages = •

Disadvantages = ◆

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Other techniques

Source – New South Wales Office on Social Policy. *Resourcing Consultation: A manual to assist consultation by government agencies*. Best Practice Paper 2. Sydney: Social Policy Directorate, 1993: p.6-9.

Other techniques

Publications about Government services and programs

Most governments agencies have a range of publications which provide information about how to gain access to services; which describe the agency's activities; or which outline research, program objectives and results. These publications include brochures, information booklets, newsletter, annual reports, annual plans and research reports.

Promotions and campaigns

Promotions often aim to encourage support for a particular event, program or project such a Sydney's bid for the 2000 Olympics. Campaigns are often directed to educating the public about specific issue with the objective of changing behaviour, such a litter reduction and 'Quit for life' campaigns.

Complaint and dispute resolution

Complaint and dispute resolution mechanisms can range from internal agency procedures to more formal structures such as boards of review and appeal, and the Office of the Ombudsman.

Responding to customer inquiries

Responding to customer inquiries can include a number of activities such as phone or 'over the counter' advice and replies to letter directed to government agencies and Ministers.

Research and data collection

Research can be conducted using internal and /or external resources. The latter includes market research companies, academic institutions and consultants. There is a range of data sources available to assist research. These include:

- census and other data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics
- data held by academic institutions, public sector agencies such as the Department of Social Security and private sector organisations
- clearing houses and media monitoring organisation.

Search conferences

Search conferences are specifically aimed at building up a picture of the issues and concerns in a specific area. They are particularly useful in areas which previously may have received only limited government or public attention or where data and research is not comprehensive. Search conferences aim at wide ranging participation.

Government discussion papers

Government discussion papers aim to broadly outline to the community the proposal or options being considered in relation to particular policies, programs or services. The intention is to encourage broad discussion and responses to the proposals. Parliamentary Inquiries frequently issue discussion papers to facilitate public comment and participation.

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Green and white papers

Green papers are a particular type of discussion paper prepared at the directions of the Minister for Cabinet consideration. They aim to identify issues and possible options for approaching a particular topic. They do not in any way commit the Minister or Government to any particular policy.

White papers on the other hand either embody current Government policy on a particular issue or its intent.

Seminars and conferences

Seminars and conferences often focus on a broad issue or policy and allow for a range of people to present information and ideas. Participants generally include representatives from relevant government agencies, direct service providers, peak non government organisations and consumers.

Networking

Networking refers to the process of informal, regular liaison between government and relevant non government agencies. This technique ensures that both parties are kept up to date with information and developments, and facilitates an effective working relationship.

Customer Councils

A number of government agencies are currently in the process of establishing Customer Councils. These Councils generally comprise customers representing different client groups.

Their role is to participate in service planning and evaluation for individual government agencies. Customer Councils are intended to:

- evaluate the current level of service performance
- advise on possible new or modified services
- recommend performance indicators of service quality
- develop quality assurance procedures
- research client needs.

Customer Councils may act as a resource for government agencies in drafting Guarantees of Service.

Consultative committees

Consultative Committees involve direct consultation with representative consumer agencies. These agencies are often well placed to identify relevant consumer interests and consultation participants. Governments often resource agencies to establish consultative committees comprising members of the agency's constituency for this purpose.

Policy round tables

Policy round tables are joint planning/decision making forums between government agencies and representative consumer groups. These forums are often 'one off' and convene to discuss a specific policy. Participants often have distinct and complementary expertise related to the policy.

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Involvement in service delivery processes

Source - Illawarra Area Health Service. *A guide for working with consumers*. Wollongong, 1997: p.23-25.

Involvement in service delivery processes

Inviting consumers to a health service planning meeting

Health facilities and services should invite consumers to regularly take part in their annual planning exercises by having consumers sitting alongside health staff to plan health service activities.

Understandably some of the priority areas for health services are already identified by governments. Consumer involvement can be invaluable in bringing the community need and issues into this planning.

Why would inviting consumers to a health service planning meeting be a good idea?

Most health services will have done some kind of needs assessment in their area. Some will already have involved consumers in some way in identifying needs, whether this is community needs or the needs of users of the service. Talking to individual groups separately can be a useful exercise. Another way of achieving a broad overview of needs from a consumer perspective would be to organise a special meeting or planning day for representatives from a large number of groups, as well as interested individuals.

Such a meeting may also bring to your attention some key groups or individuals who may be able to help you further down the track or be involved in other health service activity.

Most services will simply want to involve consumer representatives at their planning sessions with health staff.

Feedback to the Participants

A report of the meeting should be compiled and circulated to all the participants. Consumers are very sceptical about the outcomes of the many meetings they attend and will need to know how the information they have given will be used in some way. This is an excellent opportunity to develop some trust with consumer organisations and local groups. Let the groups know of other opportunities for their involvement with the health service and keep up contact.

Involving consumers in quality management

Why would it be a good idea to involve consumers in quality management?

Most managers would agree that effective management needs a rich combination of many skills. Management teams give the added depth of a number of perspectives on the same issues. Quality management is no different. There are a number of benefits to drawing in a number of people who have some expertise to offer:

- * clearer direction for the project from the start
- * involvement of key people during the development stage
- * equal status for all the members of the management team or committee
- * potential for greater credibility amongst those observing from outside the health service
- * efficiencies to be made by having the key people on board and easily contactable

How to involve a consumer on a quality management committee

Firstly identify the people who will have a strong interest in the committee. Consumers should ideally come from a formal group of some kind if at all possible, or have a network of other consumers they can tap into. One of the broad health consumer groups is suggested as a starting point.

Consumers are more likely to have a vested interest in the quality of the service if they have in some way used the service or been involved in a health issue.

In inviting people to join the quality committee, you should be clear about their role and ensure the equal status of all players involved, i.e. ensure that everyone has a say in all the decisions. If you have a particular set of decisions that you believe are the sole province of the health service, then they simply need to be stated right from the start.

Be prepared to go over some old ground while people learn about quality and about what you want to achieve. Make sure that you supply them with as much background material as possible when you first approach them.

Out of pocket expenses must be considered for consumer representatives to cover costs such as taxis, fares, and child care.

Involving consumers in health service evaluation

Evaluation is sometimes, but wrongly, considered the province of experts. While evaluation requires the rigour of scientific thought and approach, it does need those who are most affected to be involved, in order to really measure “value”. Consumers can contribute to the design of evaluation and the interpretation of information, as part of an evaluation process. The advice from consumers will be particularly helpful in regard to eliciting responses from the people who use the services provided.

Why involving consumers in health service evaluation is a good idea

The perspective of consumers will be valuable in evaluation as they can provide advice about what matters to consumers and how they may be able to convey their assessment of the service.

The consumers who were users of the health service can be the best arbiters of its success or otherwise. They can contribute first hand experience of the service and explain the impact it had on them individually. Such case studies are an excellent way to demonstrate the real impact of the service. The way in which care is provided is sometimes more important to consumers than the outcome.

How to involve consumers in evaluating the health service

There are various levels at which consumers can be involved in evaluation.

Consumers can be part of an evaluation process such as self-assessment.

Consumers can participate in evaluation as the receivers of the services provided. Apart from passively being counted as participants, consumers can provide both written and verbal feedback about their experiences within the health service. This may be by way of surveys, focus groups or even telephone polling.

Providing suggestion boxes and processes to use this information to evaluate and improve services can be successful. Contact Wollongong Hospital, Bulli Hospital and the Dental Service for more information.

Feedback to consumers taking part in the evaluation

It is essential that the people who give their name and address receive information about the outcome of the evaluation. Those who were part of a self-assessment team, or took part in focus groups or discussions should be given the option of receiving the full results.

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Which consultation methods?

Source - New South Wales Minerals Council. *Guidelines for Best Practice Community Consultation in the New South Wales Mining and Extractive Industries*. Sydney, 1997: p.23.

Chapter Eight-

Which Consultation Methods?

It is impossible to predict which consultation methods will be the most successful in any given situation. A company should therefore develop a flexible community consultation strategy. It should also experiment with a diverse range of consultation methods and evaluate their effectiveness. Ultimately the best consultation method depends on the characteristics of the project and the expectations of the community.

In this context, this Chapter offers broad guidance about when the consultation methods described in the previous Chapter may be appropriate.

High "outrage" Project

This table describes when the consultation strategies might be used for a project which is facing or likely to face strong community outrage. It describes the types of community consultation expectations which may be appropriate. This may change according to the community audience, phase of the project and level of community outrage.

	Browsers	Attentives	Actives
Concept Phase	Information Centre Newsletters	Information Centre Newsletters Public meetings	Information Centre Newsletters Public Meetings Informal contact EIS scoping committee
Planning Phase	Information Centre Newsletters Open Days Access to personnel Community Involvement	Information Centre Newsletters Public meetings Informal contact EIS	Public meetings Informal contact EIS joint committees Community Advisory Panels or Joint committees on specific issues Good neighbour agreements
Operational Phase	Information Centre Open Days Newsletters Access to personnel Community Involvement	Informal Contact Newsletters Community monitoring Complaints management Consultative Committee	Informal Contact Community monitoring Complaints management Consultative Committee Good neighbour agreements Joint Committees
Specific Issues Management	Newsletters Access to Personnel	Newsletters Public meetings Informal contact	Public meetings Informal Contact Good neighbour agreements Joint committees

Low "outrage" project

Low outrage projects will not need such intensive consultation. The following gives an indication about the strategies which may be appropriate for such a project.

	Browsers	Attentives	Actives
Concept Phase	Information Centre	Information Centre Public Meetings Informal contact	Information Centre EIS scoping committee Joint Committees
Planning Phase	Newsletters	EIS	EIS joint committees Community Advisory Panels or Joint Committees on specific issues Informal contact
Operational Phase	Newsletters Access to personne Involvement in the Community	Complaints Management Consultative Committee	Complaints Management Consultative Committee
Specific Issues Management	Newsletters	Consultative Committee	Consultative Committee Joint Committee