

UNIT 10: HANDOUT A

EXERCISE 3

DEFINITIONS OF COMMUNITY

There are three distinct definitions of community currently in use:

- A community of geography
- A community of interest
- A community of Identity

A community of geography

Where the definition would be all people living in a defined geographical area – a street, village or town.

This might seem straightforward but you have to be able to draw a line on a map to say why the issue or concern is only relevant to those people living within that line. This can be tricky: say for example your research issue is about a need for community facilities in a rural town, does the issue only concern the people in the town or does it affect people living in outlying areas? Probably the latter – so your line might well have to be drawn a good bit out from the town boundaries. There is no perfect answer to the question and the answer will be a matter of judgment depending on the nature of your research but it is one you will need to think, be clear about and be able to explain at a later date.

A community of interest

Where people are concerned with issues which are particular to a specific section of the community: This would be issues affecting, for example, people with learning disabilities, deaf people, carers, homeless people or elderly people. Here again you will have to decide the geographical limits of where you will carry out your research. Alternatively if the community of interest is about a facility or building you would start by deciding who uses or has an interest in that building and defining your research focus on that basis.

A community of identity

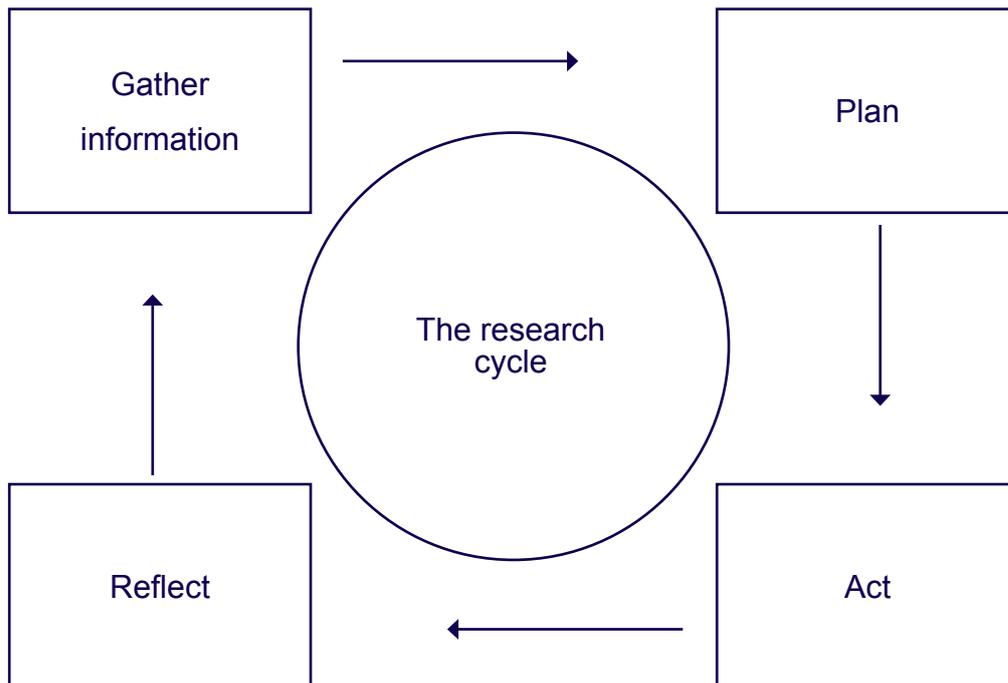
This would cover for example Gypsy Travellers, Migrant Workers or Refugees.



UNIT 10: HANDOUT B

EXERCISE 4

THE RESEARCH CYCLE



UNIT 10: HANDOUT C

EXERCISE 4

A practical example of using the cycle

“Going food shopping”

I begin at “**gather information**” so I have a quick look in the cupboards, fridge/ freezer to take account of what I have got already. Then I stop and think about who is going to be in that week, what family members work/school/club pattern is that week, who needs packed lunches etc, this helps me see what I need.

I then move on to “**planning**”, what do I need to buy? Where am I going to buy it? Will I get it all from the supermarket or will I get some there and then go to the local butchers, greengrocer to support them?

And then I go and do it. “**Act**”. I gather up bags, purse, wallet and go to the shops. I gather up shopping in trolleys, deciding how strategically I’m going to get what I need, maybe having to back track at times when I realise that I have missed something or remember that my daughter is having friends over for dinner and I will need more vegetables.

So I get it, go home and put messages away and I “**reflect**” on the success of my trip. Oh dear, done it again, spent over £30 and only have one full meal. I don’t have enough of some things and too much of others – including chocolate and I didn’t take enough bags so had to use some plastic ones which makes me feel really bad.

So, next time I go shopping, I promise myself to write up a list and take enough reusable bags - identifying “new” action for the next time I go shopping.

I then go around the cycle once again and review how effective my next shopping trip is when I take new action.



UNIT 10: HANDOUT D

EXERCISE 5

TAKEN FROM EXPERIENCES OF THE SCOTTISH COMMUNITY ACTION RESEARCH FUND 2002 - 2009

Published Information

As course participants will be aware from some of the exercises, a good starting point for research is looking for information that has already been published. This is useful as a basis for developing your research idea or forming the basis for developing your research i.e. letting you know how many people live in a particular area or what the main health issues are there. Equally, local authority Single Outcome Agreements or the strategic plans of Local Authority departments or other agencies will let you know where their priorities are.

Two notes of caution. Firstly if you are looking at statistics, particularly Health ones, remember these can be really tricky to understand fully so make sure you read any accompanying notes and get someone else to look at them and see if their interpretation is the same as yours. Secondly always check the date of when the information was published. You might find it is too old for your needs or has been superseded.

Questionnaires

There a range of ways you can use a questionnaire:

Postal

If you post a questionnaire out to people even with a stamped addressed return envelope, you will be lucky if you get a 20% return rate.

You can up the rate if you deliver by hand and pick up by hand. This is only practical if you are dealing with a small number of people/ houses. A tip, if you are going to pick up by hand, is to attach a note to the questionnaire stating the day and rough time you will be calling back to pick the questionnaire up.

On the other hand by using this method you are providing the opportunity for everyone in the community to express their views. You are less likely to be accused of “Nobody asked me for my opinion” at a later date.

Stopping people in the street

Only really works if you are asking very few questions and you can clarify that the person you stop is part of your” target group”. There is nothing particularly wrong with this method although the people carrying out the research will need to be confident about stopping strangers and engaging with them. It might help, of course, if you are doing this locally and people know who you are.



UNIT 10: HANDOUT D (CONT)

Leaving out in a public place

Not a good way to get returns - people tend to ignore them or one person fills in fifty so you get a biased return. We would suggest you don't use this approach.

Sampling

It is possible to determine a sample of people or houses and then go knock doors and ask people to go through your questions face to face.

Knowing what size of sample to take can be done in various ways. You could decide to go to every second door or just ask as many people as you can with the time and resources available to you. Be careful that you don't just pick on the same type of people. Make sure, if it's a general questionnaire, on say a community of geography, that you get a range of ages and male and female respondents.

You might want to try and get a statistically significant sample.

If you Web search "sample size calculator" you will find links to a number of sites which will let you check the size of sample you will need. As you will see this can be quite complicated with issues relating to confidence levels and confidence intervals but there are explanations of what this means on most of the sites.

Snowballing

This is a technique which states you just keep interviewing till you stop getting any different answers and then stop. The argument goes that there is a point when there is nothing more to be gained and all you are doing is carrying on for the sake of it. If you are using this approach you should not just ask two or three people but a realistic number.

Size of Questionnaire

You have to be very disciplined in devising a questionnaire. We all tend to start thinking we need to ask more and more questions just to make sure we have everything covered. The result is you end up asking loads of questions, which take up a lot of time, take a long time to analyse, and gathers information you are unlikely to ever use. Worst of all people tend to get put off and many will terminate the interview or not return your questionnaire.

For every question think why you need the information and what purpose it serves in relation to the issue you are researching. If you can't clearly identify reason and purpose you probably don't need to ask it.

A good questionnaire is short and to the point but it is important to get it right - you really don't have a second chance.

Always get a small number of people, not involved in writing it, to fill it in as a test exercise and tell you what they thought of it.



UNIT 10: HANDOUT D (CONT)

The Questions

Be very careful that you are not asking leading questions. A leading question is one where the question is constructed in such a way that the person answering is encouraged to give an answer that might not actually reflect what they think but what you want to hear. Have a look back at the examples of good and bad questions we gave in Step 1 regarding your research question. The same rules apply.

Question Formats

Formats tend to fall into two types.

The first is called an “open format” where the person answering is asked/ encouraged to give a full answer, an example

What do you think of the local community facilities?

Open format is good for getting a more developed, longer response but much more difficult to analyse. Not only do you have to read the responses but it can be difficult putting responses into categories if you want to quote percentages.

The second format is closed? This means people are given options to choose and you/they tick or circle as appropriate. Closed questions can be set up in a number of ways, the most popular being:

Example 1

Do you think the local community facilities are adequate for community needs?

Yes?

No?

If you are using this format make sure there are clear boxes where people tick yes or no. If you don't, people or even the person conducting the interview, might put the tick in a place between possible answers and make it impossible for you to judge at a later date what their response was.

Example 2

What do you think of the local community facilities? Circle the response that best represents your view.

Very poor poor average good very good

This format is good for easy analysis in terms of getting numbers and percentages quickly. The drawback is that the responses you get don't answer the question why? You might have to ask supplementary questions to get more detail.



UNIT 10: HANDOUT D (CONT)

Supplementary Questions

These are important if you want to find out more detailed information. Consider the example above; say you get 200 returns all saying the community facilities are poor/ very poor. You have a number but you don't know why people think that or what they think would be an improvement. Is it because

- They are in poor physical condition
- They are not big enough
- They don't open at the right times
- They don't put on the right kind of activities
- They are difficult to get to by public transport
- Other. Please state -----

Your supplementary question or questions can also be open or closed for example

Why do you say that? – (open)

Or closed as above a) – f) where a response could be ticked off. The option f), other, is important as it allows for reasons to be given that you might not have thought of.

Semi structured interviews.

These are based on the idea of a questionnaire and are usually open questions which form a framework for an interview. The questions will be the key areas where you want a person's opinions or views but will allow you the flexibility to probe responses or ask other questions as they come to you during the interview but will also keep you on track.

Semi structured interviews are good for using for very specific people such as Councillors, Officers or specific individuals.

You can also use them as a way of checking research findings you already have or for seeking support for your findings.

They are also good for getting quotes. Often people will say something that you find sums up a feeling or a view. If they do, ask if you can use that as a quote which you can use to illustrate a point in your final report

Remember quotes don't need to be attributed to a person specifically but just put in quotation marks. Nevertheless if you want to use the exact words then ask permission.

Many of the SCARF reports have had added power and impact where they have used quotes and/or pictures to illustrate the point that they are trying to make.



UNIT 10: HANDOUT D (CONT)

Focus Groups

Focus groups are good for getting in depth views from a relatively small number of people usually with a shared interest. Focus groups are basically about getting a group of local people together in a room, around 10 to 20 people, and ask their views on a limited number of questions relevant to your research. They are particularly good for exploring questions in more depth. So for example you can get people to discuss some finding you already have, explore ideas and ask why they came to a particular view and generally probe answers.

To work well focus groups need to be really well planned in advance to ensure they work effectively.

Things to think about:

Who and how many people do you want to invite

Is there a good place and time to hold the focus group. This will depend on who you want to attend. There is no point asking people who work to attend a Focus Group at four in the afternoon.

Equally think about any events that are happening, even if it is only on the television, which might cause people not to come. If there is a big football match, or a final of a reality show being televised have you got a realistic chance that many people will turn up?

How much/ what kind of space do you need - and ensure it is appropriate for a Focus Group

Do you need any support facilities i.e. crèche, wheelchair access

Can you provide tea and coffee?

How are you going to record what people are saying ? What stationery do you need?

Can you pay people's expenses? Some organisations pay people a small amount of money, say £10, to cover travel costs and as a thank you for their time – and use this as an incentive to get them to attend.

Next

How are you going to run the event? Have you got a key set of questions that you want answers/opinions on?

What are these questions and what order should they be in?

Do you want people to sign in? This is probably a good idea.

In a number of cases, not just Focus Groups, the event is started with a general discussion about “Ground Rules” which are written up and kept in full view for reference. These would be things like

- No swearing
- No interrupting
- Respect other people's opinion
- No shouting



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Hopefully you won't need them

How many people do you need to help facilitate the event? Do you need someone to take notes? Do you need others to help work with smaller groups?

Think about how are you going to introduce the event?

What are the key questions you want to ask them? Is there a logical order to put those questions in? How long have you got altogether and how much time can you reasonably allocate for each question?

How can you make people feel comfortable enough to contribute?

Try to think of ways you can vary the way people can contribute. Small group discussions, flip chart paper, post its etc. It is good if you can use a range of methods to give variety and maintain interest.

It might be good to get people to move around a room. Have opportunities to let people stick things up on flip chart paper or react to stuff that is already there

It is important to keep things moving and encourage people to get involved and say what they think. You should always be on the lookout to see if someone is not contributing and not getting involved and take steps to encourage them to do so. Ask them what they think about something.

Be positive and upbeat.

How are you going to write it up and capture the key messages?

Always have a conclusion, where you sum up what you have found out, what the key messages have been and what you are going to do next. Always thank people for their views and input.

Larger Consultative Events

There are different ways of making such events useful and meaningful.

You could organise an event along the lines already suggested whereby people come along to see an exhibition and have easy ways of recording their comments or views.

You could do something whereby you have a general introduction stating the focus of the meeting and break those attending into small groups to discuss specific questions, with a facilitator for each group and bring their answers or views back together at the end of their discussion.

A third way would be to hold a meeting to present your general research findings and get people's views and opinions on the findings and how you could take them forward. Again depending on funds, or availability, it might be possible to hire or borrow electronic voting equipment, which you often see being used on television programmes. This allows people sitting in the audience to vote by pressing a button and you to get an indication of the level of response. If you can get hold of the equipment it would be great for getting feedback on issues/ areas of concern in the community or for use after you



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present your research and ask the people at the meeting to endorse and support your recommendations.

We would not recommend starting off your research by inviting lots of people to a public meeting and just asking for their views. You will never keep things on track, will find it difficult to control and have great difficulty in recording the views expressed.

In all cases of large scale events preparation is just as complicated, probably more so, as all the other parts of the research process. Think about whether there is a need for microphones, who is going to put out the seating, how are you going to programme it, control it, and capture views and opinions and finally, who is going to clean up?

Other methods of carrying out action research that have proved popular with groups involved in SCARF are listed below and are great ways of getting people active, creative and involved. In the main these are not stand alone techniques but are used as triggers for further research or discussion. However they can stand alone as representation of an individual view or those of a particular group which add to other research findings.

Story Telling/ Story dialogue

This is not as simple as it sounds. Like most of the methods identified, the key to using story dialogue is preparation and this will vary depending on to what extent you use it. Sometimes it is used with a small group of people and one story teller where the story of one person's experience is used as a means to encourage those listening to reflect on their own experiences or feelings and contribute to the discussion. In other cases large scale events can be created around this methodology with a number of small groups created around individual story telling sessions. At the end of the event all the groups come together to feedback and identify key lessons for the group as a whole.

You have to be careful when using this method as you are asking someone to talk from a very personal perspective and potentially on a topic which could be upsetting for them. So ground rules have to be very clearly understood and stuck to. This applies to the story teller and those participating. You really don't want the person telling the story to ramble on for a long time, so pre briefing and a set time limit are good ideas. Equally those who are listening need to be pre briefed, need to be aware of ground rules and how the session or event will be structured.

Also think about how you will record the key themes or issues as they emerge and how you will bring these together in contributing to your research.

Our Community Health Exchange Team has done a considerable amount of work around Story Dialogue and has published a pamphlet on how to use it. We have put it on our website if you want to have a look in more detail – it's on the CHEX website www.chex.org.uk under HIC and tutor resources.



UNIT 10: HANDOUT D (CONT)

Drawings

These are good for working with children. You ask the children to draw their street, neighbourhood, area and then ask why they chose to draw particular bits or things and why they are important to them, what they like and don't like. You can record that discussion and use that and their drawings as evidence of their distinct perspective but you could also use their drawings as a display, at a Focus Group for example, to help prompt discussion.

Remember doing any kind of work with children or vulnerable people requires Disclosure so be careful how you proceed. If you haven't got disclosure could you ask the teacher if they could make the activity part of curricular activity? Could you ask carers if they would help?

Drawings can be used equally well with small groups of adults. You ask them to draw their area, community or experience of something and then ask them to explain their drawing or map.

You can be as straightforward as getting each person to explain one by one or you can generate more general discussion by asking if others in the group drew the same or different things.

Make sure everyone gets a chance to talk about what they have drawn.

Make sure you keep a record of the discussion and views expressed. Again there is no reason why the drawings, in certain circumstances, could not be used as evidence in their own right, but generally they would be used as supporting evidence to other findings.

Cameras

Mobile phone, digital or cheap disposable cameras can be given to people, or they can use their own, to take photographs of things that mean something to them, good or bad, in their area or places they visit.

Examples of how cameras have been used are:

People have used them in housing schemes to show litter problems, vandalism, spaces they like, an object that sums up their feelings about their community.

Others have given the cameras to people using parks and other open spaces to photograph specific bits of the park, space they like.

Again there needs to be time and opportunity for them to talk about the picture they have taken and why.

Photographs are also good to record the activity in your research for example people at a meeting, exhibition etc. The photographs can be good to use in your report to illustrate how you carried out your research as well as illustrate the points you want to make.

Again you have to be very careful and make sure that if people are being photographed, that they have given permission for this to happen and that the photo can be used.



UNIT 10: HANDOUT D (CONT)

Observation and recording

This is very straightforward. It is simply looking at what is happening and making a note of what you see. For example: if you want to know who is using a park and for what purpose then you could simply watch and note down how many people use the park, what for and when. You could then follow this up with questionnaires to find out some more detailed information.

Flip chart paper and Post-it pads.

There is a whole range of ways that these can be used.

You can write a question on the flip chart paper, stick it on a wall and get people to write their thoughts on the post it's and stick it to the paper or just write directly on to the paper.

You can for example have one sheet with "What I like about "and another "What I don't like" and people can write things up. You could even have a third "What can we do about the problems"

You could then look for commonality in the post its and group them to see what the top priorities or issues are.

Again you can use the findings as a basis for discussion then or at a later date.

You can do a list of issues on the flipchart and give people an equal number of "sticky dots" and ask them to allocate the dots to their top priorities. Say for example you have done a questionnaire on what improvements people would like to see made to their area and you have 20 different things people want – but really what you want is to get the top 5 and argue for them. Then you could use the above method at a Focus Group or Open Meeting to get those priorities.

A tip is to give each person 4 dots and ask them to put their dots on one or more priority. They can put all their dots on one or spread them over two or all three. When they are finished you simply count up the dots for each priority and the ones with the most dots can be considered to be of the highest priority; the one with the next highest number being the second priority and so on.

If you use this approach make sure you have a wide range of different groups in your community represented or a sample of the people who identified the 20 things. If you have 20 suggestions from teenagers, don't ask the Pensioners Club to do the prioritising.

Some groups have used variations of this in the street, in community halls and at supermarket entrances. (With permission)

If you are using these methods it is important that people have enough space to feel comfortable and have privacy to write what they like. So make sure you are not hanging over them as they do it.

Post- its sometimes fall off so if you are keeping the flipchart paper to work on later, use cello tape to hold the post its in place.



UNIT 10: HANDOUT D (CONT)

Walking along with people

This approach has been used quite a lot in parks and other outdoor settings where the researchers, with permission, walk along with the person using the space and get the person to show them their favourite space or tell them what they enjoy about the place. Views can be recorded either in note form or by using recording equipment.

Vox box/ Video box

This very much depends on your ability to access the necessary resources.

This method is the provision of a quiet space and sound recording/ DVD equipment where you get people to go and record their views on the issue you are researching. By getting as many people as you can to do this you then build up a picture of commonality or difference in people's views or experience.

Case Studies

As a research methodology, case studies are not recommended as stand alone techniques as they are difficult to build a general argument from. They can however be used as a very powerful support, often in a different format, for example using a DVD or personal diary format to illustrate and put a very personalised perspective on wider research findings that have been collected.

Some examples of how these methods have been used in SCARF projects

A group concerned about their local environment: The researchers got children to draw what they saw on the way to and from school and then got them to talk about their drawings telling what they liked and didn't like and what would make it a more pleasant journey. The group then used the drawings as the basis of an exhibition for adults and then got the adults attending to express their views on the area concerned.

A group concerned with issues facing elderly carers: In addition to a questionnaire survey the group made a DVD to show the problems faced by one lady caring for both her husband and son

A group displaying possible plans for a community facility left pens and post its at different positions in the display. The people visiting the display were encouraged to use the post its to write down what they thought of the proposals and stick them to blank sheets of paper stuck to the wall.

A community group was concerned with a small number of multi storey flats.

Posters were put up in the foyers letting people know that they would be carrying out their research the following week. They then used flip charts and stands, at the entrance to each block and asked people to write their views on the issue they were concerned with. If necessary the person manning the flip chart would write the response from the person living there. The group did not man the entrances all day but chose specific times to "catch" people as they



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took kids to school, came home from work, went out at weekends etc. The group then “posted up” their findings to let people know the results and to invite them to a meeting to discuss what to do next.

Several groups:

- Gave disposable cameras to people so they could photograph things they liked and didn't like in their community. The photographs formed an exhibition which acted as the basis for further research
- Set up exhibitions in their local supermarkets and recorded what people thought. Some just set stands up in the street and used a variety of methods to “capture” people's views or thoughts
- Used sound recording methods to interview people as they walked through an area. Others set up “Vox box” booths which people could go in to and record their views privately.
- Used DVD case studies to show, at an individual level, the difficulties faced by a “community of interest”. One group, who were researching problems for elderly carers published a report on their findings, but really brought their message home by supplementing their report with a three minute DVD case study showing the daily issues faced by an elderly lady and the very real difficulties she had caring for two dependant adults.



UNIT 10: HANDOUT E

EXERCISE 6

DEVELOPING A RESEARCH PLAN

- What is your research question?
- What is the community on which the research will focus?
- What do you anticipate the impact of your research will be?
- What research methods will you use and how?
- How will the research be implemented, by whom and within what timescales?
- What are skills available to you and where will you need help?
- What resources will you need and where will you get them?
- How will your research demonstrate an inclusive approach?
- How will ethical issues be addressed?
- What are you going to do with your findings and how will you present them?

