

Shared Solutions – Uniting users and staff in public service improvement

Basic Toolkit

Shared Solutions is a one-day collaborative workshop bringing together users and frontline staff. A hugely dynamic method to improve public services in local communities, **Shared Solutions** identifies tangible, shared priorities, helps to build respect between users and frontline staff, and facilitates negotiation and exchange of local expertise.

This basic toolkit is not a set script, but more a set of pointers for key things to consider when using **Shared Solutions**.

I. Using an agency

- ❑ It is not essential to use a research agency to help you run the workshop but there are various advantages in doing so. Agencies will provide assistance with all the stages outlined below: recruitment, incentives, workshop design, facilitation, transcription, analysis and a final report. Of these, user recruitment is very difficult to do properly without an agency; other tasks can be done in-house but require experience. The main disadvantage of using an agency is cost.
- ❑ If you are going to use an agency be sure to:
 - Follow good practice in procurement, and get at least three quotes for the work. It can be useful to approach different types of agencies, such as local and national, small and large, as they will have different strengths and weaknesses.
 - Provide a brief for them on the basis of which they can estimate costs and give them at least a week to provide a quote. As a guide let the agency know:
 - The background to the research
 - Why the research is needed
 - What the information will be used for
 - What the overall objectives are
 - Who is to be included in the research
 - Any suggestions for approach (but be aware they may offer alternatives)
 - Exactly what outputs are required
 - Any timing or budgetary constraints
 - What format you want the quote in (whether VAT is to be included, whether travel costs are to be included etc)
 - Try to identify the areas of differential cost between agencies. Some low quotes may not be value for money if they are not allocating sufficient staff time to analysing and writing up the findings. High quotes may reflect high hourly rates of pay for researchers, without offering obvious benefits.
 - Consider the agencies' experience both in the area under study, and in the methodology proposed – ask them to provide case studies and examples of recent projects undertaken
 - Select an agency and set up a meeting to discuss project design. Allow enough time for the agency to schedule the work into its planning. Agree clear deliverables (final report, presentation) and clarify what the roles of your organisation and the agency will be in setting up, running and using workshop findings. For example, it may make sense for you to organise staff recruitment, book rooms and organise refreshments, whereas the agency will organise user recruitment, design a draft agenda, transcribe and analyse findings, etc
 - Stay in regular contact throughout the project, and ask for regular progress updates

II. Recruitment

- ❑ Ensure an appropriate ratio of users to staff. For example, if it is a public service sector that is characterised by sometimes adversarial relationships between staff and users – e.g. social housing, benefit or employment advice – have an equal ratio of participants from each group.
- ❑ Explain to all participants in advance what the research is for and that the names of users or staff participating will remain confidential.

Recruiting users

- ❑ Use an impartial and experienced recruiter who is not affiliated with the users or the frontline staff to recruit participants and run the workshop
- ❑ Ensure that the users you recruit to participate are representative of the local user population of the particular public service by:
 - Gender
 - Age groups
 - Socio-economic status
 - Ethnicity
 - Disability
 - Other characteristics that might influence how they experience the public service, such as having children, language capacity, immigration status, religion etc.
- ❑ Exclude users who work on topics related to the public service in question, e.g. council workers etc.
- ❑ Pay a honorarium to the users, e.g. £75 for the day

Recruiting staff

- ❑ Recruit staff internally by publicising the workshop and identifying possible participants
- ❑ Don't rely entirely on staff volunteers – they may be more motivated or user-focused than other staff and not representative of the overall staff team.
- ❑ Do recruit a balanced mix of staff, by gender, ethnicity, age, and any other relevant characteristics
- ❑ Allow staff to attend the workshop in work time, or provide an honorarium if attending outside work time.

III. Running *Shared Solutions*

Users and staff start off working together as a whole group (in plenary). They will then split into separate sessions of users and staff. Towards the end of the day, they will work together in teams. After each session, users and staff will share their thinking.

A. Introduction: this section of the workshop aims to set the parameters and the context of the workshop, and ensure people feel empowered.

In plenary:

- ❑ Welcome and thank everyone
- ❑ Explain the workshop, its aims and sponsors, and importantly what the results lead to
- ❑ Clarify how the session will be run
- ❑ Talk about the role of the participants
- ❑ Talk about the role of the facilitator
- ❑ Assure anonymity
- ❑ Housekeeping
- ❑ Reassure participants to be open and honest but respect and listen to each others' views – emphasise the collaborative nature of the workshop

B. Ice breaker: this is a very important section, aimed at personalising users and staff and recognising each other as human beings

In plenary:

- ❑ Encourage participants to talk to the person next to them and introduce themselves (make sure users and staff are mixed up)
- ❑ Get them to do an exercise in pairs that makes people realise that they are dealing with people like themselves. For example: aside from name/job/family, find out what animal they would be if they were one and why
- ❑ Get each pair to feed back to the rest of the workshop

C. Mapping out the issues: this section explores overall views towards issues in the community and attitudes, experiences and perceptions of the public service in question

In separate sessions, e.g. two groups of users and two groups of staff:

- ❑ Give each participant post-it notes to write down all the key issues that they think the community faces – one issue per post-it note
- ❑ Stick all the post-it notes on a flipchart – group the notes into common themes/areas:
 - Discuss common themes and issues
 - Explore relative saliency of issues
 - Discuss any references the public service in question
- ❑ Use self-completion bubbles: “When I think about [public service] in my community, I think about...”
 - Discuss responses
 - What are the biggest issues at the moment?
 - What are the good things/bad things about [public service] in my community?
- ❑ Explore views and experiences of interactions with staff (in the user group) and users (in the staff group)
 - Discuss positive/negative experiences and interactions – what works well/not so well?
 - Discuss overall views in both groups towards the service provider

D. Sharing the learning: this section revolves around the groups presenting their ‘findings’ back to each other, which will lead into a discussion on similarities and differences. Kick this section off by selecting one or two spokespersons from each group

In plenary:

- ❑ Identify the key issues in their community
- ❑ List good/bad things about [public service] in the community?
- ❑ Explain views on how the relationship is with the users/staff
- ❑ Discuss common themes and responses
- ❑ Explore similarities and differences between users and staff

E. Exploring aspirations: this section looks at people's aspirations when it comes to the public service in question and initial thinking on what the priorities should be moving forward

In mixed groups of users and staff:

- ❑ Using projective techniques, such as psychodrawings, get participants to describe or draw a picture of what they would like to see when it comes to the public service in question (focus on what they think is achievable)
- ❑ Ask participants to present ideas or drawings back to each other
- ❑ Discuss common themes and ideas
- ❑ Explore how far/near people see these aspirations – and reasons behind this stance
- ❑ Identify what could make it happen and who could make it happen
- ❑ List what participants think the priorities should be in the short run/long term

F. Thinking about tangible priorities, indicators and issues: this section looks at awareness and perceptions of national and local targets and delivery-related policies of the public service sector in question.

In plenary:

- ❑ Present a list of national targets and indicators for the public service in question
 - What do they think of them?
 - Do they agree/disagree with them?
 - Are they the right targets and indicators?
 - Do they seem achievable?
 - How near or far are we from them?
- ❑ Present a list of the local targets and indicators
 - What do they think of them?
 - Do they agree/disagree with them?
 - Are they the right targets and indicators?
 - Do they seem achievable?
 - How near or far are we from them?

In separate groups of users and staff:

- ❑ Explore levels of awareness of one or two crucial policies around the particular public service that have a significant impact on the service delivery (e.g. in housing it would be the choice-based letting policy and decent homes for all policy)
 - What do they know? What have they heard?
 - Good and bad things?
 - Personal experiences?

In plenary:

- ❑ Present a short amount of information on the one or two crucial policies
 - Explore further reactions?
 - Opportunities and drawbacks?

G. Identifying your own tangible priorities: this section is based on staff and users developing their own set of tangible priorities and indicators for the public service in question.

In separate groups of users and staff:

- ❑ Ask each group to develop a flip chart with what they think the targets should be for the public service in their community
- ❑ Depending on the sector, possibly hand out a list of criteria which need to be thought about when developing targets

H. Identifying shared tangible priorities: this section will revolve around staff and users developing a common set of priorities to improve the respective local public service. Allow enough time for staff and users working in the mixed groups to talk through the full range of issues and to get used to communicating on a more informal and equal basis than may be possible in their day-to-day interactions.

In plenary:

- ❑ Ask spokespeople from each group to present back their set of tangible priorities
- ❑ Discuss presentations
- ❑ Explore similarities and differences between users and staff

In mixed groups of users and staff:

- ❑ Ask the groups to develop a common agenda for the delivery of the public service in the community structured around:
 - Specific goals
 - Indicators – what things should it be measured against?
 - Priorities – what should be given priority?
 - Overall ambitions – where should we be heading?
 - Practicalities – how will it work on the ground?

In plenary:

- ❑ Invite spokespeople – one user and one staff member – from each of the groups to present back
 - Discuss presentations
 - Explore similarities and differences

I. Final things and wrapping up

In plenary:

- ❑ Hand out a postcard to each participant and ask them to note down the one thing that should change based on the discussions of the day
- ❑ Invite each participant to read out his/her response
- ❑ Ask for final comments
- ❑ Talk about what happens next, ask participants if they want to be involved. Ask for their contact details if they are happy to be contacted about follow-up activities.

THANK AND CLOSE
****Payment of incentives****