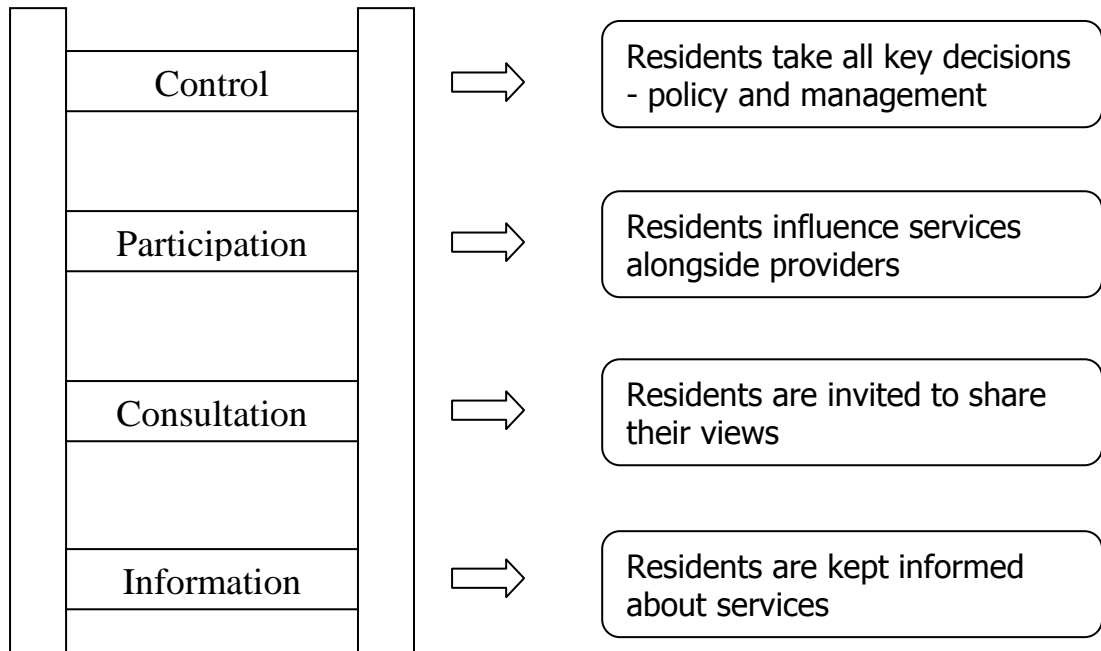


Involving residents in your RMO

The ladder of involvement

Residents using many public services have some choice about the degree of involvement they would like. The 'ladder of involvement' is a useful model for analysing the different possibilities:



Just because the RMO has achieved control, it doesn't mean that residents in the area feel or want control personally. You need to think about the opportunities for residents in your community to become involved at different steps on the ladder.

With greater power comes greater responsibility – and so we often find that, the further up the ladder we go, the fewer the number of people there are involved. An effective RMO will pay attention to all steps on the ladder, since many people start off by receiving and paying attention to information or responding to consultation, and then move on up the ladder over time.

Consulting people about RMO services and other local issues

These are some of the main methods that you can use to **consult** local people about the issues that affect them.

QUESTIONNAIRES

Self-completed questionnaires can be posted (with return envelopes) or delivered & collected door-to-door. Alternatively they might be left in meeting-places or housing offices for people to pick up. You will get a higher response by using questionnaires to interview people one-to-one – but this is time-intensive and needs proper training.

SATISFACTION SURVEYS

Satisfaction surveys are often designed to find out residents' satisfaction with particular services, such as repairs or estate cleaning. They may take the form of tick-box questionnaires, and can be collected

- face to face
- by post
- over the phone.



If the aim is to gauge the general level of satisfaction with a service at a point in time, then a 'sample' (cross-section) of residents may be sufficient, rather than surveying everyone.

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Many service-providers use feedback forms and cards to check satisfaction with one-off services such as a repair or improvement, closure of a nuisance case, or a move into a new home. This kind of information can be supplemented by follow-up phone-calls or questionnaires.

BLOCK / SMALL AREA MEETINGS

Meetings can be organised in blocks (of flats) or in small areas, to find out the key issues or problems affecting people. It is good to start with very 'open' agendas, allowing people to raise any issues and noting everything down.



DISCUSSIONS WITH EXISTING GROUPS OR ORGANISATIONS

Instead of setting up special meetings, you might go to groups or events that are already set up and running – and ask for some time on their agendas to consult with their members.



FOCUS GROUPS ON PARTICULAR THEMES

If there is a particular theme around which you want to take action (for example, the environment or children's play) you might organise a group to focus on it. The group might meet once or a number of times over the life of a project.

STALLS / EXHIBITIONS

Having a stall at an event (such as a fun-day) or in a public space (such as a shopping precinct or library) can be a way of informing and consulting people when they are feeling sociable.

Top 10 tips for being inclusive

Many community organisations complain about lack of participation and the small number of people who actually run things. Here we suggest 10 ways to open up your RMO to more people.

But before you take the plunge, make sure that you really are committed to involving more people. While you may see yourselves as over-worked and the only people who care, others may see you as a clique acting to exclude outsiders from discussion or decisions. Are you really prepared for the challenge of involving a wider range of people?



1. **Find out about other community and voluntary groups** who are active in your area. Rather than competing to involve people, perhaps there are ways you could work co-operatively with them. The more you are seen as open and flexible, the more people will be willing to get involved.
2. **Use outreach** work to make contact with sections of the community who are currently under-involved. You may need to meet people on their 'home ground' before they will be prepared to come to you.
3. **Keep local people informed** about what you are doing – for example through a regular newsletter or information sheet – and advertise the fact that you are looking for involvement.
4. **Get regular feedback** from local people, to find out what they think of your activities and results, and to keep in touch with the issues that are important to them.
5. **Offer introductory sessions or events** for potential members, so that they can find out about your RMO before making any commitment to get involved.
6. **Run social events** such as fun-days, coffee-mornings, summer outings etc. – so that people get concrete evidence of the way your organisation contributes to the community, and they learn about you in a relaxed, enjoyable setting.
7. **Take care of new people** when they first come to your meetings or events. Make sure they get a personal welcome and that the issues they bring are taken seriously. As soon as possible, give willing new members something practical to do. Most people like to feel useful, so long as the tasks are within their capability and resources.

8. **Offer training** to new people, to prepare them for fuller participation in the RMO. This does not need to be too formal; it might just be some practical support, to show them the ropes.
9. **Make your meetings user friendly.** Meetings need to balance good 'process' (being enjoyable) with 'product' (resulting in good decisions and action).
10. **Develop ways for sharing tasks and responsibilities** within the RMO. For any project, it's a good idea to break it down to its smallest parts and give as many people as possible a part to play – at the same time making sure it is co-ordinated effectively. If you have enough people, you might consider setting up working groups, enabling people to take responsibility for particular things they are interested in.