



Government Consultations: What are they and how do I respond to them?



What are Government Consultations?

As part of the policy making process the government publishes consultations on legislative changes or policies it wants to introduce as part of the policy making process. The Government produces a consultation document that details the change they want to make and asks interested people and organisations to say what they think.

The Consultation Period is at the first stage of the legislative procedure before a Bill enters Parliament. The Consultation helps to formulate the policy by gathering feedback from the public.

How will I know when a Consultation is happening?

The Government lists all open consultations on it's website;

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications?publication_filter_option=consultations

You can also find out about consultations on the website of the relevant department. For example consultations on health policies can be found on the Department of Health website.

Voice4Change England will also keep you informed of any upcoming consultations we think are relevant to BME Voluntary Sector organisations, through our website, e-alert and twitter.

Why should I respond to a consultation?

You are the expert! Often BME voluntary sector organisations know the communities they work with better than anyone. You may have evidence or insights in your sector or community from your work that no-body else has.

If it's going to impact you, your organisation, your service users, members, volunteers, or communities you work with, then it's important that you have a say!

Consultations are an important way to influence policy before it even gets to parliament, whilst it is still being shaped and formed.

How long do Consultations run for?

The Government normally allows 12 weeks for people to respond to a consultation. However, sometimes they give less time. So it's important to always check the deadline when responding to a consultation to give yourself enough time. If you are



a membership or stakeholder organisation remember to leave enough time it circulate your response for feedback. Gathering your members or stakeholders thoughts and feedback will improve your response and make it more meaningful.

What does a consultation document look like?

A consultation document should include an introduction which documents what the consultation is about, who may be interested in the consultation and how to respond to the consultation, as well as a brief outline of what is due to happen following the consultation period.

The rest of the document should cover, in detail, the changes they want to make, or the policy they are thinking of introducing. Each paragraph is given a reference number, which should help you when responding to different parts of the document.

Throughout the documents there will be a number of questions. These are the areas upon which they need seeking specific feedback.

Do I need to answer all the questions?

Only answer the questions you are interested in or have an opinion on. But remember not just to stick to the questions, if there is something in the document you want to respond to but they have not asked a direct question about, include it anyway. The consultation document should invite feedback on all of the policy and changes included, not just the questions.

8 Tips on how to respond to a consultation;

1. **Work Together.** If you don't have to capacity or resources to respond to a consultation, perhaps you could work write a joint response with a similar organisation. Alternatively, an organisation may be writing a response that you could jointly sign.
2. **Say who you are.** Include information on whether you are responding as an individual, a representative of other citizens, or an organisation, but also let them know if you want your response to be confidential.
3. **Acknowledge the positive, as well as criticising the negative.** If the consultation document includes ideas you like, say so! A consultation response can include both criticism and praise.
4. **Focus on the most important issues and prioritise you biggest concerns.** Remember that you do not need to respond to every point in the consultation.



5. **Use Evidence.** Using evidence to support your case will help your argument. You can always include statistics, diagrams, or case studies in your response, or attach any additional evidence alongside your response, along as you clearly make reference it in your response.
6. **Be brief, clear and concise.** Make sure your document has a clear layout and can be clearly read, if you need to, include bullet points, lists and links. You should also include an introduction and summary as well as clearly referencing the relevant sections or questions in the consultation document.
7. **Make sure you stick to the deadline.** This means allowing time to collate evidence, write your response and share with stakeholders to feedback and redraft if necessary before you submit it.
8. **Publicise!** Tell other people and organisations that may be interested about the consultation and put your response on your website. You should also circulate to your members or stakeholders.

Finally, if you are a BME charity or third sector organisation and need further support or help responding to a consultation, you can get in contact with Voice4Change via email at info@voice4change-england.co.uk or 02076974240.