

Technical Reports and Discussion Papers

Engagement range	Inform/Consult
Difficulty level	Hard (specialist skills required)
Cost	Medium (\$1,000 to \$10,000) High (over \$10,000)
When might you use it	To communicate an issue
Number of people required to help to organise	Small (three -six) to large (over six) team of people
Time to organise	Medium (six weeks to six months) Long (over six months)
Size of audience	Large (over 30)
Issues/resources to think about	Venue; Catering; Staffing; Moderator/facilitator; Overhead/data projectors and screen; Props for working in groups (pens, paper, pins, etc.); Children's requirements Staff; Printed public information materials; Access to layout and publication expertise/facilities (reports produced for public access should be as brief as possible and include a balance of words/illustrations/maps)
Innovation level	Low

Description

Technical reports can outline research and policy findings, and can also be used to outline proposals. The most popular format is the discussion paper which, when combined with calls for submissions, can provide both information and public input.

Consultation activities often require plain language documents that ensure technical information is presented comprehensively to a wide range of stakeholders. Technical reports are widely used for this purpose.

Objective

- To provide detailed information on complex or technical issues.

Desired Outcome

- Background information that can be used in making decisions about complex issues, or that allows good quality, accurate information to be provided to those members of the community who are interested or affected by a proposal or issue.

Uses/Strengths

- Can provide a large number of people and organisations with information.
- Can be well thought out and prepared by those with considerable knowledge, interest and expertise in the issue.
- Provides for a thorough explanation of project issues.

Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- Some participants may find the reports too detailed.
- Can be costly to produce.
- Unless clearly written, can cause confusion.
- Generic nature may not make it relevant to local issues.
- Cannot ensure people have received, read or understood the information.
- Some people are not comfortable responding in writing.
- Time consuming to develop.
- Time allowances for people to prepare responses.
- Follow up consultation activities are generally required.

Step by Step Guide

1. Consider the target audience, the agency or group budget, and production costs to determine the appropriate media via which to distribute the report (e.g. internet, print or CD-ROM).
2. Prepare mailing list, in accordance with access to addresses and the scope of the mail-out.
3. Prepare the reports and discussion papers using simple language with an emphasis on visual communication.
4. Publicise the availability of the reports and/or discussion papers. If options are available, ask in what form (email, print, website address or CD-ROM) the person would like to receive the material.

5. Provide opportunities for submission of responses, that is, allow sufficient time for detailed consideration and development of responses, and provide a variety of ways for the responses to be delivered (post, drop off points, or email).
6. Provide contact details for people with queries.
7. Advise on the opportunities for participation.
8. Collate and monitor responses.