

# 7 common budget consultation mistakes (and how to avoid them)



# A vital task



Setting the budget is one of the most critical things your organisation will do.

It's also one of the things that will most provoke scrutiny and controversy from citizens.

Consulting on budgets is key. But it's a delicate balance to do it well – to **engage** people, gain **insight** on their views and build their **confidence**.

# A little help



Since 2006, Delib have supported organisations in running **successful consultations**. We help our customers steer clear of common pitfalls which often turn an opportunity for **positive public engagement** into an ineffective exercise.

Here we share seven of the most common slip-ups so that you can learn from other people's mistakes and make the most of the **opportunity** presented by public budget consultation.

**Mistake #1:  
not consulting  
at all**



It seems basic but you'd be amazed how many organisations try to **skimp** on consultation. If you don't consult at all, you miss the opportunity to make **better-informed decisions**, you risk disenfranchising citizens and you lose out on potentially **valuable** feedback.

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Everyone is tight on time and money but a good budget consultation can be tailored to the resources you have available. It's a standard way to **inform citizens** about the budget-setting process and should be an **integral part** of any good communications strategy. Considering the rewards a good budget consultation can bring, and the harmful consequences of not running one, failing to consult is a risk not worth taking.



Mistake #2:  
not  
consulting  
online





Public consultations need to be **available** for public participation – otherwise, they're redundant. Consultations that are **hard to find** or difficult to take part in can seriously harm an organisation's reputation and public trust.

Today, that means your consultation must be available **online**. In 2012, OECD research found that **half** of all citizens used the internet to interact with public authorities – and that figure is **growing** all the time.

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The good news is that running consultations online should bring significant **savings** compared with costly paper-pushing or in-person processes. By now, taking engagement processes online should be a no-brainer.



# Mistake #3: neglecting mobile





Making consultations available for mobile and tablet users is rapidly becoming as important as making them available online at all. One of our customers reported a **750% increase** in participation in their budget consultation from one year to the next; the single biggest difference was that, the second time around, nearly a third of people took part **using mobile devices**.

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Check with your team that your consultation processes are being **optimised** for mobile devices. This point is often overlooked, and it means a significant section of the public is effectively **excluded** from engaging with your organisation.



# Mistake #4: poor accessibility





While consulting on your budgets is **good practice**, ensuring your online engagement is not discriminatory is a **legal requirement**. That means your consultation must meet accessibility standards. The RNIB identifies that ‘if someone with a disability, such as sight loss, can’t access the information on your website then it could be seen as discrimination.’

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Government guidance says that online public services, including things like consultations, should be accessible to **W3 AA** level. You can find out more about this at [webaim.org/standards/wcag/](https://webaim.org/standards/wcag/)



**Mistake #5:  
inadequate  
promotion**



Some organisations, having taken the time and effort to set up a budget consultation, then do almost nothing to **inform the public** about its existence. Unsurprisingly, this results in a near-zero participation rate, rendering the exercise a needless waste of resources.

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At the very least, you should notify existing contacts who have expressed an interest in your organisation's activity. More than that though, you have an opportunity to proactively contact a **much wider audience**. Local print and broadcast media, community groups, bloggers, forums and so on are all likely to be keen to hear about a participative budget consultation. Talking to them will ensure **value for money** from the consultation and allow you to make your case around the budget-setting process.



**Mistake #6:  
not measuring  
participation**



‘What gets **measured** gets **done**’, as the saying goes. There are fantastic tools for monitoring online activity but some organisations don’t keep track of the basics.

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Data such as number of responses, participant demographics or conversion and dropout rates allow you to **assess** how well your consultation is working.

It’s important to know who your consultation is reaching and what patterns in participation or responses are emerging. And not just to have that information but to **use it** – to identify successes and follow them, spot gaps and address them and continuously **improve the process**.

**Mistake #7:  
shying away  
from social  
media**





Organisations can be funny about social media. Some jump on every passing **bandwagon**, trying to turn all activity into 'content' for Snapchat or Instagram or the latest flavour of the month. Others paranoiacally **block** the entire internet (except BBC News) at source.

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Invariably, the situation is much simpler than either extreme: social media is simply another crucial channel to **connect** with diverse audiences. Using it to **inform and engage** people about your consultation activity should be no exception. And when you do, it pays dividends: our customers continue to see a large amount of consultation traffic coming from social media sites. These channels afford an opportunity to **talk to people**; while any conversation can carry some risk, choosing not to engage at all is a guaranteed failure.

Budget  
consultation  
done right



We've shared these common mistakes with you so that you can avoid them. We believe budget consultation is really important – and it's vital to do it well.

We've helped more than **100** organisations engage citizens online on over **\$80bn** of budgets.

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To see **how** they've done it, and to find out more about some really successful budget consultations, just drop us a line: [\*\*info@delib.net\*\*](mailto:info@delib.net)



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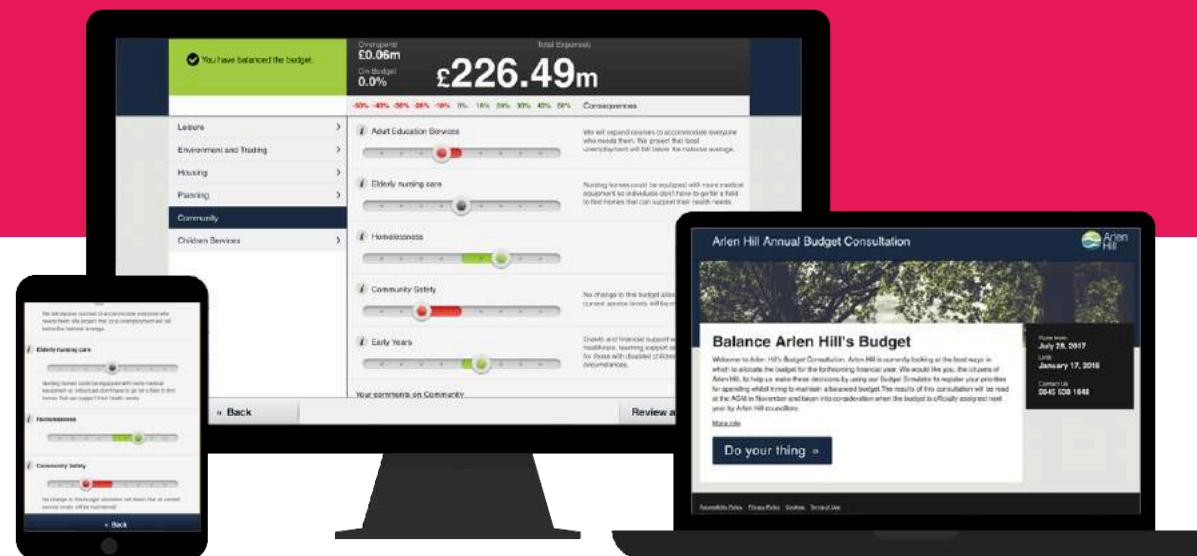
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“This online tool simulates the difficult decisions that we will have to make...it gives us valuable feedback on what people see as the priorities for spending over the next year”

*Joe Anderson, Mayor of Liverpool, UK*



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