

commsTracker

Making the Most of Involvement

The Tracker concept

Information and communications technology offers organisations huge potential to communicate and build relationships with their stakeholders. To many organisations, these technologies may seem too complex to implement and beyond their financial reach. Utilising simple web-based applications, Comms Tracker can provide you with cost effective ways of enhancing your communications with local residents and others with whom you want to engage. All you really need is access to the Internet. There is no buy-in to expensive computer hardware or software, and there are no expensive lock-in arrangements. Tailored to your specific project contexts, you get something that is specified and deployed according to your needs. You also get to decide when Comms Tracker has done its job.

Why Use a Tracker?

Organisations which use the Tracker will make a significant contribution to cutting edge good practice in resident involvement and participation.

Resident participation and involvement strategies are increasingly seen by housing associations, local authorities and regulators as a key way to improve the quality of services while decreasing costs, enhance accountability and add value to the communities they service. It is widely recognised that involvement can lead to tangible business benefits. The Corporation's Annual Efficiency process recognises this in terms of cashable and non-cashable efficiency gains and quality improvements.

Benefits to Residents and The Business



Source: Audit Commission

skills&projects

Make the link between Involvement and Service Improvement

“Stakeholder feedback is a vital business resource; It should be recorded, analysed and acted upon”
Mark Anderson,
Skills & Projects

Resident Involvement and Participation Strategies typically comprise many and various elements, from the provision by the landlord of information to residents to the inclusion of residents in the strategic management of the organisation. Housing Associations will often put together a menu of activities, providing a variety of routes to engage with residents, such as Drop-Ins, Service Reviews, Focus Groups, Estate Walkabouts, Village Voices and other initiatives that are appropriate to their local situation. They may appoint officers with specific responsibility for resident involvement, or simply ‘mainstream’ resident involvement so that it is a part of every area of activity.

Many different officers will thus be engaging with many residents and service users in a variety of settings. These encounters will spawn a wealth of feedback and information about the concerns, questions, issues and priorities of residents.

At the same time other key service providers such as health, social care and community safety will be seeking residents’ views on their services, many of which impact on each other. The Government’s “localism” initiatives adds a further theme.

“Tracker is a great way of monitoring tenants’ contacts and calls, their questions and the area the calls are coming from.”
Monmouthshire
County Council

“Organisations which use the Tracker will make a significant contribution to cutting edge good practice in resident involvement and participation.”
Patrick Harkness,
DOME
Consultants

From our work with a broad range of public and service user initiatives we understand the value of all this activity and the complexity of collating and understanding all of the messages delivered through communication. We know that the value of much anecdotal information (which won’t appear initially in Performance Indicators, but may impact on them later) is that it can provide an ‘early warning system’ enabling a Housing Association or Local Authority to identify and act on an issue before it becomes a major problem. We also know that one of the main frustrations expressed by residents is when they feel that their service provider has failed to respond or act upon the input they have contributed.

What does the Communications Tracker Do?

Skills & Projects developed a "Tracker" tool to manage situations where a number of people may be providing and receiving information in a variety of settings. There are many potential benefits:

- Capture as much Resident input as possible.
- All the information is accessible in one place
- Track who Residents are talking to.
- Monitor what Residents are saying.
- Identify and act on Concerns, Issues and Trends as they emerge.
- Priorities are Resident driven
- Residents can input directly into the process
- Residents are given consistent service/answers
- Pick up issues which might otherwise be overlooked
- Track how much time staff are spending on Resident Involvement
- Use 'Workflow' to automatically pass information and tasks from one participant to another.
- Ensure that the right person takes ownership of an issue.
- Reduce admin and paperwork
- Maintain a fully up to date record which can be analysed by area, issue, question, answer etc.
- Real-Time reports give up-to-the-minute information
- Can be used by more than one partner organisation
- Residents feel that the effort they invest is worthwhile and the reputation of the organisation is enhanced as it is seen to act on feedback.
- Provide a database of interested residents with information on how they would like to be consulted or involved

All staff, regardless of where they are based, or which organisation they work for, can log on to the Tracker and record an issue or concern that has been raised by a resident. This record can be classified as appropriate and may also be assigned to another professional to action. If required Residents themselves may also be given the opportunity to use the Tracker to raise issues.

Who Uses It?

The Tracker may be used by Council Officers, Housing Association Staff, Independent Tenant Advisors, Tenant Representatives, professionals from other agencies as well as 'the public'.

Reports can be generated:

- So the board can monitor resident involvement
- So key staff can track issues for which they are responsible
- Those responsible for involvement can ensure that issues are not 'buried'
- New Issues, Trends and Priorities can be identified

Tracker has been used in the context of community regeneration projects in East London and South Wales.

How does it Work?

The Tracker has a straightforward and easy to use interface to help people enter information as accurately and speedily as possible. Users of the system quickly become accustomed to entering information and running reports.

The Tracker uses internet technology which means it can be used by professionals from different organisations in different locations and may even have a public interface if required. It stands alone from an organisation's existing IT systems, which means that it carries no risk to the integrity of systems already in place.

The system has been developed for use in a variety of service user involvement settings and is highly adaptable to different circumstances. The issues raised and the requirements to monitor them will be different for each implementation of the system.

All professionals who use the Tracker are assigned an individual log-on identity and password to enable them to access the system. This individual log-on will also control what they are able to do; whether they can simply enter data, view what other people have written, create reports etc.

The Tracker uses a Microsoft SQL-Server database which holds the data in a secure environment and provides a powerful platform for generating reports.

Next Steps

We would be happy to come to discuss the potential of the Tracker to support your Involvement and Participation initiatives.

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Skills & Projects is a London and Brighton-based consultancy that helps organisations and individuals to improve their effectiveness and achieve their goals through collaborative design, facilitation and evaluation of learning and development processes. We specialise in working with social organisations, notably those involved in delivery of community regeneration, housing and education. We have extensive experience of carrying out quantitative and qualitative research, and can offer a wide range of methods to help organisations better understand and engage with their stakeholders. Among these, we have particular strengths in the design and delivery of on-line surveys, focus groups, one to one interviews, and action research projects. We can conduct training and development needs analyses, offer advice and support on organisation's training and development policies, and a wide range of training to support individual and organisational capacity and skills development. Skills & Projects also has extensive experience of policy analysis, development and guidance in a wide range of organisational contexts, including at a national level.