

The CMFs (Common Measurement Framework forms) are the evaluation questionnaire used by all 14 areas of the UK funded by the Big Lottery Fund through the Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better programme. All projects use these forms to help build up a bigger picture about what works to tackle loneliness and isolation among older people.

This Learning Digest pulls together what we have learnt from our projects so far about completing these forms. It covers advice for preparing in advance as well as practical tips and tricks completing the forms.

Advice for preparing in advance:

1. Prepare a few different ways to explain the forms to participants.

This 'spiel' should cover why they are being asked to complete the forms, who will have access to their data and a brief overview of the type of topics covered. A clear explanation is key to encouraging participants to complete the forms; they are less likely to want to do this if they are unsure why they are being asked for this information and where it is going.

2. Familiarise yourself with the questions in advance.

If a participant has a query, you don't want to be reading the form for the first time and trying to come up with an answer on the spot. Know what questions are asked in each form and speak to your manager or the BAB Learning & Monitoring Officer if you don't understand something.

3. Prepare an answer for common questions you may be asked.

Common queries include why there are questions about sexual orientation, religion, loneliness and being able to personally influence decisions in their local area. Sexual orientation and religion are included for two reasons; to make sure our projects are reaching participants from all backgrounds and to make sure our projects are having the same impact on all demographic groups. Regarding the questions in the red form (including loneliness and influencing decisions), these questions cover a wide range of topics because they are the same questions used by over 300 projects around the UK, all of which are undertaking different activities. It is still useful for participants to answer these questions.

4. Develop a system for completing these forms and really think through how this will work in practice.

For example if volunteers are helping participants to complete the forms, who will they give the forms to and when? How will you make sure this process complies with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations)? How will you keep track of which participants have completed each form and when this happened, so that you know when to issue the follow-up red form? It is important to allow enough time to complete the CMF forms. This

is likely to involve finishing an activity early on the days when forms need to be completed so that there is enough time for this to be done. Similarly, remember to allocate enough staff time for the administration related to the CMF forms.

5. Request translated versions in advance if you know these are likely to be needed.

This will make it easier for participants who are less fluent in English to complete the forms and reduce the amount of assistance needed.

Practical tips and tricks for completing the forms:

1. When giving participants the red form, you may want to warn them that some of the questions are quite personal and direct.

Telling them this in advance means that it will not come as a surprise and you can emphasise that these questions all help to build up a bigger national picture; their answers will not affect the service they receive. You can also remind them that the forms are confidential and if there is any question they do not want to answer then they can leave it blank and move on to the next one. These questions are mostly at the beginning of the red form, so they have can work backwards if they prefer.

2. Physically show participants the ways in which the forms are anonymous and confidential.

For example showing them that the page with their name on is perforated and will be separated from their answers. It can also help to point out the box where the anonymised code will be written (top of page 3 of the blue form and page 5 of the red form). Emphasise that Bristol Ageing Better will not pass their details to anyone else and will not contact them, pointing out that the forms do not ask for any contact details.

3. When completing these forms in a group setting, a few strategies can be used to create a positive environment.

For example offering participants a cup of tea at the same time or having a box of chocolates that they can pick from when they have finished their form. For the red exit forms, you may want to combine these with a group celebration about completing the project or a reflection on what has been achieved so far, although be aware that attendance levels may be lower for this session. Make sure you have a separate private space available to use if needed, for example if an individual has sight difficulties and needs you to read the questions aloud. For reasons such as this, you may need an extra pair of hands to help out in a group setting, for example another staff member, a volunteer or the BAB Learning & Monitoring Officer.

4. Trial asking participants to complete the forms at home and bring them back next time.

For some participants this will work well and they will appreciate being given the space to do it on their own, but be aware that others will not complete them this way, for example they may forget, need assistance or simply lack an incentive to do this at home. If participants complete the forms at home, it is best if they still bring these forms to you so that you can log this and check that the project details are correct, instead of participants posting it directly to BAB.

5. For the red exit form, explain why they are being asked to complete the same form again.

This is particularly necessary when the project is short as it means the individual may be completing the same questions again just a few weeks later. Explain that it is so that the individual journey can be measured over the course of the project. Ensure they are aware that they will also be asked to complete the same form again 6 months later, again so that their journey can be measured and the longer-term impact of the project can be identified.

6. Present the forms with a positive attitude.

If you are positive about the forms then participants are usually happy to fill them in. However if you present them with a negative attitude then participants are much less likely to complete them and may feel resentful of doing so which can damage their engagement with your project. Participants may ask whether anything will come out of all this evidence being gathered - explain that because it is being gathered across the country then it will be a really strong evidence base and hard for decision makers to ignore.

7. Double check that the consent page and project details box are complete before sending the forms to BAB.

The consent page is at the front of the blue form. Without this we cannot use the participant's data. The project details box is vital to us being able to match the form to your project and, again, if we do not know what project it is from then unfortunately we cannot use the form. The project details box looks like this:

Delivery partner:	
Project name:	
Time point (please circle):	Entry Exit Follow Up

Refusal is relatively rare

From what we have learnt so far, it is actually quite rare for participants to refuse to complete the CMF forms. Instead, participants can end up not completing them due to other circumstances which luckily can be overcome.

For example it is common for projects to not allow enough time for these forms to be completed (e.g. stopping activities early to do this), meaning that participants end up leaving without completing a form.

Another common reason is when projects do not chase forms that have been taken home by participants or they do not keep track of who has completed a form and the date this was done. This leads to forms not being completed simply because the individual forgot or was not given an exit/follow-up red form at the appropriate time.

For these reasons, **it is important for projects to have a process in place for completing these CMF forms and to allocate enough time for this administration.** Look at how many of your participants have not completed a form, and think about how many of these were because the individual refused and how many were due to other circumstances. Try to overcome these other circumstances by trialling different ways of completing these CMF forms.