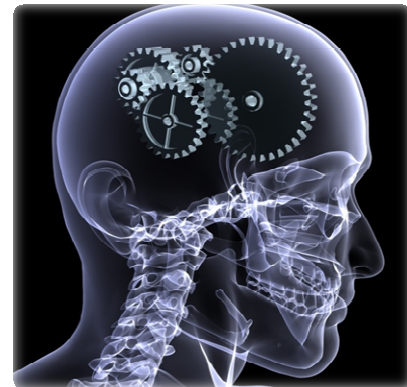


# Oxford City 'Talkback' Citizen Panel

## BACKGROUND

Citizens Panels have traditionally been a cost-effective way for local authorities to regularly consult with residents on a range of different subjects. By recruiting a representative sample of the local population, high quality feedback can be obtained cost effectively through a variety of surveys, focus groups and other panel activities. Citizen Panels generally achieve high response rates.

Panels are a good way to get feedback from residents on the service performance, obtain views on proposed services (or regulatory legal changes) or determine the feasibility of introducing new services. Traditionally, panel members are consulted via postal surveys but we are increasingly being asked to examine alternative communication channels.



## CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Oxford City have run their Talkback Citizen Panel for many years and M·E·L Research were successfully appointed to manage this panel in early 2010. Since inheriting the panel, we have worked collaboratively with the Council to enhance the value derived from it:

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- ◆ Surveys are organized on a **rapid basis**, allowing the Consultation Manager to respond to internal needs as quickly as possible;
- ◆ Oxford has a highly transient **student population**, generally living in communal establishments and private rental accommodation. We devised a bespoke system of recruiting and keeping in touch with this particular 'difficult to reach' group;
- ◆ The **online capacity** of the panel has been enhanced. We have migrated many panelists and are now in a position where around one-fifth of all responses are completed by web survey. This also provides the Council with a resource to undertake short, fast feedbacks if required or online focus groups.

## CLIENT SERVICE AND OUTCOMES

The project is led by M·E·L's Senior Research Account Manager, Dave Ruston, who works closely with the Council's Consultation Officer. All fieldwork is organised and processed by our internal Field and Data team, which helps to ensure a smooth project from start to finish.

We assess the quality and representativeness of the Talkback panel on a regular basis, in partnership with Oxford City officers who provide local intelligence. Oxford City also use the Talkback panel to regularly repeat important modules of questions and key indicators so that any changes can be tracked over time. M·E·L provide detailed analysis and reports on panel surveys.

Margaret Melling, Consultation Manager at Oxford City Council said: "*We particularly appreciate M·E·L's clear, accessible reports and their ability to provide advice and guidance on use of the panel and interpretation of results. Our recent panel survey showed that M·E·L was able to deliver key findings within a very demanding timetable.*"

For further information about Citizen Panel products, please contact  
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