
Module 1

Guidebook

As the foundation for The Social Research Toolkit, Module 1 commences with an exploration of the 'Research Persona' and asks you to think about the sort of researcher you are. In particular, attention is given to thinking about what drives you, and how it is that you might come to perform social research.

From here, attention is turned to the two major approaches- or *paradigms*- for conducting research; qualitative research inquiry and quantitative research inquiry. We discuss briefly the differences between these approaches and in which contexts their specific use might be valuable.

Finally, we consider some current trends in 'engagement' and build a picture around how you might think about engaging with community, your colleagues and your organisation in order to develop a research informed view of community.

Module 1-1 The Research Persona

What makes you tick? This might seem a strange question to ask in a module about social research, but who you are and how you see the world will provide an insight into the sort of research you will feel most comfortable with. Within this, your *dispositions*- the way you see the world- will provide clues as to the sort of researcher you are, and how comfortable you will be undertaking certain types of research. The Module 1-1 Video discusses these points and encourages you to think about the sort of researcher you are and the sorts of research you tend to oscillate toward. 'Activity 1.1 Research Persona Log' then asks you to record some thoughts around these points.

Module 1-2 Qualitative Research/Quantitative Research

In short, we might say that:

Qualitative research is interested in uncovering the values, beliefs, and feelings connected to a particular phenomenon or situation. Qualitative

Module Content

Module 1 considers the role and purpose of social research in the local government setting, and in particular focuses on:

- the 'research persona'
- the two major 'paradigms' of social research; Quantitative research and Qualitative research.
- your dispositions to research.
- the relationship between social research and local government community engagement.

Module 1 provides the foundation for this program and asks you to consider *who you are* as both a professional and 'practitioner researcher' and the way you might go about undertaking social research.

Module Activities

1-1 Researcher Persona Log

1-2 Social Research Matrix

1-3 The Location of Data

1-4 The Practitioner Researcher

Social Research Toolkit:

using social research in local government
community engagement

research stresses 'lived experience' and probes what people think and feel- as attitudinal markers- about a particular phenomenon.

Quantitative research by comparison is largely concerned with the quantities connected to a particular phenomenon or event; the frequency, scale and duration of a particular situation, event or occurrence.

Both types of research have their place, but the key point here is to understand where you fit- to which of these approaches do you most comfortably align?

After considering your connections to the broad characteristics of Qualitative and Quantitative Research, attention is turned to how you might go about identifying and gathering 'data'. The Module 1-2 Video asks whether you are comfortable directly engaging with community to seek original 'created' data, or whether you prefer exploring 'existing' data contained within reports and previously collated research findings. It is important to realize that both qualitative and quantitative data can be found in either existing sources of data or created from new research. 'Activity 1-2 Social Research Matrix' asks you to consider these points and to locate where you sit as a researcher.

It is also important to note here that the focus of this program is on *social research*. Social research can be conducted from either a qualitative or quantitative viewpoint, and indeed, many research inquiries use combinations of both qualitative and quantitative research to reach their conclusions.

For the purposes of this program at the least, we see social research as research that is concerned with, in one way or other, *human beings and the associations they have with each other and the places in which they live*. As professionals interested in how communities function, you can hopefully see the significance that social research might play in the work that you do.

Module 1-3 Approaches to Social Research for Local Government

To complete Module 1, an introduction to current theory in community engagement is covered, to situate the place that social research might play in local government community engagement.

Social theorist Chantal Mouffe argues a case for what she has called 'agonistic pluralism' when considering community. What Mouffe was getting at is a fairly straightforward idea; that each of us has our own views on things, our beliefs and attitudes, orientations and dispositions. As human beings we are each individuals. Taken on a larger scale, this will mean that each community, organisation or group is then made up

of a range of viewpoints, as held by each member of that group, organisation or community.

When applied to engagement, this will mean that the engagement has to take account of the range of views and attitudes that exist within any community. Community is never just one thing- and is never easily defined *exactly*. There will always be competing views in community and differences of opinion, regardless of how cohesive and connected that community might appear to be from the outside.

This is what Mouffe means by 'agonistic pluralism'- that a community will be 'pluralist', in so much as there are multiple views contained within that community, but also potentially 'agonistic' in that these views might actually be competing and may not necessarily be complimentary. There may even be outright conflict present.

So, what does this have to do with social research?

Well, in short, social research is the key for unlocking an *informed* view of the community. Social research allows you to come to terms with differences in the communities and groups you work with- to understand these differences and the viewpoints that underpin them. Social research enables the exploration of the multiple ways community can be understood, and it is for this reason that social research is valuable for local government community engagement professionals.

Whether applied according to a short review of a particular community event, or a large, long term social survey of an entire region, social research provides an evidence base that can be used to not only build a defensible account of community but also a rationale for how you might do your work as a local government professional. Social research provides you with the insight into the communities, groups and organisations you work with as well as the evidence you might use to argue for a new line of funding, the instigation of a new initiative or project, or to maintain services for a particular purpose.

So, it is in this sense that we argue that you should see yourself not only as a professional involved in the engagement of community, but also as a social researcher interested in uncovering views from the community (and your local government organisation). This is what we refer to as being a 'practitioner researcher'.