Stakeholder Participation Guidance

Guidance to support stakeholder participation in design, implementation and assessment of policies and actions

May 2018

How to design and conduct consultations

8. Designing and Conducting Consultations

Consultations are processes that enable exchange of information between stakeholders (including between government and other stakeholders), including providing information and capacity building to stakeholders and enabling diverse stakeholders to provide input reflecting their needs and interests related to the policy that is the subject of the consultation.

Checklist of key recommendations

- Identify and use socially and culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive consultation methods that enable effective consultation of different stakeholder groups, including those that may be marginalised
- Conduct consultations with diverse stakeholder groups to support the design, implementation and/or assessment of the policy
- Share with stakeholders a synopsis of the input received during consultations and how the input was taken into account

8.1 Importance of consultations

Consultations are important to:

- Obtain input from stakeholders about policy design, implementation and assessment
- Provide information to stakeholders and raise their awareness about the policy
- Enable exchange of knowledge and understanding between different stakeholders including with the users
- Provide an opportunity for capacity building to help stakeholders to participate more effectively.
Consultations can help to:

- Improve outcomes by taking account of stakeholders’ input at relevant decision points
- Review, identify and prioritise different options and approaches including helping to identify those that optimise benefits across diverse stakeholder groups
- Capture stakeholder feedback on what is working well and where issues arise
- Contribute to transparency
- Build trust, common understanding and legitimacy by providing stakeholders with an avenue to input and have their views and concerns taken on board

8.2 Methods for conducting consultations

It is a key recommendation to identify and use socially and culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive consultation methods that enable effective consultation of different stakeholder groups, including those that may be marginalised. Stakeholder representatives and people with experience of prior consultations can help to determine the most appropriate methods for specific groups. Consider whether consultations may be more effective by enabling anonymous participation and/or keeping information confidential.

When designing and planning consultations, various consultation approaches can be considered, including those listed in Table 8.1. Different methods can be used together in a complementary way. Use of electronic media and the internet can be relatively low cost while reaching a large number of stakeholders. However, it is important to assess the extent to which access to the internet may be limited for some stakeholders and consider using electronic methods as a tool complementing other consultation methods.

Table 8.1: Consultation methods

| Public meetings | An open, accessible method of consulting with the public. Depending on the scale of the issue under consultation, they can take place at any level (e.g., national, subnational, local). They may be located and designed to facilitate consultations with specific stakeholder groups, for example with those that may be directly affected and/or marginalised (e.g., village congregations, town hall meetings, workplace meetings). Ensure they are accessible and adequate notice is given to enable interested stakeholders to participate. Meeting size affects participation. Groups of fewer than twenty people provide greater opportunities for everyone to speak. Breaking out into smaller groups and using participatory methods (e.g., asking participants to provide input on cards, then grouping the cards into issues and getting their input on ranking the issues) can help to capture all viewpoints. |
| Workshops | Gathering a group of stakeholders to gain their feedback in a structured format. They enable different stakeholders to discuss and exchange views on specific topics, often adopting a face-to-face format which allows for brainstorming and testing ideas. A series of workshops can be more effective than a single workshop. Different workshop types can be adopted (e.g., open space discussions which lack an initial agenda and emphasise self-organisation, write shops where groups of stakeholders develop written documents together and round table discussions). Facilitation is important, and a skilled neutral individual can help to ensure that group rules are clear, views are taken seriously, and no one participant dominates. |
| Focus group | Semi-structured discussions with a small group, generally from similar backgrounds (generally 5–12 participants plus 1–2 skilled facilitators). Open |
| discussions | discussions explore people’s attitudes, concerns and preferences toward a specific issue, with the range of viewpoints collated at the end. Community members not used to formal meetings may feel more comfortable expressing themselves in a focus group discussion (e.g., women, ethnic minorities, or disadvantaged castes; the disabled; or poor individuals and households). Focus groups generally last about two hours and the discussions among participants are guided by a skilled facilitator. |
| In-depth interviews | Face-to-face or virtual interviews with individual stakeholders that can be used to get a sense of stakeholders’ perspectives. They can be structured (formal, and closely following a written interview guide), semi-structured (partially directed by an interview guide, but open and conversational to allow interviewees to introduce other topics of interest), or unstructured (organised around a few general questions or topics, but informal and open-ended). Structured interviews are likely to yield information that can be compared and generalised, while less structured ones can explore an issue in depth and permit related issues to be introduced into the discussion. Interviews with key informants possessing particular knowledge of an issue can be especially useful. |
| Stakeholder assessments | Systematic consultation with stakeholders to help identify and design climate policy, signal any potential constraints to their participation, and obtain feedback on reactions to an intervention during implementation. This assessment is an investigation of the perceptions of a systematic sample of beneficiaries and other stakeholders to ensure that their concerns are heard and incorporated into policy formulation. |
| Expert elicitation | A protocol for consulting with experts including a process for helping experts understand the elicitation process, avoiding biases, and producing independent and reliable judgments. Expert elicitation can help to avoid bias when expert judgments are needed for assessments. Refer to the 2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories Chapter 2 Approaches to Data Collection for an expert elicitation protocol.1 |
| Surveys | A sequence of focused, predetermined questions in a fixed order, often using closed questions with predetermined, limited options for responses. Surveys can be useful to identify problems or objectives, narrow the focus or clarify the objectives of the policy, plan strategies for implementation, and monitor or evaluate participation. Surveys can be conducted through interviews or by requesting written responses either online or on paper. |

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| Written consultations | Typically involve using a consultation web page or printed sheet to introduce the policy and to solicit written input. A draft document, broad topics, or open-ended questions can be used to solicit comments, with more freedom to submit personalised responses than a survey. The call for written comments can be made to specific stakeholders or to the public. Define a deadline for receiving comments, ensuring that this allows sufficient time for stakeholders to be made aware of the invitation for comments and to provide the comments. Identify appropriate methods to solicit comments (e.g., email, letter or phone) and for submission of comments (e.g., online, email, mail or hand delivery to an office or a box in a public place). Provide an explanation to stakeholders about how their input will be shared and used. For example, a synthesis of the comments and responses can be posted bi-weekly on the internet or a summary can be published at the end of the consultation. Publication of comments during the consultation enables further reactions from stakeholders. Social media can also be used. Online consultation enables open public consultation but has limitations as it only reaches those who are literate and have internet access, and therefore may not reach marginalised stakeholders. |
| Electronic discussion (e-discussions) | Enable stakeholders to provide input in response to input from other stakeholders through an electronic medium. E-discussions can be moderated discussions on specific topics (e.g., comments on a draft document). They can be held through an electronic mailing list (e.g., a list-serve), on a website where comments from other stakeholders are posted (e.g., in response to a blog or other information posted on the web) or via social media (e.g., Twitter or Facebook). The advantages of these discussions include lower costs and the ability to reach larger audiences. The disadvantage is that access to the internet may be limited for some stakeholders. Thus, electronic means are best used as a tool complementing other consultation methods, such as face-to-face interviews or other events. To be a successful complement to other consultation tools, ensure that online deliberations are competently and constructively moderated. |

Some consultation methods use a facilitator to guide the discussion. Box 8.1 describes the role of a facilitator in consultations as well as the characteristics users can look for when identifying a facilitator.
Box 8.1: Role and characteristics of a facilitator

Meeting or workshop facilitator role:

- Helps develop the agenda before the meeting
- Helps users determine or adjust the objective and achieve desired results
- Helps participants understand how this meeting will contribute to the broader stakeholder participation process for the policy and how the outputs will be used
- Remains neutral and does not provide personal views on content
- Creates a safe and encouraging environment for open discussion
- Seeks appropriate participation from all participants
- Ensures that everyone has an opportunity to speak and that their views are respected
- Keeps groups focused on desired outcomes
- Guides the process and makes suggestions for alternatives
- Makes sure the note taker captures all valuable information
- Designates someone to keep track of time and helps to stay on time

Characteristics of a good facilitator are:

- Familiarity with the subject
- Understanding of the whole (stakeholder participation) process
- Neutral to the topic of discussion
- Good reputation and trust with all participating stakeholders including the target stakeholders and the entity sponsoring consultations, often including both civil society and government
- Ability to engage the audience, encourage participation and to keep people’s attention and the discussion moving
- Ability to level unbalanced interactions, especially when differences exist among the powerful and powerless stakeholders
- Ability to guide and listen

Further references

For guidance on consultation methods, see the following references:

- UNECE’s Tool #50: Stakeholder Consultation Tools
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s Stakeholder Engagement Framework

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8.3 Planning consultations

It is a key recommendation to conduct consultations with diverse stakeholder groups to support the design, implementation and/or assessment of the policy. Consultation is not a one-off event but a dynamic, ongoing process that can involve several objectives, target groups and methods at different times. Plan consultations carefully as part of the overall planning for stakeholder participation and include them in the stakeholder participation plan explained in Chapter 4. Share the plans for consultations with stakeholders in advance to allow them to prepare well and to select the consultations they want to participate in.

When planning consultations:

**Set clear objectives for consultations** by conferring with internal and external groups with knowledge of the policy and the implementation context and area. Define the scope of consultations by identifying and prioritising issues for consultation, defining clearly from the start what is and is not under consideration.

**Identify appropriate stakeholder groups** for the subject of the consultations (see Chapter 5 for guidance on identifying and mapping stakeholders to identify the groups that are most affected or have greatest influence on a policy). For example, ensure that stakeholder groups potentially affected by the policy have an opportunity to raise concerns about potential negative impacts, express desired outcomes and provide input on the policy design including the theory of change, both before the program design is finalised and during implementation and assessment.

**Adapt consultation methods for the identified stakeholder groups.** Select the most appropriate consultation methods (e.g., written consultations, in-person events or internet-based methods) considering the scale and impact of the respective initiative (e.g., a large-scale initiative with a broad impact requires input from a wider range of stakeholders than a more technical policy measure), the appropriate level of interaction for the stakeholders and for the topic, factors affecting accessibility (e.g., language and disability) and timing requirements. The type of consultation should be proportionate to the scale and impact of the respective initiative. A large-scale initiative with a broad impact will require input from a wider range of stakeholders. A more technical policy will merit a more targeted approach.

Stakeholder mapping (see Chapter 5 for guidance on stakeholder mapping) that helps users understand stakeholders based on level of influence and interest can help users to determine the most appropriate methods for consultations. Figure 8.1 provides examples of methods for providing information and conducting consultation that are likely to be appropriate for stakeholders with different levels of influence and interest with respect to a policy.

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Conduct stakeholder consultations at each relevant stage of policy design and implementation. The most appropriate type, level and methods of stakeholder consultation depend on the type of stakeholders and their relative level of interest and influence (see Box 8.1 and also Section 5.5 for guidance on mapping stakeholders using this kind of matrix). They also depend on the stage of policy design, implementation and assessment. For example, the following types of consultation can be helpful at the following stages of policy design and implementation:

- **Before policy implementation** to establish the need and/or opportunity for the policy, to research possible policy responses and to identify workable solutions by reviewing a range of policy options, including consultations on:
  - Issues and problems that a policy could address and setting objectives
  - Possible policy responses and associated challenges and opportunities
  - Potential policy options and the detail of proposals, for example with respect to feasibility, effectiveness and/or potential impacts

- **During policy implementation** to develop plans for implementation of the policy and to optimise stakeholder participation in implementation, including consultations on:
  - Plans for implementation with respect to efficiency, effectiveness and equity in meeting policy objectives, on ways that stakeholders can participate in implementation and on policy outcomes, results and impacts including ways to address negative and enhance positive outcomes

*Source: Adapted from Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2011.*
After policy implementation to evaluate efficiency, effectiveness and equity with respect to achieving policy objectives and to provide feedback for improvements to policy design and implementation, including consultations on:

- Methods for, and the findings of, monitoring (i.e., the assessed impacts of the policy) and technical review, including on ways for stakeholders to participate
- Ways that findings from monitoring and technical review can feed back to improve design, implementation and assessment of the policy
- Lessons learned about the process followed for the design, implementation and assessment of the policy, including on stakeholder participation

Use several complementary consultation methods to obtain varied input from different stakeholders at different times using the most appropriate approaches.

Share and validate the plans for consultation prior to commencing consultations by using the most adapted media for the target stakeholder groups, using feedback from stakeholders to improve the planning. See Chapter 4 for guidance on planning and Chapter 7 for guidance on announcing and communicating consultations.

Assess effectiveness of past consultations and revise plans for future consultations through a participatory evaluation and planning process conducted with stakeholder representatives.

### 8.4 Conducting consultations

Conducting an inclusive and equitable consultation process is essential to ensure effective participation and the contribution of marginalised groups.

Conduct consultations at mutually agreed locations and through representatives who are designated by the stakeholder groups in accordance with their own procedures (see Chapter 5 for guidance on identifying legitimate stakeholder representatives). Different approaches can be appropriate for different stakeholder groups.

One of the guiding principles of consultation processes is inclusive engagement with stakeholders who are difficult to reach or have limited access. Priority stakeholders such as those that may be directly affected by the policy need to be targeted but may be more marginalised and harder to consult with, especially for certain sectors such as water, agriculture and forestry. Inclusive consultation requires informing and engaging broadly with the communities and other stakeholders using socially and culturally appropriate methods to enable them to have meaningful influence on the subject of consultation. These could include indigenous peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Conduct consultation in a way that is gender and inter-generationally sensitive.

Where consultations involve group discussions, for example in workshops, solicit assistance from experts who are skilled at managing group dynamics. In addition to a facilitator, a note taker or rapporteur is helpful to record key points. Often, a rapporteur does not need to keep detailed minutes but can capture the progress of the discussion, themes, points, issues and areas of substantial agreement or disagreement. It can help to video or audiotape the proceedings. Summarise commitments and next steps at the end of the meeting.
Skills training or learning activities can be helpful for organisers and participants of consultations, for example through conducting multi-stakeholder consultation training courses events to enhance knowledge on the topics and skills on conducting consultations.

The findings from consultations need to be analysed, reported and discussed with representatives of the stakeholder groups concerned (e.g., with an advisory group established to support the stakeholder participation process for the policy). This analysis feeds into the decision-making process about the design, implementation and assessment of the policy.

On completing a consultation, develop a report of findings, acknowledge key issues raised during consultations and respond as appropriate and describe how the outcomes of the consultation process will be incorporated into policy. Share these reports with stakeholders, including those that participated in the consultations and those who were invited but not able to participate. Providing timely feedback is important to sustain stakeholder interest in and commitment to the process. In addition, the findings of all the consultations should be publicly disclosed.

Further references
For guidance on conducting consultations, see the following references:

- African Development Bank’s Chapter 4, *Handbook on stakeholder consultation and participation in ADB operations*[^4]
- European Commission’s *Guidelines on Stakeholder Consultation*[^5]
- Action Research & Action Learning’s *Guiding the consultative process*[^6]

### 8.5 Feedback mechanisms for ongoing consultations

Feedback mechanisms enable ongoing consultations throughout the policy design and implementation cycle. Feedback mechanisms can take different forms and serve a variety of purposes, from channelling suggestions to improving the quality of a specific climate policy that is being developed to addressing the concerns or questions a stakeholder group may have in relation to a policy that affects them.

Feedback can go both ways. It includes opinions, concerns, suggestions and advice provided by stakeholders to those responsible for design, implementation and assessment of policies. Feedback also includes information provided to stakeholders about how their input has been used, or not, to influence the design, implementation and assessment of the policies.

It is important to make a distinction between “feedback” and “grievances”. Feedback is information provided back to stakeholders (including to the government) in response or reaction to previous information from that person or entity. Feedback includes opinions, concerns, suggestions and advice without need for a specific resolution. By contrast a “grievance” is an issue, concern, problem or claim (perceived or actual) that an individual or group wants to be addressed and resolved. Where feedback is

not effectively dealt with, it may escalate into a grievance (see Chapter 9 for guidance on grievance redress mechanisms).

Diverse channels for feedback include:

- Dedicated email address or web page
- Verbal or written feedback at a drop-in centre
- Verbal communication at a meeting
- Physical feedback box at an office or in a public place
- Telephone hotline number
- Text message (e.g., SMS)
- Social media (e.g., Twitter or Facebook)

It is important to clarify roles and responsibilities to process input from feedback mechanisms to ensure that it informs the relevant stage of policy design, implementation and/or assessment and that a response is provided where appropriate.

Establish feedback mechanisms early in the design stage and maintain them throughout the life of the policy to optimise the benefits from this form of consultation throughout the policy design and implementation cycle.

8.6 Documenting how input was addressed

It is a key recommendation to share with stakeholders a synopsis of the input received during consultations and how the input was taken into account. It is important to explain to stakeholders how their input has influenced decision making and helped to shape the design, implementation and/or assessment of the policy.

All input received can be compiled according to the issues raised. A written explanation of how each issue has been addressed can be prepared. Input and comments received from meetings, workshops or written consultations may be overlapping. To streamline communications, the input can be categorised and summarised in a synthesis document that explains how the different types of input were addressed (e.g., whether they were relevant, whether the suggestions were adopted, or what changes were made in response to the input). This is particularly effective where users receive a significant amount of input.

It may not possible to adopt the recommendations of all input received in the consultation process; some suggestions may be contradictory, or may not be feasible. In such cases, provide a justification explaining why certain recommendations were adopted over others. It is important to ensure that, at a minimum, stakeholders see that their input was considered.

Make the input received and the explanation of how it was taken into account publicly available and disseminated it to the stakeholders that provided input. See Chapter 7 for more information on how to provide information effectively to various stakeholder groups.