

8 Designing and conducting consultations

Consultations are processes that enable exchange of information between stakeholders (including between government and other stakeholders). This includes providing information and capacity-building to stakeholders, and enabling diverse stakeholders to provide input reflecting their needs and interests relating 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 with different stakeholder groups, including those that may be marginalized
- Conduct consultations with diverse stakeholder groups to support the design, implementation and 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 users of the ICAT guides
- provide an opportunity for capacity-building to help stakeholders to participate more effectively.

Consultations can:

- improve outcomes by taking account of stakeholders' input at relevant decision points

- help to review, identify and prioritize different options and approaches, including those that optimize benefits across diverse stakeholder groups
- capture stakeholder feedback on what is working well and issues that arise
- contribute to transparency
- build trust, common understanding and legitimacy by providing stakeholders with an avenue to provide 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 with different stakeholder groups, including those that may be marginalized. 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 if anonymous participation is allowed, and/or information is kept 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 have a 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 that complements other consultation methods.

Some consultation methods use a facilitator to guide the discussion. [Box 8.1](#) describes the role of a facilitator in consultations and the characteristics users can look for when identifying a facilitator.

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, public meetings can take place at any level (e.g. national, subnational, local). They may be located and designed to facilitate consultations with specific stakeholder groups, such as those that may be directly affected and/or marginalized (e.g. village congregations, town hall meetings, workplace meetings). Ensure that they are accessible and adequate notice is given to enable interested stakeholders to participate. Meeting size affects participation. Groups of fewer than 20 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. Workshops enable different stakeholders to discuss and exchange views on specific topics, often adopting a face-to-face format that allows brainstorming and testing of ideas. A series of workshops can be more effective than a single workshop. Different workshop types can be adopted (e.g. open-space discussions that lack an initial agenda and emphasize self-organization, write shops where groups of stakeholders develop written documents together, 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 single participant dominates.
Focus group discussions	Semi-structured discussions with a small group, generally from similar backgrounds (usually 5–12 participants plus one or two skilled facilitators). Open discussions explore people's attitudes, concerns and preferences about a specific issue, with the range of viewpoints collated at the end. Community members not used to formal meetings (e.g. women, ethnic minorities, disadvantaged castes, people with disability, poor individuals and households) may feel more comfortable expressing themselves in a focus group discussion. Focus groups generally last about two hours, and discussions 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. In-depth interviews 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 (organized around a few general questions or topics, but informal and open ended). Structured interviews are likely to yield information that can be compared and generalized, whereas less structured ones can explore an issue in depth and permit related issues to be introduced into the discussion. Interviews with key informants who have 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 stakeholder 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 <i>2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories</i> (Chapter 2: Approaches to data collection for an expert elicitation protocol). ^a
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.

TABLE 8.1, continued

Consultation methods

Written consultations	<p>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 personalized 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 comments. Identify appropriate methods to solicit comments (e.g. email, letter, phone) and for submission of comments (e.g. online, email, mail, 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 in that it only reaches those who are literate and have Internet access, and therefore may not reach marginalized stakeholders.</p>
Electronic discussion (e-discussion)	<p>Enables 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 server), 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, online deliberations need to be competently and constructively moderated.</p>

^a Available at: www.ipcc-nggip.iges.or.jp/public/2006gl.

8.2.1 Further references

For guidance on consultation methods, see the following references:

- UNECE's *Tool #50: Stakeholder Consultation Tools*⁴²
- Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's *Stakeholder Engagement Framework*.⁴³

⁴² Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/better-regulation-toolbox-50_en.

⁴³ Available at: <http://docplayer.net/4006046-Stakeholder-engagement-framework.html>.

8.3 Planning consultations

It is a *key recommendation* to conduct consultations with diverse stakeholder groups to support the design, implementation and 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. Consultations should be carefully planned as part of the overall planning for stakeholder participation and included in the stakeholder participation plan explained in [Chapter 4](#). Plans for consultations should be shared with stakeholders in advance to allow them to prepare well and to select the consultations they want to participate in.

When planning consultations, take the following into account.

Set clear objectives for consultations by conferring with internal and external groups that have knowledge of the policy, and the implementation context and area. Define the scope of consultations

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 the 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:

- Familiar with the subject
- Understands the whole stakeholder participation process
- Neutral to the topic of discussion
- Has a good reputation and trust with all participating stakeholders, including the target stakeholders and the entity that is sponsoring consultations, often including both civil society and government
- Able to engage the audience, encourage participation, and keep people's attention and the discussion moving
- Able to level unbalanced interactions, especially when differences exist between powerful and powerless stakeholders
- Able to guide and listen

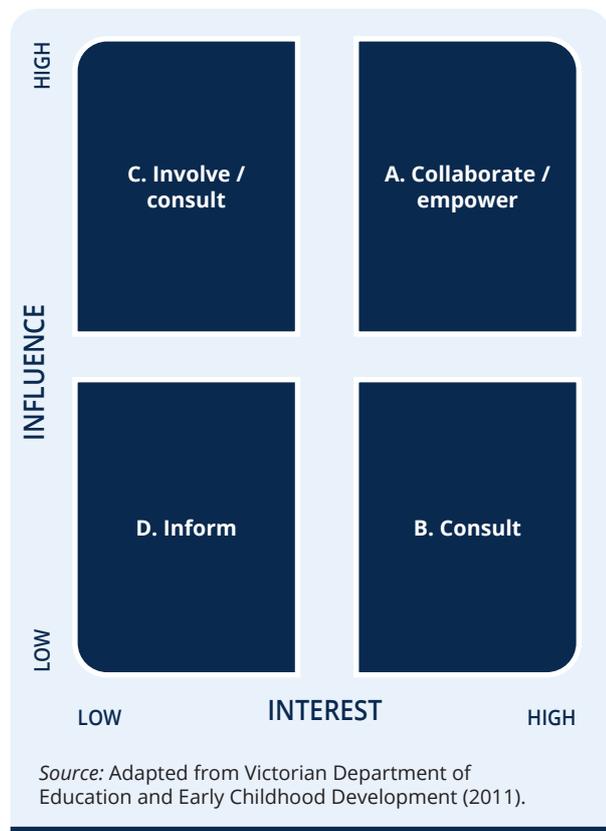
by identifying and prioritizing issues for consultation, defining clearly from the start what is and is not under consideration.

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 over 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 causal chain, both before the programme design is finalized 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, Internet-based methods), considering

the scale and impact of the initiative, 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 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](#)) that maps stakeholders based on their 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 consultations that are likely to be appropriate for stakeholders with different levels of influence and interest with respect to a policy. [Figure 8.2](#) illustrates this approach used to inform stakeholder engagement strategies for a policy in Kenya (see [Box 5.4](#) in Chapter 5).

FIGURE 8.1

Stakeholder matrix

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 levels of interest and influence (see [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 different 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 (e.g. with respect to feasibility, effectiveness, potential impacts).
- **During policy implementation** to develop plans for implementation of the policy and to optimize stakeholder participation in implementation, including consultations on
 - » plans for implementation with respect to efficiency, effectiveness and equity in meeting policy objectives
 - » ways that stakeholders can participate in implementation
 - » policy outcomes, results and impacts, including ways to address negative and enhance positive outcomes.
- **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 monitoring, findings of monitoring (i.e. the assessed impacts of the policy) and technical review, including 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.

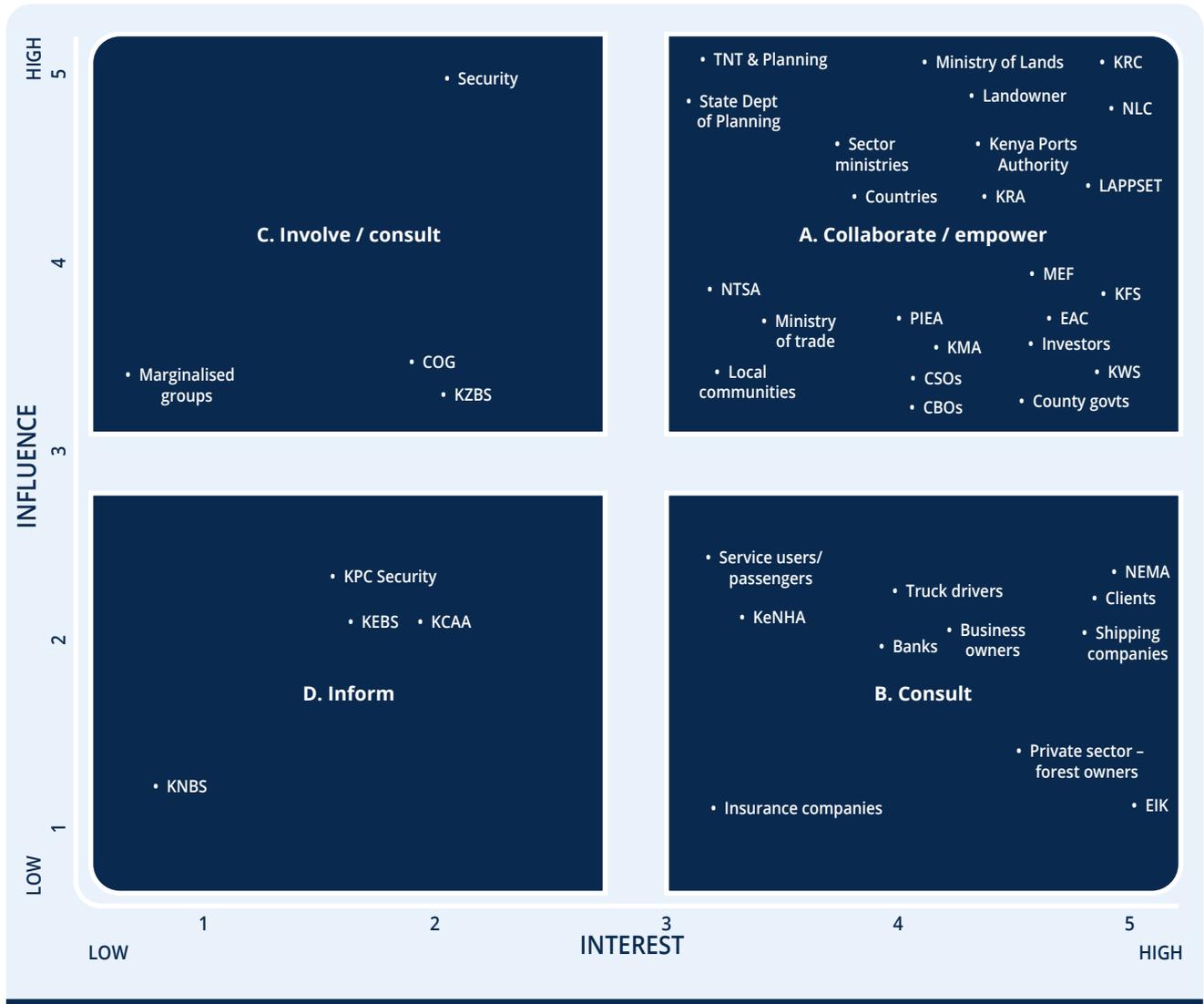
Use several complementary consultation methods to obtain input from different stakeholders at different times using the most appropriate approaches.

Share and validate the plans for consultation before commencing consultations by using the most appropriate media for the target stakeholder groups, and use feedback from stakeholders to improve the plans. 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.

FIGURE 8.2

Stakeholder matrix to inform stakeholder engagement strategies for a policy to shift freight from road to rail in Kenya (see [Box 5.4](#))



8.4 Conducting consultations

An inclusive and equitable consultation process is essential to ensure effective participation and the contribution of marginalized groups.

Conduct consultations at mutually agreed locations and through representatives who are designated by the stakeholder groups using 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 is inclusive engagement with stakeholders who are difficult to reach or have limited access. Inclusive consultation requires informing and engaging broadly with communities and other stakeholders using socially and culturally appropriate methods to enable them to have meaningful influence over the subject of consultation. Stakeholders might include indigenous peoples, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Conduct consultation in a way that is gender and intergenerationally sensitive.

Priority stakeholders such as those that may be directly affected by the policy need to be targeted but may be marginalized and harder to consult with, especially for sectors such as water, agriculture and forestry.

Where consultations involve group discussions – for example, in workshops – seek 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. Summarize commitments and next steps at the end of the meeting.

Skills training or learning activities can be helpful for organizers and participants of consultations – for example, training courses to develop skills in 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 who participated in the consultations and those who were invited but were 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.

8.4.1 Further references

For guidance on conducting consultations, see the following references:

- African Development Bank's *Handbook on Stakeholder Consultation and Participation in ADB Operations* (Chapter 4)⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Available at: www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Policy-Documents/Handbook%20on%20Stakeholder%20Consultation.pdf.

- European Commission's *Better Regulation Guidelines* (Chapter 7)⁴⁵
- Action Research & Action Learning's "Guiding the consultative process".⁴⁶

8.5 Feedback mechanisms for ongoing consultations

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

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 whether and how their input has been used to influence the design, implementation and assessment of policies.

It is important to distinguish between "feedback" and "grievances". Feedback is information provided back to stakeholders (including the government) in response to previous information from that person or entity. A specific resolution is not always needed. In 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 communication at a drop-in centre
- verbal communication at a meeting

⁴⁵ Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/better-regulation-guidelines-stakeholder-consultation.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Available at: www.aral.com.au/resources/consulpro.html#a_cp_guide.

- physical feedback box at an office or in a public place
- telephone hotline number
- text message (e.g. SMS)
- social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook).

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

Feedback mechanisms should be established early in the design stage and maintained for the life of the policy to optimize 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 assessment of the policy.

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 categorized and summarized 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, what changes were made in response to the input). This is particularly effective where users receive a significant amount of input.

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

The input received and the explanation of how it was taken into account should be made publicly available and disseminated to the stakeholders who provided input. See [Chapter 7](#) for more information on how to provide information effectively to various stakeholder groups.