

Guidance for national OGP dialogue

OGP countries commit to developing their country Action Plans through a multi-stakeholder process, with the active engagement of citizens and civil society.

Involving civil society in the development of the national Action Plan is a critical step in improving the dialogue between citizens, civil society and government. This in turn is one of the primary aims of OGP. Governments are required to report on the quality of their dialogue with civil society in their OGP self-assessment report, and the Independent Reporting Mechanism also assesses performance in this area.

In summary, we encourage governments to follow the following steps to ensure effective consultation: *Plan* consultations early in the policy development process, and publish a plan for the consultation that *explains* why the government is consulting and how stakeholders' views will be taken into account. Strive to *involve* a diverse group of stakeholders, including hard-to-reach groups, and *organise* the consultations in ways that are accessible to the people whose views are sought. *Analyse* the input received from consultations, *assess* whether respondents were representative and *provide feedback* to participants to explain how decisions were made and what the next steps will be. Finally, *act on the findings* to improve policies and programmes, and then *evaluate* the consultation process to help improve future consultations. Throughout the consultation, *communicate clearly* and directly, with a focus on using plain language that will be easily understood by regular citizens.

The [OGP Articles of Governance \(Addendum C\)](#) outline seven 'Guidelines for Public Consultation on Country Commitments', as follows:

- 1. Availability of process and timeline:** Countries are to make the details of their public consultation process and timeline available (at least online) prior to the consultation.
- 2. Adequate notice:** Countries are to consult the population with sufficient forewarning to ensure the accessibility of opportunities for citizens to engage.
- 3. Awareness raising:** Countries are to undertake OGP awareness-raising activities to enhance public participation in the consultation.
- 4. Multiple channels:** Countries are to consult through a variety of mechanisms—including online and through in-person meetings—to ensure the accessibility of opportunities for citizens to engage.
- 5. Breadth of consultation:** Countries are to consult widely with the national community, including civil society and the private sector, and to seek out a diverse range of views.
- 6. Documentation and feedback:** Countries are to produce a summary of the public consultation and all individual written comment submissions are to be made available online.
- 7. Consultation during implementation:** Countries are to identify a forum to enable regular multi-stakeholder consultation on OGP implementation—this can be an existing entity or a new one.

This document offers best practice recommendations on each of these seven guidelines, based on OGP experience. The last page of this document provides a set of helpful resources (OGP-specific and beyond).

This document offers best practice recommendations on each of these seven guidelines, based on OGP experience. The last page of this document provides a set of helpful resources (OGP-specific and beyond). Civil society organisations can use the guidance to formulate requests before the actual consultation takes place. Governments can use the guidance to design their consultation – ideally together with civil society. The Independent Reporting Mechanism uses the seven guidelines in the Articles of Governance to evaluate participating country adherence to OGP requirements.

1. Availability of process and timeline: Countries are to make the details of their public consultation process and timeline available (at least online) prior to the consultation.

Governments should aim to provide the following details of the consultation process:

- Clear information on the government's OGP point of contact;
- Clearly stated purpose of the consultation process;
- Where the country falls in the OGP cycle (i.e. is this the first or second national Action Plan);¹
- Information on the scope of the consultation and the methods to be used, as well as what can be expected after the consultation has formally closed;²
- Timeline of meetings, including objectives, expected outcomes and logistical information (e.g. location, format for input, contact details);
- List of directly invited participants (from government, civil society and other stakeholders);
- Information on who can participate additionally and how;
- Specific pre-defined topics to be discussed (if applicable) during consultation in the event that a thematic approach is planned (e.g. open data, extractive industries, open budgets);
- Roles and responsibilities in the process of government, civil society and other participants;
- Materials to be prepared/discussed by participants before the consultation process begins.

2. Adequate notice: Countries are to consult the population with sufficient forewarning to ensure the accessibility of opportunities for citizens to engage

To effectively publicise the consultation process it is important that multiple channels are used; start doing this at least four weeks before consultation begins. This could include the following actions:

- Post a document on the responsible agency's website that explains the consultation process and how the government will address responses;³
- Clearly state a deadline for responses, any alternative ways of contributing, and the language (s) in which responses are preferred;³
- State the date when and the place where the summary of responses will be published;³
- Explicitly state who to contact if respondents have comments or complaints about the consultation process;³
- Make reference to all relevant background information.³ A good starting point is to openly discuss with civil society the preliminary work done on open government and to share government expectations and ideas for OGP commitments;

3. Awareness raising: Countries are to undertake OGP awareness-raising activities to enhance public participation in the consultation.

Beyond the basic 'getting the word out', countries should consider the following recommendations:

- Take steps to raise awareness of OGP and the consultation exercise among a diverse group of stakeholders and individuals who are likely to be interested, including audiences beyond the capital city;²
- Present information in a way that is likely to be accessible and useful to the stakeholders with substantial interest in the matter; relevant documentation should be posted online to enhance accessibility and opportunities for reuse;¹
- Organise preliminary workshops to raise awareness of open government/the OGP basics and encourage a common starting point for consultation discussions;
- Create a national OGP website (as a government or in partnership with civil society) that explains the OGP basics, provides information on the national process, and carries key national OGP documents (e.g. Action Plan, monitoring reports). Make sure it is easy to find, easy to understand and available in the national language(s). For example, [Indonesia](#), [Ireland](#), [Mexico](#) and the [United Kingdom](#) have web pages dedicated to the local OGP process built by civil society, the government or both.
- Organise outreach activities to publicise the government's participation in OGP. This might include working with media partners to disseminate interviews or Q&A sessions with public officials; the active use of social media; organising webinars or other forms of online discussion; and/or press conferences to publicise the country's commitments and responsibilities within OGP.

4. Multiple channels: Countries are to consult through a variety of mechanisms—including online and through in-person meetings—to ensure the accessibility of opportunities for citizens to engage.

- There are many different online tools countries can use to solicit public input. It is important to make sure the online platform is easy to use, easy to find, and clear about how the government will receive and respond to input. In-depth consultation can be combined with surveys and/or online voting.
- In parallel to - or building on - the online mechanism it is advisable to have in-person meetings to discuss proposals and prioritise them (e.g. thematic working groups). For example, in Ghana the National Steering Committee organised three in-person consultation meetings in rural regions.
- Countries should make sure that some of these activities reach a diverse group of stakeholders, including those outside the capital city.
- Allow sufficient time for responses - international best practice recommends that when consultation takes place over a holiday, the response time should be extended.

5. Breadth of consultation: Countries are to consult widely with the national community, including civil society and the private sector, and to seek out a diverse range of views.

Some suggestions:

- OGP does not have a specific definition of civil society. Click [here](#) and [here](#) for some common definitions. It will depend on the national context how civil society is defined and who key stakeholders are.
- Ask local experts for suggestions about appropriate organisations to consult.² This is likely to include traditional transparency and accountability organisations, but also more issue-driven organisations, for

example in the health sector or those working on environmental issues.

- Identify and map organisations with the appropriate expertise and maintain an up-to-date database;³ Key stakeholders may include research organisations, associations, foundations, interest-based advocacy groups or community organisations, academics, businesses and business associations, faith-based organisations, trade associations, oversight institutions, information commissioners and ombudsmen, social movements, media, etc.;
- Consultations should also include individuals representing a variety of government agencies or departments;
- Where appropriate, contact the donor community and international cooperation offices in your country to discuss how they might be able to support the national OGP process. OGP has formal partnerships with the World Bank, OECD, IDB and UNDP, and they can be contacted for assistance either directly via the national offices or via the OGP Support Unit.

6. Documentation and feedback: Countries are to produce a summary of the public consultation and all individual written comment submissions are to be made available online.

Constructive, timely feedback to stakeholders improves the transparency and accountability of the overall Action Plan development process and helps make the connections between stakeholder input and the final result.² The following are some suggestions on documenting input and providing feedback:

- Keep track of all suggestions made; If possible include all of these on the responsible agency's website or the national OGP site and/or as an annex to the national Action Plan. As a minimum, publish a summary of the comments received via these channels;
- Ideally, publish all written submissions (grouping submissions by topic), and explain why they were or were not included in the Action Plan;
- Try to be prompt with the feedback to stakeholders after the consultation closes;
- Publish a summary of the next steps of the OGP national process;
- Invite respondents to comment on the consultation process and suggest ways of further improving it;³
- Include this in an (evaluation) report on the consultation. That report could also contain details of and statistical information on the participants (i.e. number of respondents, their type, geographical distribution).

7. Consultation during implementation: Countries are to identify a forum to enable regular multi-stakeholder consultation on OGP implementation—this can be an existing entity or a new one.

Experience shows that having a platform for permanent dialogue is an important factor in building a true partnership based on trust and understanding, exchanging expertise and monitoring the process. There is a wide diversity of such platforms. Some of the principles include:

- Try to include a variety of government, civil society and other stakeholders and balance the numbers across interest groups;
- Agree early on roles, responsibilities, frequency of meetings;
- It helps the national process if there is sufficient capacity/resources to run/coordinate the permanent dialogue;
- The civil society representatives should be self-selected by civil society and not be selected or appointed by government

Two good examples

- In Mexico the Tripartite Technical Secretariat includes the Presidency, the Access to Information Institute and an elected representative of each of the eight participating civil society organisations. The Secretariat discusses and makes decisions on all OGP-related matters.
- In Peru, by Presidential Decree, the Multi-sectoral Commission comprises three representatives of civil society organisations (elected by participating CSOs) and one from the private sector; as well as five government entities (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Electronic Government Office, the Public Administration Office and the Department of Justice). Additionally, the Comptroller General and the national Ombudsman participate as observers. The Commission meets regularly to follow-up on national implementation efforts.

Good OGP-related resources

- The OGP [basics](#) of consultation and Action Plan development.
- The OGP [basics from a purely civil society perspective](#) with suggestions for advocacy and useful documents.
- Overview article [Improving the OGP experience](#): lessons from 15 countries and access to the individual [country case studies](#) offer ideas and inspiration.
- The UK consultation for the second Action Plan: [A brief on the lessons learned](#).
- The [Open Government Guide](#) highlights practical, measurable, specific and actionable steps that governments can and are taking across a range of cross-cutting and focused areas.
- The [Open Government Standards](#) project defines the OGP core concepts of Transparency, Participation and Accountability.

Good consultation resources

- [Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe. Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process. \(2013\).](#)
- [OECD. Guidelines for Online Public Consultation.](#)
- [OECD. Background Document on Public Consultation.](#)
- [UK Government Consultation Principles.](#)
- [UNDP. Multi-Stakeholder Decision-Making. \(2012\).](#)
- [European Union. Directorate General for Health and Consumers. Code of Good Practice for Consultation of Stakeholders.](#)
- [The World Bank. Consultation with Civil Society Organizations; General Guidelines for World Bank Staff. \(2000\).](#)
- [Scottish Executive: Consultation Good Practice Guidance. \(2004\).](#)

Sources

- ¹ [UK Government Consultation Principles.](#)
- ² [European Union. Directorate General for Health and Consumers. Code of Good Practice for Consultation of Stakeholders.](#)
- ³ [OECD. Guidelines for Online Public Consultation.](#)