

DESIGNING  
AND MANAGING  
AN OGP MULTISTAKEHOLDER  
FORUM

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A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK WITH GUIDANCE AND IDEAS

Executive Summary

Open  
Government  
Partnership



The work in this publication is based on research commissioned by the OGP Support Unit. The purpose of the commissioned research was to:

- Capture the rich experiences in OGP countries with different models of permanent dialogue and collaboration.
- Create a practical, action oriented handbook with ideas and guidance for the OGP community – both within government and civil society.

Ernesto Velasco-Sánchez developed a methodology and conducted the research independently of OGP. All findings in this report emanate from his efforts and should be understood as third party recommendations to the OGP community.

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# Executive Summary

## COLLABORATION IS THE CORNERSTONE

The participation of both civil society and government is essential to the success of the Open Government Partnership. Their collaboration is vital at the international level and within each participating country. That is why OGP participants commit to developing their National Action Plans through a multistakeholder process, with the active engagement of citizens and civil society.

OGP's consultation requirements (see next box) ask countries to "identify an existing or new forum to enable regular multistakeholder consultation on OGP implementation." The majority of OGP countries by now fulfill this requirement. This document shows the advantages of having a Multistakeholder Forum (or simply Forum) – a structured environment designed to maximize participation and cooperation between government and civil society by bringing relevant partners into the discussion and ensuring that all voices are heard.

A Forum is a cornerstone of each country's successful participation in OGP and is crucial to delivering collaborative open government reform. However, no two Forums are identical – the character of each nation's government and civil society participants will influence the model they design and the practices they adopt for their open government work.

Addendum C of the Open Government Partnership's [Articles of Governance](#) states that OGP participants commit to developing their country action plans through a multistakeholder process, with the active engagement of citizens and civil society. Taking account of relevant national laws and policies, OGP participants agree to develop their country commitments according to the following principles:

### Consultation during development of Action Plan

- **Availability of timeline:** Countries are to make the details of their public consultation process and timeline available (online at a minimum) prior to the consultation.
- **Adequate notice:** Countries are to consult the population with sufficient forewarning.
- **Awareness-raising:** Countries are to undertake OGP awareness-raising activities to enhance public participation in the consultation.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Documentation and feedback:** Countries are to make available online a summary of the public consultation and all individual written comment submissions.

### Consultation during implementation

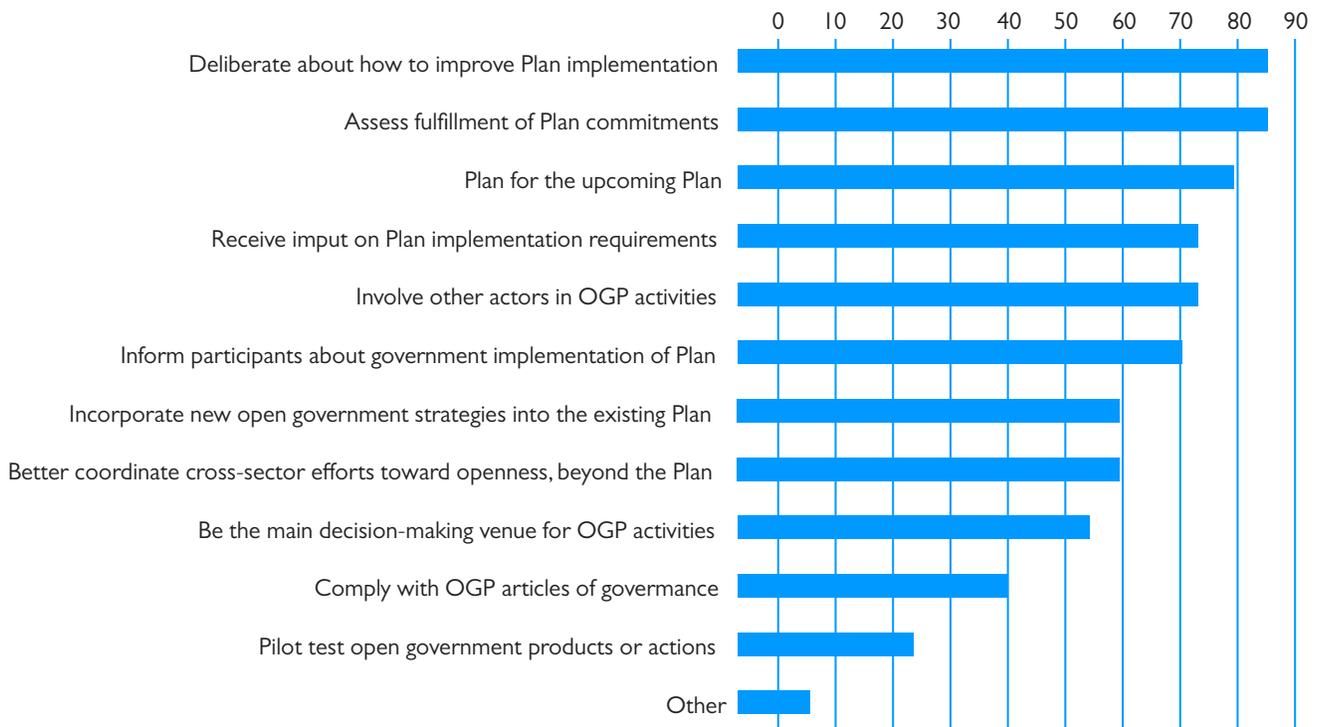
- **Consultation during implementation:** Countries are to identify an existing or new forum to enable regular multistakeholder consultation on OGP implementation.

Furthermore, the [OGP Guidance Note](#) gives suggestions for best practices and outlines what is required in a consultation Forum for participation in OGP. Source: Open Government Partnership, OGP Consultation During Implementation Guidance Note, available at [http://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/attachments/OGP\\_Con\\_dur\\_imp%20%281%29.pdf](http://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/attachments/OGP_Con_dur_imp%20%281%29.pdf)



A survey of points of contact, members of civil society organizations (CSOs) and Independent Reporting Mechanism’s (IRM) researchers conducted by the OGP Support Unit found that most Forums focus on monitoring and improving National Action Plan commitments. As shown in the table below, almost half of respondents saw the Forum as a way to integrate others into OGP activities and promote open government policy beyond the Plan.

## OGP SURVEY: MAIN FUNCTIONS OF THE MULTISTAKEHOLDER FORUM



Source: OGP Support Unit Survey on Multistakeholder Forums, conducted in August 2015, n=33, more than one option could be selected.

This handbook is intended to help government and civil society actors participating in national OGP processes to meet the Partnership’s guidelines. Moreover, it aims to support them in moving beyond the minimal requirements and develop fuller and more ambitious approaches to permanent government-civil society dialogue. It draws on the experiences of OGP participants to assist actors in refining existing mechanisms and to aid new actors to create and manage their own Forums. Each country’s stakeholders should consider their own situation and which aspects of different models would work best for them, as well as whether they would need to make use of other means in order to develop a successful permanent dialogue mechanism.

There are three phases in the Forum life cycle:

- Creation of the Forum and participant recruitment
- Managing the ongoing operations of the Forum
- Participation in the development of the National Action Plan (or Plan)

## Phase One: Creation of the Forum

Preparation and planning are essential to avoid early disappointments in the creation of the Forum. Clearly-stated activities, information and political support should be arranged from the start. Early agreement on a Forum's goals, its resources, its general characteristics, and the process for its creation will help balance the expectations of different actors with what can actually be achieved.

To help in the creation and operation of a Forum:

- Ensure sufficient political support.
- Mobilize and involve leadership inside and outside government.
- Review the existing legal framework.
- Agree on the basic features or characteristics of the Forum.
- Establish a calendar for the creation for the Forum.

Careful consideration of who will be at the table representing government, civil society organizations and other interested parties will help in determining who should be part of the endeavor from the start. Strong leaders will move the process forward toward setting up the Forum while considering feedback from all sides. Design of the Forum must be an effort of co-creation between government and civil society. Forum participants can look at case studies and discuss the approaches taken by others to select the practices that will work for them and their country.

The Forum can be established by:

- Administrative decision, such as an executive decree.
- Creation of new laws or building on existing legislation.
- Formal or informal agreements.

There is no required framework for setting up the Forum, but general guidelines suggest rules for naming representatives, some means of public accountability, and collaboration and shared responsibilities by government and civil society.

Once participants are identified, it is generally a good idea to provide an overview of the Open Government Partnership's goals and operations to ensure there is a common understanding of what open government means and how to achieve it within the OGP framework.

Partners should be encouraged to operate as co-creators of the Forum and work together for the open government agenda. This can be challenging where relations have been less cordial. There also needs to be room for the addition of new partners and the rotation of existing partners into new roles.

## Phase Two: Managing the Forum

Once the Forum is established, participants must ensure its work continues in a steady and sustained fashion. This requires commitment and communication from all parties.

Effective communications should consider the needs of the recipient, both in relation to content and the means to receive it. Communication surveys can be utilized at the outset to determine the best way to connect with participants, and the surveys can be used to regularly assess information systems in order to make adjustments when necessary.

Forum meetings must be frequent enough that their effectiveness does not wane between sessions, but not so frequent that there is insufficient time to see measurable gains. Of course in periods of intense activities – such as during the drafting of the National Action Plan – meetings will by necessity be more frequent.

Meetings must also be accountable to the public by providing accessible minutes, agendas and advance notice of dates and venues.

The Forum can function primarily as a space for decision-making or for consultation, or a combination of the two, although most countries opt for one or the other. The rules for making decisions – consensus rule, majority rule or qualified majority rule – must be established in advance, as well as determining what constitutes a quorum in order to make decisions binding.

Throughout the process, communication among participants is crucial, as is communication with external stakeholders and those with an interest (though not necessarily a role) in open government policy development. Much like intra-Forum communication, effective information strategies consider both the audience's needs

and how it receives news. In addition, meetings, working groups and other opportunities outside traditional communications tools can be effective ways to include other interested parties in the Forum process.

The Forum must be firmly established, but also flexible enough to adapt to changes in government and civil society. To be prepared for change, Forum members can:

- Document the Forum meetings and other activities.
- Appoint a co-chair and member's substitutes in case of absence.
- Establish a rotation policy that develops skills among all participants.
- Adopt a succession plan for the chair, co-chair and technical secretariat.
- Prepare induction materials for newcomers.
- Establish multiple links with high- and mid-level officials that allow an easier flow of information in relation to Plan implementation.
- Make agreements for continuing dialogue in case of external political crisis.

Alongside the hard work of establishing the Forum, it is important to make sure that there is a continuous commitment to learning and improvement. This can be achieved by assessing Forum activities as regularly as every six months. Additionally, to be in accordance with OGP principles, the Forum has to be accountable to the public for its activities, the resources allocated to it and the results obtained.

## Phase Three: Participation in development of a National Action Plan

Once the Forum is up and running, members' work turns to their role in the two-year cycle of the National Action Plan. As the Plan comes together, Forum members continue to promote government-civil society dialogue for greater public engagement.

As the Forum designs its consultation methodology for the Plan, its members should ensure the public is made aware with advance notice of the process and that a wide range of perspectives is

sought. This can include diversity in both regions and viewpoints.

The Forum also plays an important role in monitoring Plan implementation. This can include ensuring there is sufficient documentation, that relevant capabilities are recognized, and that there are sufficient resources, monitoring and timely feedback. Forum members also can serve as facilitators, connecting OGP researchers with key participants during the reporting process.

## Going beyond the Plan: Promoting Open Government policies and principles

The challenges to openness in each country can be numerous, complex and long-standing. They may require multiple interventions over a long time. OGP National Action Plans cannot be expected to resolve all the challenges and their underlying causes. Action Plans operate on a short time frame, with limited resources, and the information and technologies at its disposal are sometimes imperfect or unreliable.

Because of this, building open government policy cannot be confined to the OGP Plans. More actors are pushing openness initiatives, more public sector institutions are showing interest

(e.g. the legislative and judicial branches) and new technological solutions are being developed every day. The Forum's representatives have to be aware of this and act proactively to go beyond the OGP process. They should promote openness in innovative ways in order to support initiatives that work in parallel to the Plan and take advantage of peer learning opportunities within the country and internationally.

Openness requires contributions from diverse sources and the sustained mobilization of all kinds of social resources – all aimed at making a difference in people's lives.



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