



4 Creating Space(s) for National Dialogue: The Multi-Stakeholder Forum

Key Takeaways

- In line with Standard 1, all OGP national members are required to establish a formal space for ongoing dialogue between government and civil society representatives.
- All OGP members must meet the relevant minimum requirement for setting up and running such a space for dialogue.
- There are many different ways to fulfill this Standard, offering OGP members flexibility. A proven approach is a multi-stakeholder forum or platform, referenced as the Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF).
- MSFs have a range of responsibilities that help government and civil society to effectively work together on open government objectives throughout the entire Action Framework.
- OGP members are encouraged to consider other elements and factors when setting up their MSF for a more ambitious application of Standard 1 and to ensure their success and effective operation.



Multi-Stakeholder Forum

In line with Standard 1, all OGP country members are required to establish a formal space for ongoing dialogue between government and civil society representatives. Dialogue is fundamental to the OGP model as it fosters trust, promotes joint problem-solving, and empowers civil society to influence the development, implementation, and monitoring of open government commitments.

Standard 1

Establishing a space for ongoing dialogue and collaboration between government, civil society, and other non-governmental stakeholders.

Minimum Requirement 1.1

A space for ongoing dialogue with participation from both government and civil society members, and other non-governmental representatives, as appropriate, that meets regularly (at least every six months) is established. Its basic rules on participation are public.

IRM Assessment

The IRM will assess whether the country complies with three key measures:

- Did a multi-stakeholder space for dialogue exist?
- Did the space for dialogue meet at least every six months?
- Was the information on the space for dialogue publicly available?

See IRM Guidelines [here](#).

There is no prescribed framework for establishing a space for ongoing dialogue, which allows for flexibility to adapt to country-specific contexts. As a result, there are multiple ways to fulfill this Standard. Based on the experiences of OGP members throughout the years, a proven approach has been to create a multi-stakeholder forum or platform, referenced as the **Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF)**

MSFs can be institutionalized, set up as decision-making or consultative bodies, be organized into working groups and sub-committees, or take on other forms. MSFs reflect each country's unique priorities, as the character of its government and civil society participants influences the model they design for the MSF and the practices they adopt for their open government work. This is particularly relevant during the co-creation process of action plans, as explained in [Development of Action Plans and Commitments](#).

OGP encourages countries to think broadly about opportunities to engage actors from various branches and levels of government in this space, along with other stakeholders such as those from local governments, parliaments, the judiciary, autonomous bodies, the private sector, academia, and others. The composition of the space for dialogue should be carefully considered to make sure it includes all necessary actors to effectively drive open government reforms, while not replicating any existing avenues for dialogue and cooperation between government and civil society.

The text below refers to the required space for dialogue as an MSF and outlines key approaches and considerations to establishing such a forum.

4.1 Responsibilities of the MSF

The purpose of an MSF is to provide a structured and inclusive mechanism for government and civil society to work together on open government objectives throughout the entire Action Framework. Even though key responsibilities of the MSF may vary country to country, they typically include and are not limited to the following.

- **Strategic and tactical planning.** Based on available resources, priorities within and outside the government, and the political context, the MSF strategizes on the best ways to approach open government objectives through the OGP Action Framework and beyond, including the development, implementation, and monitoring of action plans, approving award submissions or funding applications, participating in the Open Gov Challenge, and more. For example, it can establish the goals of the action plan and the strategic themes to be addressed or used to respond to emerging priorities or opportunities. At the same time, it can coordinate, feed into, or collect feedback from broader cross-sectoral efforts towards government openness.

Note: To assess your domestic baseline of the OGP process, we recommend completing the [OGP Health Check Questionnaire](#).

- **Engagement.** The MSF proactively identifies ways to engage stakeholders from within and outside government on different open government processes in the country, including the development, implementation, and monitoring of the action plan and other initiatives to reach open government objectives. It also establishes avenues for other non-governmental stakeholders, such as academia and the private sector, to engage with the OGP process. The MSF also provides opportunities for remote participation in some meetings and events to facilitate the inclusion of groups unable to attend in person.
- **Communication.** The MSF undertakes activities to inform open government stakeholders and the broader public about open government reforms and processes in the country, such as the development of the national action plan, and how they can participate. It also proactively communicates and reports back on its activities, decisions, and results to government and civil society stakeholders.
- **Oversight.** The MSF oversees domestic processes related to OGP and is responsible for overseeing the development, implementation, and monitoring of action plans and other open government commitments. For example, it assesses the development and implementation of action plans and identifies ways to approach these processes in future iterations. It also engages with the IRM during periods when the IRM is preparing reports to assess the country's performance (see [IRM Assessment of Minimum Requirements](#)).

4.2 Key Elements to Consider When Setting Up an MSF

The MSF comprises representatives from government and civil society. Its ultimate composition should consider the following.

- **Balance.** The MSF should make sure that no constituency, government, or civil society is over or underrepresented. In consultation with civil society, the government point of contact defines and coordinates the participation of other government actors and stakeholders in the MSF.
- **Inclusion.** The MSF should proactively include representatives of groups such as women, youth, seniors, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ and indigenous communities, or other historically underrepresented groups. These groups often have different needs or insights decisive in shaping proposed government reforms.

- **Diversity.** The MSF should represent a diverse set of stakeholders, interests, and policy areas. Conducting a diversity assessment can help determine which groups or interests have, or lack, access or influence over the MSF.

There is no single required framework for setting up an MSF, and many MSFs across the OGP membership base vary significantly in structure, scope, and decision-making processes. Regardless of model, the following considerations can guide the process of establishing an effective and meaningful forum for dialogue.

- **Coordination with existing structures.** Before setting up an MSF, it is beneficial to map out existing councils, committees, groups or other avenues of cooperation already bringing together government and civil society. Building on such existing mechanisms or aligning with them, rather than duplicating them, can position the MSF as an umbrella to unify or streamline broader open government reform.
- **Government participants.** It is important to have representatives from the ministries, departments, and/or agencies responsible for implementing open government policies. It is also beneficial to include ministries with cross-government coordination capacity. In the implementation phase, it is also important that the agencies implementing commitments are involved with and communicate with the MSF.
- **Civil society participants.** Civil society selection for the MSF can follow different methods depending on the country context. OGP's recommended approach is a self-selection process, whereby civil society participants select among themselves who will join the MSF. This process should actively reach and engage a diverse range of actors, including less-resourced or marginalized groups. All interested civil society organizations should be informed and given the opportunity to self-nominate. OGP recommends this self-selection process, but governments can also participate in the selection as long as the process is transparent, open to all interested civil society actors, and based on clear rules and criteria. It is also advisable to periodically refresh or expand MSF membership and allow new and diverse participants to join.
- **Other participants.** In some OGP countries, representatives from other branches or levels of government, academia, or the private sector are included in the MSF. In certain cases, donors or international institutions may participate as observers to make specific contributions. Such representation should not reduce or replace the space reserved for civil society participants in the forum.
- **Size of the MSF.** The MSF should have enough representatives from government and civil society to be inclusive and reflect key open government stakeholders in the country. At the same time, it should remain lean enough to be agile and efficient in decision-making and functioning. A core function of the MSF is to engage stakeholders beyond the MSF in the development and implementation of the action plan. The MSF does not reflect or represent all stakeholders involved in the OGP process.
- **Political support.** Political support, especially from high-level officials within the executive branch, is required for the success of MSFs. This support can be secured by involving high-level officials in specific activities or moments of the MSF or ensuring they are regularly updated and engaged in deliberations within the MSF.
- **Legal standing.** In some cases, an MSF can have a legal or administrative basis that is acknowledged and adhered to by its members. This basis may take the form of an executive order, a legal decree, or existing legislation. In other cases, a formal or informal agreement among MSF participants may suffice.

To manage expectations both internally and externally, the MSF should clearly define its roles and responsibilities and position itself as a platform for dialogue, collaboration, and co-creation. There are at least three different types of MSF models that can be considered. However, actual configurations often blend elements of these approaches depending on context.

- **The MSF as a decision-making body.** In this model, the MSF has the authority to make binding decisions on certain open government policies and processes. The government commits to implementing these decisions, ensuring the MSF's guidance translates into action. This arrangement grants stakeholders genuine ownership and allows the MSF to drive tangible reforms. However, it must be carefully integrated into existing legal and administrative frameworks to avoid conflicts and ensure seamless implementation.
- **The MSF as a consultative body.** Here, the MSF serves in an advisory capacity. It provides recommendations on open government initiatives, while ultimate decision-making authority remains with the government. This structure enables the government to retain control of policy direction while benefiting from broad stakeholder input. To maintain trust and engagement, it is essential for the government to provide clear, transparent feedback on how the MSF's advice is considered and acted upon to keep stakeholders engaged and trusting.
- **The mixed model.** This approach combines elements of both decision-making and consultative structures. The MSF may hold decision-making power over selected aspects of the open government agenda, while offering advisory input on others. This flexibility allows decisions to be tailored to specific policy areas, yet requires clear delineation of responsibilities to prevent confusion and encourage effective collaboration between the MSF and the government.