

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 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* if 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 (online at minimum) 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 make a summary of the public consultation and all individual written comment submissions 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, based on OGP experience. The last page of this document provides a set of helpful resources (OGP specific and beyond).

Civil society organizations 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 7 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 (online at minimum) prior to the consultation.

Governments should aim to provide the following details on 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 1st or 2nd 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;^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}
- 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 if a thematic approach will be followed (e.g. open data, extractive industries, open budgets, etc.);
- 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 to use multiple channels, and start doing so at least 4 weeks before consultation begins. This could include:

- Post a document on the responsible agency’s website that explains the consultation process and how the government will address responses;^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}
- Clearly state a deadline for responses to be sent, any alternative ways of contributing, and the language (s) in which responses are preferred;^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}
- State the date when and place where the summary of responses will be published;^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}

- Explicitly state whom to contact if respondents have comments or complaints about the consultation process;^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}
- Make reference to all relevant background information.^{Error! Bookmark not defined.} A good starting point is to openly discuss with civil society preliminary work done on open government and 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 that are likely to be interested, including audiences beyond the capital city;^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}
- 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
- Organize preliminary workshops to raise awareness of open government/OGP basics and encourage a common starting point for consultation discussions;
- Create a national OGP website (as government or in partnership with civil society) that explains OGP basics, provides information on the national process, and holds 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 webpages dedicated to the local OGP process built by civil society, the government or both.
- Organize outreach activities to publicize the government's participation in OGP. This might include working with media partners to disseminate interviews or Q&A sessions with public officials; active use of social media; organizing 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 prioritize them (e.g. thematic working groups). For example, in Ghana the National Steering Committee organized 3 in-person consultation meetings in rural regions.
- Countries should make sure some of these activities reach a diverse group of stakeholders, including outside of the capital city.
- Allow sufficient time for responses – international best practice recommends that when consultation takes place over a holiday, extra time should be allotted to the response time.

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 organizations to consult.² This will likely include traditional transparency and accountability organisations, but also more issue-driven organisations, for example from the health sector or those working on environmental issues.
- Identify and map organizations with the appropriate expertise and maintain an up-to-date database,^{Error! Bookmark not defined.} Key stakeholders may include research organizations, associations, foundations, interest-based advocacy groups or community organizations, 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 make a summary of the public consultation and all individual written comment submissions 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 stakeholders' input

and the final result. ^{Error! Bookmark not defined.} 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. At 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, ^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}
- Include this in an (evaluation) report on the consultation. That report could also contain details 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 to build a true partnership based on trust and understanding, exchanging expertise and monitoring of 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

Description and links to good examples and materials

- In Mexico the Tripartite Technical Secretariat includes the Presidency, the Access to Information Institute and an elected representative from one of the eight participating civil society organizations. The Secretariat discusses and makes decisions on all OGP-related matters. More information on its mandate is available here (TO FOLLOW VERSION 0.4).
- In Peru by Presidential Decree, the Multisectorial Commission is composed by three representatives from civil society organizations (elected by participating CSOs) and one from the private sector; 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. More information on its mandate is available here (TO FOLLOW VERSION 0.4).

Annex: resources and references

Good OGP related resources

- The OGP [basics](#) around consultation and Action Plan development
- The OGP [basics from a pure 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](#) for ideas and inspiration
- The UK consultation for the second Action Plan: [lessons learned in draft](#)
- 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 INGO's 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. \(2004\)](#)

Footnote references

¹ [UK Government Consultation Principles](#)

² [OECD. Guidelines for Online Public Consultation](#)