



Centre for  
Public Impact  
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# A brief introduction to... Public consultation

# Public consultation

**Broad-based and targeted  
public consultation**

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## What is Public consultation?

Public consultation is a process by which government actively seeks information and feedback on a specific policy or policy area from stakeholders and the general public.

It can take place at practically any stage of the policy cycle, from objective-setting and design to delivery and evaluation, and at each stage it can inform government of public's opinion as well as help identify less well-known alternatives and overlooked consequences. It can be a one-off endeavour or an ongoing dialogue between government and the relevant stakeholders.

By definition, public consultation is limited to issues chosen by the government or mandated by law. Its scope can vary significantly between and within governments and depends on the organisational culture, the nature of the subject matter, and the government's access to sufficient relevant information.

## What does it seek to achieve?

The purpose of public consultation is to allow citizen input to inform policy design and decision-making. Through public consultation, government seeks to incorporate the views and knowledge of individuals, stakeholders and other levels of government into policymaking. It aims to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public policy by maximising the empirical and political information available to the government on related evidence, concerns and implications. Additionally, through the engagement of individuals and interest groups, public consultation increases compliance rates and lowers the costs of enforcing a policy.

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# Keys to success

## What are the key success factors?

- ✓ Processes and materials that are easy to understand and engage with
- ✓ Timing that allows for substantial policy changes following the consultation
- ✓ Broad outreach that captures input from all the relevant stakeholders and gives everyone a voice
- ✓ Sufficient timeframes to allow stakeholders to submit considered responses, especially when representative bodies have to contact their members to conduct secondary consultations
- ✓ Involving all levels of government to leverage existing information or expertise, and streamline efforts  
Accommodating those stakeholders who ask for their input to remain confidential
- ✓ Clear communication of the consultation's effect on the policy

Frequent or simultaneous consultations may reduce effectiveness due to the burden on stakeholders. It is therefore important to schedule mutually convenient consultations, and potentially to merge related ones, in order to minimise this burden.

# Keys to success



## Things to look out for

The following table displays three specific challenges related to public consultation, as well as potential mitigating factors.

Issue	Main challenges to address	Ways to mitigate
Slow policymaking	Proper consultation requires a substantial amount of time to plan, execute, analyse, and act on its outcome.	Plan public consultation into the policy process. Establish robust stakeholder networks.
Unbalanced inputs	Stakeholders with more resources, or that are better organised, may dominate the process.	Design active outreach to ensure sufficient involvement of all stakeholders. Design materials that are easy to understand and engage with.
Genuine engagement	Consultations may become merely symbolic, done solely for the appearance of public engagement.	Government commitment to publish the concrete changes made as a result of the consultation.



# Approaches

## and tools

## Broad-based consultation

Inviting the public to submit feedback on drafts of concrete government initiatives through a clearly defined process in a given timeframe.



### Online consultation:

a website offering policy drafts for consideration and feedback submissions, or interactive engagement through social media tools to encourage and track public discourse.

### Example:

U-Report is a mobile application that enables young people to become “U-Reporters” and voice their opinions and ideas about important topics that matter to them. The results are then relayed to decision-makers, such as MPs, who use them to inform their policies. U-Report was first launched by UNICEF in Uganda and has since spread to over 20 countries worldwide. See: Centre for Public Impact, *UNICEF’s U-Report: using mobile technology for youth participation in policymaking*



### Public hearing:

a publicly documented meeting of government officials and interested parties who are granted the opportunity to comment in person and potentially engage in dialogue and debate. It is usually discretionary and ad hoc, used to supplement other consultation channels.

### Example:

as part of the Child-Friendly Cities movement, Italian municipalities established Children’s Councils where children can meet with members of the municipal government to discuss ideas and proposals for improving the cities they live in. See: Centre for Public Impact, *The Child Friendly Cities (CFC) movement in Italy*



# Approaches

## and tools



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## Targeted consultation

Actively engaging with a small number of parties who are either directly affected by the proposed policy or hold valuable information and expertise for informed decision-making.



### Expert consultation:

a form of government dialogue with relevant parties, it offers speed and flexibility at the expense of limited transparency and unequal access. Usually, it is a preliminary step meant to provide a “sanity check” before launching a fully-fledged consultation.

### Example:

UK’s 2006 smoking ban legislation, which prohibits smoking in public premises and workplaces, was based on careful consultation with experts from the British Medical Association and other health and government bodies as well as representatives from the private sector. See: Centre for Public Impact, *Smoking ban in England and Wales*



### Advisory bodies:

often called councils or committees, these are groups of sectoral representatives or experts appointed for a set term by the government in order to scrutinise its policies and facilitate external feedback. Their mandate can vary considerably from offering advice to providing necessary approval.

### Example:

Havana’s urban farming, prompted by food scarcity and diminishing resources in Cuba’s capital, was supported by a series of advisory bodies such as the Technical Advisory Board, which represents 11 agricultural research institutes. See: Centre for Public Impact, *Urban agriculture in Havana*

# Approaches

and tools



## Citizens' juries:

a representative group of randomly-selected citizens, commissioned by the government to offer advice on managing trade-offs and priorities in a given policy area. They do so via a series of thorough public and moderated group deliberations, informed by government and expert briefings and private discussions with family, friends and colleagues.

## Example:

Citizens' juries have been employed in Canada and Australia on a wide range of policy issues, including mental health, infrastructure investment and nuclear waste.

See: Centre for Public Impact, *Taking the public pulse: introducing a new form of jury service*



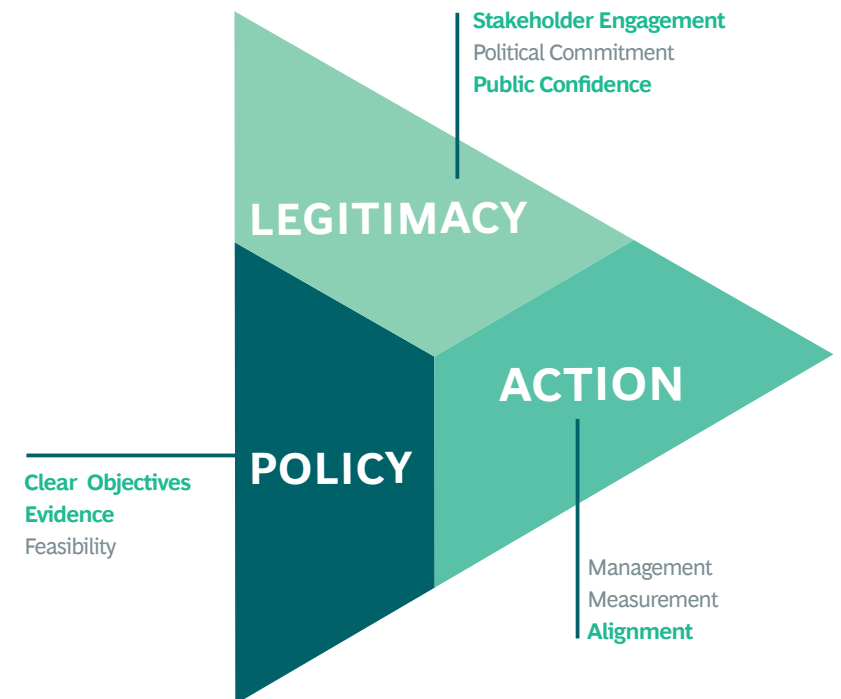
# Fundamentals

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## How does Public consultation help achieve greater public impact?

CPI's Public Impact Fundamentals are a systematic attempt to understand what makes a successful policy outcome and describe what can be done to maximise the chances of achieving public impact. Below, we have highlighted the elements of the Fundamentals that are most likely to be positively influenced by Public consultation.

### THE PUBLIC IMPACT FUNDAMENTALS





## Further reading

**The Centre for Public Impact,**  
The Public Impact Fundamentals, 2016

**OECD,**  
Background Document on  
Public Consultation, 2006

**Open Government Guide,**  
<http://www.opengovpartnership.org>

**Australian Government,** Best Practice  
Consultation, 2016

**Claudia Chwalisz,**  
The People's Verdict: Adding Informed Citizen  
Voices to Public Decision-making, 2017



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