

Public Consultation Position At-a-Glance

Public consultation is a critical component of good governance. It enables members of the public to engage in governance, encouraging them to make contributions and monitor integration of their inputs into public policy which increases buy-in. Public consultation goes beyond notification which the OECD describes as “a one-way process of communication in which the public plays a passive consumer role of government information.”¹ Instead, it facilitates two-way communication through which the opinions may be shared, problems identified, and proposals evaluated. The goal of public consultation is to collect information and feedback for use in the development of a higher quality product.

In order to be effective, public consultation must:

1. Have a realistic timeline that considers people’s access to information and modes of participation, including internet connectivity, and political, social, and economic climates

Begin with provision of information on the purpose, process, and benefits

Prioritize stakeholders and include diverse groups of people including those most impacted by the product

Have a clearly defined process for feedback and follow up to ensure participants are aware of the ways their inputs are used in the development of the final product

Close with a public report on the process, analysis, and outcome

Benefits of public consultation include:

1. **Increased access** to a range of expertise and lived experiences. Information and views collected from a diverse group of people helps to ensure that a wider set of people and circumstances are considered, and plans can be made to meet specific needs and circumvent obstacles.

Increased transparency. Engaging members of the public increases their awareness of plans and processes. Even those who do not directly participate in consultative processes have a more positive perception of entities known to meaningfully engage the public.

Balanced interests. Various groups can express their points of view and have their opinions considered alongside those they oppose or challenge. Responsible parties then have multiple perspectives to consider which is a way of avoiding groupthink and marginalization of vulnerable and underrepresented groups.

Increased engagement. When views, plans, and proposals are presented, those participating in the process can apply them to their own areas of work and experiences, enabling them to identify and share gaps and challenges. These can then be addressed.

Identification of unintended consequences. Members of the public are able to ask, “what if” and “what about” based on their knowledge and experiences to expose the negative impact of plans and proposals that may not have been previously identified or considered, particularly by those who craft them in response to an existing issue.

Increased buy-in. When people engage in a process, offer feedback, and see evidence of their contributions, there is a sense of ownership and collaboration which can increase commitment to the product, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and outcome.

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/36785341.pdf>

Improved compliance. Contributions to regulations, legislation, and policy, particularly when there is due consideration and necessary amendments are made, can result in the products being deemed more reasonable, acceptable, and suitable, resulting in people adherence.