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Ensuring quality of participation: Guiding Principles for Citizen Participation Processes

This chapter introduces nine principles to ensure quality of citizen participation processes. Methods of citizen participation outlined in these guidelines rely on principles of good practice to ensure their quality: purpose, accountability, transparency, inclusiveness and accessibility, integrity, privacy, information, resources, and evaluation.

Guiding principles for citizen participation processes

Various methods of citizen participation outlined in these guidelines rely on different principles of good practice to ensure their quality. Even though methods have their own specificities, there are general principles to keep in mind when implementing citizen participation activities that can help ensure quality of a participation process. These principles have been developed based on the analysis of good practice principles for each method (for which such principles were available), and the OECD *Guiding Principles for Open and Inclusive Policy Making*.

- [New Zealand Principles of Online Engagement](#) (2022^[1])
- [OECD Good Practice Principles for Representative Deliberative Processes](#) (2020^[2])
- [OECD Best Practice Principles on Stakeholder Engagement in Regulatory Policy](#) (2017^[3])
- [East, North, and South Ayrshire Councils Good Practice Principles for Participatory Budgeting](#) (2016^[4])
- [EU-Citizen Science Good Practice Principles for Citizen Science Projects](#) (2015^[5])
- [OECD Guiding Principles for Open and Inclusive Policy Making](#) (2010^[6])
- [IAP2 Core Values of Public Participation](#) (2017^[7])

Figure 3.1. Guiding Principles for Citizen Participation Processes



Source: Author's own elaboration.

1) Clarity and impact

The objective of a citizen participation process should be defined from the outset and linked to a defined public problem or challenge. It should aim for a genuine outcome – and whenever possible, citizens and affected communities should be encouraged to set the agenda and propose issues to be addressed by participatory processes. A participatory process should have a clear link to decision making, and participants should be able to perceive their impact on public decisions.

2) Commitment and accountability

Public authorities should be clear about the expected results of the process to manage participants' expectations. There should be a public commitment to respond to or act on participants' recommendations, following up on the use of their inputs in a timely - and when possible public - manner. Public authorities should inform participants and the broader public on how they use the received inputs.

3) Transparency

The participation process should be announced publicly before it begins. There should be full transparency on any applicable decision-making process which will follow the participation process. The process design and all materials, as well as relevant data, should be available to the public in a timely manner. The response to the inputs received from participants and the evaluation after the process should be publicised and have a public communication strategy. Public authorities can make use of public communication mechanisms to increase awareness beyond participants.

4) Inclusiveness and accessibility

Any interested person or stakeholder should be able to participate, and the processes should reflect the diversity of the community. This means that the methods chosen must be appropriate for the intended audience, efforts are made to reduce barriers to participation and to consider how to involve underrepresented groups. Participation can also be encouraged and supported through remuneration, covered expenses, and/or providing or paying for childcare and eldercare.

5) Integrity

The process must have an honest intention. Depending on the scale of the process, there can be oversight by an advisory or monitoring board, and the participation process can be run by an arms' length co-ordinating team that is different from the commissioning authority. Efforts should be made to protect the process from private interests or policy capture by specific interest groups.

6) Privacy

There should be respect for participants' privacy. Any data collected and published should have participants' consent. All participants' personal information and data should be treated in compliance with international good practices, such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and taking into account legal and ethical issues surrounding data collection and sharing, copyright, and intellectual property.

7) Information

Participants should have access to a wide and diverse range of accurate, relevant, and accessible evidence and expertise. Participation processes should be designed to give citizens full (to the extent necessary) and clear knowledge about a specific issue.

8) Resources

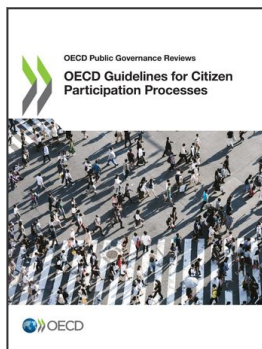
Public authorities should secure the necessary resources to properly implement participatory processes. Such resources can be human, financial, and technical. Public authorities might need to call on external expertise, but when possible should build capacities internally to foster a culture of participation. In addition, public officials should have access to appropriate skills, guidance, and training as well as an organisational culture that supports both in-person and online participation.

9) Evaluation

Participation processes should be evaluated to create an opportunity to learn and improve. Evaluation strengthens the trust of policy makers, the public, and stakeholders in any recommendations or other outcomes of participation processes. There should be an anonymous evaluation by the participants to assess the process based on objective criteria and an internal evaluation by the co-ordination team. An independent evaluation is recommended for some participatory processes, particularly those that last a significant time.

References

- East, North and South Ayrshire Councils (2016), *Participatory Budgeting Toolkit*. [4]
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From:

OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/f765caf6-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2022), “Ensuring quality of participation: Guiding Principles for Citizen Participation Processes”, in *OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/3b93098f-en>

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