

ABC Guide on Citizen Engagement

Citizen's trust in administration is one of the core aspects of democracy. It depends on people's personal experiences of fairness of administration, but also of opportunities to take part in and influence decision-making processes. Citizens' voice require government's response, while the quality of citizen engagement depends very much on the quality of public administration and capacity of the public servants to engage with citizens meaningfully around the public policy reforms, innovations in different sectors, strategies, others. This new engagement paradigm departs from the key pillars of an "Open Government" which are: being citizen-centered, opened, transparency and collaborative; acting as an enabler of innovation and technology, and being accountable to the citizens.

Ideally, citizen engagement processes should comply with both national legislation dealing with this issue as well as internationally recommended practices, such as the classical guidebook on "Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making" by Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD), 2001.

The aim of the ABC Guidelines is to highlight the main stages of the decision making preparation processes based on the Law on Transparency in Decision Making (2008), and since there is no one-size-fits-all model for citizen engagement, these Guidelines also serve as a concise and practical reference tool for a successful implementation of citizen engagement by public authorities.

Key pillars of an Open Government



Citizen centered



Opened, transparent
and collaborative



Innovation and
technology enabler



Accountable

Stages of the decision making preparation process

Guiding principles for each stage

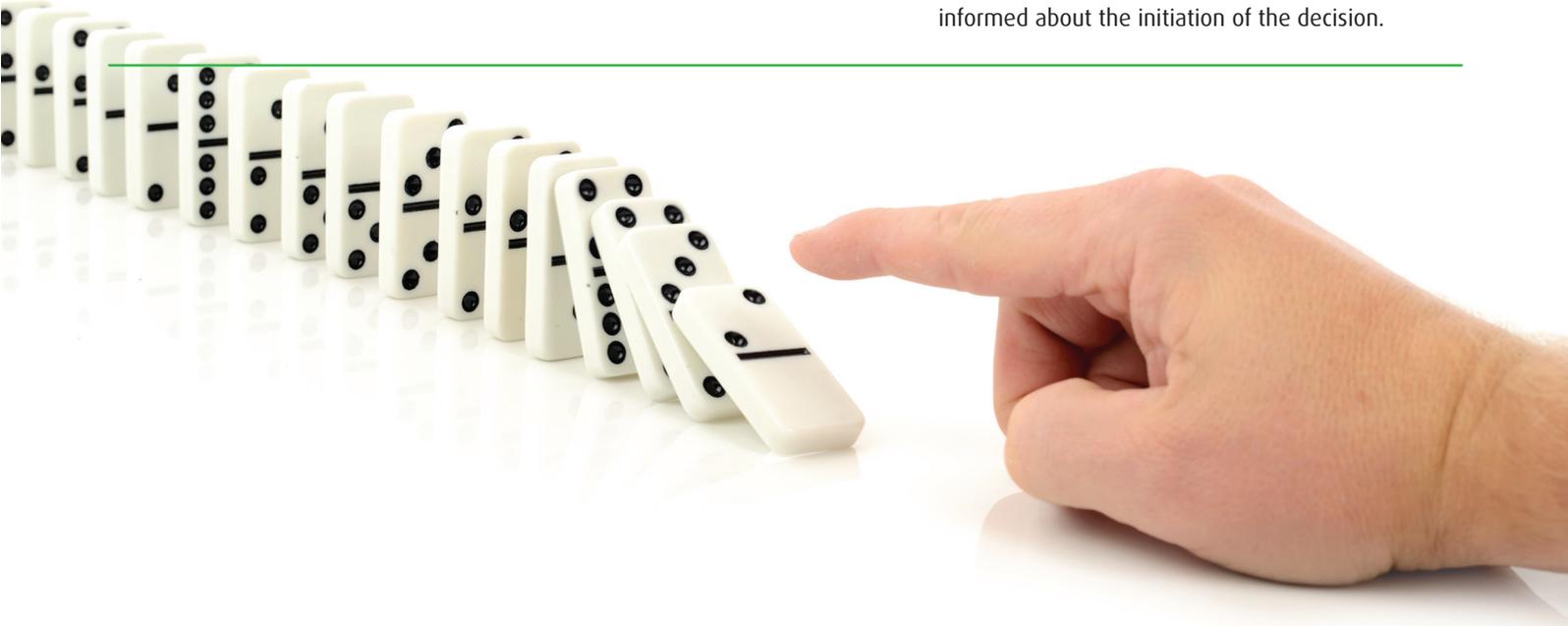
What does this mean in practical terms

Stage 1

Initiation of the decision

Getting acceptance from decision makers to engage with citizens and commit to use the results in policy making.

- Clear understanding by the public authority on how the decision will be made and the level of likely policy influence.
- There are human and financial resources available for the public engagement process;
- Public authority is clear with who has final responsibility for the implementation of the decision and commits staff or a department to the process;
- The coordinator from within public authority is informed about the initiation of the decision.



Stages of the decision making preparation process

Stage 2

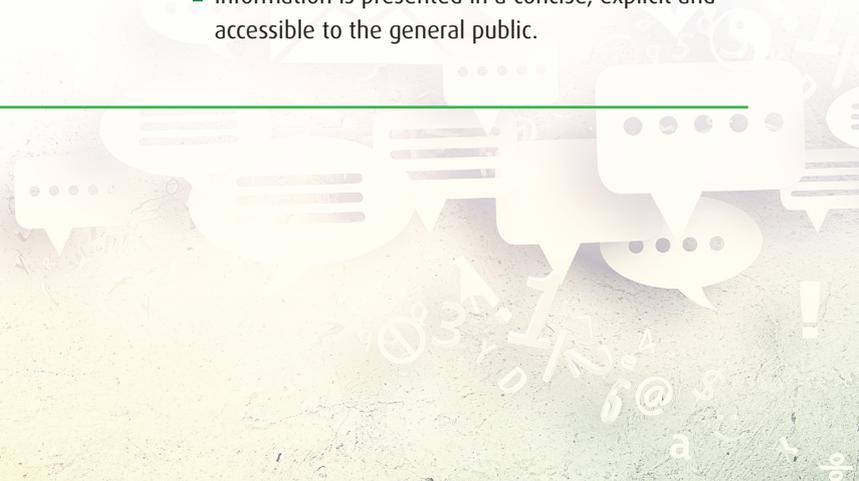
Informing about the initiation of the decision

Guiding principles for each stage

Educating citizens by providing accessible information about the issues involved to enable them to articulate informed opinions.

What does this mean in practical terms

- Specific interested parties are defined; An announcement (both general and directed) of initiation of a decision is being prepared;
- Interested participants and the broader community receives access to clear and detailed background materials including via the online medium;
- Information is presented in a concise, explicit and accessible to the general public.



Stages of the decision making preparation process

Stage 3

Preparing public consultations

Guiding principles for each stage

Framing issues for public consultations neutrally by providing unbiased information about the issues in a way that allows the interested parties and the broader community to evaluate competing options facing decision makers.

What does this mean in practical terms

- Materials related to the draft decision are being prepared among which informative note, analytic studies, impact assessments, other materials that served as a base for developing draft decision;
- Consultation method for the given case is being defined from a broader Public Consultation Methods;
- Public consultation is being planned based on stages for public consultation planning;
- The manner in which interested parties may send recommendations and comments is being defined;
- Reasons for not organizing public consultations (in case of not receiving any recommendations) are being formulated;
- Notification of withdrawal of the draft decision from the decision making process, including the reason of withdrawal is being elaborated if that is the case;
- The reason of approval of an urgent decision without public consultation is being elaborated and presented (should that be the case);

Stages of the decision making preparation process

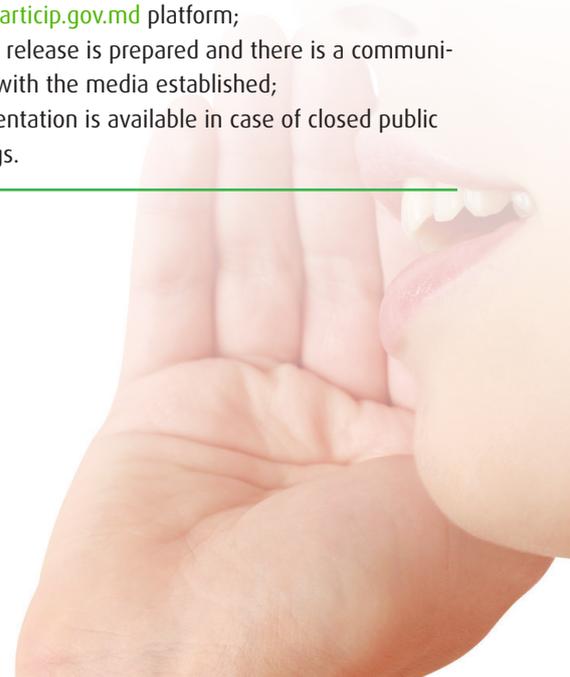
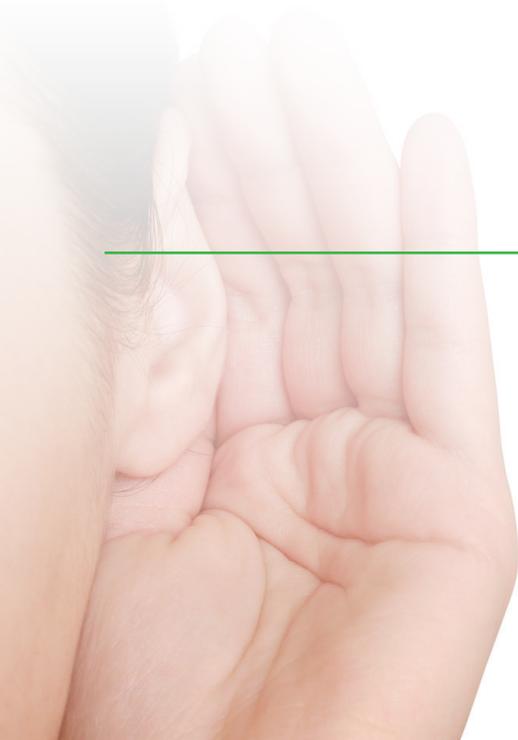
Stage 4 Informing about public consultations

Guiding principles for each stage

Working on sharing priorities and ensuring that interested parties and the broader community knows and understands the impact of their involvement. Building motivation for participation in public consultations.

What does this mean in practical terms

- The announcement/invitation to public consultations is being prepared;
 - The announcement (invitation) is being made public along with draft decision and related materials (web page, visible place, e-mailing, regular mailing, media, including social media);
 - The draft decision is being published on the www.particip.gov.md platform;
 - A press release is prepared and there is a communication with the media established;
 - Argumentation is available in case of closed public hearings.
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Stages of the decision making preparation process

Stage 5 Conducting public consultations

Guiding principles for each stage

Achieving diversity and inclusiveness by involving a demographically balanced group of citizens reflecting the community and the community needs (as related to the decision being put forward for public consultations). Supporting quality deliberations by ensuring all voices are heard; organizing discussions which are community focused rather than on individual participant self-interest; and encouraging consideration of the big picture

What does this mean in practical terms

- Participants are selected in a way that is not open to manipulation and that represents a cross section of the community. A random selection process is preferable.
- Participants are asked not what they want personally but what is in the best interests of the broader community;
- Participants express trust and faith in the process.
- Topic experts available during the consultations to respond to questions.
- People are given enough time to absorb information and express their views.
- There is no right or wrong views, there are just views and all of them are being documented;
- Complementary public consultations are being conducted should that be necessary (expert opinion, working groups, public debates);
- Access to mass media to public consultation procedure, including broadcasting is being provided;



Stages of the decision making preparation process

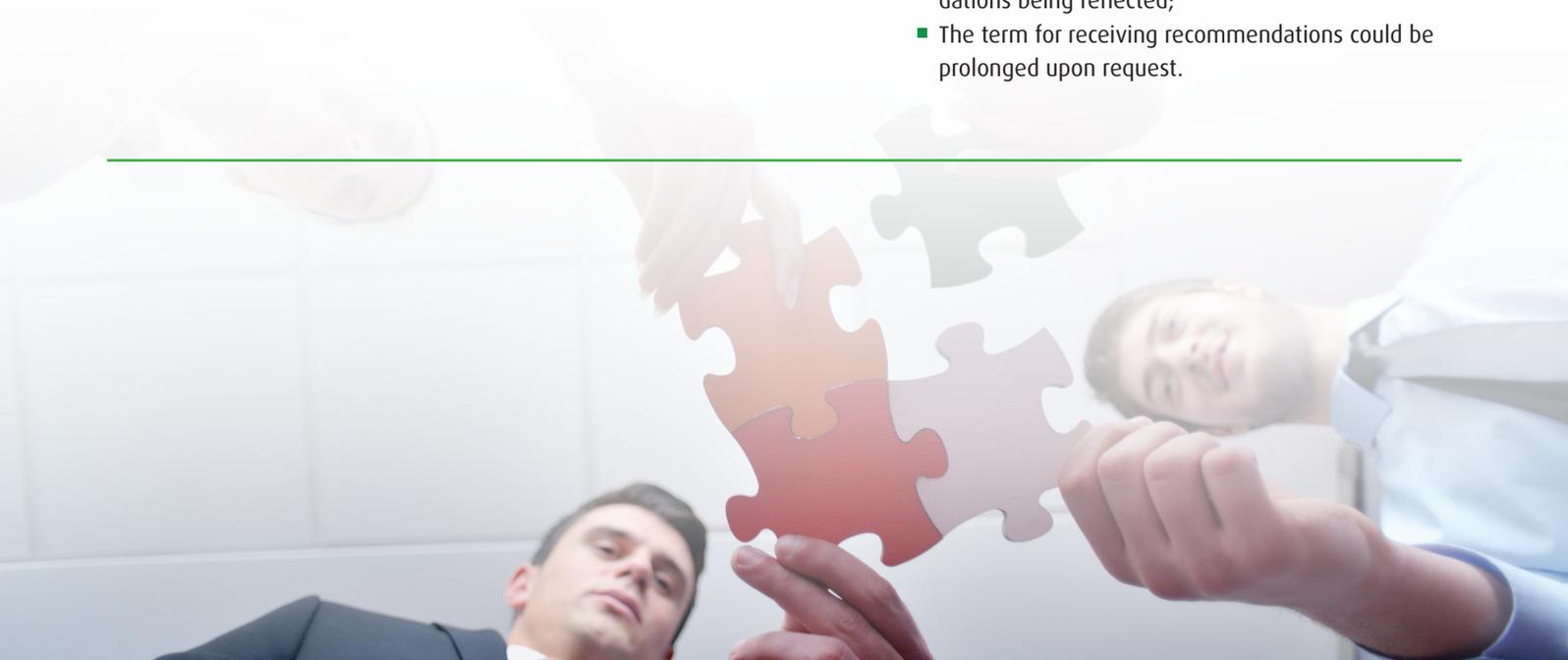
Stage 6 Collecting recommendations

Guiding principles for each stage

Making it matter with a strong likelihood that recommendations received and priorities shared by participants will lead to action.

What does this mean in practical terms

- All the recommendations received are being registered as per set Registration procedure;
- Recommendations received individually and via online means are included in the synthesis of the recommendations;
- Minutes of the face-to-face consultations are being prepared with both verbal and written recommendations being reflected;
- The term for receiving recommendations could be prolonged upon request.



Stages of the decision making preparation process

Guiding principles for each stage

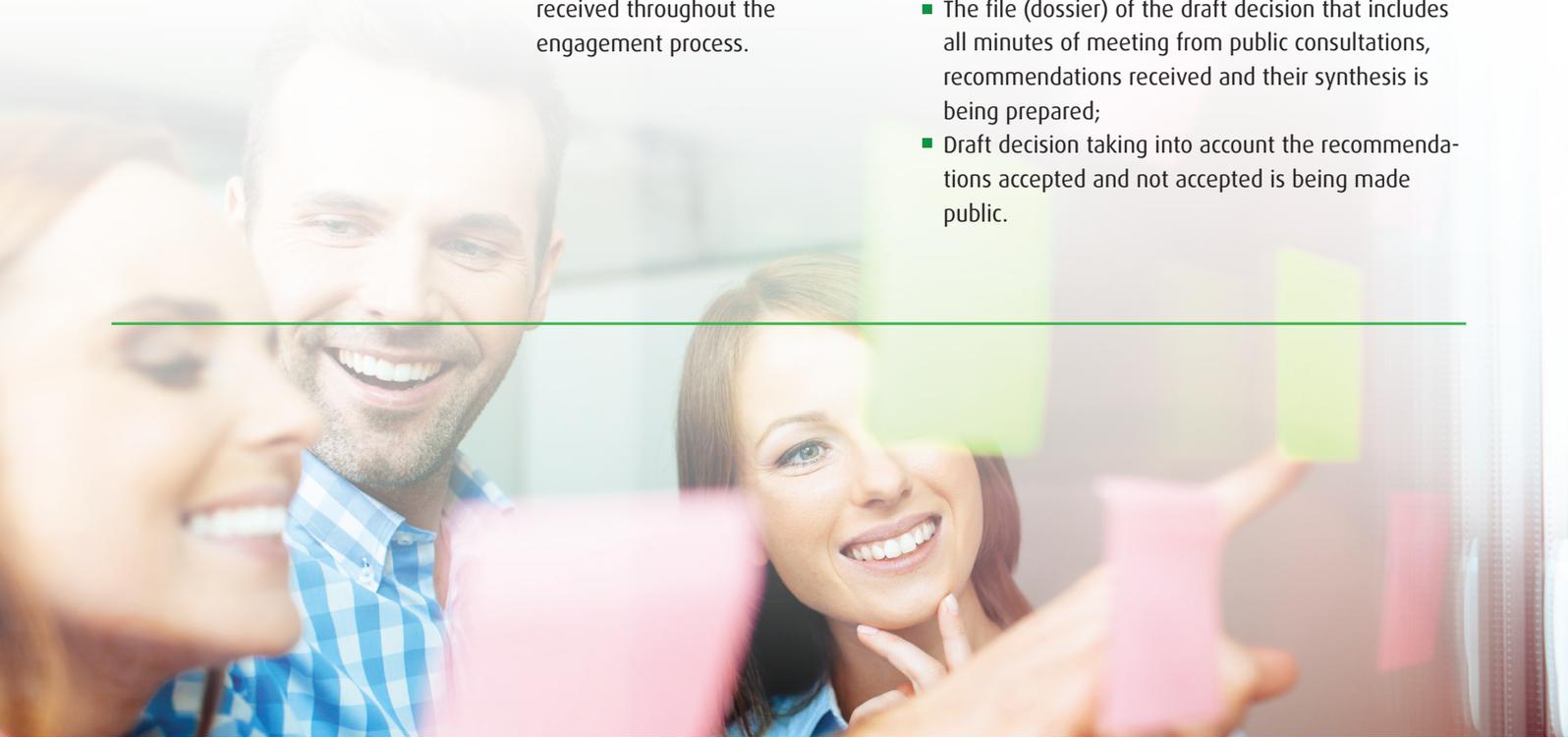
What does this mean in practical terms

Stage 7

Review of recommendations

Reflecting input received in the materials resulted from consultations. Assuming the obligation to account for the use made of citizens' inputs received throughout the engagement process.

- Acceptance or rejection of recommendations received is being made based on thorough examination of all recommendations received;
- Synthesis of recommendations prepared;
- Synthesis of recommendations made public;
- The file (dossier) of the draft decision that includes all minutes of meeting from public consultations, recommendations received and their synthesis is being prepared;
- Draft decision taking into account the recommendations accepted and not accepted is being made public.



Stages of the decision making preparation process

Guiding principles for each stage

What does this mean in practical terms

Stage 8 Publishing

Committing towards transparency and accountability throughout the process, particularly by sharing publicly the complexity, pros and cons of arguments provided by participants in the consultation process and the final results of this process.

- Public consultation results approved and published;
- All interested parties informed about the results of the consultation/s;
- The file (dossier) made available to the public;
- The approved decision published.



Stages of the decision making preparation process

Guiding principles for each stage

What does this mean in practical terms

Stage 9 Reporting

Sustaining involvement through on-going communication and feedback on monitoring and evaluation of the decision approved. Building new motivation for engagement.

- On-going updates and communication is being provided publicly;
- Outcomes associated with participation in the process are being presented/shared with the broader community;
- The coordinator is provided with all necessary information for drafting annual report on transparency in decision making;

The full version of the Citizen Engagement Guide can be accessed from <https://sites.google.com/site/citizenengagementguide/home>

The ABC Guide on Citizen Engagement comes to support the Government of Moldova in increasing the transparency in the decision-making in general, and provides a brief overview of the main stages of the implementation of the Law on transparency in decision-making, in particular. It is elaborated as part of a close cooperation between Estonian e-Governance Academy, Open Government Institute Moldova and Moldova e-Government Center. The full version of the Citizen Engagement Guide can be accessed from <https://sites.google.com/site/citizenengagementguide/home>



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