

The World Bank Group

Consultation Guidelines

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Introduction

Ongoing dialogue between the World Bank Group and stakeholders—government, civil society, media, academia, and the private sector—is a critical aspect of the World Bank Group’s work. Tapping into a broad range of perspectives, exchanging views, and capturing feedback strengthens the outcomes and accountability of the Bank Group’s engagement and helps build enduring partnerships. It is through this multi-stakeholder dialogue that the Bank Group can help implement more effective solutions to local, regional and global development challenges.

At times this dialogue becomes formal and specific in scope and time. Stakeholder consultations are a time-limited engagement platform through which interested and impacted parties can share their input and perspectives on a proposed area of the World Bank Group’s work. This exercise is done with the objective of influencing decisions. Therefore, the objective of consultations is to seek the views of those affected by our work but outside the internal decision-making process. By ensuring that affected and interested parties express their views about a particular policy, strategy, study, or program, and by ensuring that a wide range of potential impacts is taken into account, the Bank Group’s decision-making process becomes better informed, more rigorous, and more accountable. Moreover, consultation has become an essential component of the open and accessible governance of the Institution.

These Consultation Guidelines aim at sharing guiding principles and implementation standards on consultations led by the World Bank Group. They are based on experience and are meant to evolve as we receive feedback from stakeholders. In this document, we outline areas and types of consultation, when they are conducted and for how long, principles that should guide World Bank-led consultations, and implementation key components.

The Consultation Guidelines are part of a consultation framework that provides access and information for stakeholders as well as guidance to staff on how to plan and implement consultations. As part of this framework, the World Bank Group also developed an online [Consultation Hub](#), a platform for information about consultations and feedback from stakeholders.

Areas and Types of Consultation

Any new policy development process, including proposed new policies or changes to regulation, as well as Country Partnership Strategies, global thematic studies, and programs include consultation with stakeholders.

Types of consultations with stakeholders depend on the purpose of the consultation—whether stakeholders are consulted to gather their ideas and input, whether they are consulted to validate a decision already made, or whether they are consulted on options to help the Bank Group make a decision.

Consultations methods and formats vary depending on the scope of the World Bank Group’s proposed engagement (local, national, regional, or global), the purpose of the engagement, the nature of the issues being discussed, and the parties and stakeholders interested in influencing the outcome of the process.

Effective stakeholder engagement in the context of investment projects financed by the World Bank can improve the environmental and social sustainability of projects, enhance project acceptance, and make a significant contribution to successful project design and implementation. These consultations are led by the borrowing governments. See the [Environmental and Social Framework website](#) for more information and guidance.

When Are Consultations Conducted?

It is important that consultations are conducted early in the process when policy, country strategy, programs, or thematic study objectives and approaches are still under consideration. Normally consultations commence after Management and Board approval of the engagement and consultation plan.

How Long is a Consultation Period?

The duration of consultations depends on the nature of the issues being discussed and the scope of the consultations—whether local, national, regional or global. It may be appropriate to have more than one consultation period over the course of policy, country strategy, and thematic study development. Consultations may continue through all stages of the development of a proposal.

Adequate and realistic timeframes for consultations need to be planned to allow stakeholders sufficient time to provide informed and considered responses. The minimum requirement for the duration of a consultation on a new policy and a national strategy is normally 8-12 weeks on average. For smaller programs and reports, the consultation period is normally not shorter than 4 weeks.

Consultation Principles

Regardless of types, format, scope and duration of consultations, there are a number of principles that govern the process of consultation and, when applied, make it effective.

Openness

The process is open. By calling a consultation the World Bank Group is prepared to be influenced when making decisions; the institution is open to the input from stakeholders and stakeholder contributions will be taken into account.

Access to Information

Stakeholders need access to all relevant information in advance. This principle applies to information on the consultation process as well as materials that would help stakeholders to provide informed opinions on the subject of consultation. Information is primarily accessible on dedicated consultation websites, however, it can be customized and made available as needed.

Accountability

The input and feedback from each stakeholder is collated and assessed, shared back with stakeholders, and brought to the attention of decision makers. In a consultative process, the World Bank Group is, therefore, accountable for the outcome of the consultation and for how stakeholder input has informed and helped shape the World Bank Group business.

Transparency

The consultation process is transparent. Information is available to stakeholders about relevant aspects of the process, stakeholder engagement, stakeholder input, consultation outcomes, and how stakeholder input is used.

Visibility

All those who may be impacted by a decision or are interested in participating in a consultation process need to be made reasonably aware of the process. This means making an effort to reach all impacted groups, experts, and other relevant and interested stakeholders.

Stakeholders should be informed of proposed consultations through dedicated consultation websites, through the World Bank Group Consultation Hub, and through other appropriate means (press releases, and advertisements, newsletters etc.). The Consultation Hub will notify stakeholders who have signed up to receive information on consultations.

Accessibility

Stakeholders must have reasonable access to the process. The methods chosen for the consultation must be suitable for the intended stakeholders, including people with special requirements. Additionally, the information provided to stakeholders should be reasonably easy to comprehend.

Implementation Key Components

Regardless of the type, scope, subject, and duration of consultation, a well-conducted process incorporates a number of key components that guide the planning and implementation of a consultation exercise. A consultation plan, included in the documentation to the Board of Executive Directors and made available publicly after approval, provides an overview over the subject and purpose of the consultation process; different rounds and consultation periods as appropriate; targeted stakeholder groups; methods; timeframes; ways to document, communicate and disseminate the process; feedback management mechanisms as well as feed forward stakeholder input into decision-making; anticipated end product; and contact information.

Clear Subject and Purpose

The subject matter and the purpose of consultation need to be clear to stakeholders. Information provided to stakeholders include in particular: why stakeholders are called upon to share their views, for how long, on which topics/issues/themes, the scale of the exercise, the scope of influence, how the consultations will be run, and how stakeholder input will be used after the consultation ends, how it will be reported and where, and how stakeholders will be notified about the use of the feedback they provided. This includes being clear about the timeline of the development of the strategy, program, policy or project and at which point of the process the consultations are being held.

Stakeholder Engagement and Representation

The success of stakeholder consultations depends on the transparency and the inclusiveness of the selection of stakeholders to be consulted and on the representativeness of those who will eventually provide input. Adequate representation of stakeholder groups in the consultation process need to be ensured, keeping in mind the multi-stakeholder dimension of the World Bank Group's work and impact, and that our stakeholder groups differ among issues and topics.

Consultations should be designed to focus on the parties directly affected by, or with an interest in, the proposed engagement. Stakeholder organizations, for example business communities, civil society organizations and consultative bodies are often able to help in identifying target groups. The World Bank Group works with appropriate trade, community, private sector, governments, Indigenous Leaders, or civil society organizations to access stakeholders who would otherwise go unheard. Many Bank

Group consultations are also public in that options are provided for interested parties to submit comments most often electronically or through public hearings.

Appropriate Forms and Methods of Consultations

The choice of the consultation method depends on a number of factors, including the purpose of the consultation, its subject matter, the range of stakeholders, and the scope and duration of the exercise. The methods selected must be appropriate for the intended stakeholders, articulated at a suitable technical and education level, and ensure that effective means are used to address the needs of hard-to-reach groups and others with special requirements. While it might involve a little more planning and administration, it is often useful to use more than one channel and method for consultations.

Using a variety of methods can, in fact, help to include different groups in the process and widen access. Several methods that can be employed include (but are not limited to):

- Written submissions
- Public hearings or face-to-face meetings
- Focus group discussions with particular types of stakeholders
- Structured surveys (quantitative and/or qualitative)
- Web-based consultations and interactions (surveys, questionnaire, comments, social media tools and channels, including web forums, blogs, twitter)
- Advisory Groups and Expert Groups

Consultation locations for meetings/focus groups need to be accessible to relevant stakeholders, including those with special requirements.

Documentation, Communication, and Dissemination of the Process

Providing and sharing information is the foundation of an effective consultation process. This principle is applied to the process, the various consultation events, and the results and outcome of the consultations. All information on consultations should be available on the relevant website and in the project offices or project information centers. Good practice suggests that background documents and summaries of input received (without attribution) are made public, as well as lists of consultation participants. Summaries and participant lists are made public with the consent of the stakeholders concerned.

Background materials provide information on the subject matter of the consultation and allow stakeholders to reach an informed opinion. Materials can include documents to initiate discussion, a questionnaire with guiding questions, overview papers introducing and describing the consultation subject, any related technical briefs/studies, Frequently Asked Questions, links to general information about the consultation subject and related issues, list of consultation meetings, summaries of previous consultation meetings and participants lists, feedback summary reports, and management responses.

Appropriate ways to publicize consultations are considered and implemented so that stakeholders can take advantage of the full consultation period to prepare considered

responses. A notification period of 4 weeks normally suffices; however, the advance notice depends on the complexity and the scope of the topic to be discussed. Adequate notice of consultation meetings should be given to stakeholders. Invitations to attend consultation events should be issued at least 2-3 weeks before the consultation meeting. Longer notice is needed for complex consultations. A meeting agenda should be distributed ahead of the meeting together with relevant background materials to help stakeholder prepare their input.

Careful consideration will be given on how to reach stakeholders and access views from relevant sectors of the community and the economy. While many interested parties can usually be contacted directly, there will often be other interested parties who can only be reached through intermediary bodies.

All participating stakeholders will be informed about the proposed methods of documenting consultations as well as new meetings scheduled, new materials made available (including meeting minutes and participant lists), or any other new developments relevant to the consultation.

Using specialist media or events can also help promote consultation exercises among interested groups. As far as is possible, consultation documents should be free of internal jargon and easy to understand for the appropriate technical level required in the consultation.

Accountable Feedback Management to Feed Back to Stakeholders and Feed Forward Stakeholder Input into Decision-Making

A meeting summary with the main discussion points is made available after every consultation meeting in a timely manner (no more than 10-15 days after the meeting), unless participants request confidentiality. Responses to online questionnaires are also summarized. Input is not attributed to individuals. Summaries are published on the dedicated consultation website.

Providing feedback to consulted stakeholders on how their input was considered closes the feedback loop and is considered the main accountability measure of consultations. An overall summary of the input received from the consultations is conveyed to the Bank Group's decision-makers (Board of Executive Directors) and inform their deliberations.

Once decisions are made, the results of the consultation process and final impact must be publicly disseminated on the consultation website and, as far as reasonably practicable, accessible to all who participated in the consultation process. Results include number, geographical location, and sectoral membership of all those who provided comments, the comments (both written responses and those received through other channels such as discussion forums and meetings), the form and manner in which suggestions received have been taken into account by the Bank Group, and the reasons for not accommodating suggestions, if applicable.