Citizens as Partners

OECD HANDBOOK ON INFORMATION, CONSULTATION AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN POLICY-MAKING

GOVERNANCE

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Drafted by
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ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Foreword

This OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making is a practitioner's guide designed for use by government officials in OECD Member and non-member countries. It offers a practical "road map" for building robust frameworks for informing, consulting and engaging citizens during policy-making. The Handbook recognises the great diversity of country contexts, objectives and measures in strengthening government-citizen relations. As a result, it offers no prescriptions or ready-made solutions. Rather, it seeks to clarify the key issues and decisions faced by government officials when designing and implementing measures to ensure access to information, opportunities for consultation and public participation in policy-making in their respective countries.

The policy lessons and examples provided in the Handbook are drawn from the OECD report entitled "Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making". The report is the result of over two years of joint efforts by OECD Member countries and represents a unique source of comparative information on measures taken for strengthening citizens access to information, consultation and participation in policy-making. A short Policy Brief designed for policy-makers, setting out the report's main findings and policy lessons, is also available on the OECD web site.

The author of this OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making is Marc Gramberger, independent consultant in strategic communications (marc@gramberger.com). This Handbook has been written in co-operation with Joanne Caddy of the OECD Public Management Service, with illustrations by Lászlo Quitt. The report is published on the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD.

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Welcome!

Welcome to the OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making – a practical guide to informing, consulting and engaging citizens in the development of public policy.

This handbook has a clear purpose: to give government officials practical assistance in strengthening the relations between government and citizens.

Government-citizen relations are high on the public agenda. Citizens and organisations of civil society have become increasingly vocal in recent years, bringing forward issues and demands and trying to influence policy-makers. At the same time, citizens participate less and less in formal democratic processes. Voter turn out in elections, for instance, is eroding. Facing declining trust, governments are under pressure to relate to citizens in new ways. Governments also realise more and more that citizens' input can be a vast resource for policy-making – especially in an increasingly complex world.

The handbook explores the background, pressures and objectives for governments to become active in strengthening their relations with citizens.

Many governments have started first initiatives to inform, consult and actively engage citizens in policy-making. Some governments have long-standing experience in this field. However, when officials try to get an overview on how to strengthen their government's relations with citizens, they often find themselves pretty much on their own. Few publications provide a comprehensive overview and advice on practical aspects of the subject.

The handbook fills a gap: it presents an overview of current state-of-the-art practices in informing, consulting and engaging citizens in policy-making.

The overview and practical examples in this handbook drawn on a major study on strengthening government-citizen relations conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) together with government officials in its Member countries. The final report of this study, *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making (OECD, 2001)* provides an up-to-date comparison and analysis of governments' activities in this area. A summary is provided in a policy brief. Both publications are available on the OECD web site (see References in Part IV).

The handbook blends examples, concepts and analyses with insights and tips from practice.

It explores what strengthening government-citizen relations entails; what the reasons, the mechanisms and the costs and conditions are. It shows

how to build a framework for it; how to plan activities strategically; what tools to use and how to employ information and communication technology (ICT) to support it. It provides its readers with ten guiding principles to keep in mind when strengthening government relations with citizens as well as ten practical tips which are crucial for success. It also points to where to get further information.

The handbook addresses public officials in a range of different positions and contexts.

The handbook offers comprehensive guidance to newcomers, and specific insight to experts in the field. It addresses officials in top management positions as well as in the political leadership. It provides assistance to government officials of OECD Member countries as well as of non-member countries. The handbook addresses officials in different cultures of administrations, respecting the diversity among governments in their approaches to strengthening government-citizen relations.

The approach and activities shown in this handbook support and complement formal institutions of democracy, and strengthen the democratic process.

The handbook is rooted in the experience of representative democracy and supports its development. When engaging in activities to strengthen their relations with citizens, governments do not give up their right and duty to make policy and decisions. Instead, they introduce new ways to exercise it. Informing, consulting and actively engaging citizens in policy-making does not diminish the rights of legislatures – indeed parliaments themselves have become active in similar activities to strengthen their relations with citizens. The activities covered in this handbook do not replace traditional institutions of democracy. The approach and activities shown in this handbook support and complement these institutions and strengthen the democratic process.

How to use this handbook

The Handbook Government-Citizen Relations has four parts:

- **Part I** addresses the question **Why government-citizen relations?** It explores what government-citizen relations are, why to strengthen them, and what the costs are.
- **Part II** tackles **How to strengthen government-citizen relations?** The chapters of this part offer examples, tools and guiding principles. They cover building a framework for strengthening government-citizen relations, planning and acting strategically, choosing and using the tools, and benefiting from information and communication technology (ICT). They also present ten guiding principles developed by the OECD and show how to put them into practice when informing, consulting and engaging citizens in policy-making.
- **Part III** gives advice on **Which tips to follow?**
  Based on practical experience, this part suggests ten tips to follow when carrying out the activities covered in this handbook.
- **Part IV** provides hints and proposals on **Where to get further information?**
  Referring to the various issues covered in this handbook, this part lists sources for further exploration of strengthening government-citizen relations – including the original OECD report and policy brief on which this handbook is based.

The handbook addresses officials from a range of different backgrounds. These users have different needs. They can use the handbook in different ways:

- **Newcomers** may decide to read the handbook as a guideline, and use it step by step.
- **Advanced users** may want to access directly parts and chapters outlined above.

- **Experts** may be interested in specific elements only, which they can easily access via the detailed table of contents.
- **Officials in management positions** may want to study and use the handbook and its overviews, examples and practical tips in detail. Part II and III may be especially useful for them.
- **Officials in leadership positions** may find it helpful to get an overview of the reasoning, costs and crucial success points for strengthening government-citizen relations. They might concentrate on Parts I and III, browse through Part II or access the OECD policy brief (available on-line, see Part IV for full reference).
- **For all users**, the handbook may be useful as a compendium of good practice.

Part I

Why Government – Citizen Relations?

- ✓ What they are
- ✓ Why strengthen them
- ✓ What about costs

What government-citizen relations are

A straight answer first: Government-citizen relations are about interactions between government and citizens in a democracy. What does this mean concretely?

Relations between government and citizens exist in a wide range of areas from policy-making to delivering and consuming public services. This handbook looks at government-citizen relation in ***policy-making***. *Government* operates on different levels: local, regional, national and international. At all these levels, government is in contact with citizens. In this book, we concentrate on the ***national level***, which is most relevant for policy-making. *Citizens* relate to government as ***individuals*** or as part of organised groups such as ***civil society organisations*** (CSO) – all of which are covered in this publication. *Democracy* rests on the consent of citizens. In order to assure this consent, representative democracy bases itself on a set of traditional formal rules and principles – such as on elections and accompanying campaigns. Representative democracy is also based on ongoing interactions among government and citizens in between elections. It is this type of ***interaction*** which is the focus of this handbook. When looking at this relationship, the handbook takes the viewpoint of ***the government*** and asks*:* How can governments strengthen their relations with citizens? In practical terms, this means:

- **Information**

  Government disseminates information on policy-making on its own initiative – or citizens access information upon their demand.

  In both cases, information flows essentially in one direction, from the government to citizens in a *one-way relationship*.

  Examples are access to public records, official gazettes, and government web sites.

- **Consultation**

  Government asks for and receives citizens' feedback on policy-making.

In order to receive feedback, government defines whose views are sought on what issue during policy-making. Receiving citizens' feedback also requires government to provide information to citizens beforehand. Consultation thus creates a limited *two-way relationship* between government and citizens.
Examples are comments on draft legislation, and public opinion surveys.

▶ Active participation

Citizens actively engage in decision-making and policy-making.
Active participation means that citizens themselves take a role in the exchange on policy-making, for instance by proposing policy-options. At the same time, the responsibility for policy formulation and final decision rests with the government. Engaging citizens in policy-making is an *advanced two-way relation* between government and citizens based on the principle of partnership.
Examples are open working groups, laymen's panels and dialogue processes.

From information to consultation and active participation, the influence citizens can exert on policy-making rises. This influence by citizens is no replacement for applying formal rules and principles of democracy – such as free and fair elections, representative assemblies, accountable executives, a politically neutral public administration, pluralism, respect for human rights. These principles are part of the criteria for membership in the OECD. The complementary activities of information, consultation and active participation have always existed in democracies in some form and to some extent. However, with democracy evolving further, citizens demanding greater openness and transparency, and societies and challenges becoming ever more complex, governments are now increasingly seeking to strengthen these interactions.

PARTICIPATION
CONSULTATION
INFORMATION

Why strengthen government-citizen relations

Using information, consultation and active participation, governments strengthen their relations with citizens. Why do governments do this? There are three main reasons that mutually support each other:

Better public policy

Stronger government-citizen relations encourage citizens to spend time and effort on public issues. It uses and values citizens' input as a resource. Information, consultation and active participation provide government with a **better basis for policy-making** enabling it to become a learning organisation. At the same time, it ensures **more effective implementation**, as citizens become well informed about the policies and have taken part in their development.

Greater trust in government

Information, consultation and active participation give citizens the chance to learn about government's policy plans, to make their opinions be heard, and to provide input into decision-making. This involvement creates greater acceptance for political outcomes. Government shows **openness**, which makes it more trustworthy for the citizen – the sovereign in any democracy. By building trust in government and better public policies, strengthening government-citizen relations enhances the **legitimacy** of government.

Stronger democracy

Information, consultation and active participation makes government more transparent and more accountable. Strengthening government-citizen relations enhances the basis for and encourages more **active citizenship** in society. It also supports citizen engagement in the public sphere, such as participating in political debates, voting, associations, etc. All this leads to a stronger democracy.

Governments' efforts to inform, consult and engage citizens in policy-making cannot replace representative democracy and do not intend to do so. Instead, they complement and strengthen democracy as a whole.

Governments' increased attention to strengthening their relations with citizens is the result of a **changed context for policy-making**. National government finds itself dealing with an increasingly interconnected world and has itself grown highly complex. Society and markets demand that more and more areas have to be taken care of in greater detail. Many challenges surpass national or administrative frontiers. Take for example tax evasion, crime and environmental degradation. Modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) have increased and accelerated these interdependencies. These challenges require national governments to co-operate and find agreement across multiple levels of government – be it local, regional, national or global.

As a result, government policy-making becomes **more complicated**. It makes it harder for citizens to understand and to hold government accountable. Government's limited resources make it difficult to ensure policy-making and implementation on its own. In the midst of this complexity, citizens perceive their influence through voting to be declining, and with it their trust in government. There is more talk of the "democratic deficit" and reduced government legitimacy.

Governments find themselves increasingly under pressure to ensure that public policies are effective and legitimate. They realise that they will not be able to conduct and effectively implement policies, as good as they may be, if their citizens do not understand and support them.

In seeking to strengthen their relations with citizens, governments are reacting to pressures affecting all phases of policy-making: from problem identification, policy development, decision-making, to implementation and evaluation. **In doing so governments:**

- **Respond to calls for greater transparency and accountability**

  Governments react to rising public demands and increasing scrutiny of government actions by media and citizens. Through government giving information on the plans for a new policy, the draft of the policy, the status of implementation, or experience with it, citizens acquire better, more correct and up-to-date knowledge. They are better equipped to understand and to monitor government activity. This creates the basis for more active citizenship.

- **Meet citizens' expectations that their views be considered**

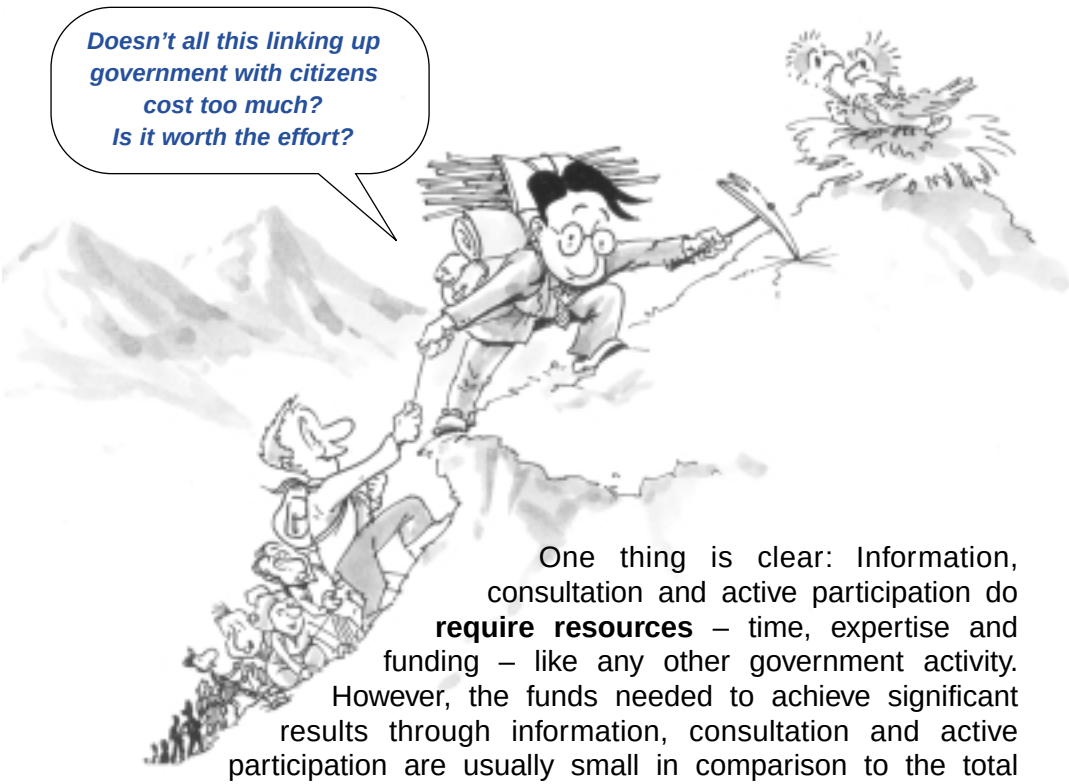
  Seeking out and including citizens' input into policy-making, governments try to meet citizens' expectations that their voices be heard, and their views be considered. By enlarging the circle of participants in policy-making, government gains access to new sources of information. By giving all interested parties the chance to contribute to policy-making, governments increase the chance of greater voluntary compliance.

- **Counter declining public support**

  Governments try to act on the steady erosion of voter turn-out in elections, falling membership in political parties and the results of surveys revealing a loss of confidence in key public institutions. Through information, consultation and active participation, government reduces the obstacles for citizens to know about, understand, comment and participate in policy-making. They lower the threshold for citizens to know and act. They let citizens experience first-hand that government does what it is supposed to do – serve the people. Citizens see that their own constructive engagement within the democratic society pays off.

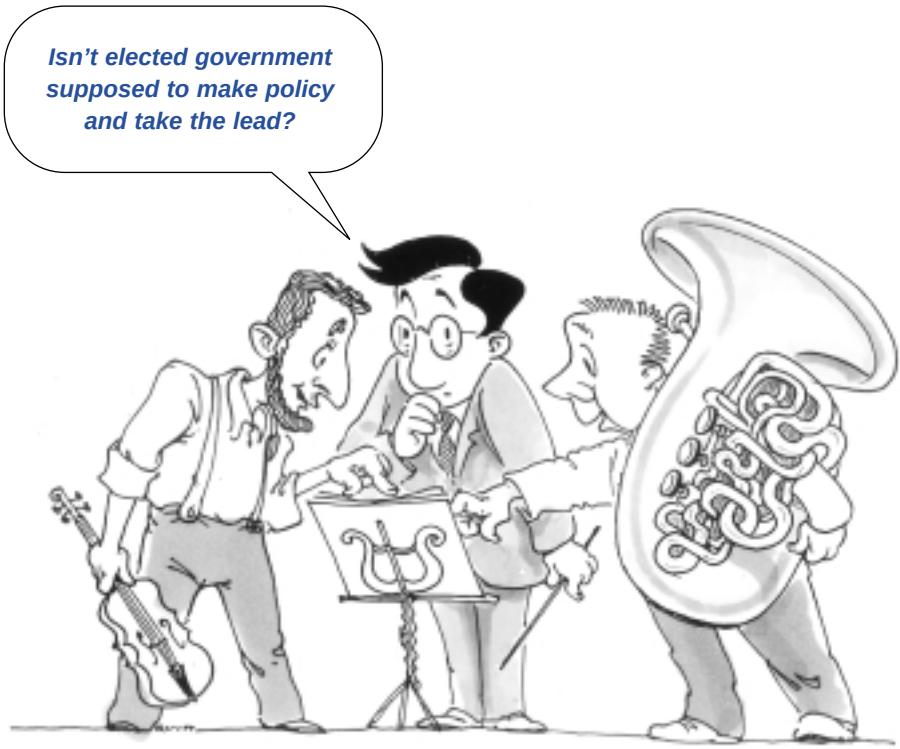
What about costs

Strengthening government-citizen relations is an important activity that can help governments achieve better public policies, greater trust in government and stronger democracy. But objections are often heard. Let us look at three of the **reservations** you might come across as a practitioner of government-citizen relations. And in so, doing explore the importance of leadership and commitment highlighted by these reservations.



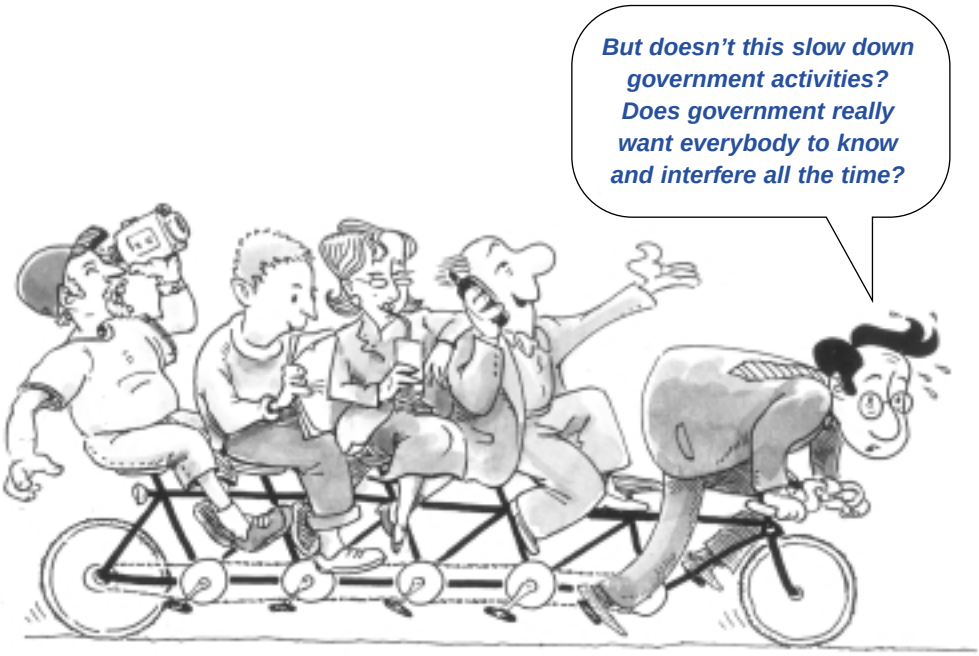
One thing is clear: Information, consultation and active participation do **require resources** – time, expertise and funding – like any other government activity. However, the funds needed to achieve significant results through information, consultation and active participation are usually small in comparison to the total amount spent on a given policy. Are these resources well spent? If the effects of strengthening government-citizen relations – such as chances for better implementation, better policies, voluntary compliance

and more trust in government – are valuable, then they are well spent. Given the problems arising from poorly designed and implemented policies, **governments indeed find strengthening their relations with citizens to be worth the investment**. They also increasingly learn that not engaging in them can create much higher costs, through policy failure in the short term as well as loss of trust, legitimacy and policy effectiveness in the long term.



Government's task is to govern, to make policy – there is no doubt about it. Information, consultation and active participation are not a replacement for government taking initiatives or deciding. Government has a leadership role, and citizens expect government to fulfil it – after all, that is why they voted it into office. The question, however, is **less *whether* to lead than *how* to lead**. Governments can practice leadership in two ways. They can either practice leadership ignorant of citizens' direct concerns and input. This gets governments into crises of lack of trust. Or governments may practice leadership open to citizens' concerns and input. This gives government the chance to tap into wider resources of citizens and civil society in order to develop better policies and gain more trust and

legitimacy. It is in line with an informed and collaborative kind of leadership that balances leading and listening. Strengthening government-citizen relations is a means for government to fulfil its leadership role in an open way and more effectively, credibly and successfully. When using information, consultation and active participation, the **role of the leadership** in government is to choose and decide upon the approach. What tools to use for what end? How much resources to spend? It also needs to decide on how to use the input for policy-making. The **role of management** is to provide the leadership with the best basis to take these decisions. It gives comprehensive and thorough suggestions. It organises and runs the activities, facilitating the relation to the citizens. And it communicates the result of the activities back to policy-makers, whenever they have not been directly involved. As with any other government action, these activities are subject to the scrutiny of **parliament**, the legislature – which has its own privileged relations with citizens.



Strengthening government-citizen relations is **not a magic wand**. Just pretending to take citizens' views and input into account and not doing so is likely to be counterproductive – leading to less trust in government and democracy. This is why, for all attempts to strengthen government-citizen relations, **commitment and leadership is vital** for success. Without the

commitment of the government's political level and top civil servants, information, consultation and active participation initiatives get stuck, cannot reach policy-making, and are not able to achieve their effects. Of course, strengthening government-citizen relations is **no guaranteed way to success** either. Providing the public with greater opportunities for information, consultation and active participation may generate opposition. It might impose significant delays on policy-making. It can be costly for governments. Such risks should, however, be compared with the **negative effects** and **costs of not engaging** citizens.

The question faced by governments today is not whether to strengthen government-citizen relations. The question is how to do it **professionally and successfully**. Sometimes, government will want to involve the public at large. At other times, it might want to concentrate on specific groups for specific input or maintain reserves on certain restricted types of information. Strengthening government–citizen relations is a serious activity that is likely to have very positive effects – if it is done with attention and care. This is where this handbook comes in – to show the potential, to point to pitfalls, to portray best practices – helping to make measures for information, consultation and active participation a success.

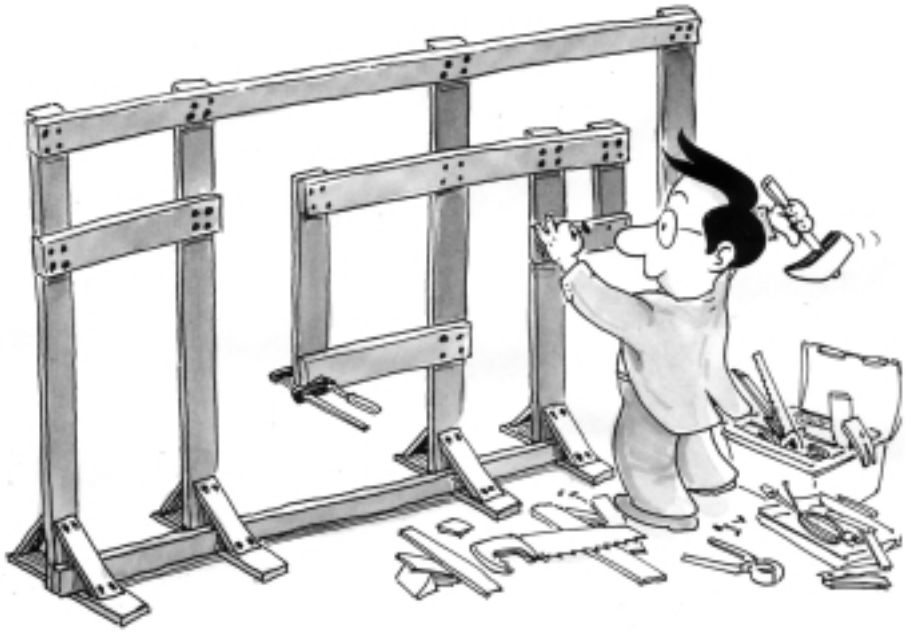
Part II

How to strengthen government – citizen relations

- ✓ Build a framework!
- ✓ Plan and act strategically!
- ✓ Choose and use the tools!
- ✓ Benefit from new information and communication technology (ICT)!
- ✓ Put principles into practice!

Build a framework!

When embarking on strengthening government-citizen relations, building a framework is a prerequisite. A framework provides the setting, in which these relations can evolve and be strengthened. It is about the legal **rights** of citizens to information, consultation and active participation, about governmental **policies** and about the **institutions** charged with the tasks. It also covers the **evaluation** of activities and **general capacities** to conduct them. Much of the legal and policy framework concerns access to information – a condition for strengthening government-citizen relations. For the practical design of a framework, the following sections show the state of the art. They illustrate both evolving standards and different approaches. They provide a menu for building new frameworks and for reviewing and strengthening existing ones. Of course, each of the elements mentioned have to be adapted to fit the situation and existing legal and institutional frameworks of the country concerned.



What information elements to apply?

Legal elements for information

Information is the basis for all strengthening of government-citizen relations. Countries vary greatly in terms of **laws** on citizen's access to information (often called freedom of information laws – or FOI laws). Sweden introduced its first laws on this subject as early as 1766. Finland, in 1951, was first to adopt modern legislation. The U.S. followed in 1966 with the Freedom of Information Act. After a sharp rise from 1980 to 2001, now four out of five OECD Member countries have legislation on this subject. Austria, the Netherlands, Hungary and Poland have enshrined citizens' right to access information in their **constitutions**. Additional provisions enhancing access to information are made in laws in areas such as environment, consumer protection and health.

In designing these laws, all countries face a **double challenge**: Balance the right of access to information, on the one side, with the individual right to **privacy**. And balance it, on the other side, with the need to keep **confidential** information which if disclosed would harm public interest. This is why access to information is best embedded in a framework: sound legislation, clear institutional mechanisms, an independent judiciary for enforcement. When designing or reviewing laws on information access for citizens, it is advisable to keep the following aspects in mind.

Define what information is accessible to citizens:

- **What basic principle:** Legislation gives citizens access to information. Legislation may explicitly state that access is the rule, and secrecy the exception (for instance Norway, New Zealand, Finland).
- **What exemptions**: Legislation mostly foresees exemption for citizens' access to information in the following areas: national security, private company data, individual privacy and legal proceedings. Some countries extend this to minutes of Cabinet meetings (for instance Iceland) and specific internal working documents for the annual budget (for instance Norway). Some countries (for instance Spain, Poland) explicitly define classified information, allowing for broad rights of appeal (for instance Finland).
- **Whose information**: The legislation may apply to government and its units on the national, regional and local level (for instance the United Kingdom), to a range of public authorities from ministers to public

hospitals (for instance New Zealand) and to all organisations and individuals when they exercise public authority (for instance Finland).

- **What form**: Information may be provided in several forms: print, audio, visual, electronic, etc. Some legislation may need an update in order to include electronic documents (as done in the US in 1996).
- **What about privacy and data protection**: There usually are specific laws to protect individual rights to privacy. Some of these are based on OECD guidelines on the subject. A directive of the European Union (EU Data Protection Directive, 95/46/EC) has been implemented by national law in EU Member States and in Central European countries that are candidates for accession (for instance the Czech Republic, Poland). Again, some legislation might need to be updated in order to extend this protection to the electronic area, as done with Canada's Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act of April 2000.

Define how the information can be accessed and/or received:

- **How to request access**: Legislation may require no identification and no explicit reasons from citizens when they approach government with a request for information. Some countries still have laws requiring individuals to identify themselves or demonstrate a legitimate interest in the information requested – which places limits on the scope of their requests.
- **How to state and appeal a refusal**: The law may oblige authorities to give a written explanation of the reasons for rejecting a request for access to information (for instance Austria, Finland, Poland). Procedures to appeal against such refusals are generally provided.
- **What to publish actively**: Legislation may demand the state to disseminate key information actively – without a specific request by citizens. The information covered may include for instance laws, rules and procedures, services provided, organisational structures, etc. (as for instance in Spain and New Zealand).
- **What languages**: In countries with several official languages, legislation may guarantee that citizens receive the information they seek in any of the official languages. (for instance in Canada, Finland, Luxembourg, and Switzerland).
- **What maximum response time**: Often, information laws feature a time limit for delivery of information. The time granted to the public

administration in which to respond to a request for information may range from 15 days (for instance in Korea) to 8 weeks (for instance in Austria).

Policy elements for information

Policies on access to information give substance to legal rights. They ensure that citizens receive the information sought. They may also prescribe the active dissemination of information to citizens.

For policies on providing information actively or on request, clarify:

- **What practical response time**: Policy can require administrations to respond within a time frame which is shorter than foreseen by law. This may cover circumstances such as response time for press inquiries (for instance 24 hours in Poland), or for requests via email (for instance 16 hours in Korea).
- **Whether or how much to charge**: Information can be given free in all cases (for instance Austria) or free under certain circumstances, if used for a public purpose (for instance New Zealand) or for fulfilment of basic democratic rights. Some countries explicitly follow the policy that pricing should not be a hindrance for citizens accessing information.
- **How to deal with informal requests**: Governments may receive many informal requests for access to information and may react generously. This needs to be based on clear internal rules on what kind of internal documents can be given out to citizens without referring to formal procedures under Freedom of Information Laws. Compared to these usually more work-intensive formal procedures, this approach can help to free internal resources, as the government of Ireland notes.
- **How to manage information**: Being able to implement legislation on access to information effectively depends on information management. Continuously improving the in-house capacity for ensuring quality, protection and security of information is a wise investment.
- **How to disseminate information actively**: Actively publishing information is an important aspect of information policy. Dissemination activities range from public information campaigns (e.g. on public health) to regular publication of printed materials (for example, official

journals and annual reports, brochures, leaflets) as well as via broadcasts (by radio, television).

- **How to present information**: For information access and dissemination to have the desired effects, government information needs to be understood by citizens. For that, they have to be clear and comprehensible – often a major challenge for administrations the world over. In order to support administrative staff in these tasks, some countries have developed guidelines and style manuals for their employees when drafting materials destined for members of the public (for instance Italy and Spain).
- **How to handle general contacts with citizens:** Standards and guidelines can also help government staff to establish a professional and respectful contact with citizens. The United Kingdom's standards for central government request personnel to be friendly, helpful, timely, and also provide clear information on complaint procedures.

Institutional elements for information

Institutions for information make sure that the tasks get fulfilled in the way foreseen by law. They either implement the provision of information, or they control and enforce it.

When setting up or reviewing institutions for information, consider:

- **Who does the job** Government information services in each ministry or public organisation or even at all levels of government (for instance Italy) can be charged with the information tasks. This also helps to make active use of information. It is important that the service has a direct link to leadership and receives and supports its commitment.
- **Who co-ordinates** When several units are busy in informing citizens, co-ordination becomes an issue. A co-ordination service can pool certain information activities, give advice, and oversee whether information policy is carried out as foreseen. Receiving the commitment and support of top leadership is again essential. Co-ordination is often done by offices established under the prime minister or council of ministers (as for instance in Canada, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, and the United Kingdom).
- **Who oversees, controls and enforces**: Independent institutions may play an important role in controlling that laws on access to information, data protection and privacy are respected. They serve as a contact point for citizens who want to file a complaint. They investigate the

basis of such complaints and may also act on their own initiative. Their decisions may be binding (for instance Finland) or be recommendations. In many countries, this function is fulfilled by an institution headed by an Ombudsman or Commissioner and supported by professional staff. The head of the institution is usually appointed by Parliament, to which she/he reports. In the United Kingdom, there is one Commissioner for both, information access and data protection.

What consultation elements to apply?

The framework for consultation is usually less extensive than the one for information. Many countries have started only recently to recognise it as an essential element of public policy- making. In some countries, public consultation and citizen feedback are a long established practice (for instance Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) – mostly with informal rules. In Switzerland, the constitution foresees consultation on important projects and international treaties. The Swiss political system also features binding referenda as instruments of direct decision-making by citizens. These are not covered in this handbook which focuses exclusively on tools and processes that do not impinge upon government's right to make decisions. Consultation can also take the form of receiving feedback through complaints – potentially a large resource for policy-making.

Legal elements for consultation

Consider the following elements for a legal framework on consultation:

- **How to treat the issue of referenda**: A referendum is a formal ballot on a policy issue in which all citizens eligible for voting have the right to participate. It may be required for changes of the constitution, be called by the government or be held on request by a certain number of citizens (as for instance in Switzerland). It can be consultative (as for instance in Finland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Luxembourg) or even binding if, for example, a sufficient number of citizens have participated (for instance in Poland). Results of consultative referenda carry tremendous moral weight and have a high impact on government decision-making. Introducing binding referenda establishes

direct decision-making by citizens. This constitutes a deep change to the government system with far-reaching consequences for political leadership. It raises wider issues that fall outside of the scope of the present handbook.

- **What about rights of petition**: Citizens may have the right to submit petitions to government. These rights may be laid down in the constitution (for instance as in Spain, Poland and Switzerland) or laws (for instance the Czech Republic).

- **How to design administrative procedures laws**: These laws can strengthen the rights of citizens when they are potentially affected by a policy decision (for instance as in Iceland, Korea, Luxembourg, Poland, Norway). The laws may include prior notice and public hearings where citizens can pose questions and defend their interests. These rights may concern all interested citizens (for instance Finland), or only those directly affected (for instance Italy). They may grant the right to objection and appeal after the decision is made but before the decision is implemented (for instance in the Netherlands).

- **How impact assessment laws can strengthen consultation**: These laws require authorities to assess the expected impact of laws, policies and in some cases even programmes before their adoption. These laws can concern regulation in general, or in specific sectors, such as the environment or building and land use. Provisions in these laws may ensure that affected citizens receive prior information and can voice their opinion on the issues at stake (as in all 15 Member States of the European Union, Canada and Japan).

- **How to treat special interest groups**: Laws can require governments and authorities to consult with specific interest groups if these are affected by law and policy-making (for example, professional associations in Austria and indigenous people in Canada).

Policy elements for consultation

Effective public consultation and citizens' feedback can also be incorporated in policy-making without adopting legislation. Some countries (for instance Finland, Iceland) rely instead on **policy** statements, formal rules or informal practice. Even in cases where laws exist, policies support legislation and provide further guidance on their implementation.

When designing or reviewing a policy on consultation look at:

- **What to include in policy statements:** Official government policy may require government and authorities to consult with citizens and interested parties (for instance Canada). This may cover developing and modifying regulations and programmes. It can stipulate that the consultation has to be timely and thorough, and can go on to define all of these terms in detail. It can also require good coordination of consultation in several areas in order to reduce duplication, avoid "consultation fatigue" and make the best use of efforts by government officials and citizens.
- **How to design rules**: Rules can be used to specify public consultation on regulations and government decisions or even preparatory papers (as in Norway). They can require public notification and specify how citizens can submit comments – for instance by letter, fax, e-mail and at a public hearing (as for instance in Japan). They can require that every law proposal features a summary of the consultations undertaken – such as on the key stakeholders consulted, on the processes used and on the results achieved (as in Canada).
- **How guidelines can help**: Guidelines can assist public officials in preparing and managing relations with the public. They can also provide guidance on how to consult effectively specific groups – such as indigenous people (as, for instance, in Canada and New Zealand).
- **What about standards?**: Setting standards can also affect citizen feedback and consultation. The Australian Standard on Handling Complaints, for example, sets three criteria for systems dealing with citizens feedback: they need to be visible, accessible and responsible.

Institutional elements for consultation

The best laws and policies will not work if there are no public institutions to implement them. They are the first point of contact for citizens to address government with their comments and complaints.

When considering institutional elements for consultation, look at:

- **How advisory councils could help:** Advisory bodies, commissions and councils can help governments to consult and receive in-depth information from citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs) on

policy options in specific areas. Governments can establish permanent or ad hoc bodies. Several countries have long-standing experiences with tripartite forums of government, business and labour representatives (for instance Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland). Other bodies include representatives of public interest in areas such as ethnic relations, disability, or administrative reform.

- **What institutional interfaces for complaints**: Where do citizens go with complaints and suggestions? Many countries have developed dedicated interfaces for this purpose. Citizens can lodge their complaints through government agencies and their field offices, administrative counselling centres and telephone hotlines (such as in Japan). Information campaigns via television, radio and print media serve to raise citizens' awareness of these opportunities.

- **What role parliamentary committees could play**: Parliamentary committees can also provide opportunities for consultation. As a part of their work, they can invite the public to provide input and reaction, and raise awareness through media advertising (for instance New Zealand).

- **Which institutions for oversight**: The oversight role of the Ombudsman or Commissioner mentioned earlier may go further than the area of information. It may also cover the rights and policies for consultation and the legality of public administration actions and decisions. Here too it may act on its own initiative, or on the basis of complaints by citizens. In some countries, parliaments themselves review the results of public consultations conducted by governments before considering a new draft law (for instance as in Denmark, Norway, Sweden).

What active participation elements to apply?

Active participation builds on the insight that citizens can make an active and original contribution to policy-making. It taps into the broader resources of society in order to meet the many governance challenges facing our societies today. It envisions the role of government not as a micro-manager, but as an enabler and provider of frameworks. Within these frameworks, market and civil society, individual citizens and groups may organise their activities and relations. Here, the relation between government and citizens in policy-making can become a partnership.

Engaging citizens in policy-making rests on a couple of **conditions**. First of all, government needs to recognise the **autonomous capacity of citizens** to discuss and generate policy options. It also needs to share agenda-setting. And it requires a commitment from government that policy proposals generated jointly will be taken into account in reaching a final decision. Citizens, on the other hand, need to accept a higher degree of **responsibility** to accompany their own enhanced role in policy-making.

Active participation is a **new frontier** in government-citizen relations. A few countries are beginning to explore the area. In Canada, citizen engagement is set as a policy priority. Interactive government is a distinctive approach in the Netherlands, calling for citizens' participation in the preparation of decisions. Here, decisions are to be made in co-operation and consent between authorities and citizens. So far, however, experience in general is limited and mostly exists as experiments at the local level. There are few elements for a legal, policy and institutional network, apart from traditional rights granted to citizens.

For elements supporting a framework for active citizen participation, consider:

- **If legislation and referenda initiated by citizens are applicable**: Constitutions or laws can grant citizen the right to propose legislation (for instance Austria, Poland, Spain) or to initiate non-binding referenda (for instance New Zealand). For binding referenda initiated by citizens (for instance Switzerland), keep in mind that they introduce a strong element of "direct democracy" with implications for government systems based on representative democracy. These issues go beyond the scope of the present handbook.

- **If policies on active participation are an option**: Government resolutions may set the aim to create and advance possibilities for active citizen participation (for instance Finland). Here, citizens and their organisations are supposed to play a major role in shaping policies affecting them, while governments are seen in an enabling role. Government policy may achieve this by transferring responsibility to local authorities, citizens and their organisations (as in the Netherlands). Guidelines for implementation and evaluation of greater citizen engagement can support active participation (for instance Canada).

- **How government can support the evolution of active participation**: There are no clear institutional responsibilities for active participation in OECD countries so far. Government can help the development of active participation by a number of activities aimed to: collect good practices, raise awareness, develop guidelines for engaging with citizens.

What evaluation elements to apply?

Evaluation allows governments to know if their activities were successful or not. This provides the basis for new or redesigning existing activities. Evaluation is a central part of planning and running information, consultation and active participation activities. Some countries have established legal and policy frameworks to support evaluation.

When considering framework elements for evaluation, review:

- **If legal requirements for evaluation are suitable:** Laws may require an automatic evaluation by independent evaluators after five years (such as in the law on administration in the Netherlands).
- **If annual evaluation reports should be made obligatory:** Ministries may be obliged by law to deliver annual reports on complaints and proposals received from citizens (for example in Spain).
- **If publication of evaluation reports should be mandatory:** Freedom of Information legislation may require government to conduct and publish evaluations of the law's implementation in annual reports (as in Norway).
- **How guidelines can help**: Government can develop internal guidelines on evaluation to assisting its staff in planning and implementing evaluations. The quality of an evaluation depends largely on the quality of the data available. Attention should be paid to defining the types of data needed for evaluation and how it is to be collected from the design phase.
- **How to involve citizens**: Evaluation processes may include citizens directly (for example through participation in review boards) or indirectly (through surveys).

What general capacities to develop?

In order to conduct concrete activities to strengthen their relations with citizens, governments need to develop a general capacity for informing, consulting and actively engaging citizens in policy-making. A minimum of general capacity is necessary as an operative basis and is a condition for effectiveness. Developing this general capacity fosters professionalism in strengthening government-citizen relations and enhances success. The following list gives a broad review of key aspects of general capacity, stretching from the minimum to maximum levels needed.

For developing and enhancing the general capacity for strengthening government-citizen relations, focus on:

- **Adequate structure**: Within government, responsibilities for activities of strengthening government-citizen relations should be clearly assigned. Many governments have designated units responsible for specific activities or for co-ordination and guidance (for more information see “Institutional elements for information” in “What institutional elements to apply?”).
- **General commitment by leadership and access to decision-making**: Efforts by public officials to inform, consult and engage citizens in policy-making can only be effective if top leadership supports them. Commitment by political leadership and top management thus is essential. In practice, this requires leadership to take an active interest in and provide visible support to these activities. At the same time, leadership needs to ensure that the inputs received from citizens are indeed incorporated into decision-making – and this means also for the officials in charge of these activities.
- **A basis of general resources**: Governments need to provide financial and human resources for information, consultation and active participation. Without a minimum level of financial and human resources, no activities can be conducted and relations with citizens cannot be strengthened.
- **In-house skill development**: Activities to strengthen government-citizen relations require specific skills. Many of these skills should be developed and made available inside government. Training courses can help to prepare existing personnel for planning and conducting these activities. Recruitment of personnel with professional experience and capacity in the area also helps to develop and enhance in-house

skills. Knowledge and experience in communication techniques – such as those of journalism, public relations, publishing and advertising – is certainly helpful, especially for many of the technical tasks. However, the full range of skills needed to strengthen government-citizen relations is much broader. It ranges from strategic, political and issue-related competence, process design, moderation, and facilitation abilities to communication and management skills.

- **External advice and outsourcing**: When strengthening their relations with citizens, governments benefit from external expertise – whether they are relative newcomers to the field or have long-established experience. Expertise from outside the administration ranges from high level strategic advice (to help develop the legal and institutional framework or plan events) as well as technical services to conduct them (for example, web site design). Drawing on external expertise provides government with the opportunity to learn from others. Outsourcing can also lessen the workload on internal services. It is crucial, however, that governments do not take external advice and outsourcing as an excuse for not investing in, and developing their own internal competence. Because of the direct link to policy-making, internal expertise and skills are needed – not least in order to make sure that external assistance follows the government's guidelines!

- **Internal awareness and open communication culture:** Within government, it is useful to assign units and individuals with specific responsibilities for informing, consulting and actively engaging citizens. In order to achieve best results, however, the approach of trying to strengthen government-citizen relations needs to be equally supported throughout the government and public administration. Governments achieve this by raising awareness of legal obligations, opportunities and concrete tools for strengthening relations with citizens. Furthermore, they may use best practice examples, rewards, and policy elements such as guidelines to stir interest and action in this field. This way, governments may aim at developing a general culture of transparency, openness and communication within government.

Plan and act strategically!

Building on the framework, governments can tackle concrete actions to strengthen government-citizen relations. The most important thing, however, is not to jump directly into action – but to **think first**: What do you want to achieve? How can you best achieve it? How will you be able to know if you were successful? If activities of strengthening government-citizen relations lead to problems, it is often because these questions were not addressed beforehand.

For successful actions in information, consultation and active participation, governments need to **plan and act strategically**. You need to distinguish between the different **phases** of concept development and planning, the implementation phase, and the evaluation phase. The first phase, concept and planning, is an investment that will bear fruit at all stages. It entails clarifying the objectives you want to reach, the public you want to address,

and the resources at your disposal. It provides the basis for selecting the mix of tools and implementing the activities. Planning evaluation from the outset gives you the chance to know if and how far your activities were successful, and to improve planning and action for the future.

Developing a concept and planning can be a **step-by-step** process, following the path provided in this chapter. Often, however, government officials may find that they need to **jump back and forth** between the elements in order to account for the interrelations. Creativity is a central capability for any planning of activities of information, consultation and active participation– as is analysis. For creativity to work, it needs room for manoeuvre. Bear in mind, however, that objectives and publics are the most important elements – in the end, activities need to follow objectives, not the other way around.

Which objectives?

Objectives describe **what to achieve**. They are about results, the **effects** you want to accomplish. Objectives help you focus on the important issues when planning, executing or evaluating. They help you identify which actions are needed. They help to justify the actions. And they put these actions into a larger perspective.

Part I of this handbook sets out several objectives for strengthening government-citizen relations – most importantly: greater trust in government. The handbook also addresses a variety of broad effects strengthening government-citizen relations can have, for instance, better functioning of democracy, better policies, better implementation, more voluntary compliance, etc. And it outlines the mechanisms leading to these effects, such as providing citizens with access to information, seeking and using their input, involving them in policy-making. Together, these elements describe the general **context, effects, and mechanisms** for activities strengthening government-citizen relations within a policy framework. The elements are linked to each other. They correspond to different levels of objectives**.** When planning activities to strengthen government-citizen relations, there are at least **three levels of objectives**:

- **What is the contribution to wider aims of the government?** How do they fit in with policy goals in general or within a specific sector?
- **What effects is the set of activities aiming to achieve?** What will be the direct outcome and effect of the activities planned?

- **What is needed in order for these effects to be achieved?** What are the mechanisms? What are the concrete deliverables?

When developing objectives,

- **Set objectives at all levels**: This puts activities in context and makes the link to broader goals of government.
- **Be realistic**: There is nothing wrong with ambitions – but setting them unrealistically high in your planning phase may lead to inflated expectations and to disappointment when they are not achieved.
- **Match objectives with publics, resources and activities**.
- **Write objectives down**: This makes objectives explicit and provides the basis for evaluation.
- **Share**: Develop objectives together with staff – and, at the very least, share them with staff, so they know what they are working towards. Do the same, if and as far as possible, with stakeholders and publics.

Whom to address?

Which citizens should receive the information, be consulted or actively participate? Often and most importantly, these are all citizens of your country. Sometimes, however, these are only those citizens who, for instance, are residing in a specific area. At other times, again, you might also want or need to address citizens of other countries. These groups of citizens are called **publics**. Sometimes they are referred to as "target groups". Publics are groups of citizens you want to reach or engage through the activities of strengthening government-citizen relations. Distinguishing publics as groups of citizens is a necessary first step and can be done in terms of

- **Particular policy sectors**: for instance, public health services.
- **Geographical policies**: local groups of citizens, for instance in the case of policies for rural or remote communities.
- **Different phases of the policy-cycle**: depending on the phase of the policy-cycle, you might need to address different sizes and kinds of groups of citizens.
- **Diverging characteristics**: linguistic, ethnic or other minorities, or groups distinguished by age, gender, profession, etc.
- **Use of media**: citizens using the Internet or reading newspapers.

When citizens have a direct interest in the issue at stake, they are called **stakeholders**. Because of their direct interest, they usually are very important publics to address in policy-making. At the same time, governments may find it very important to balance this with involving the **general public**, or all citizens concerned. In their efforts to strengthen government-citizen relations, governments often address publics of **individual citizens**. At the same time, they might also specifically address publics of citizens' organisations – such as labour, business, professional organisations, other interest groups or **Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).** These organisations and their officials may formally or informally represent views of part of the citizens on specific issues. They are also a means to reach citizens who are in contact with these organisations. This is why these organisations are often important publics to address. At the same time, these organisations have interests of their own, which do not necessarily reflect those of the citizens behind them. It is important not to confuse these organisations, however important they may be, with the individual citizens themselves.

When defining publics:

- **Answer**: who is important to address on the issue at hand following the criteria as those mentioned above.
- **Be specific**: When selecting whom you want to inform, consult or engage, be specific. Imprecision risks wasting resources.
- **Review the characteristics of publics**: Their media use, location, topical interest, etc. provides important help for finding an adequate approach and suitable activities.
- **Match publics with objectives, resources and activities**.
- **Be inclusive:** openness and equal access are important principles for strengthening government-citizen relations.

How to select tools and activities?

How to select tools for activities that will reach the publics and fulfil the objectives? Selecting tools is an important step in planning information, consultation and active participation. Selecting tools depends very much on the situation a government is facing. It depends on

- **Objectives**: If the effects you want to achieve are about raising public awareness and knowledge, tools concentrating on information are adequate. If the objective is to receive feedback from citizens, selecting consultation tools will make sense. If the desired effect is to engage citizens in developing new policy options, tools for active participation apply.

- **Publics**: Tools need to be selected and adapted to fit the public with whom they are supposed to bring government in contact. To give an example: If the goal is to reach directly all citizens in the country, it is advisable to use tools that present information in a way that is understandable to all.

- **Available resources**: Without adequate resources, tools cannot be used. The tools selected need to fit in with what staff and technical equipment is available, and with what government can and is willing to spend.

When matching tools with objectives, publics and available resources, government officials may find that one tool is not enough to create the necessary level of contact with publics and reach their objectives. Usually, a **mix of tools** is necessary. A mix of tools may also give governments the chance to use their efforts in several ways in order to reach publics better and achieve objectives. Integrating tools is of special importance when using new information and communication technology (ICT). **Integrating traditional and ICT tools** can help to boost effectiveness while overcoming many limits of ICT.

The following chapter *(“Choose and use the tools! “)* provides an overview, a structure and many examples of tools. Following their main line of use, the tools are divided into tools for information, tools for consultation, tools for active participation and tools for evaluation. The subsequent chapter devotes special attention to tools based on new information and communication technologies (ICTs). The overview, structure and examples are included to provide you with inspiration and creativity when designing the right mix of tools to match the specific situation and challenges your government is facing.

When defining the mix of tools and activities,

- **Get an overview of available tools.** The experience of other national governments or local governments in your own country may provide useful examples.

- **Create a mix of tools matching objectives, publics and resources**. Choose tools on the basis of defined objectives, publics and resources – not vice versa. However attractive it may be to focus on creating a mix of tools: they still have to be adapted to fit the circumstances.
- **Think about how traditional tools can be integrated with new ICT tools**, if applicable.
- **Be specific about how the tools will be used**: Further planning on the concrete use of tools (when, where, who to do what task, etc.) helps to lead to effective activities.

What about resources?

What are the resources at your disposal for addressing the publics and reaching your objectives? This means concretely: Who should do which task? What materials or services are needed? How much does it cost? Where are the money and people coming from?

Basically, two kinds of resources are of importance for strengthening government-citizen relations: financial resources and human capacity.

- **Financial resources** are the funds available to pay for materials and services needed. They are usually provided in the budget of the part of the administration that is charged with the task of running an activity to strengthen government-citizen relations. It can be, however, that funds for these activities are available through other budget lines, be it general administrative or policy specific ones.
- **Human capacity** is above all about the time personnel can spend on the activities. How many persons are available to fulfil the tasks related to the activity, and how much of their work time can they spend on it. Human capacity is also about the capabilities of the persons available. What is their education and experience related to the tasks to accomplish during planning, implementation and evaluation? What about management needs? Is there commitment from the political leadership, top management and staff?

Having adequate resources is vital. Without them, activities to strengthening government-citizen relations cannot go ahead. The kind and amount of resources available determine what kind of activities can be done. They have a huge impact on whether, or how far publics can be addressed and objectives be reached. They are a crucial part of the practical setting for strengthening government-citizen relations. This is why

it is important to **match resources with objective, publics and activities/tools**. What resources do certain activities require? Do the resources available allow for this or not? How far can the publics be addressed and the objectives reached? If resources match the activities – very good. If they are not sufficient, try to

- **Be creative with existing resources**: Check if there are less expensive and less time-intensive ways to use the tools. There might be other tools that have similar effects and need fewer resources.
- **Use one resource to compensate for the other**: If you have much funding but little human resources, you can consider delegating some of the tasks to contractors outside the administration – as long as that does not infringe on the policy prerogatives of government. The other way round, with little funding and many human resources, you can consider having the internal personnel perform tasks that were originally to be given to contractors outside the administration. Assess critically how far this is realistic, for instance in terms of in-house expertise.
- **Increase the resource base**: You can try to request more resources from higher up the hierarchy. Here again, commitment from leadership is essential. You can also try to obtain financial resources or seconded personnel from other administrative units or programmes if your activities cover a part of their tasks in strengthening government-citizen relations.
- **Set priorities**: Whatever the resources at your disposal, in the end, you cannot do and achieve everything at the same time. You need to set priorities. And if, despite all attempts, your resources do not cover what is needed, you need to give priority to certain activities, publics and objectives.
- **Acknowledge limits**: Resources for strengthening government-citizen relations are limited, like for any other government activity. If resources are not sufficient to do what is intended, explicitly acknowledge and spell out the consequences: limits to activities, limits to the publics addressed, limits to objectives achieved. Make sure that these limits are known to leadership.

When considering resources:

- **Secure commitment** from political leadership, top management and staff. This is a precondition for successful activities on strengthening government-citizen relations.

- **Review** your existing resources in terms of finances and human capacity.
- **Match resources with objectives, publics and activities.**
- **Do not underestimate** human or financial needs.
- **Follow the points** mentioned above, if you find that resources are not sufficient.

How to plan evaluation?

Once objectives are set, publics are defined, resources have been allocated and tools have been selected, a final important step in the planning phase remains, namely: **evaluation**. Planning and conducting evaluation helps government officials to

- **See if their activities were successful**: Were the tools effective? Have publics been contacted as planned? Were the resources adequate? Have the objectives been reached?
- **Demonstrate to others that the activities were successful**: This is important to justify planning and activities.
- **Learn from experience**: Evaluating and sharing the results enable government to learn from their activities. It enables governments to compare activities and set benchmarks for good practice. This gives incentives for improving planning and practice, and raises awareness for strengthening government-citizen relations within the organisation.
- **Redesign activities and create new ones** on the basis of a reflection on their experience. This increases the chance for success in the future and builds capacity to respond to new and emerging demands.
- **Do all this during and after implementing activities**. Planning evaluation activities gives the chance to track the success and eventually modify activities not only after, but also during implementation.

Evaluation needs to be part of proper planning. If governments start thinking about evaluation only during or even after implementation, they not only deprive themselves of some of the above-mentioned opportunities, they will almost certainly run into problems, because measurements are not defined, necessary data not collected, and resources for evaluation are unavailable. The following two chapters provide an overview and examples

of evaluation tools and how to put them into practice. Planning evaluation includes selecting these tools and preparing their use.

For evaluating and redesigning, remember to

- **Make sure to include evaluation tools and their use in the planning**.
- **Match evaluation tools** with objectives, publics, resources, and the tools for information, consultation and active participation.
- **Carry out evaluation not only after, but if possible, also during activities**.
- **Make full use of the potential of evaluation**: Use it to measure success, to demonstrate it, to enable learning from experience and support awareness across the organisation, and to improve current and future implementation.

Choose and use the tools!

What are the available tools?

What tools are available to strengthen government-citizen relations? One thing is clear: there is no scarcity. There seems to be an almost endless number of tools, and **myriad possibilities** for combining them – a great basis for the practitioner. At the same time, it makes it necessary to go to the basics in order to get a proper overview.

Information, consultation and active participation require contact and communication between government and citizens. This means concretely that there is an exchange of **messages.** Messages are about the content: What do those sending a message say or express? What do those receiving a message hear or understand? Messages can be anything as simple as the opening times of an information centre to the complex reasoning behind a new policy proposal. The way these messages are exchanged is also important: How will the message be expressed, sent and received? There are countless **means**, and they all have specific **characteristics** such as

- **Form**: Addressing one or more human senses, the means can be **audio** (for instance with speeches and discussions), **visual** (texts and pictures or slides), and any **audiovisual** combinations of these, (for instance video films, commented slide shows, etc.).

- **Support**: Governments can communicate **without further support** – for instance speaking or listening to an audience. They can also use **objects and products** to relate to citizens – for instance hard copy, like documents and books, or their electronic versions.

- **Channel of delivery**: Governments can choose between different channels to deliver communications. The channels can be **physical:** via direct handout, mail delivery, or **electronic:** via telephone, radio, television, email, etc. Governments can also cooperate with **persons and organisations** as **intermediaries** for communications, for instance, Civil Society Organisations.

Governments can choose between different **approaches** in strengthening their relations with citizens. Governments can choose between

- **Speaking/sending or listening/receiving – or both:** Governments can speak or send messages (as in a public speech), listen or receive messages (such as when listening to questions or comments) or both, as in a conversation.

- **Active or passive:** Governments may contact citizens actively, on their own initiative, as when organising an open dialogue conference. Or they can react passively to citizens' requests, for example when providing access to a government document.

Control or no control: Governments can choose a channel it controls (as with a government newsletter or brochure) or choose one where they exercise no control (for example, by giving information to a CSO representative who then publishes an article in the organisation's own newsletter).

- **Ad hoc or ongoing**: Governments may contact citizens on an ad hoc basis (such as in a one-off public debate on health policy) or on an ongoing basis (for instance, with a continuous exchange on health issues through permanent roundtables).
- **Broad or restricted**: Governments can choose to communicate broadly (reaching a large audience through a television advertisement) or in a restricted manner (to reach a small, well-defined set of citizens).
- **Limited or significant interaction**: Governments may aim for limited levels of interaction with citizens (as when posting a document on a web site for comments) or for a lot of contact with citizens, for instance through direct exchange on a stand in a market place.

Usually tools for strengthening government-citizen relations are a **mix** of several characteristics and approaches. Within the following chapters in this part, the handbook shows **structures and examples** of tools for information, consultation and active participation. These are examples of widespread or innovative tools of good practice in strengthening government-citizen relations. They have been chosen to act as inspiration for action. They are not prescriptions for action. Success in using these tools requires them to be **tailor-made** to fit objectives, publics and resources that can vary greatly in different situations and countries. Successful action requires using **imagination and analysis** to come up with modified and new tools that can meet challenges. Looking at the following examples, as well as thinking in terms of message, means, characteristics and approaches might help you with that.

When developing an overview of possible tools for activities, consider:

- **Different characteristics** of tools in terms of form, support and channel of delivery.
- **Different approaches** of government to use the tools, such as sending/receiving, active/passive, control/no control, ad hoc/ongoing, broad/restricted, limited/significant interaction.
- **Using both analysis and creativity** to identify, select, adapt, invent and mix the tools needed.

What tools to use for information?

When informing, governments create a one-way relation with citizens: Government sends, and citizens receive information. Information is at the basis of strengthening government-citizen relations. It is a condition for further activities of consultation and active participation to work. Governments can passively provide access to information, or inform citizens actively, on their own initiative. They can use information products, direct and controlled channels or independent channels to deliver the information.

Government **passively** provides citizens with access to official documents upon their request- for instance under provision of a freedom of information law. For this **provision of access to information**, important tools are:

- **Interfaces for citizens' access**: For citizens to access official documents, government needs to present the documents to them. One way to do this is to send citizens a copy of the document by postal mail or electronic mail. Another, more simple way is to offer an equipped office with a photocopy machine in the government's premises.
- **Internal information management**: Government needs to be able to identify and locate the documents citizens are looking for. This can be done by continuously classifying and archiving documents as well as, as for instance in Finland, databases. It is important to use one single set of rules for this and to apply them throughout the administration.
- **Catalogues, registers and indexes**: Finding information can be difficult – both for citizens and for officials. Catalogues, registers and indexes are tools to make finding information easier. They list and sort data and make it more accessible. This concerns policy areas, such as the environment. In the US, a toxic release inventory gives citizens access to information on which kind of toxic chemicals are sited where. Catalogues also make it easier to find publications – be they in the form of official documents or video films, as in Belgium (Flanders).
- **Questions and answers**: Government officials give direct answers to questions received from citizens. This is a more interactive way of dealing with requests from citizens. It forms a part of many further tools addressed later in this section. Answering questions from citizens is a one way-relationship, if government treat the input by citizens simply as a request for information. If governments analyse the pattern of requests received from citizens or focus on the content of what citizens say, requests for information may become a useful source of feedback.

Actively, governments can take the initiative to inform citizens on policy-making through a variety of **information products or publications.** They comprise for instance:

- **Official documents**: In addition to fulfilling citizens requests through passively giving access to documents under freedom of information laws, governments can publish official documents on their own initiative. In many countries, legal provisions prescribe publication of certain documents, for instance ad hoc through public notices or ongoing in an official journal (see chapter *"Build a framework"*). The official documents may be laws, regulations, cabinet agendas and minutes, deadlines for decisions, implementation plans with clear responsibilities, evaluation reports, announcements on opportunities to participate in consultation exercises, etc.

- **Preparatory policy and legal papers**: In order to inform citizens about planned policy or legal initiatives, governments can create and issue specific preparatory documents stating their state of thinking or planning about an issue. This usually takes the form of a policy paper or a document presenting a draft law. Sometimes, governments attribute colours as names to policy papers indicating the status of the document and its situation in the policy cycle. A so-called Green Paper is an early-stage document, outlining government's first approach to an issue. A White Paper signifies that the policy proposal is already in a later stage of preparation. Before decision-making, governments can also publish draft laws. Green and White Papers and draft law publications are often part of consultation exercises- see the consultation tools section later on.

- **Reports**: In the implementation and evaluation phase, governments can use thematic reports to give information about the results of policies. These reports can cover a specific policy or parts of it. They can give an overview of the entirety of government's activities as with an annual report. And this annual report can also announce new or ongoing policy plans, as in the case of the United Kingdom where the government's annual report sets clear targets or benchmarks. Citizens can use these to judge how government is doing in delivering what it promised.

- **Handbooks, guides, brochures, leaflets and posters:** Official documents, papers and reports are not usually very easy to read and understand. For citizens who want to get an overview or search for pieces of relevant information, it can be restraining and tedious to use

them. Governments can rework and repackage the information in order to make it more accessible and more attractive for citizens to read and use. This way, governments also heighten the awareness of the policy issues under consideration. Handbooks, guides, brochures, leaflets and posters are ways to do this. They feature overviews and summaries, clear and easy to understand language, visual elements such as graphs, cartoons, and attractive layout. Many governments use this tool extensively, for instance on the functioning of institutions and on policy-making processes. These publications may also concern citizen's rights, for example, in the form of a handbook or as a series of guides (as in the Citizens' Guide in Greece or the European Union's guides on the introduction of the single currency).

- **Audio tapes, films and games**: In addition to repackaging the information into new kinds of texts, governments can present them in different forms and on other supports. The tools include audio tapes and video films, or presentation slides. Quizzes and other games portray information in a more playful way and may reach specific audiences – such as youth.

Information products only inform citizens if they reach them. In order to reach out to citizens, governments can use different channels of delivery. First of all, **governments can deliver the information directly, via channels they control directly such as:**

- **Statements and speeches**: Government officials give speeches or present orally information on policy issues. This is one of the most widely used ways to inform and it is often a part of a mix of other tools. Speeches can be enriched with information products, such as visual and audiovisual supports, e.g. slides with texts and graphs, accompanying documents, short films, etc.

- **Direct mailing**: Delivering information products directly to citizens' doorsteps is a very broad and relatively expensive tool to inform citizens. In the Netherlands, the government used direct mailing to inform citizens of measures taken for the year 2000 computer problem with a one-page description (Y2K).

- **Telephone services**: Governments offer citizens the opportunity to call the government directly in order to receive information on a specific question or issue. The phone service is often toll-free, as with Canada's government inquiry centre. The information is given by individual operators to individual callers. The telephone service can

also be partially or totally pre-recorded, with citizen navigating through pressing telephone buttons.

- **Information centres and information stands**: Information centres are fixed information spaces accessible to citizens. The centres are stacked with government information products and often have personnel to help citizens find the information they are looking for. In Greece, every prefecture has its own information centre. The centres can also focus on specific issues, as with Japan's global environment information centre. Furthermore, governments may use information stands as mobile ad hoc or permanent information spaces within their own premises (e.g. local offices, public libraries) or at fairs and events organised by others.

- **Own events and exhibitions**: Organising special events such as conferences or exhibitions bring information to citizens through a range of formats and supports, using and combining many of the tools mentioned above. Poland for example used quizzes and competitions when explaining state reforms to a broad public.

- **Advertising**: Advertising, buying and using space in mass media is another controlled way for governments to inform citizens. The space used can be on all kinds of mass media, like billboards, newspapers, radio, television or the Internet. In Ireland, government placed advertisements in telephone books to inform citizens of the introduction of the freedom of information act.

Apart from these channels the government keeps control of, governments can also use third parties to channel information to citizens. Among these **independent and indirect channels are**

- **Press releases, press conferences, press interviews, etc.**: Addressing journalists and mass media as intermediaries, governments solicit mass media reporting about policies and initiatives. This reporting, the final format of which government does not control, also serves to give information to citizens.

- **Co-operation with Civil Society Organisations**: Governments team up with civil society organisations (CSOs), such as citizens' and business associations, or trade unions, in order for them to channel information to citizens. Possibilities for this cooperation run from very restricted means – such as informing CSO representatives, who then inform their members – to jointly informing citizens. In the US, for instance, the Environmental Protection Agency worked together with,

and provided funding for, NGOs to disseminate environmental information.

For information tools, be sure to:

- **Choose and adapt the tools to suit the objectives**: Information tools are more and less adequate and have to be used differently depending on the objectives to be reached. For instance, creating awareness about a policy issue, or developing a deep understanding require very different approaches and tools.
- **Select the tools to suit the specific public:** Different publics have different characteristics. Tools should be selected and used accordingly, for instance in terms of presentation, language, style, etc.
- **Making sure the information reaches the publics:** Nothing is gained if the tools are well chosen and adapted, but if the information never gets through to publics. Attention to delivery is important.
- **Making information attractive**: When publics receive information from government, they are more likely to use it, if government makes it easy and attractive for them to understand and use it. In most cases, this can be achieved with a minimal investment in clear, concise drafting. In no case should simplification lead to misinformation.
- **Respecting independence of uncontrolled channels**: Independent channels are, by their very nature, uncontrolled. When using these channels, governments have to acknowledge and accept their independence in choosing how government information will be used. It is therefore in the interest of government to ensure that the media and citizens receive as complete a set of information as possible.

What tools to use for consultation?

Consultation is a two-way relation between government and citizens. Governments receive input from citizens passively and unsolicited or actively through inviting citizens to respond.

Unsolicited feedback from citizens may contain valuable information for government. For example, requests for information may reveal the need to adapt or redesign information activities. Suggestions might feature useful propositions for consideration by policy-makers. Complaints may point to

necessary adjustments of public policies. **Tools supporting the use of unsolicited feedback are:**

- **"Letterboxes"** as entry points for suggestions and complaints, allow the collection of data, channel and follow-up the information inside the government, and ensure that receipt is acknowledged and answers are given.

- **Information management software** packages ease the collection and quantitative and qualitative analysis of unsolicited feedback.

- **Analytical reports** on this input enable governments to make use of it. The reports may also be published and may demonstrate the commitment of public administrations to transparency and accountability.

Governments receive **solicited feedback** from citizens when they inform citizens on an issue and ask for their views on it. **Tools to support solicited feedback include:**

- **Questioning, listening and reporting**: There is no feedback without questions. Reaching citizens with questions and listening, and being open to their answers is vital. In principle, questioning and listening can be a part of any contact with citizens. For governments to be able to use the input received, reports to persons in charge of these issues are essential.

- **Comment periods and actions**: Using this tool, government defines a period of time for receiving comments or appeals from citizens on a policy proposal or issue, such as the environmental impact of a planned activity. It also selects the methods for submitting comments, for instance via mail to a specific address ("letterbox") and via a toll-free telephone hotline, and decides on the way citizens are informed about the action, issue, deadline and way to submit comments. The government of the United Kingdom organised comment periods on issues such as education reform and the draft freedom of information legislation. They made citizens aware of it through information handouts distributed in supermarkets and newspaper advertisements.

- **Focus groups**: This tool gathers a group of citizens in one place for a period of a day or less. The participants are to be representatively selected in terms of the population or of specific publics. The members of the focus group receive information and are interviewed individually

and in plenum about their views and reactions. This tool enables governments to receive in-depth feedback.

- **Surveys**: With surveys, governments present a series of questions to citizens, collect their responses and analyse them. When aiming for a valid result, the citizens who are to participate in the survey are selected as a representative sample of the population. A structured questionnaire lists the questions. With closed questions, citizens have the possibility to choose between several pre-defined answers. With open questions, citizens can answer freely. Surveys can be filled out by citizens themselves or by interviewers. Canada's government conducts biannual surveys on service delivery, and receives around 3,000 questionnaire responses by mail – the results are used to set priorities for implementation.

- **Public Opinion Polls**: Public opinion polls are established instruments for portraying opinions held by a population on a given issue at a certain moment in time. In order for them to deliver statistically valid results, public opinion polls follow a strict methodology. It involves random samples, trained interviewers, and pre-tested questionnaires. For instance, Denmark conducted polls on citizens' trust in the public sector. From the answers received, the Danish government is able to draw conclusions concerning critical policy areas and actions fostering trust in government.

In contrast to receiving citizens' feedback, the interaction between government and citizens in consultation is more intensive. Ad hoc consultation concerns a specific issue or tasks and is done over a limited amount of time. **Governments use the following tools for ad hoc consultation**:

- **Inclusion of individual citizens in consultative bodies**: Governments may ask individual citizens – such as experts or representatives of Civil Society Organisations – to join as members of review boards evaluating government policies or programmes, as commonly practiced for instance in Finland. The resulting interaction between government and citizens is intense. At the same time, the interaction is restricted to the one or few persons selected and depends on what actions they take to inform and involve a wider circle of organisations or groups.

- **Workshop, seminars, conferences**: These events enable government to enter into a direct exchange with a group of citizens and representatives of interest groups. During workshops, seminars and

conferences, government may present information, ask participants to respond and then enter into an open discussion. The Irish government held a series of these events throughout the country when introducing its white paper on rural development. The Korean government organised several consultation workshops on government reform. Its officials also attended seminars and conferences by Civil Society Organisations on the issue and reported back on input received from them.

- **Public hearings**: Public hearings may be required in certain decision-making processes (such as under environmental impact assessments) or be established practice in policy-making. They are open not only to specifically invited experts and laymen, but to all citizens who wish to attend. A panel led by a government official chairs the events. Panel members may be nominated by the government, by Civil Society Organisations and by Parliament. High-level policy-makers may attend, such as European Commissioners in the case of the EU's consultation on specific environmental policies. The discussion can explore the issue in a wider framework or focus on concrete policy proposals.
- **Non-binding referenda**: Non-binding referenda can be used for a concrete consultation of the entire population on a specific issue with a choice of answers. Binding referenda go further and place the outcome of the decision itself directly in the hands of the citizens. They are thus not covered in this handbook. (See the chapter on *"Building a framework!"*)

When governments want to consult with citizens on a more steady and permanent basis, **governments use tools for ongoing consultation such as:**

- **Open hours**: This tool offers citizens regular opportunities to meet and talk to decision-makers. In Iceland, all ministers hold open hours once a week at a given time and place. Open hours allow for direct consultation although only for a limited number of people.
- **Citizens' panels**: These panels are composed of citizens selected on the basis of a representative sample of the population. Governments regularly consult the citizen's panel by postal or telephone surveys, interviews or workshops in order to receive reactions on a variety of policy initiatives. In the United Kingdom, the People's Panel is composed of 5,000 citizens randomly selected and representative for the population in terms of age, gender and region.

- **Advisory committees** are composed of representatives of public interest, who are appointed by government bodies, with the aim of ensuring broad representation and providing a forum for ongoing consultation. In Poland, for instance, a national advisory council advises the government on policies and issues of relevance for the disabled. Denmark has created 31 committees with interest group representatives, each covering a specific area of European Union policies.

When choosing tools to receive feedback from and consult citizens in policy-making make sure to:

- **Announce consultation**: For citizens to be able to voice their views in consultations, they need to know about it. Governments need to inform publics openly about the when, where and what of the consultation before it start.
- **Pay attention to selection procedures**: Whom to select for consultation is not only crucial for the quality of answers received through consultation, it is also crucial for the effectiveness of consultation. If citizens and participants are not selected representatively, but are chosen because of their closeness to the government or its officials, then results will be flawed and the exercise may lead to mistrust rather than more trust in government. Setting, publishing and following clear rules and conducting selection transparently can help.
- **Ensure the use of the input:** If governments do not make use of the input received, and have not intended to from the very start, then the activity is of no use for strengthening government-citizen relations.
- **Consider delays:** Consultation exercises can be time-consuming, may lead to opposition and delays in policy-making. Clearly defined goals and limits of consultation as well as thorough planning can help.

What tools to use for active participation?

Governments engaging citizens in active participation in policy-making is the most advanced way of strengthening government-citizen relations. It means that government acknowledges and supports citizens' own, autonomous role in the relationship. Citizens participate in setting the policy agenda and in shaping the dialogue between themselves

and government. They may themselves work out and propose policy options. To a significant extent, government thus gives up exclusive control over the content and channels of the communication – allowing for partnership to develop. While active participation means that citizens can exercise significant influence on decision-making, the final decision rests still with government. This is a crucial point: neither partnerships and active participation nor information and consultation reduce governments' rights and duties to make policy decisions. Governments remain responsible for the decisions they take – and are accountable to elected parliaments and to the citizens as the sovereigns of democracy.

Apart from mainly local initiatives, such as so-called interactive policy-making in the Netherlands, governments also create and experiment with tools for active participation on the national level. Some of these tools focus on **setting the policy agenda** concerning a specific issue. This involves pointing out and deliberating about specific questions and aspects regarding an issue and making **recommendations**. These tools deeply involve a small group of individual citizens who are non-experts on the issue at hand. **Tools for engaging citizens in public agenda setting are:**

- **Consensus conferences**: A group of 10 to 15 citizens gather to question experts on a policy issue. After the questioning, they discuss the issue among themselves. At the end, they publicly present the conclusions they share – the consensus. The group of citizens is randomly selected. They are all laymen (i.e. non-experts) regarding the issue they will focus on. This tool is widely used in countries like Denmark and Norway, which held consensus conferences on many aspects of new technology, such as genetically modified food.

- **Citizens' juries**: This more recent tool is fairly similar to consensus conferences, but features a couple of important differences. Questioning takes place as in a courtroom, open to the public at large. The questioning and deliberation time is much shorter, and the conclusions do not have to yield a broad consensus. Beforehand, government widely announces the initiative including the selection procedure for jury members, for instance via advertising. The procedure is open to all non-experts. In France, a citizen jury took part in a general review of the health system.

Another group of tools strongly engages restricted **expert publics**. These tools mostly involve representatives of interest groups such as Civil Society Organisations. The tools lead to **concrete policy proposals or even co-operation in policy-making and implementation**. Due to their restricted

nature, their capacity to involve individual citizens is, however, very limited: **Tools to involve expert publics are:**

- **Evaluation by stakeholders**: This tool puts the evaluation of governmental policies into the hands of a group of experts and representatives of interest groups and civil society organisations. Government gives access to data needed and commits itself to publish the results of the evaluation. The results contain analysis of the present policy and recommendations for policy changes. The Italian Government had user associations carry out evaluations of government activities to strengthen their relations with citizens.
- **Traditional tripartite commissions and joint working groups:** These tools place a selected group of expert representatives from organisations in a joint group with government representatives. The group then works out concrete proposals for policy-making. It operates on its own and is often subject to a degree of secrecy until a negotiated conclusion is reached. These restrictions limit the effects of this tool in increasing wider public participation. The conclusion can be an agreement on a policy or on an alternative draft law, and may involve shared implementation, as through public-private partnerships. A traditional tool in this area is tripartite commissions of government, business and labour as in Austria and Germany.

Aiming at involving more then a few citizens and experts, government employs a group of tools geared at achieving **broader public engagement**. These tools may develop recommendations, policy proposals and cooperation in policy-making and implementation. **Among the tools involving broader public engagement are:**

- **Open working groups**: This tool uses similar structures and reaches similar ends as the tripartite commissions and joint working groups presented above. In contrast to these traditional approaches, open working groups operate publicly and use opportunities to involve broader parts of the population. The government of Flanders (Belgium) established joint working groups with delegates of associations representing or helping the poor to develop new policy initiatives to fight poverty and social exclusion. The meetings were mirrored with local processes on service delivery involving poor citizens and their families.
- **Participatory vision and scenario- development**: In a facilitated process, a group of citizens, government officials and experts develop one coherent vision or several diverging scenarios about future

developments. The sets of possible futures focus on a specific topic and policy area, or even on territorial units such as cities or countries. Information tools such as articles, videos or exhibitions then carry the vision or scenarios to a broader public. In combination with consultation and participation instruments, vision- and scenario-development engages citizens in an active discussion on policy options feeding back into policy-making. Several cities in the Netherlands have used this tool for involving large groups of citizens in local policy-making.

- **Citizens' Fora**: A citizens' forum gathers a large and broad group of civil society representatives around a specific policy area or issue. It provides a framework to deliberate and co-operate, to develop policy proposals as well as to engage a wider number of citizens. The outcome of citizens' fora is a direct input for governmental policy and again reaches further groups of citizens. Citizens' fora can become ongoing activities run by Civil Society Organisations. In Norway, the Youth Forum for Democracy gathers citizens aged 15 to 26, many of whom are representatives of youth organisations. The forum identifies barriers preventing young people getting involved in politics and proposes new policies and measures. The minister of children and family affairs receives these proposals directly.

- **Dialogue processes**: Dialogue processes directly engage broad group of citizens in policy-making. To this end, they use several tools adapted to different phases of the process. As an example, citizens' input may be gathered in a series of open, interactive workshops throughout the country, as with Canada's Rural Dialogue or the Dialogue Process in the framework of the Canadian National Forum on Health. The input is used in conferences with experts and representatives of interest groups and the government, which work out draft policy proposals. These proposals can then be checked through citizen workshops before the policy proposal is finalised. The structures created for the dialogue process can also be used for ongoing active participation.

For active participation tools pay attention to:

- **Providing adequate time and resources**: Engaging citizens in active participation usually requires more time and resources than information and consultation activities. For citizens to engage in informed dialogue, they need to be able to develop a high level of awareness and knowledge. They are also often involved in several

phases of the policy cycle, such as, for example, in the design and evaluation phases. This increases the time and resources governments need to spend on active participation activities.

- **Ensuring balance and fairness**: Because of its strong influence on decision-making, a balanced and fair process is critical for active participation tools. The temptation to manipulate can be high, with harmful consequences. Governments may want to assess in advance the effects on decision-making of their use of these tools.
- **Dealing with diverging interests**: When involving different groups of citizens, the outcome can still be divergent solutions. See Part III of this Handbook (*"Ten tips for success"*).
- **Respecting the role and rights of legislatures**. Parliaments are the leading arena for the representation of citizen's interests. They may be sensitive to activities that infringe on their role and rights. Governments should avoid using tools for active participation in a way that diminishes the role and rights of legislatures. In some cases, including legislative representatives in active participation activities might be an option, or reporting to parliament on the results of such exercises.
- **Reviewing characteristics of consultation tools that also apply to active participation**: In principle, the need for proper announcement, representative selection, ensuring use of the input and the possibility of delays for policy-making also apply to some active participation tools. Governments may want to take this into account for planning and implementing active participation.

What tools to use for evaluation?

Governments evaluate information, consultation and active participation activities in order to determine their **success** in strengthening government-citizen relations. They check how far these activities are efficient, effective and adequate in terms of reaching the objectives established beforehand. Governments can use a range of tools to that end. Using these tools, governments clarify what data will be used in evaluation (for instance public opinion polls) and how they will measure success (for instance through measuring citizens' attendance at, and satisfaction with, a conference). **Among the tools for evaluation are:**

- **Informal reviews:** Through informal contacts with CSOs and citizens and by asking for and listening to their comments, government officials

get an impression of how their activities have been received by their publics. Through open discussions with staff within government, senior managers can learn about how the activities are valued internally. These reviews can be formalised and extended into workshops. If not, these informal reviews remain simple tools which do not deliver systematic information. However, they give some indications on the success of activities.

- **Collecting and analysing quantitative data:** Governments can collect data on a wide range of relevant areas, such as the number of requests for documents and information products, on the amount and content of complaints and proposals received, on attendance of events, etc. To collect and compare these figures across ministries and bodies, government needs to establish standard procedures and measurements. In the framework of its Freedom of Information Act, Norway collects data from all ministries and the prime minister's office on all requests for recorded documents, refusals and their reasons.

- **Participant surveys and public opinion polls:** Surveys among attendees of events or readers of government publication can reveal information about their use and views of their contact with government. For the broader population, public opinion polls can help governments to determine the effects of their activities. Italy uses surveys to assess the impact of its information activities. The Swiss government conducts a public opinion poll after each referendum in order to learn more about citizens' reasons for the vote and their sources of information.

- **Reviews**: These are systematic and intensive evaluations of activities. They can involve diverse and broad data collection and in-depth analysis. This tool can be especially important for activities that are highly relevant, resource-intensive, experimental or complex. Canada and the United Kingdom ran intensive evaluations on broad consultation activities and revealed many aspects to improve, such as the need for better co-ordination between services and participation of high-level civil servants.

- **Who evaluates? Governments**, of course, carry out evaluations themselves – it is an important part of strengthening government-citizen relations. If governments want a more neutral perspective on their activities, they can ask **independent experts** to carry out evaluations. France had an expert committee review its use of a citizens' jury. The committee produced a series of recommendations for improvement, such as better training and broader representation,

clearer objectives, etc. In some countries, such as the United Kingdom, **parliamentary committees** carry out their own evaluations of activities to strengthen government-citizen relations. Using evaluation itself as an occasion to strengthen their relations with citizens, governments may also ask **citizens or representatives of civil society** to evaluate their activities (see section "*What tools to use for active participation?"*). This can reveal important and deep insights into how target groups have perceived government's efforts.

Of course, governments need to **use the results** of the evaluation so that the effort put into conducting them makes sense. Once the evaluation is done, it needs to be communicated within the government. This can happen via **reports** and **presentations**. Governments may also choose to **publish** the evaluation reports, thereby contributing to higher transparency and accountability. Legal or policy requirements can make evaluations and their publication mandatory, as in the Netherlands or Spain (see section *"What evaluation elements to apply?"*). Finally, governments can learn from the evaluation and **modify their activities or policies**. After the evaluation of its consultation activities, the Norwegian government took action and appointed special co-ordinators and organised special training courses to improve further the success of its activities.

When using evaluation tools, remember to:

- **Define data needs beforehand**: Clarify the tool and basis before starting to evaluate: What kind of data will the evaluation be based on? Who collects the data and how? How is success measured? What are the indicators? Who is going to evaluate? What will happen to the evaluation once it is done?
- **Invest in evaluation and develop its practice:** Investments in guidelines, benchmarks and training can help develop the practice of evaluation (see the section *"What evaluation elements to apply?").*

Benefit from new information and communication technology (ICT)!

Why ICT?

New Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become a major focus of governments for strengthening their relations with citizens. Many governments put high hopes in them. ICTs are **computers or other screen based terminals, databases, software applications and the networks connecting them**. And, indeed, ICTs can provide powerful tools for strengthening government-citizen relations. At the same time, they remain just that – tools – and should not become ends in themselves.

Equally, they are only one among other powerful tools which are presented in the section “Choose and use the tools!”. ICT tools are relatively new and have certain advantages and specific limitations – this is why they are addressed here in a separate section. ICT attracts and deserves attention because of its special features:

- **More, faster, further**: ICTs codify information into electronic data, calculate and treat this data at high and increasing speed, and can transmit it quickly and to large numbers of recipients. Electronically, ICTs thus allow one to do more, faster, further – automating procedures and transferring results almost instantaneously to many even at far-away places, e.g. via e-mail and the Internet. This opens up many new opportunities for making information available, for disseminating and receiving it.
- **New user-oriented ways of providing and organising information**: ICT allows you to organise data in different ways at the same time. It can simultaneously support hierarchies, such as site maps, and associative structures, such as indexes and cross-links. It can do this even to the level of small bits of information which otherwise may be hidden in long texts or lists. This allows governments to provide and organise information in new, user-friendly ways.
- **Multimedia and interaction**: ICT allow for combining information in different forms: text, graphics, sound and audiovisual elements. ICT also allows more interactivity and choice for the user in how to absorb information presented and how to react to it. These interactive and multimedia abilities open up new opportunities for presenting information in more entertaining ways. They also support a more independent, and less pre-defined, consumption of information by citizens as well as the production and sharing of new knowledge among citizens.

These qualities have led to a general boom in using ICTs for a variety of **reasons and tasks**. Governments support ICT use within their countries in order to foster the information society and keep their economies competitive. At the same time, governments increasingly make use of ICTs themselves. They do this especially via delivering services on-line[1], via demonstrating and promoting the use of ICT and via marketing and selling their own data resources – from national statistics to weather forecasts.

1. See forthcoming OECD report “From In-line to On-line: Delivering Better Services”.

Governments are also increasingly using ICTs in strengthening their relations with citizens. Among the reasons OECD governments give for their increased attention is: the wish to establish an on-line presence and visibility and to deliver more information efficiently and effectively. Some governments have also started to apply ICTs for supporting consultation and participation of citizens in policy-making.

When judging the **impact** of ICTs, several governments report that its use has led to much higher levels of feedback from citizens – for instance in Japan and Spain as well as the European Union. At the same time, governments, for instance in Norway and Switzerland, found that their contact with citizens became faster and more informal. The following sections give examples of how to use ICTs in strengthening government-citizen relations, and then go on to examine the limits of ICT and ways to deal with them.

When using ICT keep an eye on:

- **How ICT frameworks and tools need to be adapted**: ICT is a very dynamic area. The technical basis for its present use improves and expands continuously. Present ICT frameworks and tools for strengthening government-citizen relations may need to be adapted accordingly.
- **What technical innovations are on the horizon**: The advent of new technologies can already be envisaged, such as interactive television, high-speed mobile networks, etc. These technologies may bring new opportunities for strengthening government-citizen relations through expanding Internet.

What about frameworks to support the use of ICTs?

Some governments have started to expand existing legal, policy and institutional frameworks in order to support the use of ICTs. As the widespread use of ICTs is fairly recent, these frameworks are **still in an early stage of development**. In most cases, they concern **general aspects** of ICT rather than their specific use in strengthening government-citizen relations. This is certainly the case for **legal frameworks**. Here, governments are introducing and revising laws on a number of aspects relating to ICTs, among them: promoting the use of ICT, safe-guarding privacy and data protection and enabling online transactions.

Policy frameworks also concentrate on the general aspects of ICT use. Some treat the issue as part of policies on e-government (for instance in Korea and Norway) or within policies on the modernisation of public services (for instance in France). In some countries, policy frameworks also refer directly to government-citizen relations. They concern for instance

- **Promotion of ICT use for information, consultation and active participation**: Policies on the preparation for the information society (for example in Denmark, Ireland or Switzerland) may promote or require governments' use of ICT for information, consultation and active participation of citizens.
- **Pledge to publish and consult online**: Some governments have issued a pledge to put all relevant government information online by a certain date (such as in Australia, Canada and Iceland). They may also set themselves the goal to employ ICTs in their consultation with citizens.
- **Handbooks and guidelines** support a coherent approach towards ICT use throughout the government and administration. This applies to general technical, format and content criteria (for instance in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Switzerland), as well as to specific aspects such as answering e-mails and evaluation reviews of homepages (as in France and Denmark)

Institutional elements for ICT use by government can be quite diverse from country to country. ICT use may be organised in a centralised or decentralised way. The responsibility may lay with individual ministerial departments, special agencies (in Italy), or special representatives (as in the United Kingdom). To support a decentralised approach, the Netherlands has recently established an in-house centre of expertise within the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Affairs. In using ICTs – be it for strengthening government-citizen relations or otherwise – governments must ensure they have adequate technical, financial, as well as human resources.

When building frameworks to support the use of ICTs consider:

- **How far specific provisions to support government-citizen relations are necessary**: Most national frameworks focus on supporting the use of ICTs in general. Some specific elements might,

however, be useful in strengthening government-citizen relations – for instance policy statements and handbooks.

- **How to adapt to the dynamic development of ICTs**: Given the rapid rate of innovation in the ICT field, frameworks to support the use of ICT in government-citizen relations may rapidly prove inadequate. The capacity to monitor and adapt frameworks is needed.

How can ICTs help with information?

Information is the area of government-citizen relations in which ICTs have been most frequently used to date. This is not surprising, as ICTs are powerful data-handling tools. Governments and public administrations dispose of vast amounts of data. ICTs enable them to process, make accessible and distribute these quickly and efficiently. This also applies to information relevant to policy-making. **The main ICT tools governments use for information are:**

- **Web sites**: In the year 2000, around 80 per cent of all OECD central government units were reported to have a web site, and their number is rising. In many countries all central government units have their own web site, such as in Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

- **Portals**: Some governments establish portals as front doors for entry to all offers of the government on the Internet (as has been done in Ireland, New Zealand, France and Belgium). They provide a single access point to various parts of central government (in Portugal), as well as to other levels of government (for instance in Norway).

- **Search engines, clear site structures and links**: These tools help users to quickly find the information they seek. Clear site structures and links to other sites containing relevant information make navigation easier. Search engines allow users to search documents with simple and free keyword entries, providing them with a list of links and direct access to the documents identified. Government web sites may also offer several layers of search engines per department, making it easier to focus the search (such as Canada).

- **Electronic kiosks**: Governments can offer access to online public information through electronic kiosks and computer terminals located in public buildings that are free for citizens to use (for example in Greece, Portugal and Mexico).

- **CD-ROMs, computer diskettes**: CD-ROMs, as an off-line storage device, ease access to data-heavy applications. The governments of, for instance, Portugal and Norway use them within their information activities. Computer diskettes are used to publish smaller amounts of data electronically and off-line.

Governments use these tools to publish documents and many of the **information products** mentioned in *What tools to use for information.* **Information products commonly published and distributed through ICTs are:**

- **Policy proposal documents, draft legislation and reports**: Governments of, for instance, Austria, Denmark and France publish policy proposals or draft legislation on the Internet. Parliaments also publish draft legislation on their web sites (such as in New Zealand). Governments also publish evaluation and other reports this way.
- **Official documents, current legislation, budgetary information, catalogue documents**: Governments such as those of Luxembourg and Austria provide free online access to current legislation. The government of the United States, for instance, publishes documents on the country's budget (including explanatory texts and graphics) on the Internet.
- **Policy-making processes and procedures**: Many governments provide a wide range of relevant information for policy-making (press releases and speeches, government structures and legislative timetables) on their web sites.
- **Depository and archive of publications**. As a result of putting official documents and other information products on their web sites, governments create a depository and archive of publications. This is very handy for citizens who can download the information products electronically on their computers or terminals.

Using the ICT tools for storage and fast and efficient distribution of existing information makes sense. This alone, however, does not make the full use of ICT's possibilities. In fact, ICT can be a powerful support for governments to create and exchange new information, make information more accessible and present it in innovative ways. At the same time, the use of ICTs must be integrated with traditional information activities.

Governments may develop innovative ways to make new or previously unpublished information accessible through ICTs such as:

- **Official details of government structures, and personnel**: Among these are details of government structures, and the names, positions and contact addresses for specific public officials. Switzerland, Mexico, and New Zealand, for instance, also provide on-line advice to citizens on structures, procedures and contacts in national government and even in international organisations.

- **Adapted online texts and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**: Countries such as Canada have put texts online that are specifically written to respond to on-line users, such as Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), etc.

- **Personal information**: In order to increase transparency and data security, the Netherlands is exploring ways to allow citizens gain direct access to, and monitor, their own personal information held by government authorities.

Details of information, even if available in traditional publications, may be difficult to find for citizens because it is complicated to access, or requires prior knowledge of where to look. **Governments can make information easier to find and access through the following ICT-supported activities:**

- **Re-packaging existing catalogues, registrars and document collections.** Governments, such as that of the United States, repackage existing catalogues, registrars and document collections making use of ICT's data connection possibilities.

- **Internet-adapted guides and dynamic details of administrative procedures**: Korea publishes Internet-adapted guides and details of administrative procedures underway – this has also helped to increase consultation with citizens. Denmark puts the "real-time" status of waiting lists for specific health care services online.

- **User-oriented navigation**: Governments group, create and present information under specific headings which make it easier for citizens to find their way around in the government's virtual spaces. This way, countries may guide users to headings for specific publics, such as business persons, experts, or citizens, etc. Denmark directs users to specific topics and services by bundling together information on specific "life events" such as "having a baby" and "moving house". In this way citizens do not need to know beforehand which administrative units deal with these issues.

Governments are exploring ways of integrating innovative measures with more traditional information products, for example through:

- **Entertaining elements**: ICTs give governments the chance to make it more pleasant for citizens to access information. These elements include films, audio voice-over or music sequences, animated graphics, or games and quizzes. The online version of the annual report of the government of the United Kingdom features ten explanatory films on how policies are carried out by frontline staff.
- **Interactive questions and answers**: For the preparation of the introduction of the new currency (the euro), the European Union established an interactive database named Quest. The database contains more than 150 concise and easy to read questions and answers on the euro in eleven languages. Questions and answers are linked through structures, indexes, a search engine and direct cross-referencing. The database grew through frequent updates with new questions by citizens. It is also used as a reference for instance by EU speakers and is accessible in exhibitions on the euro, as well as in paper format.
- **Integrating web sites and telephone services**. The United Kingdom combines user-friendly, factual, service and policy information on a specific web site on the National Health System. At the same time, the site is integrated with a 24-hour telephone service.

When using ICT tools to provide access to information, consider

- **Meeting the need for information management**: Placing new and existing texts and documents on web sites quickly leads to a huge amount of continuously accessible electronic information. Government capacity to manage and review information needs to grow in step with this: Which texts and documents are published on-line and which are not? What is the status of each of these documents: are they current, outdated, or need updating? Are they officially validated? In what language? In this context, professional information management and the ability to link the front office (web site) with the back office (i.e. the processes and procedures undertaken within government) becomes an absolute necessity.
- **Adapting the information to fit the strength and weakness of ICT**: Documents which have originally been prepared for other media – such as electronic versions of printed brochures, newsletters, speeches, or longer documents – do not fit well with current computer

and terminal screens. At the present state of technology development, reading electronic documents can become tiring and expensive. Electronic copies of printed information products may be suitable for downloading, but less for direct consumption through ICTs. Text information on ICTs is generally easier to read if kept short and concise. In general, matching information and means allows for greater efficiency and effect.

- **Catering for technical variations on the user's side:** Citizens might use equipment with different standards and non-current software.
- **Dealing with increasing expectations and demands**: In ICT, yesterday's newest application can quickly become the standard of today, and the outdated means of tomorrow. At the same time, citizens' expectations of the speed, scope and format of information are rising. Governments should prepare to meet rapidly rising demands and their repercussions on resources.
- **Using lessons from experience:** Many of the points to watch out for when using traditional tools for information provision (see chapter *"Choose and use the tools"*) also apply to the use of ICT-tools for information.

How can ICTs help with consultation and active participation?

Apart from the many ways to use ICTs to provide information, governments have also started to use ICTs for consultation with citizens. Some of them have even stated this as an explicit goal of their ICT policies (such as in Norway and the Netherlands). **ICT tools for consultation with citizens include:**

- **Electronic letterboxes:** Electronic letterboxes give citizens the opportunity to send feedback to governments. These can be e-mail addresses to which citizens can freely write. There can be several letterboxes devoted to different issues. Web letterboxes may provide online forms with different predefined sections to fill out (as in the United Kingdom).
- **E-mail distribution lists:** Via these lists governments circulate documents such as draft policy papers to interested parties. Citizens can subscribe to these lists via a web site. After receiving the information, they can then send their reactions and comments to the government (as in Iceland).

- **Web fora and newsgroups**: While these tools are similar to e-mail distribution lists, they feature a decisive difference: citizens can view the reactions of all participants and can, in turn, react and interact. The government web site of the Czech Republic features an on-line forum on its administrative reform programme. Korea installed a dialogue system on its budgetary planning process that receives nearly 5,000 comments a year. Governments may leave this exchange completely open, use facilitators, or employ moderators to screen and eliminate offensive remarks. Finland's government opened a policy web forum where citizens did not have to register – experience showed that the moderators only had to intervene in a very few instances (for example to remove racist remarks).
- **On-line live chat events**: E-mail lists and web forums are spread over longer periods of time where there is generally a time-lag in users' interaction. In contrast, live chat events offers participants the possibility to exchange views promptly, live and in "real time", within a fixed period of time – usually two hours. The Danish Minister of Education holds an on-line chat once a week. The European Union offers occasional open, multilingual chats with Commissioners. Sometimes, governments restrict the number of participants to 12-15 in order to allow for a more intensive group conversation.
- **Surveys:** Governments may also conduct surveys on the quality of their services or on policy issues on their web sites or through e-mails. While these surveys can deliver interesting insights, they are rarely representative of the population as a whole.

Governments have just started to use ICTs for consultation on a range of issues. Especially in the beginning phase, when they are exploring this new avenue, governments have often chosen topics that are themselves linked to new information and communication technologies. This was the case in Denmark, Norway, Ireland and the United Kingdom where issues such as draft laws on electronic commerce were the subject of on-line consultation. As many government officials, citizens and interest group representatives involved in this area are likely to use ICTs themselves – such topics favours exploratory initiatives by government and first experience with on-line consultation by citizens. At the same time, these topics – and the use of ICT itself – also limit the scope of the public reached. Some citizens might simply not be on-line, or might be completely unaware of the consultation exercise. In order to raise public awareness of the opportunities offered by on-line consultation, Canada has started to involve citizens and civil society organisations in the design of ICT-supported consultation activities.

Using ICT for actively engaging citizens in policy-making is so far the least developed area of ICT assisted activities to strengthen government-citizen relations. This is still a largely unexplored area. However, some **ICT tools for governments to engage citizens actively, are beginning to emerge such as:**

- **External linking**: Governments may establish links from their web sites to external web sites. These might be run by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), interest groups, individual citizens or, as in the case of the United Kingdom's National Health Service site, mass media. Pointing to or even publishing policy views which are not necessarily their own or even opposed to them, governments adopt an open approach to policy-making. This way, they effectively support joint agenda setting with citizens and civil society and foster open exchange.

- **Using government web fora and on-line chats**: These tools for consulting citizens can, in principle, also be used for actively engaging citizens in policy-making. To this end, governments need to foster the development of policy proposals by, and in co-operation with, citizens via their own web fora and chats.

- **Using citizens' web fora and on-line chats:** Government can consider participating in dialogue with citizens not only on its own, but also on citizens' web sites. Even if these opportunities are not always easy to identify, they can be an important means for governments to reach out to, and engage citizens in policy-making.

- **Interactive games and scenario planning**: Governments may develop innovative ways to use ICT to engage citizens in developing policy options or proposals through on-line games and scenario planning – as did the Finnish city of Tampere concerning the city's urban development plans.

- **Virtual work spaces:** The governments of Finland and Canada have created virtual work spaces in the form of on-line working groups with virtual libraries and archives for citizens to engage with government in policy-making. The Canadian government has created a specific web site for this purpose – in co-operation with partner organisations representing the citizens that government seeks to involve (e.g. youth).

When using ICT tools for consultation and active participation, consider:

- **Using data gathering and analysis applications**: These software applications might offer valuable help in collecting, compiling and analysing public feedback and input.
- **Involving citizens in the design phase**: Involving citizens and representatives of civil society organisations in the design phase of ICT-supported consultation activities may strongly increase chances for broader participation.
- **Being careful with moderation and facilitation**: Moderating or facilitating electronic consultation activities might be necessary to ensure that every participant gets the chance to be heard and that no illegal and improper comments disturb the exercise. The line between moderating and censorship can be thin however, and censorship contradicts the very idea of free and open public consultation. Governments need to consider these issues carefully when moderating or facilitating on-line consultation activities.
- **Learning from experience:** Many of the issues to watch out for when using traditional tools for consultation and active participation (see chapter *"Choose and use the tools"*) as well as those for ICT tools for information (see previous section) may apply as well here.

How to use ICTs for evaluation?

With its powerful data handling capacities, ICT is a valuable help for the evaluation of information, consultation and active participation activities – whether they are ICT-based or not. ICTs can be of assistance with collecting data, preparing quantitative analyses and with managing the information. Tools to evaluate ICT supported activities to strengthen government-citizen relations make use of ICT themselves, but also involve elements of more traditional evaluation tools. **Among the tools supporting evaluation are**:

- **Software applications** for example data entry, storage, analyses, and work flow.
- **Web statistics:** Governments may collect detailed and comprehensive statistics on, for example, web site usage in order to quantitatively evaluate their ICT activities (such as in Mexico).

Software applications allow for the automatic collection and regular reporting of these statistics.

- **User feedback**: Some countries, such as the United Kingdom and France, have specifically requested users of their web sites to provide detailed feedback on their experience. The ICT tools for this are similar to those used in consultation.
- **Reviews of web sites**: Review studies offer opportunities for deeper qualitative evaluation of ICT use. In France, on request of the national government, independent agencies run extensive evaluation studies on governmental web sites, using a grid of more than 120 criteria and quality indicators.

When evaluating with ICT, consider that:

- **ICT-based evaluation is still in its infancy**: Currently, ICT tools may offer only limited support for evaluation. The dynamic development in ICT may, however, quickly lead to more powerful tools that are also more adapted to the specific needs of evaluating efforts to strengthen government-citizen relations.
- **ICTs cannot deliver automatic evaluation**: ICT may help with evaluation, and may be used to automate many otherwise time-consuming tasks in relation to it (such as data gathering and analysis). The preparation and outcome of ICT evaluation support, however, needs human planning and analysis to provide useful information for evaluation.

What are ICTs limitations and how to deal with them?

Despite the many advantages and opportunities offered by ICTs for information, consultation and active participation – ICT use also has its limits. Governments must be aware of these limits if their ICT-supported activities are going to strengthen government-citizen relations. The list of **main limits** is both long and significant:

- **Digital divide**: The digital divide describes the gap between those with access to ICTs (and especially the Internet) and those who do not. This gap exists between individuals at different levels of income, education, gender and age. It also exists between households, businesses and geographic areas and entire countries. In January 2000, the percentage of citizens with subscriptions to Internet providers ranges widely from around 20 per cent in Canada, Denmark, and Korea to

about 2 per cent in the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary and Mexico. As far as ICTs are concerned, the digital divide marks the difference between "information-haves" and "information have-nots". It sets significant limits on any government plans to rely exclusively on ICTs in reaching citizens and raises the question of how to ensure equal access for all citizens.

- **Usability for special groups**: Some groups in society have particular problems accessing and using ICTs. These are, for instance, disabled people, the elderly and minority groups where language may be a barrier.

- **Computer and ICT literacy of citizens:** Even if citizens have access to ICTs, this does not mean that they know how to use it. It is possible that ICTs will become easier to use in the future, for example through interactive television sets. For the time being, however, ICTs require users to have specific skills and be "computer-literate". These are skills which are not acquired overnight and are unlikely to be widespread in the immediate future.

- **Human capacity in government:** Computer literacy may also be a problem on the government's side. In OECD Member countries, an average of more than 50% of public employees have access to a computer at their workplace – in some countries the figure is 100% in central government (for instance Australia, Finland, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Japan). Even if these figures are much higher than for the public at large, actively using ICTs in government-citizen relations also demands higher skill levels. The use of ICTs is also likely to increase the amount of feedback, which can strain human, as well as technical resources.

- **Technical capacities:** Using ICT to support information, consultation and active participation requires adequate technical equipment on both sides: that of government and that of citizens. When activities become successful, technical needs on the government's side can quickly increase. Also, the ICT systems used for strengthening government-citizen relations may not necessarily be directly compatible with prior ICT systems used in government.

- **Costs and financial limits**: In comparison to other tools, ICT usually looks like a cost-saving activity. This can indeed be the case. At the same time, higher demands and expectations in terms of quantity, quality and punctuality can set off these cost-savings.

- **Issues of legal status and accountability:** The legal and policy framework for some ICT-based activities has not yet been fully developed. This concerns, for instance, the role and legal status of government officials during on-line consultation and participation events. This, in turn, raises concerns regarding their accountability.
- **Privacy and security**: Issues of privacy and data security are a major source of concern for citizens – and these must be addressed if the use of ICTs for on-line information, consultation and participation is to fulfil its promise.
- **Specifics of the medium**: ICTs are an electronic means and currently work with electronic displays. They do not create immediate contact between people. ICTs depend upon a supply of energy and good telecommunication connections to work properly. These and other specifics create limitations for using ICTs in strengthening government-citizen relations, where, in many cases, non-electronic means may offer comparative advantages.

These limits should not make governments shy away from using ICTs. ICT can deliver great tools for strengthening government citizen-relations. At the same time, however, its current limits have to be dealt with. **Measures to deal with these limits are:**

- **Ensuring access**: Government can create broader access to ICT through placing connected PCs or electronic kiosks in public libraries (as in Denmark, Ireland, and the Netherlands), in public schools (as in Canada), in retirement homes for the elderly (as in Finland), and in other public spaces (for instance in Mexico and Greece).
- **Catering for special needs:** Speech recognition technologies for the visually impaired, as in Austria and Denmark, or special support for the elderly, as in Norway, are ways to help special groups in accessing and using ICT. The government of Portugal has made it a policy for its web sites to develop accessibility for the disabled.
- **Support familiarisation**. Governments can raise awareness and promote the familiarisation with ICTs through local presentations and training, as with the community centres and a cyberbus touring through the Netherlands.
- **Technical, training and organisational measures within government:** With efforts to provide adequate and updated technical equipment, assure interoperability of ICT between governmental units and existing ICT systems (as in Japan and Turkey), as well as ongoing

attempts to create a secure ICT infrastructure (for instance in Canada), governments are seeking to overcome the internal technical limitations of ICTs. ICT training and support to staff strengthens the internal human capacity of governments. Overall organisational co-ordination may help to assure the success of these efforts.

- **Strategic foresight and planning**: To avoid failures and strong financial consequences of the often heavy investments of governments in ICT, strategic foresight and planning can identify risks and help develop effective strategies to avoid and deal with them before the problem arises.
- **Legal and policy amendments to ensure privacy and security**: Amendments to existing legislation and policies for e.g. personal data, authentication, etc. can clarify open questions in these areas and provide greater guarantees to citizens.
- **ntegrating ICT tools with traditional tools**: Mixing and integrating ICT tools with more traditional tools for strengthening government-citizen relations (see “How to select tools and activities?”) may be an interesting way to go. Governments can experiment with, and reap the benefits of new opportunities through ICTs, while maintaining their traditional activities and even using ICTs to support them. This way, governments do not get caught in ICT’s limitations. When applying this double, integration-oriented strategy, however, governments have to take specific care of spending resources wisely.

In sum, governments can reduce some limitations of the use of ICT to a certain extent. Other limitations, however, such as the digital divide and the specifics of the medium, are expected to remain rather strong for the time being. **Governments thus need to acknowledge the existence of limitations in their use of ICT in strengthening government-citizen relations**.

Put principles into practice!

When building a framework, planning strategically, using tools and ICT, governments need principles to guide their actions. Based on the experience of Member countries, the Working Group on Strengthening Government-Citizen Connections of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), proposes a set of ten guiding principles for successful information, consultation and active participation in policy-making. They represent the essential elements of good practice in OECD countries and are set out in full in the policy brief (available on-line, see Part IV for full reference).

These principles are decisive for success. Acknowledging their importance is not enough. Success comes by putting them into practice. This chapter will show how to do that. As the principles are equally present throughout the handbook, you will find references to other sections for further review.

1. Commitment

Leadership and strong commitment to information, consultation and active participation in policy-making is needed at all levels, from politicians, senior managers and public officials.

To apply this principle in practice

- **Raise awareness among politicians** of their role in promoting open, transparent and accountable policy-making. For instance, provide examples of good practice from other countries; organise special events; publicise successful initiatives, etc.
- **Provide opportunities for information exchange among senior managers** for instance through holding regular meetings, peer reviews, and through applying tools for performance evaluation and knowledge management.
- **Provide targeted support to public officials** through, for instance, training, codes of conduct, standards and general awareness raising. Special initiatives, such as award schemes, can support this.

See also the chapter on “Build a framework!”.

2. Rights

Citizens’ rights to access information, provide feedback, be consulted and actively participate in policy-making must be firmly grounded in law or policy. Government obligations to respond to citizens when exercising their rights must also be clearly stated. Independent authorities for oversight, or their equivalent, are essential to enforcing these rights.

To apply this principle in practice

- **Ensure that public officials know and apply the law**: Providing support (e.g. training, intranet site on good practices) and advice (e.g. central help-line) can help.
- **Strengthen independent institutions for oversight**: Oversight may come through established procedures (e.g. parliamentary review) or through dedicated bodies (e.g. Ombudsman).
- **Raise public awareness**: Use means of information (television advertising, brochures, show cases, etc.), education (for instance in schools) and partnerships (with civil society organisations).

See also “What about costs” (Part I), and the section on “What general capacities to develop” in “Build a framework!” (Part II).

3. Clarity

Objectives for, and limits to, information, consultation and active participation during policy-making should be well defined from the outset. The respective roles and responsibilities of citizens (in providing input) and government (in making decisions for which they are accountable) must be clear to all.

To apply this principle in practice

- **Avoid creating false expectations**: From the very start, and as much as you can, define and communicate your objectives (such as to know citizens' policy priorities or to develop jointly policy solutions). Specify commitments (e.g. to publish survey results) and the relative weight to be given to public input (e.g. given international treaty obligations).
- **Provide full information** on where to find relevant background materials (from government or non-governmental sources), on how to submit comments (e.g. orally at a public hearing, in writing, by e-mail), on what the process is (for instance key deadlines, main contact persons) as well as on what the next steps are for decision-making.

See also "Plan and act strategically!" (Part II) and Tip 3 (Part III).

4. Time

Public consultation and active participation should be undertaken as early in the policy process as possible. This allows a greater range of policy solutions to emerge. It also raises the chances of successful implementation. Adequate time must be available for consultation and participation to be effective. Information is needed at all stages of the policy cycle.

To apply this principle in practice

- **Start early** in assessing information needs and identifying appropriate tools for engaging citizens at each stage of the policy-making process. Plan for public information and involvement early in the policy cycle.
- **Be realistic** in building enough time for public information and consultation into decision-making timetables. Ensure that the timing of consultation is closely linked to the reality of government decision-making calendars (for instance regarding legislative programmes or deadlines for international negotiations).

See also Tip 4 (Part III).

5. Objectivity

Information provided by government during policy-making should be objective, complete and accessible. All citizens should have equal treatment when exercising their rights of access to information and participation.

To apply this principle in practice

- **Set standards** for public information services (such as those provided by professional civil servants) and products (for instance drafting guidelines). Enforce standards through internal peer review and monitoring. Establish clear procedures for public consultation, provide guidelines and training for public officials (e.g. codes of conduct) and consider alternatives (e.g. appointing an independent facilitator).
- **Ensure access** by using multiple channels for information (brochures, television advertising, Internet, etc.) and consultation (e.g. written and oral). Provide information in clear and straightforward language. Adapt consultation and participation procedures to citizens' needs (e.g. public hearings held after office hours).
- **Establish and uphold rights of appeal** by introducing and publicising options for citizens to enforce their rights of access to information, consultation and participation. These are, for instance, complaint procedures, judicial reviews and interventions by the Ombudsman.

See "What information elements to apply?" in "Build a framework!" (Part II) as well as Tip 2 and 3 (Part III).

6. Resources

Adequate financial, human and technical resources are needed if public information, consultation and active participation in policy-making are to be effective. Government officials must have access to appropriate skills, guidance and training. An organisational culture that supports their efforts is highly important.

To apply this principle in practice

- **Set priorities** and allocate sufficient resources to design and conduct the activities, including human (e.g. internal staff time, external experts), financial (e.g. to cover publication costs and fees) and technical resources (e.g. video-conferencing).
- **Build skills** through dedicated training programmes (on drafting information brochures, moderating a public roundtable, etc.), practical handbooks and information exchange events.
- **Promote values of government-citizen relations** throughout the administration by publicising them (e.g. in the form of charters) and leading by example (e.g. through direct participation for senior officials and politicians).

See also "What general capacities to develop" in "Build a framework!" and "What about resources" in "Plan and act strategically!"

7. Co-ordination

Initiatives to inform citizens, request feedback from and consult them should be co-ordinated across government. This enhances knowledge management, ensures policy coherence, and avoids duplication. It also reduces the risk of "consultation fatigue" – negative reactions because of too much overlapping or poorly done consultation – among citizens and civil society organisations. Co-ordination efforts should not reduce the capacity of government units to ensure innovation and flexibility.

To apply this principle in practice

- **Strengthen co-ordination capacities**: Through instruments such as a dedicated Internet site, you can enable public officials and citizens to know what information, consultation and participation activities are underway within government at any given moment. Guidelines and training can help to ensure that citizens experience the same standards when they interact with different parts of the administration.
- **Build networks** of public officials responsible for information, consultation and participation activities within the administration. A basis for this is regular meetings. Networks can pool skills (for instance with on-line database of names and fields of expertise) and enable to share lessons (such as lessons from local government or other countries).
- **Encourage innovation**: Identify and disseminate examples of good practice (via a central policy unit, regular newsletter web site, etc.) and reward innovative practices (with for instance an annual award).

See also "What information elements to apply?" in "Build a framework!" (Part II).

8. Accountability

Governments have an obligation to account for the use they make of citizens' inputs received – be it through feedback, public consultation or active participation. To increase this accountability, governments need to ensure an open and transparent policy-making process amenable to external scrutiny and review.

To apply this principle in practice

- **Give clear indications** on the timetable for decision-making and how citizens can provide their comments and suggestions (e.g. through information brochures, public hearings) and how their input has been assessed and incorporated in the decisions reached (e.g. with a summary report or final briefing session).
- **Clarify responsibilities** and assign specific tasks to individual units or public officials (e.g. for the preparation of information, or for reporting). Ensure that these responsibilities are publicly known (for instance by providing contact e-mail addresses on the Internet site).

See also "Build a framework!" and "What tools to use for evaluation" in "Choose and use the tools" (Part II) and Tip 9 (Part III).

9. Evaluation

Evaluation is essential in order to adapt to new requirements and changing conditions for policy-making. Governments need tools, information and capacity to evaluate their performance in strengthening their relations with citizens.

To apply this principle in practice

- **Collect data** on key aspects of the information, consultation and participation initiatives (e.g. complaints received) and plan for data collection from the outset (e.g. periodic public opinion surveys, number of participants in public hearings).
- **Develop appropriate tools** for evaluation. This can be done for instance through interdisciplinary working groups of experts on consultation, evaluation and audit. Promote the use of the tools.
- **Engage citizens in evaluating** specific events (e.g. through questionnaires) as well as overall government efforts for strengthening government-citizen relations (for instance with a review panel).

See also “What evaluation elements to apply” in “Build a framework”; see “How to plan evaluating and redesigning?” in “Plan and act strategically”; see “What tools to use for evaluation” in “Choose and use the tools!” and finally see “How to evaluate with ICT” in “Benefit from ICT” (Part II).

10. Active citizenship

Governments benefit from active citizens and a dynamic civil society. They can take concrete actions to facilitate citizen’s access to information and participation, raise awareness, and strengthen civic education and skills. They can support capacity building among civil society organisations.

To apply this principle in practice

- **Invest in civic education** for adults and youth (for instance through schools, special events, awareness-raising campaigns). Support initiatives undertaken by others with the same goal (e.g. sponsorship of civil society organisations’ events).
- **Foster civil society** by developing a supportive legal framework (with rights of association, tax incentives, etc.), providing assistance (with grants and training), developing partnerships (with joint projects, delegated service delivery, etc.) and providing regular opportunities for dialogue – for instance under a jointly defined framework for government-civil society interactions.

See also “Why strengthen government-citizen relations” (Part I) and “Choose and use the tools” (Part II).

Part III

Which tips to follow

✓ Ten tips for action

Ten tips for action

Ready to go ahead with information, consultation and active participation? Just one moment, please – or rather ten: In this part, you will find ten important tips to keep in mind for strengthening government's relations with citizens: These tips are based on practical experience in the field. They help you to be successful when informing, consulting and actively engaging citizens in policy-making.

Tip 1 – Take it seriously

Producing lots of brochures is not enough to strengthen government-citizen relations. The state of government's relations with citizens cannot be measured in terms of the number of documents government publishes. Nor by how many videos have been produced. While these figures may be important, the main question is what happens to these products. What information do they carry? Do they reach the publics, or do they lie around in some cupboard? Do citizens actually use the information, or do they reject it? Does government acknowledge and value the reactions of citizens – or does it turn a deaf ear? Does its activities strengthen relations with citizens, leave them unaffected or worse?

To be successful, governments have to plan information, consultation and active participation activities. Strengthening government-citizen relations means work – interesting and even rewarding work, a task to be taken seriously. It is about setting goals, planning and implementing activities to reach them, and evaluating whether they were achieved. It is about opening up government, reaching out to citizens, building and fostering relations for the support of democracy. Yes, and then it might be also be about using glossy brochures to reach the public – where this fits the goal.

Tip 2 – Start from the citizen's perspective

Consider the citizen's perspective first and treat them with respect. Why should citizens be interested in being informed or giving input in the first place? In fact, many citizens are often reluctant or unwilling to engage in information, consultation and participation activities launched by government. They might decide that it is not worth their time. They might leave it up to the government, parliament and other citizens to follow the issue. They might also mistrust the government's information or its motives in approaching and engaging them.

When governments and their officials do not consider the citizens' perspective, they can easily develop unrealistic expectations of citizens' reactions. Very often, the result is disappointment. Public officials may, in turn, develop a condescending attitude towards citizens. This lack of respect is likely to aggravate, rather than improve, their relations.

When governments consider the citizen's perspective first, they realise that citizens' time is a scarce resource. In order to catch citizens' attention and encourage them to engage, governments must adapt their activities to citizens' needs. This means adapting language and style to the public while making the interaction attractive and interesting, friendly, honest, and non-condescending. When governments involve citizens in policy-making, they create expectations. Governments need to demonstrate to citizens that their inputs are valuable and that they are taken into account when making policy. If they fail to do so, citizens may prove unwilling to spend their precious time responding to future government invitations.

Tip 3 – Deliver what you promise

Pretending and manipulating backfire. Keeping your word and building trust is essential. If governments want to strengthen their relations with citizens, then they have to deliver what they promise. Pretending to provide full information, to ask for citizens' opinions, to engage them actively in policy-making and then not doing so will lead to disillusionment. It will make it more difficult to involve citizens in the future. Pretending is about running activities for their own sake or just to be able to say that citizens were consulted. Pretending is about claiming to involve citizens in an open and representative way, but in fact inviting just those whose views are similar to one's own. Pretending is about acting as if citizens' rights of equal access to complete and impartial information are respected, while, in reality providing one-sided or incomplete to just a few.

Of course, governments can use the tools presented in this handbook for other purposes than to strengthen government-citizen relations. They can use it for instance to stave off protest, deflect criticism, defer difficult decisions, shift the blame for unpopular decisions and respond with cosmetic actions to international peer pressure. In doing so, however, they should be aware that they undermine relations with citizens – with serious consequences for their legitimacy and for democracy. Strengthening government-citizen relations is not about "selling policies". In their relations with citizens, there is nothing for governments to sell and nothing for citizens to buy. Reaping the benefits of engaging citizens in policy-making requires governments to follow the guidelines and principles set out in Part II – not just the form but the spirit.

Even with the best of intentions, governments can still fall into the trap of unfulfilled promises and citizen disappointment. This may happen because activities have to be suspended as resources run out or because the leadership does not fully understand or value their purpose and relevance. Public officials might thus find themselves left alone in crucial moments, for instance when citizens' input needs to be incorporated into decision-making. Here again, efforts to plan, budget for and ensure lasting commitment by leadership are crucial to success.

Tip 4 – Watch timing

Stronger government-citizen relations needs time to be built and to show effects. Information, consultation and active participation activities need time – there is no quick fix. To put it bluntly, citizens are not suddenly going to show greater trust in government, just because it has just started to engage them in a single policy initiative. Nor are citizens able to contribute to policy-making without having had time to become familiar with the issues and to develop their own proposals. Activities geared towards strengthening government-citizen relations need time to be implemented and time to show results.

Direct effects of engaging citizens depend very much on when citizens become involved. If this is at a later stage in the policy-cycle – close or even after decision-making – then citizens can have little real impact on policy-making. Involving citizens too late can have negative effects. In contrast, when involving citizens early in the policy cycle – as during the preparatory and explorative stages – governments can achieve much higher effects.

Tip 5 – Be creative

There is no ready-made solution to your challenges. Relations between government and citizens are not the same from country to country. This is why governments need to develop their activities in the context of their specific situation and challenges – creatively and innovatively. The methods and examples featured in this handbook are designed to provide insight and inspiration in developing your own approaches. In strengthening government-citizen relations, the key lessons are: learning from others, identifying new opportunities, taking dynamics into account and using your own creativity and innovation.

It would be so easy. Just fix objectives, publics and tools once – and be done with it. Fortunately or unfortunately – this is not the way it is. Relations between governments and citizens are dynamic: the context for this relation changes over time – and so do areas, issues and options for policy-making as well as the affected publics and individual citizens. Governments are headed for unpleasant surprises if their actions are out of touch with their general policy goals, if they forget to involve new important publics, and if their tools are outdated and no longer reach the citizens.

New tools, such as information and communication technology (ICT) offer new and exciting opportunities. As did, in history, the introduction of newspaper, radio and television. As with every previous step in the evolution of media, the development of a new technology seems to expand and complement established media – rather than replacing it. Governments would be ill advised to ignore this lesson from history and concentrate all their efforts on ICTs, seeking an illusionary instant solution to all their challenges. To be effective, ICTs need to be integrated with traditional tools. And their challenges need to be dealt with, such as that of ensuring access for all.

Objectives, publics and instruments cannot be fixed once and for all – they depend on the way the relationship is developing and on the challenges the government, the citizens and the country are facing. This means that governments need to design and adapt their objectives, tools and actions for strengthening government-citizen relations to fit the context.
The relationship is dynamic, as should be the activities to strengthen it.

Tip 6 – Balance different interests

Master the political challenge of balancing divergent inputs. When strengthening government-citizen relations through consultation and active participation of citizens, governments receive a lot of input and can use this to improve policy-making. So far, so good. But what happens when government receives conflicting input from different sides? Important interest groups and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) might be strongly in favour of certain policy options. Public opinion polls could reveal that, in contrast, a majority of interviewed citizens are very much opposed to them. If governments focus on input from organised interest groups, CSOs and experts, they may find out that these cater just for the specific interest of the few. If governments bet on the sentiments of the broad public, they might overlook the needs of important groups or other policy areas. Which public to follow? Government is elected to develop policy and to make decisions. Government can decide to follow the demands of citizens and groups – being open to citizens' input into decision-making. It can also decide to go its own way, instead – showing leadership. Which way to go? How to resolve these dilemmas?

The answer is: Governments may well find that they need to do all these things at the same time: they need to make decisions and to provide leadership, while being open to input from the public. They need to take general and diffuse interests, as well as organised interests into account. They need to balance interests, allowing for continuity and change at the same time. In a way, this is a government's job description. Strengthening government-citizen relations offers tools to deal with these dilemmas. It does not prescribe the outcome of government's decisions. Information, consultation and active participation may lead to a broad accommodation of interests and broad consensus. However, they can also reveal divergent views and raise open questions from different sides. What strengthening government-citizens relations does, is to foster understanding and clarification of a policy issue, to provide citizens and interested parties with the opportunity to have their voices heard, to provide their input and to share it with others. This way, it gives the chance for consensus to form in the first place. And it provides government with a broader view of opinions and interests, a way to balance them, and a better basis for decision-making.

Tip 7 – Be prepared for criticism

Criticism and debate are part of democracy. Consulting with and engaging citizens in policy-making rarely results in a standing ovation for government. Especially if citizens have seldom been given the chance to be heard, they might use their first opportunity to air their anger or frustration. Or they might simply choose not to follow the options proposed by government. For idealists in government, this can be a very disappointing experience. Thinking that government's policies are right and good and in the best interest of citizens, they may be upset when being openly confronted with opposite reactions from the public. The golden rule in information, consultation and active participation is: if you invite citizens to say what they think then do not be surprised if they end up doing exactly that. And be prepared to find that their ideas might not fit at all with your own. After all, the goal is to get input from citizens – not a round of applause.

As with criticism from citizens, government officials might have their problems with critical representatives from the press, interest groups and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). Critics of the government might in fact try to use governments' consultation and active participation activities as an opportunity to articulate their opposition. The situation is quite similar to that with individual citizens – but can be much more difficult to respond to. The voices of media and CSOs reach a broad audience, in contrast with that of the individual citizen. Criticism by media and CSO can lead to open disagreement and conflict. Of course, governments do not have to leave unjustified criticism unanswered. They have the right to clarify their viewpoint. What they do have to take into account, however, is the potential for criticism and conflict even if government adapts an open, inclusive approach to citizens, CSOs and media. Information, consultation and active participation do heighten the chances of constructive debate, better policies and more trust in government. They do not, however, give any guarantee against criticism and conflict, as these are simply part of democracy.

Tip 8 – Involve your staff

Be open and engaging internally as well as externally. Governments may use information, consultation and active participation activities as an occasion to look into the mirror and ask themselves: How do we deal with policy-making and implementation internally, within the government? Are employees informed about new policy initiatives? Is their input requested and taken into account? Do employees actively participate in developing and planning policies and their implementation? And are they involved in creating the framework, planning, and actions to strengthen government-citizen relations?

If governments ask citizens to deliver an important input for better policy-making, they may equally use their internal resources to the same end. As with involving citizens, involving employees does not mean giving away the right to make decisions. It means using different ways to reach decisions. Senior managers might fear that informing and involving their employees on a broader scale might lead to extra work and efforts. This might be true initially but may very well mean less work in the end. This is because, by sharing information with employees and using their input, governments can achieve their objectives better and more effectively. By practising internally what they aim at externally, governments act coherently. Step by step, they can build an internal culture of openness, transparency, and involvement – a culture that, in turn, supports successful strengthening of government-citizen relations.

Tip 9 – Develop a coherent policy

Remember: strengthening government-citizen relations is itself a policy. Strengthening government citizen relations is itself a policy – not more and not less. It is a useful support for government decision-making and for the process of democracy. It is not a substitute for government's responsibility to take decisions. It is not an alternative to established formal institutions and processes of representative democracy – such as parliamentary debate and voting. Instead, it is a very important complement to it, and may be extensively used as such.

Understanding that information, consultation and active participation is a policy has its implications. Governments may want to consider how far it makes sense to formalise this policy. A basic set of formal laws, rules and structures seems to be adequate in order to provide the framework for relations to be developed further. Obligatory consultation can lead to significant delays – even in cases where rapid and timely action is needed. More informal and flexible ways can be used to design and apply rules and activities – leaving greater discretion to government in choosing what kind of activities will be put into practice at a given moment without reducing the obligation to inform, consult and engage citizens.

Whatever approach they choose: governments need to realise that it is the way the policy is carried out that counts. They will have to stand up to explain and give reasons for their decisions on who they informed, consulted, engaged and how. Transparency, accountability, responsibility and the need for oversight apply in this, as in any other, field of policy.

Tip 10 – Act now

Prevention is better than cure. Do not wait until your government faces trouble and is forced to react. Be proactive and use existing opportunities. Try to prevent problems of poor relations with citizens emerging in the first place. Do not delay action until you have to deal with a crisis. Restoring lost trust in government is much harder than keeping it.

For governments with little previous experience with the tools presented in this handbook, it is important to make a start – but not necessarily with everything at once. Political decision-makers, administration officials and citizens all need time to get used to information, consultation and active participation. A step-by-step approach is called for. Governments may start by building the overall legal, policy and institutional framework and launching specific pilot actions to gather experience. They might find it easier to start with activities aimed at information and consultation. For countries with long-standing experience, active participation certainly is an area where they can invest in breaking new ground and developing good practices. At all stages of development in strengthening government-citizen relations, countries can learn from the experience of others – for example those presented in this handbook and the OECD report on which it is based.

There is no reason to wait and many to start.

Let's go ahead!

Part IV

Where to get more information

- ✓ OECD sources
- ✓ Overview and general information
- ✓ Legal framework
- ✓ Policy framework
- ✓ Institutional framework
- ✓ Evaluation
- ✓ Tools for information
- ✓ Tools for consultation
- ✓ Tools for active participation
- ✓ Tools for evaluation
- ✓ ICT tools for information
- ✓ ICT tools for consultation and active participation

This final part of the handbook provides you with **references** for further information. They are grouped under several headings to allow for easy identification. These sources cover general overviews, analytical documents as well as descriptions and links to practical examples of strengthening government-citizen relations.

OECD sources

Title	Description	Source details
Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making (2001)	This publication provides a detailed description and analysis of OECD countries' activities in the area. A key reference document and the basis for this handbook.	For sale on the OECD Online Bookshop: *http://www.oecd.org/bookshop/*
Engaging Citizens in Policy-making (2001)	PUMA Policy Brief No. 10 for politicians and senior government officials.	Free on-line at the OECD Public Management Website: *http://www.oecd.org/puma/*
Citizens as Partners: OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making (2001)	This handbook offers advice on applying policy lessons in practice and concrete examples of OECD countries' experience.	For sale on the OECD Online Bookshop: *http://www.oecd.org/bookshop/* *and* Free on-line on the OECD Public Management Website: *http://www.oecd.org/puma/*
Trust in Government: Ethics Measures in OECD Countries (2000)	This publication reviews ethics management in OECD countries, including trends and promising practices.	For sale on the OECD Online Bookshop: *http://www.oecd.org/bookshop/*
Building Public Trust: Ethics Measures in OECD Countries (2000)	PUMA Policy Brief No. 7 for politicians and senior government officials.	Free on-line on the OECD Public Management Website: *http://www.oecd.org/puma/*
Regulatory Impact Analysis: Best Practices in OECD Countries (1997)	A review of regulatory impact analysis in OECD countries, including reference to public consultation.	For sale on the OECD Online Bookshop: *http://www.oecd.org/bookshop/*

Overview and general information

Title	Description	Source details
White Paper on Governance in the EU, European Commission (2001)	The Paper contains a set of recommendations on how to enhance democracy in Europe.	www.europa.eu.int/comm/governance/areas/group3/index_en.htm
Report by the Working Group on Consultation and Participation of Civil Society, European Commission (2001)	The Report reviews ways to formalise conditions for participation in the European decision-making process.	www.europa.eu.int/comm/governance/areas/group3/index_en.htm
The Open Sweden Campaign, Ministry of Justice of Sweden (2001)	An initiative to increase further access and openness within the public sector.	http://www.oppnasverige.gov.se/se/?24335
High-Quality Services, Good Governance and a Responsible Civic Society: Guidelines of the Policy of Governance, Ministry of Finance of Finland (1998)	An example of a national policy framework for good governance and citizen engagement.	http://www.vn.fi/vn/vm/english/public_management/govern.htm

Legal framework

Title	Description	Source details
Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, UN-ECE Committee on Environmental Policy (1998)	This Convention, also known as the “Aarhus Convention”, establishes a framework of rights for citizens in the field of the environment and aims to “further the accountability of and transparency in decision-making”.	http://www.mem.dk/aarhus-conference/issues/public-participation/ppartikler.htm
Act on the Openness of Government Activities – Finland, (1999)	An example of national legislation on access to information.	http://www.om.fi/1184.htm#alku
The Freedom of Information Act – U.S. (1966, amended 1996)	An example of updating existing national legislation on freedom of information to cover electronic documents.	http://www.usdoj.gov/oip/foia_updates/Vol_XVII_4/page2.htm

Policy framework

Title	Description	Source details
Canadian Government Communications Policy (1996)	An example of a national government policy on "active" provision of information.	http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs_pol/sipubs/comm/comm1e.html
Code of Practice on Written Consultation – UK Cabinet Office (2000); *On-line register of government consultations*	A set of practical guidelines for civil servants and information on consultation opportunities for citizens.	http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm
Consulting Ethnic Minority Communities: An Introduction for Public Services – UK Cabinet Office (2001)	A brief review of key issues in undertaking successful consultation with diverse communities.	http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm
Community Consultation Register; Community Consultation Protocol: A Guide to Consultation Processes for the ACT Government; Community Consultation Manual: Hands on Help for Planning Effective Consultation Strategies – Australian Capital Territory (2001)	A combined "package" of policy guidelines on consultation and practical instruments for citizens and civil servants.	http://www.act.gov.au/cmd/documents.cfm
Improving Policy Instruments through Impact Assessment – SIGMA Paper No. 31, OECD (2001)	Includes information on how to undertake consultation during impact assessment.	http://www1.oecd.org/puma/sigmaweb/

Institutional framework

Title	Description	Source details
La Commission d'Accès aux Documents Administratifs (Commission on Access to Administrative Documents) – France	An institution which aims to inform and assist in the application of citizens' rights of access to information.	http://www.cada.fr/
Access to Information Review Task Force – Canada	A task force to improve access to government information for all citizens who use consultations.	http://www.atirtf-geai.gc.ca/home-e.html
Parliamentary Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information – Hungary	An example of an "ombudsman" institution charged with oversight of citizens' rights of access to information and privacy.	http://www.obh.hu/
Commission Nationale du Débat Public (National Commission on Public Debates)	A standing commission including government officials, MPs and NGOs, charged with organising public hearings and debates on the environmental impact of major infrastructure projects.	http://www.environnement.gouv.fr/ministere/comitesconseils/cndp-fiche-descriptive.htm

Evaluation

Title	Description	Source details
An Evaluation of the Cabinet Office Guide: How to Conduct Written Consultation Exercises – UK Cabinet Office (2000)	An evaluation of the adoption of a central government guide on consultation and its impact.	http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/2000/consult/code/evaluate.htm
Citizens' Control of Evaluations: The Question of Formulating Alternatives – Swedish Agency for Public Management (2000)	A review of public input in evaluation processes.	http://www.statskontoret.se/english/index.htm

Tools for information

Title	Description	Source details
Global Environment Information Centre – Japan	An information centre that aims to raise awareness of environmental issues and provide a platform for co-operation between government, business and NGOs.	www.geic.or.jp
Citizens' Guide – Greece (annual)	A manual with over 1,300 pages of information on where to find information on administrative procedures and public services. Also available on-line.	www.gspa.gr

Tools for consultation

Title	Description	Source details
The Citizens and the Public Sector – Danish Ministry of Finance (1998)	An example of using surveys to assess citizens' satisfaction with, and trust in, the public sector.	www.fm.dk/udgivelser/publikationer/citizens_public_sector_1998)
Public Opinion Surveys as Input to Administrative Reform – SIGMA Paper No. 25, OECD (1998)	A review of practice in collecting and incorporating public opinion data.	http://www1.oecd.org/puma/sigmaweb/
Guide des bonnes pratiques pour l'écoute des bénéficiares (Guide on Good Practice in Listening to Users) – Ministry of Equipment, Transport and Housing (2001)	A guide with practical factsheets on how to collect and use citizens' feedback.	http://www.minefi.gouv.fr/minefi/index.htm
Youth Forum for Democracy – Norway	A citizen forum to ensure input from youth in policy-making.	odin.dep.no/bfd/engelsk/

Tools for active participation

Title	Description	Source details
Policy Toolkit for Public Involvement in Decision-Making – Health Canada (2000)	A comprehensive guide for government officials on how to engage citizens actively in policy-making.	http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/index.htm

Tools for evaluation

Title	Description	Source details
Who are the Question-makers? A Participatory Evaluation Handbook – OESP/UNDP (1997)	A practical guide and training module on engaging citizens in evaluation exercises.	http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/who.htm
Assessment of Metropolitan Transportation Commission Public Involvement Procedures – MTC, San Francisco, *U.S.* (2000)	An example of a recent assessment report of a public involvement programme.	http://www.mtc.ca.gov/whats_happening/outreach_eval.htm

ICT tools for information

Title	Description	Source details
Government Online Strategy – Australia (2000)	A strategic framework for government use of new technologies in providing information and services online.	http://govonline.gov.au/projects/strategy/StrategicPriorities.htm
Guida alle norme (Guide to Legislation) – Italian Council of Ministers	A guide to on-line sources of legislation and law-making procedures.	http://www.governo.it/sez_guida/ricerca_sito.html
Questions and Answers on the Euro – European Commission	An interactive database on the new currency of the European Union, published in all 11 official languages.	europa.eu.int/euro/quest

ICT tools for consultation and active participation

Title	Description	Source details
Share Your Views with Us! – Public Management Department, Finnish Ministry of Finance	An on-line open discussion forum on specific topics which citizens are invited to discuss, as well as background material and links.	*www.otakantaa.fi*
Guide du courrier éléctronique (Guide to Electronic Mail) – Interministerial Delegation on State Reform (DIRE), France	A guide for public services in receiving and responding to citizens' e-mails.	www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/lactualite/lesgrandsdossiers/guidecourrierelectronique2/dire/intro.htm

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