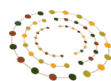




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Public Consultations 2025

**Guides on Citizen
Engagement for Parliaments**

Start >>>

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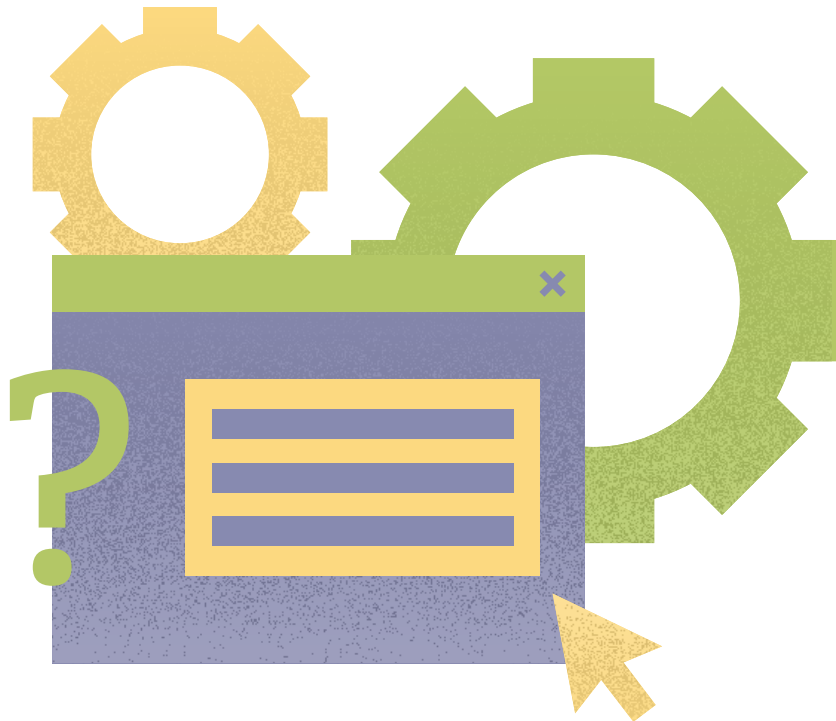
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- » Click the left right arrows in the menu to move through the content in order
- » Use the menu to jump directly to the section you want to read
- » The section currently active is highlighted in the top menu so you always know where you are

Executive summary

Public consultation is essential to ensuring that parliaments' decisions meet the needs of the societies they represent. In democracies, citizens have the right to a say on decisions that affect them. On a more instrumental level, citizens are also a vital source of information that can help to guide legislation and policymaking to better outcomes.

Public consultations offer various profound **benefits** in terms of improving parliamentary decision-making and establishing constructive channels of interaction between citizens and parliament. They present certain **challenges** too, due to the nature of parliamentary work and contextual factors in the societies they represent.

Public consultations can be carried out in **many different ways**, and can be used to gather contributions from specific groups and communities as well as the 'general public'. Drawing from a wide range of examples from parliaments across the world, this Guide presents four main consultation approaches for Members of Parliament (MPs) and staff to consider when thinking about how to consult members of the public in the course of their work:

1. Hearings
2. Online consultations
3. Discussion-based methods
4. Citizen or civil society representation on committees

The Guide then explores how to implement these approaches in practice, focusing on the following considerations:

- » **Purpose and planning**
What is the consultation for and what methods will you use?
- » **Participant recruitment**
What is your target audience and how will you reach them?
- » **Quality of engagement**
How can citizens be supported to engage and share ideas?
- » **Communication**
What information do participants need, and how will you keep them updated?
- » **Using the results**
What outputs are created and how will they inform parliamentary processes?
- » **Evaluation**
How effective is the system for citizens and for informing parliamentary processes?

Finally, we provide a checklist for assessing whether your approach reflects our **eight Principles of Parliamentary Public Engagement**:



Purpose



Inclusion



Openness and transparency



Collaboration and empowerment



Ethical standards



Planning and resourcing



Integration and coordination



Impact and evaluation



See our Guide on 'Principles of Parliamentary Public Engagement' for more detail on the principles

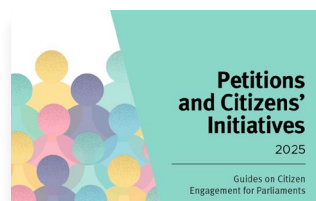
Introduction

Public consultations play a valuable role in the life of parliaments. They enable decision-makers to ensure **parliamentary processes are informed by a wide range of relevant information and to signal to citizens that their views and experiences have a place in democratic decision-making.** Parliaments are uniquely placed for public consultation as the key institutions connecting citizens and their concerns with decision-making on a national scale.

What do we mean by ‘public consultation’?

Throughout this Guide, we use the term ‘public consultation’ to refer to activities initiated by parliaments to involve citizens in information-gathering and/or decision-making. Public consultation is therefore a top-down engagement method rather than a bottom-up method (such as petitions and citizens’ initiatives, which are initiated by citizens).

Public consultation is usually carried out as part of committee work related to legislation, budgeting or oversight, but can be launched by other parliamentary actors such as individual parliamentarians or those with particular status such as the Speaker or President of the parliament.



See our Guide on ‘Petitions and Citizens’ Initiatives’ for more information on bottom-up methods of engagement

Parliamentarians have various sources of information about the issues they work on, including their constituents, political party, and government departments. **Public consultations can help parliamentarians ensure that they consider issues from a wider variety of viewpoints** and on the basis of a wide range of information, which in turn strengthens the outcomes of legislation, oversight and budgetary processes.

For citizens, public consultations are a good way of experiencing ‘how parliament works’ in practice. Consultation processes usually focus on a particular piece of legislation or inquiry topic. This allows citizens to see how parliamentarians are considering issues that matter to them day-to-day and contribute to the process.

There is great variation in consultation practice across the world. Some parliaments must fulfil constitutional duties or legislative obligations to engage the public or specific civil society organisations (CSOs) – such as trade unions – during legislative, budgeting or oversight processes. Other parliaments take a more discretionary approach to consultation. Both types of system have the potential for meaningful consultations as well as tokenistic exercises that make calls for citizen input but do not use it. This Guide presents **a range of public consultation approaches** from parliaments across the world and provides guidance on how to achieve effective and meaningful practice.

Structure of the Guide

- » **Section 1** outlines the potential benefits of public consultations
- » **Section 2** presents potential challenges
- » **Section 3** discusses four main types of approach to consultation used in parliaments across the world
- » **Section 4** provides guidance on how to put these approaches into practice
- » **Section 5** suggests key considerations for evaluating the success of these approaches
- » **Section 6** draws on our Guide on Principles of Parliamentary Public Engagement, listing a checklist for assessing how well a programme or activity is meeting key principles
- » **Section 7** points to other sources of information on the topic of public consultation

The Guide draws from extensive research of parliamentary practice, including desk research and interviews, and feedback from an international Advisory Group established to develop this suite of Guides on Citizen Engagement (see [Section 7](#)).

Section 1: Benefits

Public consultations offer various potential benefits. These include instrumental benefits such as the improvement of parliament's information-gathering and decision-making capabilities, as well as wider benefits to public understanding of and trust in parliament. Table 1 outlines the main benefits that public consultations can bring.

Table 1: Potential benefits of public consultations

Shared benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Better policy and legislation » Greater public understanding of parliament
Benefits for parliaments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Trust and legitimacy » Diversifying the voices parliament hears from
Benefits for citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Influencing policy and legislation » Feeling heard » Connecting with others



Shared benefits

Better policy and legislation

Opening up legislation and oversight processes to citizens can help produce policy that is more responsive to people's needs and circumstances. Engaging with a wide range of people can help identify actual or potential unintended consequences and incentives of policy or legislation.

Avoiding such unintended outcomes should lead to better policy and legislation, smoother implementation, and greater public satisfaction. Where public consultations are carried out at the post-legislative or oversight stage, this can contribute to more effective scrutiny of government activities and ensure that government is kept accountable.

Greater public understanding of parliament

Initiating a public consultation is an opportunity to communicate to citizens what parliament does and why it matters. Effective consultations are supported by clear and accessible information that outlines what process or decision the consultation will inform. This not only helps to ensure that citizens' responses are relevant to the process at hand but also imparts information to citizens about the roles and responsibilities of parliament, including in pre-legislative or post-legislative scrutiny, budgeting or oversight.

As the **National Assembly of Serbia** has found when implementing a programme of mobile committee hearings, "[the hearings] are learning opportunities for local institutions and citizens, as they become more aware of the role, mandate, jurisdiction and ways of working of Parliamentary committees. They see Parliament in a role that is not just a plenary session."¹

¹Newkirk, J. and Popovicki Capin, A. (2014) *Mid-term Evaluation - Strengthening the Oversight Function and Transparency of the Parliament – UNDP Project*.

Lived experience

One of the most important contributions that public consultations can make to parliamentary processes is to help parliamentarians understand how citizens are experiencing the effects of policy and legislation (or its absence) on the ground. This firsthand **‘lived experience’** of citizens can and should be combined with other sources of information to build up a comprehensive picture of an issue.

Lived experience is increasingly understood as a source of knowledge based in direct experience rather than observation or study. This is not to say that lived experience should be treated as more authoritative than other types of knowledge in parliamentary processes, but it should be recognised as a type of knowledge that can be gathered and analysed. A particular benefit that lived experience brings to parliamentary work is the impact of personal stories – this can help parliamentarians understand the reality of an issue and how it affects people’s lives.

A final thing to bear in mind is that lived experience of a given issue won’t necessarily be homogenous – there may be disagreements and conflicts between one person’s lived experience and the implications for them, and those of another person. As with conflicting academic evidence, it is for parliamentarians to review the available sources of knowledge and decide what they think is the best course of action.



Benefits for parliaments

Trust and legitimacy

A core role of parliament is to listen to, reflect upon and take into account citizen perspectives in its work. Initiating a public consultation signals to citizens that parliament is open to their views and experiences. With democracies around the world experiencing a decline in public trust, it is important that citizens feel their representatives are making decisions that are informed by public priorities, even if citizens’ desired outcomes are not implemented directly.

Opening up a process for consultation also allows parliaments to showcase the decision-making process, potentially generating a sense of parliament ‘getting things done’ and supporting trust and legitimacy. Individual MPs may also find that their involvement in public consultations bolsters their credibility and trust among their own constituents or the wider public.

Diversifying the voices parliament hears from

Public consultations can be a very useful tool for the evidence-gathering work of parliament. They can be a formal part of parliamentary committee work, as in the case of calls for written submissions and committee hearings, which usually involve stakeholders such as academic experts, government representatives, policy professionals and larger business or CSOs. Consultation can also be a beneficial supplement to parliamentary work beyond formal mechanisms. More informal methods of consultation allow parliaments to tap into the experiences and insights of those ‘on the ground’ who may not otherwise contribute, including communities affected by a particular law or policy, frontline workers who are responsible for delivering services, as well as CSOs representing affected communities.

Public consultation enhances the flow of information into parliamentary activities, resulting in more informed and evidence-based parliamentary deliberation. Proactively running public consultation activities can also help to structure the inputs parliaments receive from the public, providing interested citizens with a legitimate channel for voicing their views.



Benefits for citizens

Influencing policy and legislation

Public consultations are usually initiated to inform a specific parliamentary process such as pre-legislative scrutiny or an inquiry. They are processes that enable citizens' inputs to potentially influence parliamentarians' thinking and inform the decisions they make. Methods that present personal stories - or lived experience (see box on [page 7](#)) - to MPs can be particularly effective in impacting their view on a given issue.

For example, when the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee in the **Australian Parliament** conducted public consultation as part of its scrutiny of a 2010 bill on marriage equality, public town-hall hearings where citizens shared personal experiences were particularly influential on public discourse on the issue and contributed to further parliamentary action and eventual legislative changes in 2017.

Feeling heard

Parliamentary staff involved in public consultations report that a key effect of these processes on the citizen is to cultivate a feeling of having been heard and having one's viewpoint recognised by decision-makers. This sentiment is supported by academic research.² While citizens may have strong views on what should be done on a particular issue, and some will not be satisfied unless this is carried out, the impact of feeling heard by parliament should not be overlooked or minimised. This can help to promote feelings of belonging and positive attitudes towards democracy, as well as support positive political engagement in the future.

Connecting with others

Depending on the format used for the consultation, citizens may have the opportunity to engage with each other as well as with parliament itself. Sharing views and ideas in a structured environment may allow citizens to learn from each other, understand different views, or even form groups or associations to pursue a shared cause. Consultations can also introduce individuals and communities to new procedural tools or forums to utilise in their future advocacy.

These connections might serve as a moment of 'activation' for citizens, empowering them to better understand their rights, the nature of state power over their lives, and the processes and procedures that enable them to scrutinise government decisions or contribute to lawmaking. This activation might be seen through ongoing participation in parliamentary activities, but also outside of the parliament (for example in grassroots campaigns for reform or positive change in communities).

² Carman, C.J. (2010) [The process is the reality: perceptions of procedural fairness and participatory democracy](#). *Political Studies*, 58(4), pp. 731-751; Leston-Bandeira, C., Thompson, L. & Mace, W. (2017). [Letting the Public in on the Act](#).

Section 2: Challenges

Public consultations pose a set of challenges for parliaments to think through in order to deliver effective consultations. The key challenges are outlined in Table 2. Many of these challenges can be mitigated through the institutionalisation and proper resourcing of public consultations as a function within parliaments.

Table 2: Potential challenges of public consultations

Shared challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Limited public awareness, interest and trust » Societal inequalities » Dealing with disagreement
Challenges for parliaments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Managing expectations » Limited time and resources » Institutionalisation » Ensuring quality of input
Challenges for citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Navigating process and procedure » Feeling welcomed and heard



Shared challenges

Limited public awareness, interest and trust

Parliaments across the world observe low levels of awareness of their role in democracy.³ Many citizens simply conflate parliament with government; others may be aware of parliament from the news or from school lessons, but do not consider them bodies that they can access, let alone contribute to consultation opportunities.

In many countries, there is a sense that parliamentarians themselves are at best careerist and at worst corrupt, and people may have little confidence that ‘getting involved’ will lead to meaningful change. Trust in particular can be affected by the legacies of practices such as colonisation, which reduce some communities’ abilities to trust (or recognise the legitimacy of) and therefore participate in parliament-led consultation. On the other hand, some citizens may approach consultation opportunities with very high expectations of parliamentarians’ power to make change often because they don’t fully understand the remit of parliamentary action.

This situation can lead to frustrations on both sides. Citizens may not be able to contribute effectively and then feel that they are not getting the results they deserve. Parliamentarians may feel that they are not receiving useful or relevant inputs and will therefore be less likely to use public consultations again.

As we emphasise throughout the Guide, effective public consultation is supported by good information dissemination to citizens, both at the time of the consultation itself and generally in the usual work of the parliament. Investing in information infrastructure – such as accessible websites, social media, radio and TV broadcast, and print materials – enables parliaments to build public awareness about their work. This is especially important in a context where citizens have easy access to other sources of information (and misinformation).

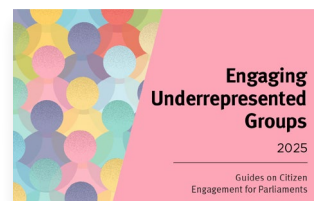
³ Leston-Bandeira, C. (2014), ‘The Pursuit of Legitimacy as a Key Driver for Public Engagement: The European Parliament Case’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 67(2): 415–36; Tormey, S. (2015), *The End of Representative Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press)

Societal inequalities

Inequalities in society are reflected in unequal democratic participation. Consultation cannot be a one-size-fits-all process, because citizens have different needs and preferences according to factors such as identity characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity or disability status), geographical location and socioeconomic background. While some communities may be considered ‘hard-to-reach’, these very communities might say the same about parliament, given that it might be located very far away from where they live or provide only limited information about what it does and how to get involved.

In order to reap the benefits discussed above, of richly informed legislation and oversight and enhanced public trust, parliaments must hold themselves responsible for delivering consultations in a way that allows citizens in their diversity to participate, rather than just the ‘usual suspects’. Parliaments should also bear in mind that inequalities affect not only whether people participate, but how. For example, more educated individuals are more likely to have the confidence to

speak up and express their opinions in front of parliamentarians, as well as to understand parliamentary language. Disparities may also affect engagement in terms of the time people have to spend contributing to a consultation (rather than working or looking after dependents) or the resources required to join a meeting in parliament or even online (where less affluent or remote groups may be disadvantaged due to lack of internet access, appropriate devices or digital skills). Barriers such as time, location, cost, digital exclusion, and disability should be considered at the planning stage and reviewed throughout the consultation process.



See our Guide on ‘Engaging Underrepresented Groups’ for more details

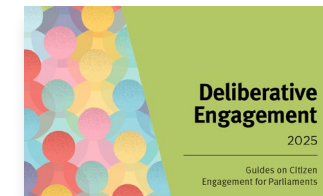
Dealing with disagreement

Those consulted are likely to have a range of opinions. This has implications for the moderation of consultation activities if they involve participants engaging directly with parliamentarians or with each other.

For subjects that are highly emotive or controversial, it is important for parliaments to design processes that acknowledge and manage conflicting opinions constructively. Part of this is ensuring that the range of viewpoints is represented, and that consultations are framed with an emphasis on evidence-based decision-making (as far as possible in a context where MPs must conciliate different influences on their decision-making). In some cases, such as knotty or controversial areas of legislation, it may be worth investing time in deliberative processes.

When presenting consultation results and subsequent decisions, it is important to demonstrate that all contributions have been considered, even if decisions come down on one side rather than another. Some consultation models may lead to

consensus, such as an agreed set of recommendations, but this is not a necessary part of consultation and should not be aimed for in all cases.



See our ‘Guide on ‘Deliberative Engagement’ for more details on deliberative processes



Challenges for parliaments

Managing expectations

The average citizen, when engaging with a parliamentary consultation process, is likely to a) have strong opinions on the matter at hand, and b) lack knowledge about parliament, its roles and responsibilities. Taken together, this means there is a risk that participants will be disappointed if their views are not translated into action. It is crucial that parliaments manage expectations in order to safeguard public trust and ensure that citizens continue to participate. This also helps to avoid public outbursts (e.g., on social media) that might cause reputational damage to parliament and the process in which it is engaged (e.g., the scrutiny of a draft bill).

Communicating clearly about how contributions from citizens are being used, and what the process looks like following consultation, can help to mitigate frustrations. Creating outputs from engagement is crucial because it signals to participants that their contributions have been recognised and received by parliament. On an interpersonal level, treating participants and their views seriously and respectfully when moderating discussions can help maintain trust in the process.

Limited time and resources

There is no getting around the fact that effective consultation takes time and requires specific skills. Some methods will take longer than others to deliver, and factors such as the target audience, accessibility needs, as well as the range of experience to be covered will also affect timelines and resource implications. Resources such as digital platforms may also be needed to achieve a wide reach (while recognising that wide reach does not guarantee quality consultation).

Staff and/or MP time and attention may be required to moderate online conversations or deal with large numbers of written submissions. If conducting in-person activities, parliaments will need to ensure that they secure appropriate spaces either in parliament or in the community. The planning stage of consultation is therefore crucial to ensure that appropriate time and resources are allocated or that ambitions are lowered if the requisite resources cannot be found.

Institutionalisation

The effectiveness of public consultation depends on the wider institutional context in which it takes place. Institutionalisation refers to the embedding of a practice within an organisation such as parliament through the establishment of policies or frameworks, dedicated resources and administrative processes, and a stable understanding of roles and responsibilities across the institution. Without these elements, consultations risk being sporadic, inconsistent or overly ad hoc in nature.

Ensuring quality of input

A key concern raised by parliamentary staff and MPs about public consultations is that citizens' inputs will not be particularly useful due to their lack of technical expertise. Inputs are indeed unlikely to be useful if processes are rushed, overly general or don't provide enough context or information to support citizens to engage. Such ineffective processes are also more likely to be captured by motivated pressure groups with resources.

Parliaments need to consider what type of input they should be looking for from citizens, and design processes to suit this, rather than expecting citizens to engage in the same way as academic or industry experts. For example, parliaments shouldn't be looking to ordinary citizens to consider the technical specifics of an AI model, but they might want to know what citizens think about potential AI applications in health or education and what values should drive developments in this area.



Challenges for citizens

Navigating process and procedure

We have mentioned above that general understanding about parliament's roles and responsibilities may be limited.

More specifically, there may be a lack of awareness of parliament's powers in relation to the government, what the role of an MP entails, how staff contribute to the work of parliament, and the different bodies that exist within parliament (e.g., committees) and their roles. A common expectation is that parliaments have implementation powers that they do not.

Parliamentary process and language are often overly formal and can constitute a barrier for citizens' involvement. Parliaments should consider themselves responsible for facilitating *informed* participation throughout the process, clearly setting out the reasons for consultation, the process it will inform, and what will happen next, through language and means of communication that foster understanding amongst ordinary citizens. If consultations are carried out without regard to these considerations, there is a risk that citizens become more dissatisfied with parliament and the democratic process.

Feeling welcomed and heard

Related to the challenge of navigating process and procedure is how citizens feel when interacting with public consultations. For ordinary citizens who are not experienced advocates or activists, contributing to a parliamentary consultation – especially if this involves attending a discussion-based event (see [Section 3](#)) – can be a significant experience.

Parliaments need to think not only about ensuring that different groups in society are able to participate in consultation exercises, but also that they are supported to do so and that their contributions are recognised. If citizens do not have a positive experience of consultation, they may lose trust in, and turn away from, institutional politics.

Section 3: Range of approaches

A wide range of methods are available to parliaments and their sub-groups such as committees for conducting public consultations. In presenting this range of methods, we include approaches beyond the online exercises that may typically be associated with the term ‘consultation’.

Calls for comments and views are a core method of consultation, but depending on considerations such as target audience(s) and topic, parliaments might also want to use **discussion-based methods** such as roundtables, workshops or deliberative assemblies. **Formal approaches** such as hearings are also a method that can be used to consult stakeholders including CSOs and citizen spokespeople.

In this section, we explore four approaches to consultation that are used to varying extents in parliaments across the world:

1. Hearings
2. Online calls for views
3. Discussion-based methods
4. Citizen or civil society presence on committees

One key thing to remember is that methods need not be used in isolation; **often a combination of participation channels will achieve the best results.**



1. Hearings

Hearings are conducted by committees in many parliaments as a core part of their work of legislation, budgeting, oversight, maladministration inquiries, approval of high-level appointments, or internal duties (the remit of parliamentary committees differs across systems). In most cases, **hearings are used to gather formal ‘oral evidence’ from expert stakeholders** such as academics, state institutions, policy professionals and business associations. In some cases, it is also customary to consult CSOs including trade unions at such hearings.

Committee hearings are an important channel for parliamentarians to gather information to inform their work. These hearings can also provide a way for citizens to see parliament ‘at work’ rather than parliament ‘on public exhibition’ in the plenary.⁴ This is because it is in committees that issues that matter to people day-to-day are looked at in detail and the work of assessing and evaluating legislation and policy is done. Many parliaments now livestream committee hearings to aid accountability and public understanding. Some parliaments have institutionalised practices of holding hearings in different parts of the country to enable different communities to engage with them.

⁴ Wilson, W. (2006 [1892]). *Congressional government: A study in American politics* (9th ed.). Dover Publications. p.69. Quoted in: Kornberg, M., & Siefken, S. T. (2023). *Committee hearings as parliamentary public engagement: A global perspective*. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 29(3), p.442.



CASE STUDY

Enhancing hearings as consultative opportunities

There are several ways in which hearings can be enhanced as consultative opportunities. Firstly, many parliaments are making efforts to diversify those whom they invite to give evidence in this way (e.g., by gender, ethnicity, disability status, age) and collecting diversity monitoring data to track progress. Sometimes this entails procedural tweaks.

For example, the **Italian Chamber of Deputies** and the **UK Parliament** have introduced remote and hybrid proceedings. Several parliaments have taken steps to enable greater engagement with the deaf community. In the **Scottish Parliament** sign language interpreters can be scheduled for hearings where deaf individuals are giving evidence. The **Irish Houses of the Oireachtas** has an integrated Irish Sign Language (ISL) team, which provides interpreting for plenary and some committee sessions and has developed a glossary of parliamentary terms in ISL. [...]

Hearings

Online calls for views

Discussion-based methods

Citizen or civil society presence on committees

[...] Committees are also taking steps to include citizens and CSOs in hearings. In some cases, this takes the form of greater support and preparation offered to citizen witnesses or those who are not experienced public speakers. In other contexts, the parliamentary schedule allots time for engagement-focused hearings. **The Chamber of Deputies in Chile** instructs each committee to hold two ‘thematic days’ each year, where hearings on topics of public interest are held and citizens directly involved in hearings.

More than 50% of parliaments conduct hearings outside parliament.⁵ The **National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia**’s rules of procedure codify ‘mobile hearings’ as part of committee practice.⁶ Since 2007, over 100 committee hearings have been held away from parliament, mostly focusing on issues affecting specific groups (such as rural communities) or organisations but also enabling citizens and CSOs to share their views on national issues. An evaluation of this initiative finds that “[b]y holding sessions in a specific geography, the logistics of actually getting knowledgeable inputs are simplified, and the qualitative inputs necessary to understand the detail of the local situation are readily available... It is an effective method for getting feedback on where legislation is not being implemented, or is detrimental to a specific geography.”⁷

Standing committees at the **National Assembly of Benin** take a similar approach, conducting ‘fact-finding missions’ in local areas, whereby committees hold discussions around specific topics in relevant locations with expert organisations, civil society groups and affected communities. The discussions are usually open for the local community at large to attend.

While most hearings are held in the traditional format of committee members questioning a panel of assembled experts, some parliaments have experimented with ‘town hall’ approaches. For example, when consulting on the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010, the **Australian Senate** Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee held several such hearings in Sydney and Melbourne to hear from civil society representatives and citizens. In 2012, the **Nigerian House of Representatives** used a town hall approach, which it called ‘People’s Public Sessions’, to gather views from the public on proposed amendments to the Constitution. Rather than being led by committees, each representative held an open meeting in their constituency on the same day: “it was like a national conference, broken down, held in separate spaces across the country”.⁸

Hearings can also include those beyond the committee room itself through interactive measures. In the **Brazilian Congress**, for example, committees can choose to hold

hearings under an initiative called ‘Interactive Hearing’, whereby questions are sought from citizens ahead of the hearing and chosen by MPs to ask during the session.⁹ Citizens are then sent clips of the session where their questions are answered. The **Scottish Parliament** uses an online platform called ‘Your Priorities’ for various committee engagement activities, including question generation for accountability hearings (when a government minister or official is giving evidence). Members of the public are able to submit questions, which committee members can then choose to ask during the session. Clips of answered questions are then uploaded to the platform for everyone to see. In the **UK Parliament**, similar crowdsourcing is conducted on an ad hoc basis, with calls for questions launched on social media when a topic is judged to have public appeal or where a government minister is giving evidence. For these approaches, effective promotion, monitoring and follow-up ensures that engagement is meaningful and that citizens’ contributions are recognised if not directly used.

⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union and United Nations Development Programme (2022) *Global Parliamentary Report*.

⁶ *National Assembly Rules of Procedure*, article 42.

⁷ Newkirk, J. and Popovicki Capin, A. (2014) *Mid-term Evaluation - Strengthening the Oversight Function and Transparency of the Parliament – UNDP Project*.

⁸ Interview (2025)

⁹ Committees in the Chamber of Deputies (lower chamber) can also choose to use this initiative for their other meetings besides hearings, under ‘Interactive Debates’.



2. Online calls for views

Structured online consultations can be a powerful tool for gathering citizen input on parliamentary business. The usual format for online consultations is to publish a prompt such as a draft bill or a set of investigation questions, and invite written submissions or comments which are then published on a dedicated webpage. Some formats include quantitative tools such as surveys or voting mechanisms to help gauge public opinion on the topic under consultation.

For example, the **Brazilian Chamber of Deputies** allows citizens to indicate their support or opposition to legislative proposals, and to submit comments that can then be ‘upvoted’ by other users. The webpage shows users which proposals have received most votes and comments in the last week, month and six months.¹⁰ The **National Congress of Chile**’s citizen participation platform, *Congreso Virtual*, is particularly user-friendly, providing a summary of each bill along with a relevant image, using icons to show clearly how many people have ‘voted’ for or against a bill and how much time is left for consultation, and allowing users to make comments and read those of others.¹¹

The most common application is at the pre-legislative scrutiny stage, where parliament (usually under the auspices of a committee or an MP) shares a draft bill and invites public comments. However, parliaments also use online consultations (sometimes called ‘calls for views’) to gather input for post-legislative scrutiny, oversight and maladministration inquiries.

¹⁰ See: [Polls in the Chamber of Deputies - Portal of the Chamber of Deputies](#)

¹¹ See: [Virtual Congress](#)

CASE STUDY

Ukraine – Verkhovna Rada Committee on Social Policy and Protection of Veterans’ Rights



In 2022–2023, the **Ukrainian parliament**, Verkhovna Rada ran a series of pilot projects to test public consultation as a part of committee inquiries. This initiative was conducted in partnership with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and USAID, following the introduction into parliament of a draft bill placing public consultation duties on public bodies. One of the pilots was conducted by the Committee on Social Policy and Protection of Veterans’ Rights as part of its post-legislative scrutiny of the 2021 flexible working arrangements law. The inquiry aimed to understand how well the provisions of the law were being implemented.

The consultation approach consisted of online questionnaires aimed at two main target groups, employers and employees, as well as an expert stakeholder meeting held on Zoom in December 2022. The online questionnaires were open for a period of one month (December 2022 to January 2023) and received over 65,000 responses.¹² The questionnaire results were summarised in the committee’s report, informing its recommendations on promoting remote and flexible working through enhanced use of ICTs.¹³

The Verkhovna Rada adopted the law on public consultations in 2024. The law is due to come into effect 12 months after the end of martial law in Ukraine.

¹² Case study presented by Dr. Maria Mousmouti on 19 March 2025 at workshop organised by Inter Pares and the National Assembly of Botswana, *Parliaments’ Legislative Powers: from pre-legislative scrutiny to oversight and effective public consultations*

¹³ See: [Report on the results of the analysis of the practice of application and effectiveness of legislation on remote, home-based and flexible working hours conducted at the request of the Committee](#)

Where draft legislation is concerned, consultations are usually open to views from across society (although many systems place restrictions according to age or citizenship status). In other cases, such as when a particular issue of public maladministration is being investigated, calls are targeted towards specific audiences with relevant expertise or experience.

Some parliaments, such as the **Congress of Peru** and the **Portuguese Assembly of the Republic**, require all legislative initiatives to be opened for online consultation; others, such as the **Polish Sejm**, require online consultation for certain types of bills (in this case, non-government bills). In other cases, such as the *Consultations Citoyennes* system run by the **National Assembly of France**, online consultations may be initiated by parliamentary actors such as committees, individual MPs and the Conference of Presidents (a committee of leading parliamentarians).

CASE STUDY

Sejm, Poland – Consultations integrated into Regulatory Impact Assessment

In 2024, the lower house of the **Polish parliament**, the Sejm, amended its rules of procedure to require non-government bills (those initiated by parliamentarians or citizens) to be subject to public consultation before the first reading in parliament. The public consultation requirement is part of a wider process called Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) carried out by the Sejm's research bureau. The RIA includes assessments of the cost of implementing the proposed legislation and other potential impacts.

The public consultation portion of the RIA follows a uniform process. First, the Sejm's IT team sets up a consultation page for the bill on the Sejm's Information System (a portal which requires ID authentication). The text of the bill is made available both on the System and on the public Sejm website, along with a basic summary of the bill, guidance for participating in the consultation, and the consultation form itself. The same consultation form is used for each bill, according to the Resolution of the Sejm that introduced the consultation process. The form includes a survey on the bill overall and the

extent to which respondents agree with its proposals, as well as a section that allows respondents to write in comments on each article of the bill individually.

The consultation process is open for a period of 30 days. During this time, anyone who signs into the Sejm's Information System is able to view any comments submitted on the bill. When the consultation period closes, staff in the research bureau summarise the survey data, reporting on the quantitative results as well as the qualitative comments. These reports are published on the consultation page of the public Sejm website,

as well as being made available to the bill proposer and MPs to inform the first reading of the bill.

Since November 2024, over 50 consultations have been completed. Some bills have attracted a high level of public engagement: for example, a 2024 bill requiring psychological assessments for those purchasing hunting weapons received over 8,000 responses, and a bill proposing to impose certain regulations on property developers received over 6,000 responses and a high level of public support.¹⁴

¹⁴ See: [Consulted bills - Sejm of the Republic of Poland](#)

More light-touch online options of online consultation can be used to inform parliamentary activities. At the **UK Parliament**, short online surveys are conducted to inform debates led by MPs in the plenary or in the secondary debating chamber, Westminster Hall. The MP is then provided with a summary of the survey results to help them prepare for the debate. Following the debate, a summary is created so that interested members of the public can track the progress of the issue through parliament.¹⁵ Sometimes this will end with a single debate, while in other cases there might be various debates and committee work on the same issue.

Social media can be used to make targeted calls to specific groups. This works best when done in collaboration with specialists who know the target audience well and can point them towards the consultation opportunity. In **South Africa**, the parliament collaborates with radio stations to organise phone-ins with committee members. This helps to spread consultation opportunities beyond those who are regularly accessing information about parliament.



3. Discussion-based methods

There is a range of other methods where groups of citizens are brought together to share and discuss their views and experiences. These methods can enable parliamentarians to gather more in-depth insights on the issue they are looking at. The live discussion format also allows participants and parliamentarians to consider opposing views, challenge evidence and potentially find common ground. Smaller private meetings are also an option when gathering evidence on sensitive matters where confidentiality and privacy are important, such as hearing experiences of exploitation or domestic abuse.

In practice, these methods can take the form of **roundtables, focus groups and workshops**. At the **Danish Folketing**, committees offer informal meetings of 15 minutes to individuals or CSOs to present their views on topics under consideration. In other contexts, committees or other parliamentary bodies proactively organise sessions to hear from citizens. Often, parliaments collaborate with CSOs such as charities or professional societies to recruit participants and support them through the process. For example, the Health Committee of the **New South Wales Parliament** (Australia) partnered with the New South Wales Law Society to organise a consultation meeting with 30 aboriginal elders as part of its 2015-16 inquiry into elder abuse.¹⁶

Definitions: Roundtables, focus groups and workshops

A **roundtable** is a discussion with a small group of people around a particular topic. Roundtables usually have a chair or facilitator and follow a general guide consisting of key themes or questions to cover.

A **focus group** is a qualitative research method that is similar to a roundtable but may be subject to a more rigorous sampling approach (e.g., recruiting participants based on demographic characteristics).

A **workshop** is a type of meeting that combines discussion with practical exercises designed to help participants share and organise ideas. Often, workshops will culminate in participants working together towards a shared output such as a set of recommendations or priorities. Roundtables and focus groups may use workshop features in order to structure discussion and produce outputs.

These meetings can be held in-person at parliament or in the community, or online using video conferencing software. They can also be held as part of visits to relevant locations as a way of gathering insights from those on the ground. Sometimes, there is just one discussion group, while at other times multiple discussions proceed in parallel before sharing key points in plenary (i.e. when all of the different discussion groups come together). As a method, these meetings can be held in a one-off, ad hoc manner or can be iterative across a particular piece of work, with the same group consulted at different stages of legislative, budgeting or oversight work.

¹⁵ See: [Recent activities - UK Parliament](#)

¹⁶ Hendriks, Regan and Kay (2018) [Participatory adaptation in contemporary parliamentary committees in Australia](#). *Parliamentary Affairs*, Volume 72, Issue 2, April 2019, 267–289

Parliamentary staff and MPs may be involved in discussions as facilitators, participants or observers. In other cases, discussion packs may be designed by parliamentary teams and distributed amongst key stakeholders who then hold discussions in their own time and space. The **UK Parliament** Select Committee Public Engagement Team uses such a method, referred to as a ‘distributed dialogue’, to gather evidence for inquiries. The method works particularly well with school groups, where discussion can be linked with curriculum topics and delivered during class time. However, the UK team has also used the method to gather evidence from adults in community groups, on topics such as policing priorities and the adequacy of welfare payments.¹⁷

The most extensive form of discussion-based consultation is the **deliberative method**. Recent decades have seen the theory of deliberative democracy applied (by governments, parliaments and CSOs) to help society deal with knotty or controversial topics that representative democracy has been unable to solve (see our Guide on Deliberative Engagement for more details).

Methods such as citizens’ juries, panels and assemblies have gained particular interest in the last decade. The defining features of deliberative methods are sortition (where participants are

selected through random stratified sampling), the consideration of evidence, reason-based discussion, (often) multiple meetings over a fixed period of time, and the development of an output (usually a set of recommendations). Consensus is not required in all models. Juries, panels and assemblies are distinguished mainly by size, with the smallest jury consisting of 10-12 people and the largest panel or assembly involving thousands of participants.

Deliberative models are time- and resource-intensive but are regarded as a rigorous consultation method. For contexts where resources are more limited, other deliberative models could be explored. For example, public dialogues and deliberative workshops do not require representative samples and can be delivered in a single day.

Ireland has developed a pioneering approach that sees collaboration between parliament and government to set up independent citizens’ assemblies that then make recommendations to both bodies. Following the Convention on the Constitution in 2013-14, subsequent assemblies have considered topics such as gender equality, biodiversity loss, and drug use. Regional legislatures in **Belgium** have integrated deliberative approaches into their committee processes, most

prominently in the French-speaking parliament of Brussels and the parliament of Ostbelgien (the German-speaking region of Belgium). The **Scottish Parliament** has an internal staff team that manages a programme of ‘People’s Panels’ to inform committee activities, each consisting of 20-25 members of the public.¹⁸ The first panel took place in March 2019, followed by panels in April – June 2019, early 2021, late 2022, early 2024 and late 2024. In 2025, the Parliament voted to institutionalise the practice of People’s Panels.



**See our Guide on
‘Deliberative Engagement’
for a detailed discussion
on deliberative methods**

¹⁷See Annex Three in this report from the UK House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee: [Benefit levels in the UK](#)

¹⁸See: [A blueprint for participation - embedding deliberative democracy in the work of the Scottish Parliament](#)



4. Citizen or civil society presence on committees

Consultation can be integrated into the structure of parliamentary committees through the appointment of citizen or civil society representatives to non-voting roles. While many parliaments appoint specialist advisors, usually academic experts, to committees to provide expertise on particular topics, some go further in giving citizens or CSO representatives a regular place at the committee table. This approach can enable meaningful knowledge exchange across the course of a particular piece of work or a parliamentary term.

The parliaments of the **Czech Republic** and of the **Slovak Republic** make use of procedures to establish ‘commissions’ to act as advisory bodies to committees

for a parliamentary term. Depending on the topic, the commissions may consist of civil society representatives, business representatives, ministers and civil servants, and are usually chaired by opposition politicians.

The Economic Affairs Committee at the **National Council of the Slovak Republic** has made particular use of this mechanism, establishing around 4-6 commissions per electoral term. Recent focuses of commissions have included: transport, energy, consumer protection, entrepreneurship, innovation and technology, and tourism. The commission on consumer protection was particularly active and influential.

The **Parliament of Sri Lanka** responded to youth protests in 2022 by amending its standing orders to allow standing committee chairs to appoint up to five youth representatives to consult during its inquiries. The first iteration of this programme was launched in May 2023. The programme began with an introductory workshop also attended by the Prime Minister, Speaker and Leader of the Opposition.

Following this, youth representatives were involved in committee meetings and reviewing committee documents. A further workshop was held in May 2024 to gather feedback from youth representatives and parliamentarians on their experiences.¹⁹

¹⁹ This case is also discussed in our [Guide on Youth Engagement](#) (see Section 7 for the full list of Guides).

Section 4: How to put it into practice

For any of the approaches detailed in this Guide, parliaments will need to address the following considerations in order to ensure that consultations are effective and meaningful.



Purpose and planning

The planning stage of the consultation is vital to ensuring that parliamentary resources are used well and that the process will contribute meaningfully to parliamentary work.

The first thing that should be identified is the **purpose** of the consultation. Parliamentarians and staff should consider what they want to learn from members of the public and how they can best use the consultation opportunity to gather this information. For example:

- » Is there a particular group you especially want to hear from?
- » Is there data that you lack that might be gathered through consultation?

The **‘when’** of consultation is often determined by parliamentary procedure, but there may also be scope to look across the workplan of the relevant body (such as a committee) and prioritise projects that would benefit from consultation. It may be worth thinking about using consultation for a mixture of agenda-setting and evidence-gathering purposes to allow citizens to have input across different stages of parliamentary processes.

In terms of **who to involve in identifying the purpose**, it is important to involve those MPs whose deliberations the consultation is intended to inform,

and to prepare a plan for MPs to review the results. This can create a sense of ownership over the consultation among MPs, as well as an interest in the process and a willingness to use the results. Other key stakeholders are internal parliamentary staff such as committee and research services staff, as well as those responsible for communicating with the public (this might be the communications or public relations team). It may be worth engaging with a small group from the target audience at this stage, to ensure that the purpose is aligned with what audiences know and how they might want to be consulted. This can help improve the process through a greater sense

of trust and ownership, and lessen the risk of ‘consultation fatigue’.²⁰

Also relevant to the question of purpose is **what the focus of the consultation is**: draft legislation, a budget, legislation already in force, a public policy area or an instance of maladministration? This will drive considerations about potential target groups and the methods that will help them contribute best.

²⁰ Consultation fatigue refers to when communities’ willingness to participate is reduced due to opportunities being framed in ways that they don’t identify with, or when they are called on multiple times to answer the same sorts of questions.

The **method** of the consultation should be the right length and depth for the audience and subject matter. Questions that can help reach a decision on method include:

- » What resources, such as budget and technology, are available?
- » How much time is available for consultation?
- » Who is available to work on the consultation, from setup to communicating the results?
- » Who are the affected populations, what numbers of people are involved, and what kinds of things can they tell us about the topic?
- » How could affected populations be involved in designing the consultation, or advising on methods?
- » Is a representative sample necessary, or are you looking for a range of experiences?
- » Are in-depth qualitative insights and stories needed, or is the focus on quantitative information?
- » What is already known on the topic (e.g., from academic studies or civil society work) and how can one avoid duplicating this information?

- » What barriers might different groups face to engaging with the consultation, and how can these be mitigated? This might involve offering multiple channels for contributing, and/or consulting target groups or their representatives on what would work best for them.
- » What spaces might parliament use to support consultation, such as rooms within parliament, constituency offices, community venues, or online spaces?

Different methods achieve different results, so spend some time considering what will be useful in supporting parliamentarians' deliberations.

Top tips

- ✓ Think about consultation positively and creatively – what can it help you achieve?
- ✓ Consider what your resources allow you to do – better to do one thing well than many things badly



Participant recruitment

When the target group(s) has been decided, think about **how best to reach them and roughly how many people you need to hear from for your chosen method**. If a representative sample is required, the services of an external sampling company might need to be commissioned (but this is only necessary for a small number of methods).

If the method is an online consultation platform open to the general public, attention still needs to be paid to **how the consultation opportunity is being promoted and who may have more difficulty accessing it**. Using a range of channels to promote consultation opportunities is important to addressing inequalities in access to information about parliament. Sharing calls for participation on social media as well as in traditional media such as print news, television and radio will help to ensure a diversity of responses. Engagement is also supported by providing clear and simple information about how to contribute to the consultation and the process it will inform.

For consultation methods such as roundtables, workshops and deliberative engagement, which require participants to take time out their schedules to participate, reimbursement for expenses or even direct payments could be considered. The **Scottish Parliament**, for example, has a payment policy that guides decisions about participant payment based on time commitment and level of preparation required.²¹

²¹ See: [Payment for participation policy | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

Across methods, it will be useful to **develop networks of relevant organisations** (such as CSOs) who can help find people affected by the issue at hand or amplify calls for contributions. These might include larger umbrella organisations with a wide reach, or smaller organisations embedded in communities. While it is helpful for parliaments to develop stable networks that they can mobilise during consultations, they should ensure that it is not the same people being consulted each time.

It is also important to ensure that a range of groups from across different communities and perspectives is included in these networks. Tapping into community infrastructure (such as schools and faith groups) can help parliaments reach those who may not engage with established CSOs. Parliaments' own education and outreach activities can also be built on to enable engagement with live consultations.

CASE STUDY

Liaising between civil society and parliament: Parliament of Ghana's Department of Public Engagement



In 2023, the **Parliament of Ghana** set up a new Department of Public Engagement to streamline engagement with different groups. The Department consists of four units: the Citizens' Bureau, Education & Internal Communication, Outreach, and Visits & Tours.

The Citizens' Bureau builds and manages relationships with civil society organisations and think tanks, aiming to enable effective two-way information-sharing between parliament and these organisations. The Bureau ensures that relevant information – such as updates on bills that relate to the organisations' areas of interest – is disseminated to the organisations. It also ensures that relevant research produced by these organisations is shared with parliamentarians.

The Bureau also offers organisations the opportunity to participate in 'forums' with parliamentarians, in which organisations' representatives meet with a balanced panel of MPs and specialist staff to discuss live parliamentary business on a particular topic of relevance.

This work is complemented by the programme of the Outreach team, which conducts sessions with underrepresented groups (such as rural communities, illiterate populations and religious groups) to let them know about bills before parliament and how they can get involved.

While these events are not always used explicitly for consultation, the relationships that are developed through them form a valuable reservoir of contacts and understanding that can be drawn on for consultation.

Top tips

- ✓ Define your target audience and make contact with them – don't expect them to come to you
- ✓ Use a range of channels to promote the opportunity
- ✓ Engage with a range of groups to avoid any one of them dominating



Quality of engagement

How a consultation is delivered affects participants' experience and the quality of results. A crucial consideration is ensuring that participants are effectively **informed** about the process to which they are contributing.

Consider **what materials** need to be provided: a draft bill, explanatory notes, a non-technical summary, alternative formats for those with visual impairments or learning disabilities? It is usually a good idea to provide information about parliament, the specific body undertaking the consultation and how they will use the results: what process will the consultation inform? It is important to ensure that this information is clearly signposted to users and expressed in simple terms.

If using a **discussion-based** format, it is important to consider how the process will be **moderated** to ensure that participants have the chance to participate equally (given potentially different levels of confidence and social status within a group).

Assigning a moderator to keep track of timing, the discussion questions and who is or is not contributing, is one way to deal with this. Paying attention to group size also helps: no more than 8 participants per group is a good rule of thumb. A mix of discussion and practical exercises can also help bring in different voices and keep the energy up.

Moderators are needed in the online world too to ensure that inappropriate contributions – for example those that are offensive, discriminatory or libellous – are identified and handled according to the relevant policies and procedures.

If holding in-person consultations, it is worth thinking about the impact that space can have on the quality of engagement. Considerations such as accessibility, lighting, acoustics, and how to create a welcoming atmosphere, are fundamental.²² Furthermore, factors such as the ability to integrate technology into proceedings and allow for a certain adaptability within the space (such as moving chairs and tables) may be important depending on the structure and format of engagement.

CASE STUDY

Peruvian Congress's Citizen Participation Platform



The **Peruvian Congress** runs a Citizen Participation Platform that allows citizens to get involved in parliamentary work in a number of ways. One of these mechanisms is the 'legislative forum', where all bills are presented for citizens to express their views on. Citizens are able to indicate whether they are for or against the proposal, or to make an alternative proposal. As well as giving the bill a 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down', citizens can submit written comments. The outputs of the legislative forum are then shared with

the proposer of the bill, their political group and the parliamentary committee responsible for scrutiny of the bill's area of policy.




To support citizens' engagement in legislative forums, the Citizen Participation Platform provides information both on the bill itself, the rationale and constitutional basis for citizen consultation, and how consultation results are used by parliamentarians. This information is presented in written form as well as in short informative animations.

²² DemNext (2025) *Spaces for deliberation: Eight spatial qualities for designing deliberative assemblies*.

Some parliaments have dedicated spaces for engagement, often built as part of Education or Visitors' Centres. The **Tongan Legislative Assembly** launched plans in 2025 for a new parliament building, which will include spaces for public consultation as well as an education and outreach centre and a media studio. Other parliaments make use of committee rooms or other meeting rooms to convey a sense that consultation is very much part of parliamentary processes. In the absence of purpose-built spaces, trade-offs may need to be made (for example between accessibility and acoustics) when choosing a space for consultation either within parliament or in the community.

When designing the actual consultation process, consider **what role MPs will play**: will they observe, ask questions or receive the results once the consultation is completed? In discussion-based formats, there are many benefits to involving MPs in the actual activities. Firstly, it helps to ensure that MPs get the information they need, as when MPs are in the room they can actively ask participants the questions they find most relevant. Also, the fact that MPs are using their time to join consultations signals to participants that their elected representatives are listening to them and that their contributions are valued.

Top tips

-  Provide clear information to participants to help them contribute meaningfully
-  Moderate face-to-face and online discussions
-  Consider how MPs will be involved



Communication

Clear and timely communication also supports the delivery of effective consultation.

One of the first things to think about is the **language** to use for your target audience. This might literally mean translating materials into different languages to include those who do not speak the official language. It also means explaining terms that might not be familiar to people outside parliament, and if possible avoiding overly formal terms (such as 'evidence').

Most consultation approaches will enable a record to be kept of those who have participated and their contact details. It is beneficial to **keep direct participants updated** at key stages both during the consultation and throughout the parliamentary process that follows, e.g., when key decisions are

made or reports published featuring consultation results. Sharing key updates with the public via the parliamentary website or social media can also help to reinforce the feeling that the consultation is meaningful. Part of this is marking the end of the process, ensuring that all relevant outputs and decisions have been shared – this is referred to as 'closing the feedback loop'. In some cases, decisions might not be made for some time, in which case it might be advisable to set up a mailing list where participants can opt in to hearing updates in the future.

Closing the feedback loop

Closing the feedback loop ensures that participants feel that their contribution has been heard and valued. When citizens respond to a call for consultation, it is important to let them know how their views have been used and any decisions that have resulted from the process. Even if the decision is not wholly in line with what individual citizens propose, closing the feedback loop helps maintain citizens' confidence in the process.

There are various ways to close the feedback loop: sending **emails** to keep citizens updated on the process, decisions made, and any key events such as debates or hearings; sharing **announcements** on the parliamentary website and social media or on public media such as radio; producing **specific documents to summarise** the results of consultations and sharing these with participants; and **including explanations in committee reports** of consultations undertaken and how the results informed decision-making.

Creating outputs from consultation is vital for signalling to participants that the process is meaningful: for example, creating user-friendly summaries of results and providing records of how they have been used by parliamentarians.

Beyond direct participants, the wider participatory culture surrounding a parliament can be improved by consistently **sharing stories of citizen influence** on decision-making.

CASE STUDY

Creating outputs: written summaries and video case studies



The Citizen Engagement Team at the **Welsh Senedd** produces a summary of findings for each engagement activity that it carries out as part of committee scrutiny. The team uses a range of consultation methods including interviews, focus groups and surveys. For lengthier pieces of engagement – for example consultations where multiple methods are used – an interim report may also be produced. These outputs are published on the relevant committee's webpage and shared with consultation participants.

The reports are written in a clear and factual style.²³ Quotes from citizens who contributed to the consultation are used to demonstrate the points being summarised. In some cases, short films are created to help communicate participants' experiences and key points to committee members. This method is used

when particularly emotive topics are under consideration by the committee.

For example, the Citizen Engagement Team conducted consultations as part of the Health and Social Care Committee's inquiry on the experiences of women with gynaecological cancer symptoms. The team then produced video case studies to help communicate women's experiences to committee members.

Where the group being consulted is particularly vulnerable, such as with the inquiry on children and young people who have suffered exploitation, actors are employed to portray participants' views and experiences.²⁴ These films are produced through collaboration between the Citizen Engagement Team, who record the initial video, and the in-house digital team who edit the video, add subtitles and upload the finished product to the website.

Top tips

- ✓ Use language that is right for your audience
- ✓ Provide clear and timely updates
- ✓ Close the feedback loop

²³ As an example, see the summary of findings from the consultation exercise conducted for the Local Government and Housing Committee inquiry on housing support for vulnerable people: [Summary of engagement.pdf](#)

²⁴ See: [Children on the Margins](#).



Using the results

Meaningful consultations are those that inform a specific process or decision. At the planning stage, the process by which parliamentarians receive, review and use consultation results should be agreed by internal stakeholders.

Consultation results must have a clear mechanism of feeding into parliamentarians' deliberations even if this input does not directly influence decisions.

When high volumes of submissions are received, internal research services may be needed to help with the analysis. Digital tools that apply artificial intelligence methods such as natural language processing and machine learning can be used to identify patterns and summarise key ideas in data.²⁵ Thinking in advance about the structure of consultations and how this will affect analysis can help avoid teams being overwhelmed by consultation data.

Top tips

- ✓ Agree with stakeholders in advance how results will be reviewed and used
- ✓ Work with internal research teams to analyse results if necessary
- ✓ Develop data analysis capability through the use of AI methods

²⁵ See the Inter-Parliamentary Union Guidelines for AI in Parliaments: [Guidelines for AI in parliaments | Inter-Parliamentary Union](#). The IPU also provides example use cases: [IPU | Use cases for AI in parliaments](#)

Section 5: Evaluation

This section offers considerations for monitoring and evaluating public consultations in terms of the **effectiveness of the process and the overall impact**.

Evaluating consultation activities helps to ensure they are meeting their aims and that resources are being used appropriately, whilst enabling teams to improve their practice.

Table 3 outlines key considerations for the evaluation of public consultations.

Table 3: Key evaluation considerations

Evaluation dimension	What to look at/measure
Numbers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How many people engage with your consultation(s)? » How many consultations do you run over a year/parliamentary term?
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Are you reaching a diverse range of people in your consultations? » Are you able to reach target groups effectively when the need arises?
Process and experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » What methods are used? Are participants given opportunities for deliberation or to respond to others? » [How] are participants involved in designing the engagement process? » What feedback do participants have about the process? » What do parliamentarians and staff think about the effectiveness of the process? How useful is it for them?
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How are consultation results used? » What impact do consultation results have on parliamentarians' decisions or actions? » What impact do consultation results have on wider public discourse? » What impact does engaging with consultations have on participants in the short, medium and long-term?²⁶

²⁶The Scottish Parliament identifies three types of impact: “changing how things work and what happens (**instrumental**), how people think (**conceptual**) and what people do (**capacity building**).” See: [Delivering a model for parliamentary scrutiny of climate change: a Climate Change People's Panel – SPICe Spotlight | Solas air SPICe](#)

Section 6: Checklist

These questions are designed to help parliaments assess the extent to which their public consultation approach meets the eight principles outlined in our Guide on Principles of Parliamentary Public Engagement.



Purpose

Is there a clear purpose for the consultation, on which stakeholders are agreed?

Will consultation feed meaningfully into a parliamentary process or decision?

Have you defined your target audience and how you will reach them?

Do you have the right resources to carry out your chosen method effectively?



Collaboration and empowerment

Are activities designed to build citizens' knowledge and agency to participate in the future?

Have you considered how citizens and/or their representatives can be involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of consultation activities?



Inclusion

Have you considered the barriers that different groups might face to engaging with consultations (e.g., time, language, digital access, general awareness of parliament)?

Have you taken measures to ensure that people from different backgrounds are able (and supported) to engage?

Do you have relationships and networks that you can use to facilitate the participation of particular groups?

Have you considered how consultation activities will be moderated to allow all participants to contribute?



Openness and transparency

Is there clear and accessible information on how citizens can get involved with consultations? Does this information exist in a range of formats and a range of locations e.g., on the website, on social media, in printed materials such as booklets?

Do you have a plan for how you will provide updates on the process, and how you will close the feedback loop?



Planning and resourcing

Do you have the resources (e.g., time, people, skills, technology) to deliver on your objectives? What resources may have to be brought in from different teams across parliament (e.g., data analysis)?

Are there external organisations (e.g., CSOs) that can help you deliver consultations?



Integration and coordination

Does the consultation activity feed meaningfully into a parliamentary process or decision?

Are (the relevant) MPs aware of the consultation and how they can engage with the results?

Are different staff teams across parliament (e.g., media, communications, education and outreach) aware of live consultations and how they can support promotion?



Ethical standards

Are all staff and parliamentarians involved aware of their responsibilities under the relevant policies such as safeguarding and data protection?

Have you ensured that participants are appropriately informed of how their information will be used?

Have you considered how to protect the rights of vulnerable groups and have you consulted with experts where appropriate?



Impact and evaluation

Do you have a plan for how feedback will be gathered from relevant stakeholders (e.g., participants, MPs, staff)?

Do you have a plan for how you will monitor the impact of consultation on parliamentary decisions, government decisions, wider discourse, participants etc.?

Do you have a plan for reviewing and discussing the data with relevant stakeholders?

Section 7: Useful materials on public consultations

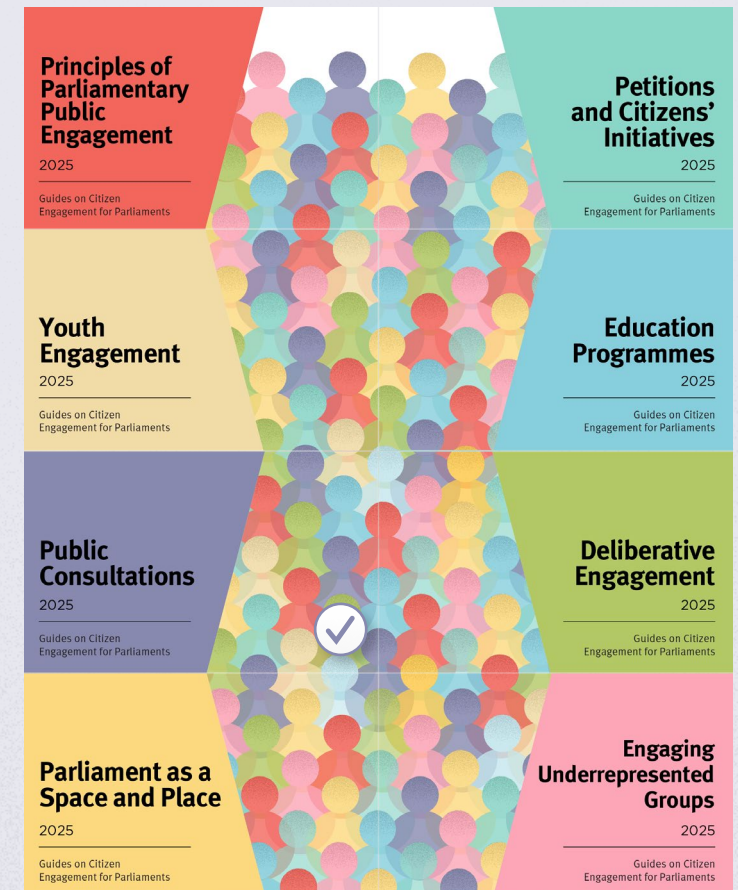
- » Inter-Parliamentary Union (2024), [Use cases for AI in parliaments](#)
- » Italian Senate (2017), [Guidelines for consultations promoted by the Italian Senate](#)
- » Scottish Parliament (2025) [Delivering a model for parliamentary scrutiny of climate change: a Climate Change People's Panel – SPICe Spotlight / Solas air SPICe](#)

See our other **Guides on Citizen Engagement for Parliaments**

This Guide was developed by Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira and Juliet Ollard at the International Parliament Engagement Network (IPEN) in collaboration with Inter Pares I Parliaments in Partnership – the EU's Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments.

The Guide draws from extensive research carried out in 2024 and 2025, including: a review of relevant academic research; interviews with academics and parliamentary officials from across the world; analysis of relevant practitioner reports and parliamentary documentation; testimonies from members of IPEN; and relevant seminars and workshops organised by Inter Pares and/or IPEN.

The Guide also incorporates feedback from an international Advisory Group established to develop this suite of Guides on Citizen Engagement for Parliaments, as well as from the IPEN Executive Team. The authors are very grateful to all those who shared their knowledge and expertise as part of this project.



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