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Focus on Citizens
Public Engagement for Better Policy and Services
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PART I

Chapter 6

Principles to Support Practice

Sound principles can help guide practice. This short chapter presents a set of ten "Guiding Principles for Open and Inclusive Policy Making" which have been validated by comparative experience and extensive policy dialogues among government officials from OECD member countries.

"Sound principles can stand the test of time."
The Guide to Online Participation
State Services Commission of New Zealand (2007)

Sound principles can help guide practice

"One size fits all" is clearly not an option. To be effective, open and inclusive, policy making must be appropriately designed and context-specific for a given country, level of government and policy field. At the same time, a commonly agreed set of principles can guide practitioners when designing, implementing and evaluating open and inclusive policy making.

This section provides a set of robust principles validated by comparative experience and extensive international policy dialogue among government officials from OECD member countries. They are an expression of the cumulative experience of OECD member countries and serve as a common basis upon which all countries may draw when designing policies, programmes and measures for open and inclusive policy making and service delivery which are appropriate to their own national context. These principles can help governments improve their practice of open and inclusive policy making as a means to meet citizens' high expectations of their policy performance and democratic performance.

The set of updated principles presented here (see Box 6.1) are based on the "Guiding principles for successful information, consultation and active participation of citizens in policy-making" developed together with OECD member countries and published by the OECD in 2001 (OECD, 2001). Since their publication, the 2001 guiding principles have been widely cited and incorporated into national policy guidance. As this report shows, some of the principles have proved easier to apply than others. Recognising their enduring value, members of the OECD Steering Group on Open and Inclusive Policy Making undertook to review, revise and update them in the light of OECD member country experience.

Survey responses from both governments and CSOs have confirmed the validity of the original 2001 guiding principles. Based on discussions among OECD member countries, this report adds a new principle on "inclusion", subsumes the principle on "objectivity" under other headings and offers the updated set of ten "**Guiding Principles on Open and Inclusive Policy Making**" as a common basis on which to adapt practice to each country's context (see Box 6.1).

This set of guiding principles may be put to work in a number of ways – as guidance for government practitioners, as a basis for evaluation or simply as a tool for dialogue with civil servants, citizens, businesses and civil society organisations.

From principles to practice and practitioners

The first section of this report has focused on scoping the main issues, providing comparative data and trends and presenting the updated "Guiding Principles for Open and

Box 6.1. **Guiding principles for open and inclusive policy making**

OECD countries recognise that open and inclusive policy making increases government accountability, broadens citizens' influence on decisions and builds civic capacity. At the same time it improves the evidence base for policy making, reduces implementation costs and taps wider networks for innovation in policy making and service delivery.

These Guiding Principles help governments to improve their open and inclusive policy making as a means to improving their policy performance and service delivery.

1. **Commitment:** Leadership and strong commitment to open and inclusive policy making is needed at all levels – politicians, senior managers and public officials.
2. **Rights:** Citizens' rights to information, consultation and public participation in policy making and service delivery must be firmly grounded in law or policy. Government obligations to respond to citizens must be clearly stated. Independent oversight arrangements are essential to enforcing these rights.
3. **Clarity:** Objectives for, and limits to, information, consultation and public participation should be well defined from the outset. The roles and responsibilities of all parties must be clear. Government information should be complete, objective, reliable, relevant, easy to find and understand.
4. **Time:** Public engagement should be undertaken as early in the policy process as possible to allow a greater range of solutions and to raise the chances of successful implementation. Adequate time must be available for consultation and participation to be effective.
5. **Inclusion:** All citizens should have equal opportunities and multiple channels to access information, be consulted and participate. Every reasonable effort should be made to engage with as wide a variety of people as possible.
6. **Resources:** Adequate financial, human and technical resources are needed for effective public information, consultation and participation. Government officials must have access to appropriate skills, guidance and training as well as an organisational culture that supports both traditional and online tools.
7. **Co–ordination:** Initiatives to inform, consult and engage civil society should be co-ordinated within and across levels of government to ensure policy coherence, avoid duplication and reduce the risk of "consultation fatigue."Co-ordination efforts should not stifle initiative and innovation but should leverage the power of knowledge networks and communities of practice within and beyond government.
8. **Accountability:** Governments have an obligation to inform participants how they use inputs received through public consultation and participation. Measures to ensure that the policy-making process is open, transparent and amenable to external scrutiny can help increase accountability of, and trust in, government.
9. **Evaluation:** Governments need to evaluate their own performance. To do so effectively will require efforts to build the demand, capacity, culture and tools for evaluating public participation.
10. **Active citizenship:** Societies benefit from dynamic civil society, and governments can facilitate access to information, encourage participation, raise awareness, strengthen citizens' civic education and skills, as well as to support capacity-building among civil society organisations. Governments need to explore new roles to effectively support autonomous problem-solving by citizens, CSOs and businesses.

Inclusive Policy Making". The rest of this report illustrates these findings by means of in-depth country case studies of current practice (Part II) and a collection of opinion pieces by leading government and civil society practitioners from a wide range of OECD member and non-member countries (Part III). Experience in the OECD member countries has shown that the practice of open and inclusive policy making evolves as part of an ongoing conversation amongst politicians, civil servants, citizens and other stakeholders. This report seeks to offer a useful contribution to this ongoing debate.

Whatever their starting point, governments in all countries are at a crossroads. To successfully meet the policy challenges they face requires a shift from "government-as-usual" to a broader governance perspective. One which builds on the twin pillars of openness and inclusion to deliver better policy outcomes and high quality public services not only for, but with, their citizens.

Reference

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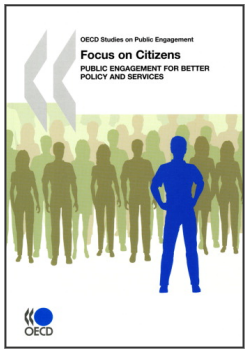

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