



Roinn an Taoisigh
Department of the Taoiseach

Reaching Out

Guidelines on Consultation for Public Sector Bodies



— Introduction

— Planning a consultation

— The consultation process

— Analysis and evaluation

— Appendices

— Further information

Table of Contents

Taoiseach’s Foreword	3
Glossary of terms	5
Introduction	9
Why consult?	10
Who are these guidelines aimed at?	12
Checklist for better consultation	14
Section 1 - Planning a consultation	15
What is the subject of the consultation?	16
What is the purpose of the consultation?	16
Does the consultation take account of your business cycle?	17
Resources	17
Has the target audience been identified?	18
Have the right methods been chosen?	19
Has the consultation been adequately publicised?	20
Will outside expertise be required?	20
Have legal obligations been complied with?	21
Section 2 - The consultation process	25
Choice of method	26
Managing the process	26
Written consultation	28
Other methods of consultation	29
Section 3 - Analysis and evaluation	35
Analysing and interpreting results	36
Acknowledgement, feedback and publication	37
Reviewing the consultation process	38
Appendices	39
Consultation flowchart	40
Consultation methods	41
Good practice examples of consultations	46
Using information technology	50
Useful addresses	53
Further information	55



Taoiseach's Foreword

In January 2004, I launched the Government's White Paper, *Regulating Better*. It sets out six core principles that Government will take into account when considering proposals for new regulations or regulatory bodies. It also outlines the actions necessary to put these six principles into practice. One of the principles is transparency, and the White Paper committed the Government to developing guidelines to promote better quality consultation across the Public Service.

Civil and Public Servants have always striven to provide an excellent quality of advice and information to the Government, to other decision makers and to their colleagues. The environment in which the Public Service operates is constantly changing however and is constantly presenting fresh challenges. A key challenge is the need for rigorous, evidence-based policy-making. These processes need to be based on good quality information, both statistical and qualitative, and consultation is one of the most important ways of accessing such information. Consultation is also a crucial element in the design, delivery and improvement of services.

The Public Service is also faced with the challenge of involving stakeholders in policy-making processes. The Government recognises that understanding the variety of perspectives on different areas of economic and social life can improve the quality of its policy and decision-making and of service delivery. Our experience of the partnership approach across so many areas of policy reinforces this understanding. Consultation must be undertaken in a way that recognises that many stakeholders may need active encouragement to participate in consultation processes. These Guidelines set out various options available to the Public Service in designing consultations that capture these varied viewpoints.

I believe that these Guidelines will help to improve the quality and increase the usage of consultation in the Irish Public Service. Their full and widespread adoption will send a strong message that the Public Service is committed to deepening its dialogue with the citizen.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Bertie Ahern". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Bertie Ahern T.D.
Taoiseach

Glossary of Terms

The following terms are explained here for the purposes of these Guidelines only.

Consultation

Consultation for the purpose of these Guidelines means a structured public engagement which involves seeking, receiving, analysing and responding to feedback from stakeholders. A structured consultation process entails defining the purpose and subject of the consultation (such as a policy initiative, a regulatory change, a legislative proposal or a service delivery). It also entails identifying the key audience whose views are to be sought, framing the questions to be asked, providing information and receiving and analysing the responses. It is important to differentiate between ongoing consultative mechanisms (involving standing committees, fora or groups) and once-off consultation exercises.

Consultation Fatigue

Some categories of stakeholders, although they have an interest in participating in a consultation, might have weakly developed institutional or analytical capacities making it difficult for them to participate in large numbers of consultations. Where the complexity and volume of consultations on a particular issue prevents a stakeholder from participating as fully as the stakeholder would wish, this is known as consultation fatigue. Consulting bodies should, in planning and designing consultation processes, have regard for the capacities of organisations and individuals to participate effectively in consultations.

Consumer & Citizen

The terms consumer and citizen should not be regarded as interchangeable.

The term **consumer** means a private individual, participating in the market by buying goods and services for their own use. The term **citizen** denotes a fuller relationship between an individual and the State and is not predicated on a particular activity,

such as buying goods and services. In these guidelines, citizen is not used in the sense of denoting nationality.

Governance

Governance can be defined as “rules, processes and behaviour that affect the way in which powers are exercised... particularly as regards openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence” (European Commission, European Governance – A White Paper, 2001). In these Guidelines the term refers to governance at all levels of Government: national, regional, local and – at times – at the level of specific economic sectors.

Public bodies

Public bodies in these Guidelines refer to the range of organisations, including Government Departments and Offices, state-sponsored bodies, independent sectoral regulators, bodies in the health and education sectors, and local authorities, who may have a role in framing, developing or implementing policies, including through regulation.

Regulation

The term ‘regulation’ can be defined narrowly to mean primary legislation enacted by the Oireachtas and secondary legislation (Statutory Instruments) enacted by Ministers empowered under primary legislation. In addition to Acts of the Oireachtas and Statutory Instruments, a wider definition would also include, Bunreacht na hÉireann, the Treaties, rules and regulations of the EU, rules and regulations made by Local Authorities, and self-regulatory bodies with regulatory powers.

Depending on the context, ‘regulation’ can also mean ‘to regulate’ in the economic and social sense of the word. For example regulation of telecommunications would be taken in a general sense to include the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources and the body of regulation that governs telecommunications.

Regulator

A regulator is generally taken to mean any one of a number of public bodies with responsibility for regulation of specific economic or market sectors. In Ireland, a number of independent regulators have been established, for example, the Commission for Communications Regulation, the Commission for Energy Regulation, the Commission for Aviation Regulation and the Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority. There are also a number of regulators whose remits are predominantly rule focused, such as the Irish Aviation Authority, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food Safety Authority. 'Regulator' in certain contexts can also refer to a private or non-statutory body, for example, those with responsibility for regulating a specific profession, such as the Medical Council or the Law Society.

Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA)

RIA is an assessment of the likely effects of a proposed new regulation or regulatory change. It involves a detailed analysis to ascertain whether or not the new regulation would have the desired impact. It also helps to identify the side effects and any hidden costs associated with regulation. RIA clarifies the desired outcomes of the proposed regulatory change. RIA is an aid to, not a substitute for, decision-making. It is an approach that improves the quality of political and administrative decision-making, while providing openness, public involvement and accountability.

Stakeholder

For the purposes of these Guidelines, a stakeholder is broadly defined as any individual or organisation with an interest in a proposal. In this regard, a stakeholder need not be directly or indirectly affected by a proposal, monetarily or otherwise. A stakeholder can have an interest in a proposal, either through having a statutory role in relation to the proposal or simply through having a general interest in it. In these Guidelines, the terms 'stakeholder' and 'interested party' are used interchangeably. It will, however, be made clear in the document if some more specific form of interest is meant.

Introduction

In the White Paper *Regulating Better*, the Government undertook to consult more widely before regulating and committed to developing procedures and guidelines to promote better quality public consultation. While Government Departments and other public bodies already consult stakeholders on a range of issues and through a variety of means, the introduction of Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) in Ireland means that public bodies will, in future, consult more widely and systematically. The White Paper recognises the need for greater consistency in our approach to consultation. Greater consistency will give interested parties a sense of what may be expected from a consultation. Structured analysis of submissions to consultations will also help to ensure a balance of viewpoints contribute to policy-making.

Consultation is about seeking the views of those outside the decision-making process in order to better inform that process. Consultation is not intended to be a substitute for decision-making, but reflects the fact that the decision-making process benefits from having the widest range of views and fullest information on a particular issue.

Why consult?

Consultation supports greater transparency, which is an important principle of good governance. It helps to ensure that the operations of Government and bodies throughout the Public Sector are conducted with greater clarity and openness. It recognises that public policy-making can be enhanced through the active involvement and contribution of all stakeholders with an interest in particular policy developments. By ensuring that interested parties can express their views about a particular proposal, the decision-making process becomes better informed, more rigorous and more accountable.

There are a number of benefits to consultation:

- It assists the decision-making process by ensuring that interested parties can express their views on a policy.
- It helps to gather useful information to inform the evidence base for making regulations, including the identification of alternatives.
- It supports the rationale for a regulatory intervention or shows that the perceived need for that intervention is not confirmed by the facts.
- It helps to inform decisions on strategic planning or investment.
- It strengthens the focus of public bodies on the needs of the public.
- It brings Government closer to the citizen.
- It empowers individuals and communities to strengthen their role in society.
- It contributes to a shared understanding of issues and work towards agreed solutions.
- It can identify the likely pitfalls or possible unintended consequences of a proposal.

Regulations are made to give effect to policies. Effective consultation helps to better frame regulations, promotes greater understanding of the proposals and better compliance with legislation. In addition, effective consultation guards against the possibility of involving only those who are most vocal or best-resourced to express views on particular policies or regulations. This can be important, for example, when it comes to ensuring that consumer interests are also taken into account when economic regulations or regulatory decisions are being made.

Consultation processes should recognise that there may be a wide range of stakeholders on any particular issue, not just those with a direct financial or other interest. As well as the general public, other stakeholders may include consumer and business groups, trade unions, regional or local groups, the community and voluntary sector, the social partners and bodies with statutory functions in a particular sector.

Who are these Guidelines aimed at?

These Guidelines have been produced as a practical guide for use by Government Departments, public bodies and any other organisations that may wish to consult with stakeholders. The Guidelines will also be of use to those who are interested in participating and responding to consultations. In this context, they are aimed at giving stakeholders a clear sense of the standards of consultation that should be expected from public bodies. The Guidelines are particularly relevant to public bodies with regulatory responsibilities, as consultation in advance of making regulations is accepted good practice and, in a number of cases, mandatory.

While not designed as a prescriptive list, the Guidelines set out the different aspects that public bodies should consider when engaging in consultation. The different components of a consultation process are considered chronologically, highlighting three distinct stages of a consultation:

- (a) planning
- (b) execution
- (c) analysis and evaluation

The Guidelines also outline the different methods of consultation and provide references to further useful information. Different methods of consultation suit different situations and the Guidelines identify a number of options for ongoing and once-off consultations. While the Guidelines acknowledge the existence, in many spheres, of ongoing consultation, this document is aimed primarily at providing guidance for the management of once-off consultation processes. The checklist for better consultation will help to ensure that all the important aspects of organising a consultation have been covered.

It is Government policy that consultation should become more widespread. It is, however, recognised that there will always be situations where consultation is neither practical nor desirable, for example, where security or confidentiality issues, or the need for emergency regulation, arises. Accordingly these Guidelines reflect

the Government's commitment to consult as widely as possible but are not designed to be legally binding.

These Guidelines will not override the discretion available to public bodies in how they formulate and develop policy or impinge on any existing legal/statutory obligations to consult which exist in respect of certain public bodies.

The greater use of consultation is likely to place demands on public bodies, some of which can be addressed through training interventions designed to meet the skills needs of public servants undertaking consultations. Such interventions include upgrading skills in evidence-based policy-making tools, such as Regulatory Impact Analysis.

Checklist for better consultation

- Are you clear on the purpose and objectives of your consultation?
- Are you clear on the questions you want to ask in your consultation?
- Have you identified all of the stakeholder groups and individuals that should be consulted?
- Have you chosen the most appropriate and inclusive methods of consultation, including those that meet the needs of 'non-traditional' stakeholders?
- Have you allowed for sufficient resources for the consultation?
- Have you considered all of your legal obligations?
- Have you publicised your consultation in online and offline media?
- Have you allowed sufficient time to give stakeholders an opportunity to consider the issues fully?
- Have you planned how you will analyse the submissions received during your consultation?
- Have you planned to evaluate your consultation process and to ensure any lessons learned are taken into account for the future?

Section 1

Planning a consultation



1. What is the subject of consultation?

Is the consultation about a new policy or service? Is the consultation on draft legislation? Is it on primary or secondary legislation? Is it about reviewing the effectiveness of existing services?

- 1.1 It is worth assessing the nature of the issues that are to be the subject of consultation, as this will determine the approach to other issues addressed in this document. If public bodies are clear about the subject of the consultation, it will help them to design the process to best effect. It will determine issues such as:
- Who will be consulted?
 - What type of consultation takes place?
 - How long it will last?

2. What is the purpose of the consultation?

Are you obliged to consult? Have you considered what you hope to achieve by holding a consultation? Are you clear about the questions you want answered and what decisions will be taken following the consultation process?

- 2.1 Some organisations are statutorily obliged to consult in certain circumstances. Even if this is not the case, clarity on the objective of a consultation will help to achieve better outcomes. It is important to ensure that stakeholders are clear about what they can expect from participation and how much their views can influence the policy-making process. This includes being clear about the timescale for completion of the consultation and likely developments arising from the consultation process. It is important that there are reasonable expectations on everyone's part and that these expectations are managed as part of the consultation process.

In 2003, the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources held a consultation on the recommendations of the High Level Review of State Commercial Ports. Interested parties were invited to make both oral and written submissions. Submissions were received from a variety of interested parties, such as the Competition Authority, the ports companies, shipping interests and services providers.

The Financial Regulator's consultation in 2005 on its proposed approach to an administrative sanctions policy for the financial services industry was directed primarily at the firms that it regulates and their legal advisors. This was a highly focused and technical consultation, where written submissions were considered most appropriate.

3. Does the consultation take account of your "business cycle"?

Has adequate time been allowed for meaningful consultation? If a regulation is proposed, does the consultation fit with the legislative timeframe?

- 3.1** Consultation should happen sufficiently early in the life of the particular proposal to allow the widest range of options to be considered. It might be necessary also to ensure coordination with related policy areas. This may involve contact with other relevant organisations, including established consultative groups or other channels. These requirements should be factored into the planning process.

4. Resources

- 4.1** It is important not to underestimate the amount of resources – people, money and time – that a consultation could consume. This holds for both the public body running the consultation and for consultees. Each phase will take time and effort: planning and running a consultation, hiring consultancy expertise if required, analysing submissions received, publication and dissemination of results and evaluating the consultation.

- 4.2** The amount of resources required should be proportionate to the scale and nature of the consultation. However, the costs of consultation can be regarded as an investment in better policy outcomes and part of an organisation's risk reduction effort.

5. Has the target audience been identified?

Is the net being cast widely enough? Have you ensured it is not just the best-resourced or most vocal stakeholders? Have you considered consumer perspectives, if relevant?

- 5.1** Identifying the audience for a consultation does not simply mean involving the 'usual' stakeholders, e.g. those who are most vocal or well known for their position on particular issues. The planning process should therefore seek to identify the entire range of stakeholders that might be affected by or have an interest in the proposal. The methodology for this will depend, to a certain extent, on the specific issue. The use of policy analysis tools, such as Regulatory Impact Analysis, can help to identify who will be affected by the proposal. Organisers can also draw on participants from previous consultations.
- 5.2** Consulting with stakeholders can also include other public bodies. In some cases, public bodies can have a statutory role, for example the Competition Authority, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Disability Authority, the Equality Authority or the Health and Safety Authority. In certain cases there may be a specific legal obligation to consult with these bodies. However, public bodies might also have an interest other than their statutory role, and consideration should be given to consulting with them.
- 5.3** While early engagement helps, overburdening stakeholders with excessive documentation or requests for comment can lead to consultation fatigue. It is important to be aware of and recognise this and design consultations that minimise the burden on stakeholders. This is particularly important when dealing with organisations that may be under-resourced, such as in the Community & Voluntary sector or Small and Medium Enterprises.

5.4 *Regulating Better* recognises that community & voluntary organisations, due to their limited resources, may find it hard to engage in public consultations on a regular basis. The *White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity* sets out the Government’s policy in relation to supporting the activities of the Community & Voluntary sector. It recognises that some mechanisms have already been established to facilitate consultation between public bodies and community & voluntary organisations. These include the Partnership process, the National Economic and Social Forum, local development agencies and structures created under the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. These Guidelines are intended to complement these initiatives and offer practical steps to support the participation of the Community & Voluntary sector.

- As well as engaging with high profile organisations, take time to identify and include less visible or hard-to-reach groups that may not already have relationships with public bodies.
- Consider the possibility of pre-consultation, and other forms of practical support and encouragement, for community and voluntary groups that might not normally participate in consultation processes.
- Avoid using the size of a group to decide whether or not to involve it.
- Allow some flexibility in how groups choose to respond to a consultation.

6. Have the right methods been chosen?

Do the methods chosen suit the consultation objectives? Will stakeholders be willing and able to participate using these methods?

- 6.1** The type of consultation chosen will depend on a number of factors, including: the purpose of the consultation; the nature of the issue under consultation; the range of stakeholders being consulted; and the duration of the consultation.
- 6.2** While it might involve a little more planning and administration, consideration should be given to using more than one channel for consultation. Using a variety of methods can help to attract different groups to participate in the process. When considering a particular method, consulting bodies should ask:

- Who are the people most likely to respond using this method?
- Are there any groups for whom this method might be inappropriate?
- What alternative methods exist for engaging such groups?
- Are there umbrella groups (e.g. in the Community & Voluntary Sector) who can assist in capturing the views of other organisations?

7. Has the consultation been adequately publicised?

Has the consultation been signalled in advance? Do the chosen media suit the type of consultation? Are there specialist publications that will reach stakeholders?

7.1 Maximising coverage of the consultation will ensure that the process is robust and credible. If stakeholders are known, inform them of the consultation in advance, but do not presume they are the only interested parties. Consider what other groups might be interested.

7.2 Consultations should be publicised appropriately and cost effectively. For example, question whether national advertising is necessary. Would trade or specialist press be more appropriate? Would a press release or photo call be more effective in securing media coverage? The consulting organisation's website should also be used to ensure maximum coverage. Understand the limitations of each channel in terms of coverage and accessibility and combine them for greater effect.

8. Will outside expertise be required?

Is the expertise available within the organisation to plan, manage and evaluate a consultation? Can it be developed? If not, is outsourcing necessary? Have tendering procedures been factored into the planning process?

8.1 In some situations, outside expertise may be justified for planning, running or evaluating a consultation. Consultations can involve market research, stakeholder identification, facilitation, or may involve seeking feedback on existing services provided by the consulting body. In such circumstances, it might be a good idea to use specialist third parties, who may be better equipped

to conduct detailed research. If the consultation consists of a series of public meetings, a significant amount of organisation will be necessary – especially if there is a need for a regional approach. Where internal resources or expertise are limited, consideration might be given to the hiring of a company with experience in this area.

- 8.2** Use of outside expertise may need to be factored into the planning process. It will have cost implications; will require consideration of competitive tendering rules and ongoing management of the consultancy process. The use of consultants to support a consultation process must always be fully justified in terms of added value and cost-effectiveness. Do not overlook or underestimate the availability of internal expertise to assist in the process.

9. Have legal obligations been complied with?

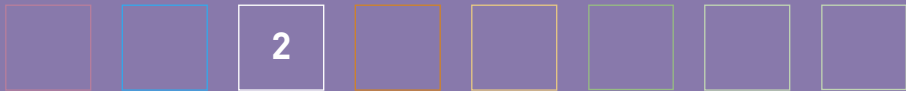
- 9.1** When planning a consultation, a variety of obligations and requirements need to be considered. This section sets out some relevant obligations and requirements that might apply. In many cases, public bodies will have their own policies in relation to these obligations, to which those engaging in a consultation should refer. There are also organisations that offer advice and further details; some of these organisations are at Appendix 5.
- a. Official Languages Act:** Section 10 of the Official Languages Act requires simultaneous publication, in Irish and English, of any document setting out public policy proposals. To be certain of whether information should be published in Irish as well as English, check with your Customer Services Officer (if applicable), with the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs or with the Language Commissioner www.coimisineir.ie
 - b. Freedom of Information:** Is there a stated policy on publishing information received during the consultation? Work with your organisation's Freedom of Information Officer to decide the most appropriate position to adopt, taking into account legal obligations in relation to confidentiality, data protection and defamation. More information on Freedom of Information is available at www.foi.gov.ie

- c. **Defamation:** While it is good practice to publish all submissions received during a consultation, consulting bodies may be legally exposed if they publish potentially defamatory material originating from third parties. Organisations should therefore adopt a practical position towards publishing submissions, with exceptions for circumstances where there is potential for defamation and should consider adopting a policy in relation to publication of submissions.
- d. **Data Protection:** Is there a stated policy on retention and use of data, such as contact details, that might be received as part of the consultation process? More information is available on the website of the Data Protection Commissioner at www.dataprotection.ie
- e. **Copyright:** Consulting bodies should ensure that they have fulfilled their obligations under copyright legislation, including the supply of copies of documentation to the relevant copyright libraries. For more information on deposit of books in copyright libraries and applying for an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) or International Standard Book Number (ISBN), see <http://www.nli.ie>
- f. **Equal Status:** Under the Equal Status Acts 2000-2004, public bodies have a legal obligation not to discriminate against individuals on the nine equality grounds of: age, family status, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, race, disability or membership of the Traveller Community. The legislation also requires providers of goods and services to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities through the making of reasonable changes in what they do and how and where they do it. The National Disability Authority publication, 'Guidelines for Effective Consultation with People with Disabilities,' provides advice on planning an inclusive consultation process and is available at <http://www.nda.ie>. (<http://www.equality.ie>)

- 9.2** Public bodies must also have regard to a variety of other standards. These include standards and obligations laid down in the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour, the Ombudsman’s Guide to Standards of Best Practice for Public Servants and the standards of quality customer service set out in the Customer Charters of Government Departments. Particular standards may also apply in other sectors. Sectoral regulators, for example, are often obliged to consult interested parties under their respective regulatory frameworks.
- 9.3** These Guidelines are not intended to supersede existing standards or statutory obligations. Rather, they are designed to complement and assist existing or envisaged consultative processes.

Section 2

The consultation process



1. Choice of method

1.1 Each consultation method has its strengths and weaknesses in terms of cost, representativeness, and how it seeks or provides information. Ultimately the methods chosen should reflect the particular circumstances of each consultation. A range of different methods is outlined in this section and a table comparing the relative strengths of different methods is at Appendix 2. It is recognised that certain methods, e.g. Citizen Juries, are not currently used in Ireland, but they are included here to demonstrate the variety of options available.

2. Managing the process

- 2.1** Running a successful consultation process is not just about good planning. Good management of the process is essential and there are some simple steps that should be followed to make the process as smooth as possible.
- a. Compile a list of interested parties in advance of the launch of a consultation (see "Identifying the target audience" in the previous section). This will help to ensure that interested parties can make best use of the time available to consult.
 - b. Assign one person to act as a coordinator or liaison officer to deal with any questions and to record and acknowledge submissions as they are received. Consider including the contact details of this person in all documentation.
 - c. While these guidelines do not fix a minimum consultation period, it is a good idea to set indicative periods for consultation processes. In other jurisdictions, minimum consultation periods are the norm. The European Commission, for example, has set a period of eight weeks for written consultations while in the United Kingdom consultation periods must be at least twelve weeks. The different consultation periods which stakeholders can expect in respect of different consultation events (primary legislation, Statutory Instruments, invitation of submissions etc.) could be set out in advance and published on the organisation's website, for example. When deciding on the length of time

and audience for a consultation, consider the likely need for representative organisations to consult their own members. Also consider whether any bank holidays or other holiday periods fall within the proposed consultation period.

- d. Be clear about the deadline for response but be flexible enough in your planning to accommodate an extension to the deadline. The publicity of a consultation on a particular question might raise the profile of the issue in the public domain or within particular groups. This may lead to requests for extensions or to the realisation that further groups need to be consulted.
- e. Public bodies are likely to have different types of consultation events and it is very important that similar consultation events are handled in similar ways. It may be helpful to publish internal guidance to promote consistency in the management of consultation processes.
- f. The Internet can increase the effectiveness of a consultation process. Pros and cons of using IT in consultation processes are discussed in more detail at Appendix 4. Public bodies should, as good practice, have a dedicated section for consultations on their websites.
- g. Consider including a detachable response form with the consultation document. This allows those responding to state who they are and whom they represent. It also allows them to provide feedback on the documentation and the overall process. It also allows the categorisation of consultees for the production of response statistics as part of the evaluation phase.
- h. Consider how feedback to those who have taken part in consultation will be handled. Will consultations be published? Will responses to consultation be given and/or published?

3. Written consultation

3.1 Written consultation processes are among the most frequently utilised methods among public bodies in Ireland. The drafting and content of written consultation documents therefore requires particular attention. As the content and style of a consultation document will depend on the issue and the 'house style' of the consulting organisation, there is no one best way to write such a document. The following drafting pointers should help to increase the clarity and accessibility of a consultation document.

- Highlight the questions being asked throughout the consultation document and include a summary, listing key questions and details of how stakeholders can make their submissions.
- Provide a brief background to the proposal under consultation; the purpose of the consultation; policy or regulatory options being considered; who is likely to be affected; and give references to further sources of information.
- Use language that is simple and accessible, avoiding the use of jargon or technical language, unless intended for a specific audience. Get professional advice if necessary.
- Keep the document short – people are put off by lengthy documents.
- Avoid acronyms or, if necessary, list those used in a glossary.
- Make the document available in a variety of formats. Formatting and layout should also have people with visual impairments in mind – consider the size of font, arrangement of text on the page, minimal use of underlining and of colour contrast. What works in print does not always transfer well to a website. Seek the advice of representative organisations.
- Do not assume that people will be familiar with the way public bodies work. Structures and processes should be explained wherever possible.
- Avoid the use of language that reinforces stereotypes. If you are unsure of the correct terms to use, ask representative organisations. The National Disability Authority's 'Guidelines for Effective Consultation with People with Disabilities' provides advice on planning inclusive consultations.
- Test the draft document for clarity and the use of jargon with colleagues who are not directly familiar with the issues.

3.2 Strengths and weaknesses of written consultation

For

- Good for communicating detailed or technical information
- Good way to get views on complex issues from interested parties
- Views expressed in submissions more likely to be based on common understanding of the issues
- Can be adapted to online media
- Online commentaries or submissions possible
- Can be accompanied by contextual questions
- Allows time for considered responses to be prepared

Against

- Can lead to excessive formality or use of jargon
- Some groups may lack the resources for full analysis and response
- Preparation of responses can be time consuming
- Responses may not be entirely representative and can be difficult to analyse

4. Other methods of consultation

There is a wide variety of consultation methods to choose from. Some of these methods are used more frequently than others in Ireland, while others, although not traditionally utilised by public bodies in this country, are commonly used in other jurisdictions. Some of the more common methods are listed below, while a more comprehensive list is included at Appendix 2.

4.1 Information Technology

The use of information technology and particularly the Internet is becoming pervasive in the day-to-day business of the Public Sector. The use of IT tools to increase coverage of, and participation in, a consultation should always be considered. IT increases the opportunities to reach a wide range of interested parties but over-reliance on tools like the Internet should be avoided, given the lack of universal access. A more detailed discussion on using information technology is available at Appendix 4.

For

- Very low cost of publication on the Internet
- Can reach a wide audience
- Facilitates easier collection of submissions
- Allows for interactive presentation of consultation materials
- Information can be updated / amended relatively quickly

Against

- Lack of universal access
- Possibility of technical problems
- Information needs to be designed and presented differently online
- IT not a solution to all aspects of consultation – submissions still need to be analysed offline
- May lead to expectations of faster analysis of submissions, feedback and decisions arising from consultation process

4.2 Advisory committees

Advisory committees are semi-permanent or permanent committees established by an organisation to act as a source of expert advice on complex issues. While normally associated with ongoing consultation, such fora can also be used for once-off consultation processes. They may be composed of social partners, representative organisations and/or experts in the particular field. If ongoing, the membership of such committees should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure balance of representation.

For

- Good source of advice on complex social or technical issues
- Recognised expertise of committees helps to inform decision-making processes
- Can help produce more appropriate policy, especially when dealing with complex or controversial policy issues.

Against

- Selecting membership to ensure representativeness can be difficult.
- Ensuring smooth internal dynamics within a group can be difficult
- A clear mandate and timeframe is necessary
- Standing advisory committees need time and resource commitments to ensure effective functioning.
- Management may not set clear boundaries between the group's advisory role and management's responsibility for decision-making.

4.3 Comment/Suggestion schemes and complaint mechanisms

Forms which offer customers an immediate channel for comments, complaints and suggestions regarding the service they have received. The primary purpose is to provide information to staff quickly so that operational problems can be corrected as soon as possible.

For

- An immediate and economical channel to engage people
- Immediate feedback facilitates quick resolution of issues
- Gives people control over the way in which they respond
- Simply-designed forms encourage a high response rate

Against

- Self-selecting and therefore may provide an unrepresentative sample
- Can raise unrealistic expectations
- May be regarded as a public relations exercise

4.4 Questionnaire-based surveys

Quantitative research which provides answers and statistics in response to set questions. Quantitative surveys can be face-to-face, postal, telephone, email or web-based.

For

- Good for longer and more complex questions
- Can be directed towards a targeted and representative audience
- Allows audience to take time to complete survey
- Allows a considered response to sensitive subjects
- Useful where a high level of interest is anticipated
- Relatively low-cost way to contact large number of people

Against

- Questionnaires need careful design
- Little control over who completes it
- Response rates can be low
- Does not suit subjective or opinion-based questions

4.5 Face-to-face interviews

Interviews that allow in-depth exploration of individual views, attitudes, behaviour and motivation.

For

- Can be structured or open-ended as appropriate
- Sample selection can be controlled
- Interviewer needs to have necessary skills to properly explore issues
- Provides good qualitative information in a relatively short time

Against

- Time required to identify interviewees and arrange interviews
- Qualitative data can be difficult to analyse
- Can be expensive and time-consuming to analyse the results
- Interviewee may not be as open as interviewer would wish
- Risk of implicit bias/halo effect

4.6 Focus groups

Consists of a small number of people led by a trained facilitator in a one-off discussion focused on a particular topic. Issues can be explored in considerable depth. Focus groups are a useful way of finding out what specific groups of people think about proposals.

For

- Allows for a well-defined objective and structured discussion
- Targeted recruitment can include groups otherwise excluded
- Can promote ownership of issues through participation
- Anonymity possible if third party facilitators used

Against

- Membership of group requires careful selection to ensure representativeness
- Untrained moderators might not accurately capture feedback
- Unclear or confused objectives can lead to poor quality outcomes
- Risk of biased conclusions or conflicting messages if group has been allowed to digress or be influenced by individual members
- Time-consuming to assess and write report

4.7 Public meetings

Meetings that are arranged for members of the public to find out about and express their views on a specific issue. Meetings are held in public and attendance is usually open to anyone.

For

- Excellent method of capturing opinions
- Allows anyone to contribute their views
- Transparent process and facilitates media interest in the issue
- Can be repeated in multiple locations as often as necessary

Against

- Attendance can be unpredictable
- Possibility of domination or disruption by specific interests
- Can be intimidating for people to put across their views
- Quality of meeting depends on quality of facilitation
- Can lack focus
- Report preparation can be time-consuming

Section 3

Analysis and evaluation



Analysis and evaluation

1. There are a number of elements to the post-consultation phase which enable an organisation to maximise the benefit from a consultation. These elements are presented in sequence below, together with key questions to consider for each stage.
 - 1.1 Both public bodies and participants in consultations should always distinguish between the evaluation and analysis of a given consultation process on the one hand, and the processes by which substantive decisions will be taken on the other. It is recognised that decision-making processes arising from consultations are particular to each organisation and context. Consideration of the decision-making process itself is outside the scope of these Guidelines.

2. Analysing and interpreting results

Has the approach to analysing the consultation been built into the consultation plan, including the approach to recording submissions received and consideration of third party expertise to analyse submissions?

- 2.1 Fundamentally, analysis must be able to interpret responses to the key questions asked in the consultation. Results can be interpreted in different ways and the consultation methods chosen will impact on the type of analysis that is possible. Consider engaging outside expertise to assist with analysis of submissions, particularly if the consultation is on a technical matter. The analysis should begin as soon as possible after the consultation closes.
- 2.2 It is important to consider in advance the nature of responses expected and the level of analysis to be used, so that the consultation can be designed accordingly. Consulting bodies should also be aware of, and plan for, the possibility that the consultation process will generate its own publicity and may give rise to concerted or coordinated responses by particular groups.

2.3 Whatever method is chosen, the following steps are recommended:

- Keep complete and accurate records of all information, requests, documents issued, submissions received.
- Acknowledge receipt of submissions.
- Decide on a methodology for analysing submissions for key issues.
- Sort submissions to build a profile of both consultees and issues being raised. This helps paint a picture of both common issues and differences of opinion.
- Examine major issues raised for policy implications. Consistent positions or recurring points arising in submissions might have implications for a proposal. Will further analysis or consultation be necessary? Is it possible to distinguish practical solutions from less realistic ones?
- Decide whether a further round of consultation is necessary.

3. Acknowledgment, feedback and publication

Has publication of submissions to the consultation been planned? Are there procedures in place for protecting confidential information and personal data received during the consultation?

- 3.1** Participating in the consultation is likely to raise expectations that participants' views will have an impact. Acknowledging and publishing the submissions received is an important way of enhancing the transparency of the consultation process. Giving feedback to those who have taken part in consultation reassures participants that their views have been taken into account and it reinforces the benefits of dialogue between them and consulting bodies.
- 3.2** It is good practice to publish a list of the submissions received, summarising key messages and specific suggestions. Where possible, it is good practice to publish all submissions received, subject to considerations of confidentiality and/or defamation.

4. Reviewing the consultation process

Has time been set aside for an evaluation of the consultation process? Is there expertise available in your organisation to help with evaluating the process?

4.1 Review is an integral part of the overall consultation process. It allows an organisation to examine the effectiveness of the consultation process and provides a basis for refining the process for future use. A review should take place after all phases of the consultation process have been completed, including analysis of submissions.

4.2 Some issues to consider when reviewing a consultation include:

- Did the consultation reach its target audience? Was this audience representative?
- Did the consultation provide all participants (and potential participants) with an equal opportunity to take part?
- Were the methods appropriate to the objectives?
- How much time and resources, human and financial, were actually used in comparison to what was anticipated? Was the consultation cost-effective?
- Was the process transparent and easily understood by those participating?
- What was learned from running the consultation and what can be improved in future consultations? How can this learning be shared with colleagues?
- Was the consultation timetable maintained? If not, why?

The advice in these Guidelines is designed to assist Government Departments and Public Sector bodies to plan, manage, analyse and evaluate consultation processes effectively. The Guidelines are also designed to be of help to all participants and stakeholders in public consultation. The overall objective in producing the Guidelines is to promote and support the consistency and quality of public consultation as a means to more informed decision-making, which is a key commitment in the Government's White Paper *Regulating Better*. In practice, many organisations engaging in consultation processes will use, or will certainly be familiar with, the range of methods and approaches set out in this document. It should serve as a useful source of advice for those already experienced in consultation, as well as those approaching it for the first time.

Appendix 1 - Consultation flowchart

Planning	Subject and purpose of consultation ↓ Identification of timescales and questions for consultation ↓ Identification of stakeholders and methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the consultation about? • What will the consultation achieve?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the scope of the consultation? • How long will it last? • What questions need to be answered?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who should be consulted? • What is the best way of reaching them? • Will your chosen methods reach everybody?
Execution	↓ Decision to proceed ↓ Publication and distribution of material ↓ Consultation period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the chosen channels reach everybody? • Is the material accessible? • Have you considered legal obligations?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you chosen channels that will reach everybody? • Is the material accessible? • Do stakeholders have enough time to respond?
Analysis & Evaluation	↓ Analysis of responses and dissemination of results ↓ Review of consultation process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will submissions be published? • Will the analysis draw out key messages and themes? • How will feedback be given? • Will you need help to do analysis? • Will another consultation round be required?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What worked and did not work in the consultation? • How will lessons be disseminated? • Did the consultation make a difference?

Appendix 2 - Consultation methods

Written consultation

The submission of comments based on a published consultation document or request for comment notice in the press. Written consultation is the most popular method of consultation in Ireland.

Comment/Suggestion schemes and complaint mechanisms

Forms which offer customers an immediate channel for comments, complaints and suggestions regarding the service they have received. The primary purpose is to provide information to staff quickly so that operational problems can be corrected as soon as possible.

Mystery shopping

An organisation testing the services it provides through an 'agent' of the organisation posing as a service user. The agent will test the quality of the service in pre-determined areas and report back to the organisation. Mystery shopping is designed to provide a picture of the type of experience a genuine service user would have. If properly structured, the exercise can provide very specific and detailed feedback on service quality.

Piloting proposals

Piloting changes in a small area of a service, or among a small group, is a good way of testing whether a change will work. It is also used as a way of highlighting factors that may help or hinder the proposed change. This allows consulting bodies to plan for and communicate these issues when mainstreaming the change.

Public meetings

Meetings that are arranged for members of the public to find out about and express their views on a specific issue. Meetings are held in public and attendance is usually open to anyone.

Open Days/Road Shows/Exhibitions

Events that provide an opportunity for users or clients to meet an organisation and its staff, ask questions and provide comments or written feedback about proposals. More formal events can be structured with presentations and discussion panels. On a less formal basis, organisations can place information stands at major public events.

Focus groups

Consists of a small number of people led by a trained facilitator in a one-off discussion focused on a particular topic. Issues can be explored in considerable depth. Focus groups are a useful way of finding out what specific groups of people think about proposals.

Customer/User panels

Involves a small group of users who meet representatives from Departments/Offices, on a formal or informal basis, to express their opinions on the services they have received or to express user concerns. Customer panels meet regularly over a long period and are aimed at attracting a large number of customers to include the widest possible representation.

Advisory committees

A semi-permanent or permanent committee established by an organisation to act as a source of expert advice on complex issues. These may be composed of social partners, representative organisations and/or experts in the relevant field. The membership of such committees should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure balance of representation.

Face-to-face interviews

Interviews that allow in-depth exploration of individual views, attitudes, behaviour and motivation.

National fora

National fora are fora which can be established under partnership structures such as the National Social and Economic Forum. Such fora are convened on a regular basis

to promote consultation on particular issues with the wider group of social partners. They can be preceded by pre-consultation meetings held on a regional basis, to maximise effective participation of groups who would normally be excluded.

Inquiry by design

An intensive workshop bringing together public officials, stakeholders and members of the public to consider and suggest solutions for complex issues, such as planning. A given workshop will involve a structured, but fast-paced, interchange of ideas between participants so that results can be produced rapidly. A cost effective means of envisioning outcomes at an early stage and of assessing proposals at the final stage.

Community fora

A locally based forum for residents and other stakeholders to participate in local decision-making relevant to an area. Committees meet regularly to discuss issues that affect them. Community fora are often used to make recommendations to a local authority.

Citizen panels

Panel of a relatively large (c. 500 – 2500) representative sample of population. Used to assess reaction to specific proposals, to assess local or sector-specific service delivery, and to develop views about future priorities, needs or goals.

Citizen juries

A structured method of obtaining detailed, considered views from members of the public on specific issues. Juries are comprised of a similar number of people to a court jury (12 –16) and are neither experts nor members of particular interest groups. Juries hear evidence from expert witnesses over several days and then draw conclusions.

Customer surveys – Questionnaire-based surveys

Quantitative research which provides answers and statistics in response to set questions. Quantitative surveys can be face-to-face, postal, telephone, email or web-based.

Foresight/Market observatory

Foresight exercises bring together technical experts, policy makers, industry representatives and others to identify strategic issues affecting a particular policy area – including emerging opportunities, technologies and trends and recommendations for appropriate policy responses. A market observatory will generally be an ongoing mechanism for tracking developments such as trends in innovation in a particular industry. Market observatories are used to inform the development of policy in particularly complex areas and may or may not have ongoing interaction with the industry being observed.

Ballots/Referenda/Deliberative polling

National referenda are generally held to decide matters relating to the Constitution. However, referenda to decide local issues are also possible. Deliberative polling takes place among a representative sample of the population. After learning more about the issue, the same group of people is polled again. This method seeks to generate a robust result through targeted dissemination of information on an issue to the sample group of people.

Information Technology

The use of information technology, particularly the Internet, is part of day-to-day life in the public sector. The use of IT tools to increase coverage of and participation in a consultation should always be considered when planning a consultation process. IT increases the opportunities to reach a wide range of interested parties but over-reliance should be avoided, given the lack of universal access. A more detailed discussion on using information technology is available at Appendix 4.

Comparative chart of consultation methods[^]

Method good for:

* Reasonable ** Good *** Very good **** Excellent

Method	Providing Information	Seeking information	Representative views	Quantitative views	Qualitative views	Special interest views
Advisory Committees	***	****	***	*	****	*
Ballots /Referenda / Deliberative Polling	**	**	***	****		*
Citizens' Juries	****	**	**	*	***	*
Citizens' Panels	***	***	****	***	***	*
Comment / Suggestion Schemes		**	*	*	**	*
Community Fora	**	**	***	*	***	
Customer Surveys	*	***	****	****	*	*
Customer User Panels	****	***	**	*	***	***
Face-to-face interviews	***	***	*	*	****	***
Focus Groups	***	***	**	*	***	***
Foresight/Market Observatory	***	****	**	**	****	*
Information Technology	***	**	*	**	*	*
Inquiry by Design	****	****	***	**	****	**
Mystery shopping		**	*	*	*	*
National Fora	**	****	***	**	****	**
Open Days / Road Shows/Exhibitions	****	*	*	*	*	*
Piloting proposals	**	***	***	*	***	*
Public Meetings	****	*	*	*	*	*
Written consultation	****	***	**	**	**	*

[^] Adapted from the UK Cabinet Office publication, *How to consult your users*, 1998. This chart is a "rule of thumb" guide only.

Appendix 3 - Good practice examples of consultations

Department of Health and Children Health Strategy

In preparing its new health strategy 'Quality and Fairness – A Health System for You', the Department sought to encourage a strongly participative approach to its development. The main objective was to gather the views of members of the public, service users, service providers, as well as staff and management of the health services. The Department appointed Colgan and Associates to assist it with the design, planning, implementation and report of the consultation programme. Consultations began at the end of March and continued through to the end of May 2001.

As well as these key stakeholders, the Department established a Steering Group to oversee preparation of the Strategy. This Group was supported by a National Health Strategy Consultative Forum, which represented key stakeholders, whose role was to provide advice on the key themes and direction of the Strategy. Given its standing nature, the Forum was considered to underpin the entire consultation process. It was divided into eight working groups, each dealing with a specific issue: funding, eligibility, delivery systems/human resources, population health, quality, voluntary/statutory interface, e-health and futures in health care.

Consultation with stakeholders took place in the following ways:

Members of the public

- A consultation pack and questionnaire, 'Your Views about Health' was distributed to members of the public and organisations, who were invited, by means of the questionnaire, to describe past experiences and give views about future changes. 1500 submissions were received in this way.
- Irish Marketing Surveys were commissioned to carry out market research, involving a quantitative and qualitative survey using a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults.
- The Department had intended to hold public meetings but travel restrictions put

in place to prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease in 2001 prevented these taking place.

Organisations

- Organisations participated in the process by completing the questionnaire 'Your Views about Health'
- A number of organisations made submissions independently setting out their views.
- Health Boards arranged workshops for locally based organisations.
- Over 300 submissions were received from organisations in total.

Health Services Personnel

- Each Health Board carried out extensive consultation with its own personnel.
- Consultation also took place with staff in the Department of Health and Children.
- Health services personnel were also able to complete the questionnaire 'Your Views about Health'.

Disadvantaged Groups

- In the case of people living in poverty, a separate consultation process was undertaken through structures of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS).

How the consultation process informed the development of the Strategy

The material received through the questionnaire and individual submissions informed the development of the Strategy in several ways:

- The material was analysed, indexed, and made available to the various working groups involved in developing the Strategy.
- Reports on the submissions were prepared for the Steering Group.
- An overview of the findings was presented to the National Consultative Forum in July 2001.

A report was prepared by the Department on the themes that emerged from the consultation process. This was published as 'Your Views about Health' in December 2001 and is available on the Department's website at <http://www.dohc.ie>

Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government consultation on the Water Services Bill

The Water Services Bill 2003 provides for a comprehensive update of legislation governing the management and provision of water services.

There were widespread consultations with relevant stakeholders during its development. Following preliminary discussions with representatives of local authority and rural water sector management, a series of public meetings was arranged at various venues around the country over November/December 2002. The meetings were aimed at outlining the general content of the proposed legislation and facilitating discussions with representatives of the rural water sector, with a view to finalising the provisions on a proposed licensing system for group water schemes.

Public meetings were considered the best vehicle to facilitate communication with the sector's widely dispersed membership. They also afforded the Department an opportunity to gauge reaction to the contents of the Bill on the ground. The meetings were organised at five venues around the country under the auspices of the National Federation of Group Water Schemes and were advertised locally. Costs were relatively minor, being confined mainly to venue hire. Those in attendance were invited to make follow-up written submissions.

Attendance at the meetings averaged around 100-150. Each meeting consisted of a presentation followed by a Q&A session, which saw good audience participation. Even though attendees were invited to make written submissions subsequently, little further correspondence was received. Department officials recorded issues and concerns raised at the meetings and these were subsequently taken into consideration in the development of the Bill. Ongoing contact with the National Federation continued on an informal basis to keep them abreast of developments.

Once the Bill is enacted, further consultation will take place with the water services sector prior to the introduction of licensing.

Further information is available on <http://www.environ.ie>

Department of Social and Family Affairs – Pre-Budget Forum

Pre-Budget Forum

The purpose of the Pre-Budget Forum (which has been held every year since 1988) is to give voluntary organisations operating in the social services area an opportunity to express their views, concerns and priorities with regard to social welfare changes in the run up to the Budget. It is a full-day event held approximately six weeks before Budget day.

Of the 29 organisations invited to attend the 2004 Pre-Budget Forum, 27 attended and were represented by 41 participants.

Organisations are requested to furnish written submissions relating to social welfare matters in advance of the event. Organisations with similar concerns are invited to consider submitting joint submissions. Organisations are also advised to focus their presentations on the day on the most important points made in their written submissions. Each organisation is given a maximum of six minutes in which to make its presentation on the day. Submissions received are not published by the Department.

Representatives from the Combat Poverty Agency, the National Disability Authority, the Department of Finance and the Family Support Agency are also invited to attend the Forum as observers.

Appendix 4 - Using information technology

1. The widespread availability of the Internet has made it one of the most popular ways for Public Sector bodies to reach people. It has a number of **benefits**, including:
 - Very low cost of publication
 - Opportunity to reach a very wide audience
 - Potential to tailor information to a variety of audiences
 - Allows inclusion of relevant background information as well as links to other relevant resources
 - Allows the presentation of information in non-linear format, through hierarchies or through non-hierarchical linking, allowing the reader to drill down to specific points
 - Allows for the use of multi-media to enhance the interactivity of the medium
 - Allows the potential for deeper engagement, through online forums or chat sessions
 - Allows for cheap publication of submissions to the consultation as well as feedback and analysis of a consultation

2. These benefits should be set against a number of **challenges** to using the Internet that consulting bodies should be aware of. These include:
 - Lack of universal access to the Internet and lower computer literacy among certain groups within society – the so-called ‘digital divide’.
 - Other technical issues hindering access – metering of time online, connection speeds, compatibility of applications.
 - The need to be proactive in targeting potential participants – it is not enough to simply publish on the Internet and hope that people discover the consultation.
 - People read online material differently to printed material. If material is to be read online instead of printed, consultation documents, press releases and speeches should be structured in a way that makes reading them on a screen easier and quicker.
 - Online material should conform to the latest W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

- Particular attention should be paid to design and content for people with visual impairments. See the National Disability Authority's *IT Accessibility Guidelines* for further information.
 - Websites need to be updated at each milestone in both the consultation and the wider policy process. Important dates, such as opening and closing dates, feedback and next steps, such as the publication of draft legislation should all be made available. This process can be made easier through collating all consultation information for a Department on a specific part of a website.
 - Submissions to the consultation still need to be analysed offline. While the Internet facilitates easier dissemination of information and collection of submissions, it cannot act on the submissions received.
 - Perception that the Internet allows for a faster process may lead to an expectation of quick feedback and analysis of submissions. In fact, decisions on policy or legislation arising from the consultation process are not likely to be made any quicker. Documentation should spell out the pace at which developments will happen and state where and when feedback will be published.
 - The speed of innovation in ICT suggests that consulting bodies need to consider whether emerging technologies might offer opportunities for increasing the scope or coverage of consultation e.g. through the use of text messaging or 3G phones.
 - Consulting bodies need to carefully design data dissemination and retention policies when using information technology, in order to comply with data protection obligations.
 - When using information technology, consulting bodies will also need to strike a balance between strategies to increase the coverage of a consultation and technologies that might be unnecessarily intrusive.
3. ICT tools for consultation
- **Web-based consultation documentation** – in its simplest form, the publication of consultation information on an organisation's website. Consulting bodies should also have a dedicated section for consultations on their websites. A consultation section might include the following:

- What issues the body is consulting on
 - How the consultation is taking place, e.g. through focus groups, public meetings, surveys, or online methods
 - How people can contribute to the consultation
 - What stage each consultation is at
-
- **Online submission to a consultation** – this allows the submission of responses to a consultation process directly through website forms.
 - **Electronic mailboxes** – give participants the opportunity to send feedback to consulting bodies, either by email or using a web page response form.
 - **Email distribution lists** – can be used to circulate consultation information to pre-identified groups of people. Accessing contact information can be difficult but if a consulting body has an ongoing relationship with a group(s) of people, then there is likely to be ready access to contact lists.
 - **Issue-based website forums** – provide for participation in online discussion forums, where the feedback from other participants can be viewed, thus allowing participants to respond to those views as well as to the original consultation document or proposals. Consulting bodies can use facilitators or moderators to ensure that the discussion stays within specific parameters or to guard against the publication of defamatory or offensive remarks.
 - **Online chat events** – these allow participants to exchange views instantly, thus taking on the form of a discussion, (rather than time-lagged posting with forums). Chat events are useful to promote a consultation through the presence of, for example, the sponsoring Minister in the discussion. Participation in the discussion might be limited to pre-selected individuals, either to structure the conversation or to allow for a more intensive discussion among specific experts. This format could still allow others to view the discussion.
 - **Online focus group** – online consultation with a representative group, usually on specific issues.
 - **Web-based surveys** – this is simply an online version of a survey and is useful in gathering information about attitudes and feedback on customer survey issues. Its value in policy-based consultations may be more limited.

Appendix 5 - Useful addresses

Better Regulation

Department of the Taoiseach
Government Buildings
Upper Merrion Street
Dublin 2
Tel: + 353 1 619 4041
LoCall: 1890 227 227
Fax: + 353 1 619 4082
Email: betterregulation@taoiseach.gov.ie
<http://www.betterregulation.ie>

Combat Poverty Agency

Bridgewater Centre
Conyngham Road
Islandbridge
Dublin 8
Tel: + 353 1 670 6746
Fax: +353 1 670 6760
Email: info@cpa.ie
<http://www.cpa.ie>

Data Protection Commissioner

Irish Life Centre
Lower Abbey Street
Dublin 1
Tel: + 353 1 874 8544
Fax: + 353 1 874 5405
Email: info@dataprotection.ie
<http://www.dataprotection.ie>

Irish Language Policy

Department of Community,
Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
Dún Aímhirgin
43-49 Mespil Road
Dublin 4
Tel: + 353 1 647 3000
LoCall: 1890 474 847
Fax: + 353 1 667 0826
<http://www.pobail.ie>

Equality Authority

Clonmel St
Dublin 2
Tel: + 353 1 417 3333
Fax: + 353 1 417 3366
Email: info@equality.ie
<http://www.equality.ie>

FOI Central Policy Unit

Department of Finance
73-79 Lower Mount Street
Dublin 2
Tel: + 353 1 676 7571
Fax: + 353 1 604 5750
<http://www.foi.gov.ie>

Foras na Gaeilge

7 Merrion Square
Dublin 2
Tel: + 353 1 639 8400
LoCall: 1850 325 325
Fax: + 353 1 639 8401
Email: eolas@forasnagaeilge.ie
<http://www.gaeilge.ie>

National Adult Literacy Agency

76 Lower Gardiner Street
Dublin 1
Tel: + 353 1 855 4332
Fax: + 353 1 855 5475
Email: literacy@nala.ie
<http://www.nala.ie>

National Disability Authority

25 Clyde Road
Dublin 4
Tel: + 353 1 608 0400
Fax: + 353 1 660 9935
Email: nda@nda.ie
<http://www.nda.ie>

Office of the Information Commissioner

18 Lower Leeson Street
Dublin 2
Tel: + 353 1 639 5689
Fax: + 353 1 639 5676
Email: info@oic.ie
<http://www.oic.gov.ie>

Office of the Language Commissioner

Spiddal
Co Galway
Tel: + 353 91 504006
Fax: + 353 91 504036
Email: eolas@coimisineir.ie
<http://www.coimisineir.ie>

Office of the Ombudsman

18 Lower Leeson Street
Dublin 2
Tel: + 353 1 639 5600
LoCall: 1890 223 030
Fax: + 353 1 639 5674
Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie
<http://ombudsman.gov.ie>

Office for Social Inclusion, Department of Social and Family Affairs

Store Street
Dublin 1
Tel: + 353 1 704 3851
Fax: + 353 1 704 3032
<http://www.socialinclusion.ie>

Standards in Public Office Commission

18 Lower Leeson Street
Dublin 2
Tel: + 353 1 639 5666
Fax: + 353 1 639 5666
Email: sipo@ombudsman.gov.ie
www.sipo.ie

Further Information

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http://leadership.gc.ca/categories.asp?Sub_id=250&lang=e

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<http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/techniques/index.jsp>

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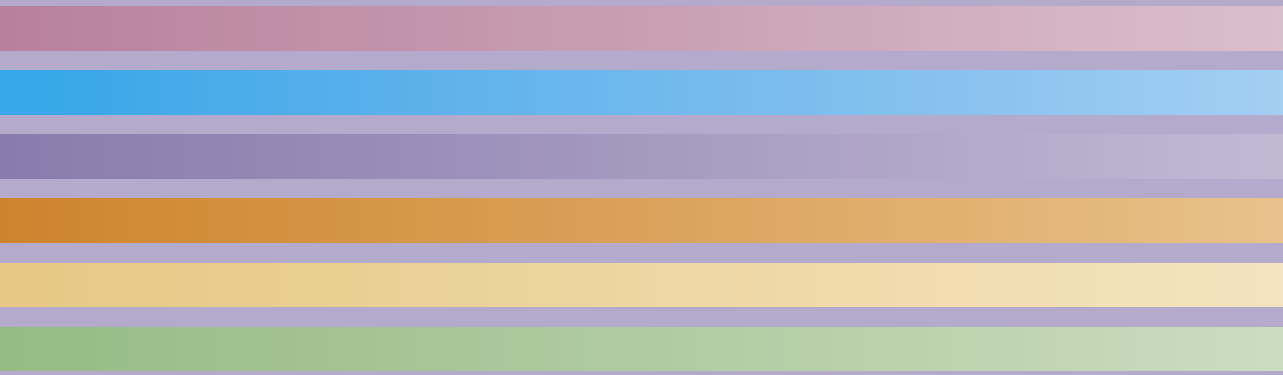
National Disability Authority, (2002), 'Ask Me – Guidelines for Effective Consultation with People with Disabilities'. <http://www.nda.ie>

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www.betterregulation.ie