

THE CHALLENGE OF PARTICIPATION

MONTRÉAL'S PUBLIC CONSULTATION
AND PARTICIPATION POLICY



Montréal 

PREFACE

Montréal's public consultation and participation policy aims to foster, through the appropriate practices, the exercise of participatory democracy, a key component in any representative democracy. In creating this policy, Montréal acknowledges the fundamental rights of the public to influence the decisions that affect them and to participate in the development of their community. Having thus chosen to place its citizens at the centre of its planning and activities, the city has created a tool by which it can better understand their expectations and concerns through the application of recognized standards.

This policy also aims to make government practices more coherent and open to discussion and exchange. Montréal, a city that already offers its citizens numerous opportunities to participate in public affairs, is expanding the offer by establishing a reference framework for public consultation and participation practices. As such, this policy is intended as a means for improving the decision-making process and strengthening relations between the public and the municipal government, and rests on the following premise: consultation and participation facilitate and clarify the decision-making process, and result in increased public acceptance of any projects undertaken. The policy also recognizes that, except for issues dictated by law or regulation, it is the responsibility of elected officials to assess opportunities for public consultation. In addition, the policy recognizes the legitimacy of opting for a public participation process that is adapted to the situation.

The policy targets all municipal authorities, including corporate agencies such as the Office de consultation publique de Montréal, special or permanent City Council committees, and committees created by the City Council along with municipal departments. Moreover, boroughs are invited to promote the practices outlined in the present policy and adopt them as needed.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

- Encourage citizens to participate actively in civic life, as well as in the development and management of municipal affairs.
- Foster public consultation practices that are transparent, credible, effective and useful to the decision-making process.
- Formally acknowledge the power of the community to influence the decisions of various city authorities.

These objectives may be attained through the implementation of specific practices relative to the three pillars of participatory democracy; namely, **information**, **consultation** and **participation**. Achieving the above-mentioned objectives also depends on **support** for the practices underlying the three pillars, as well as on **evaluation and follow-up** mechanisms.

When all is said and done, the present policy embodies a practical framework that aims to encourage participation in community affairs by the greatest possible number of citizens. It also constitutes an instrument by which issues may be clarified and the decision-making process made easier.

INFORMATION

For purposes of this policy, "information" is defined as a one-way communication process in which the municipal administration produces information and delivers it to the public at large.¹

Information constitutes a vital prerequisite to community participation in municipal affairs. For their engagement to be clear and their participation useful, citizens must understand what the issues are, on the one hand, and the mandates and activities of the city's officials and departments on the other. If the consultation and participation process is to be understood, it must first be clearly explained. In the end, citizens must respect the procedural framework of the process.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

- Actively provide information to allow the greatest possible number of citizens, particularly those who are often marginalized or difficult to reach, to become interested and involved in municipal affairs.

GOOD PRACTICES

- Produce and distribute information aimed at making the consultation and participation process, along with the actions and mandates of city officials, better understood.
- Prior to any consultation, produce and distribute complete, objective, pertinent, user-friendly and accessible information on the policy, project or program in question.
- Post an up-to-date calendar of consultations held by various municipal authorities on the City of Montréal Web site.
- Keep communication lines open regarding city policies, projects and programs.

CONSULTATION

For purposes of this policy, “consultation” is defined as a two-way communication process in which citizens provide feedback to the municipal administration.¹ Consultation allows citizens—individuals and groups alike—to ask questions and express expectations, concerns, comments or opinions, with a view to helping the municipal authorities to reach the best decision.

Consultation centres on a predefined topic and is carried out according to a preset schedule. It operates within a clear and recognized set of rules. If they are to guarantee the credibility of the process, decision-makers must consider the opinions collected and provide reasons for their eventual decisions.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Make use of the authorities and procedures that are best suited to the matter at hand and the issues under consideration.
- Promote diversity in the opinions expressed.
- Inform the community of the results of a public consultation, along with the ensuing decisions and their reasons.
- Respect the rules and ethical requirements of the process.

GOOD PRACTICES

- Consultations on important subjects for which a statute or regulation has not already enacted a rule require that a clearly worded public notice be broadcast or placed in the media at least 15 days in advance, so that the public may be informed and granted a reasonable period of time in which to peruse the relevant documentation.
- Make the relevant documentation available no later than the day the notice appears.
- Hold public consultations in two parts: in the first, table the issue(s) and welcome questions; and in the second, encourage the expression of opinions.
- As needed, separate these two parts by a sufficiently long interval enabling citizens to prepare responses, particularly when these must be in the form of written briefs.
- Produce and publicize a report that, on the one hand, summarizes the opinions and concerns expressed, and on the other hand provides their analysis along with any applicable conclusions, advice or recommendations.
- Inform citizens of the results of a public consultation, of the subsequent decisions and the reasons for them.

PARTICIPATION

For purposes of this policy, “participation” may be defined as a partnership between the public and its municipal administration. This partnership is based upon the active engagement of citizens in the development of policies, programs and projects.¹

As such, when the expertise of members of civil society is sought for a given project, program or policy, their participation, by nature interactive and varied, constitutes a partnership that is one of the hallmarks of participatory democracy.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

- Build concrete and lasting partnerships with the members of civil society, the purposes of which are to exchange information, identify the needs, design the projects, programs or policies, and evaluate the results.

GOOD PRACTICES

- To the greatest extent possible and in a manner acceptable to all involved, seek out public participation in finding and implementing solutions for controversial projects.
- As needed, establish a follow-up committee that includes members of the public.
- Involve civil society—citizens, groups, organizations, institutions—in the process of developing projects, programs or policies.

¹ Definition adapted from *Engaging Citizens in Policy-making: Information, Consultation and Participation*, OECD: PUMA Policy Brief No. 10, 2001, 6 p.

SUPPORT

To support the three pillars of participatory democracy—information, consultation and participation—Montréal fosters a municipal environment that is open to its citizens' contributions.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Develop knowledge and skill in matters of public consultation and participation.
- Promote consistency between the modus operandi and the ethical framework used by the various city authorities involved in public consultation and participation.
- Try to ensure satisfactory and constructive participation in the various public consultation and participation processes.

GOOD PRACTICES

- Provide training opportunities to public servants and elected officials who must work directly with the public.
- Adopt and implement ethical and operational rules that are standardized yet adaptable to the particular mandate of a given authority.
- Index the means used by city officials to facilitate participation.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

Continued improvement of processes favours perennial use of public consultation and participation. For this reason, it is vital to periodically assess the application of the public consultation and participation process; the relevance of the subjects of consultation and participation; the roles of and the methods employed by the various authorities; and, lastly, the adequacy of means.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

- Two years after its adoption, and every two years afterward, the present policy will be submitted to a public evaluation process. This process will seek the expertise of persons of recognized ability, who may or may not be employed by the city.

GOOD PRACTICES

- As a means of sharing their experience, the authorities to whom the present policy is addressed are invited to submit a yearly report to City Council regarding the public information, consultation and participation practices applied over the course of the year.

CONCLUSION

The challenges inherent to public consultation and participation are enormous. Wishing to play a more active role in the decision-making process, citizens are increasingly demanding to be informed and consulted, particularly regarding decisions that directly affect them. Conversely, elected officials are the legitimate representatives of the public, responsible for making decisions. In such a context, the present policy offers a framework that attempts to strike a balance between these two cornerstones.

Implementing public consultation and participation must remain proportional to the complexity, breadth and impact of the decision to be made, as well as to the size and scope of public concerns.

Because it, itself, stems from an exercise in participatory democracy (i.e., the Montréal Summit and the ensuing Task Force on Democracy) the present policy, by its very existence, proves that participatory democracy can yield results. The onus is now upon the city's constituents to explore the channels that will enable them to implement the guidelines and practices stated in this policy, and upon its citizens to embrace them.

