

Appendix C – Consultation Guidelines for Policy Development and Review

Consultation: General Approach

- Consultation allows you to obtain the points of view of relevant groups of interest regarding the policy document(s) you are developing.
- It involves active engagement with interested members of the Queen's community and full and frank conversations about what you are trying to achieve with your policy.
- It should be thorough, sincere, and meaningful for all involved (for example, you should explain the purpose of consultation, your expectations, which groups you reach out to, etc.).
- It is not a deliberative process. However, ensure to account for the inputs received from groups of interest for accountability purposes.
- Consultation is about building consensus across groups of interest and having conversations that may be difficult.
- It helps to develop a two-way relationship in which you, as a policy proponent, set the questions and manage the process, and groups of interest provide feedback.
- Engaging with your groups of interest ensures an opportunity for complete, accessible, and relevant information to be provided before full policy development.

Engagement and Consensus

- It is important to remember that consensus does not equal consent. If there is opposition from groups of interest, try meeting with separate groups or individuals to better understand their points of view. Engage in frank conversations about why specific directions are being chosen.
- Take the time to discuss any disagreement. Ensure that your groups of interest understand that, though consultation involves active participation, it is not a partnership in which both parties (the policy sponsor and groups of interest) define the policy process and content.
- Make sure to communicate in advance to your groups of interest whether their views will be reflected in draft policies and why or why not. Otherwise, they may express disappointment or anger, generating resistance to change and a sense that they have not been listened to.
- Allow groups of interest to voice their views and ensure the policy proponent actively demonstrates that these voices have been heard and that genuine attempts to reflect these views in the policy have been made, wherever possible.

Although not all groups of interest may agree to an approach, they should believe that you have genuinely attempted to understand their viewpoint. Generally, this requires that you **demonstrate engagement** with their views. This can include attempts to broker agreements with groups of interest that do not agree with each other. It may consist of placing alternatives before the group and actively discussing the pros and cons of each approach.

Whatever way this is done, it should show a predominant focus on attempting to reach a satisfactory, not perfect, outcome for key groups of interest, who will be those persons most directly impacted by a policy or its change. It would be best if you strived for true accord and should only proceed in its absence where there is a legislative or regulatory imperative to be respected or a strategic priority of the university to be achieved that is supported by the senior administration or the university's governing bodies.

It is always helpful to “close the loop” with groups of interest. For example, you may choose to end consultation sessions by confirming your next steps and timeline, or you may wish to reach out to specific groups post-consultation on the feedback you have decided to include or not include, with your rationale. This should be viewed as a must where there is particular opposition or discomfort. These conversations may be challenging and likely to change the outcome but are essential to actively engaging with good faith participants in your process and demonstrating goodwill.

Principles of Consultation

1) Accountability and Transparency

Consultation should be conducted to hear participants' opinions.

Be transparent concerning what you will and will not do as a result of consultation. Be clear about from whom you will seek feedback and how that feedback will be considered in developing your final policy proposal. Consider how the feedback will be shared with your initial working group, senior leaders and others across the community.

2) Accessibility

Groups of interests' access to information is crucial for active participation and fostering transparency. Therefore, consider providing information promptly to all groups of interest and engage in “active” provision of information, including several options for those who wish to provide feedback, such as large and small group meetings, one-on-one chats, email submissions, and online forms.

When providing information to groups of interest, remember that many will likely not have your deep knowledge of the issue in question. Therefore, be sure to provide context on the policy's needs and development so that participants can provide relevant and helpful feedback. In addition, provide opportunities for anonymous feedback when dealing with sensitive subject matters.

Ensure you consider visible and invisible barriers when designing your consultation process and contact the Human Rights and Equity Office for advice as needed.

3) Commitment

Be genuinely committed to fully engaging with the consultation process and demonstrate this to all involved through your words and actions. Listen closely to feedback, be honest in your responses, and take time to consider what you hear when drafting your documents. As part of the change management process, you are not only seeking views, but you are also seeking to establish consensus.

Consultation: Importance and Relevance

- Consultation's primary purpose is to improve decision-making by ensuring that decisions take into account the views and experiences of those affected by the policy.
- Well-conducted consultation allows you to obtain relevant feedback from groups of interest for your policy's development at all process stages.
- It contributes to making informed decisions about your policy's content, gathering input from individuals with different expertise and background from yours, and "testing the waters" with groups of interests. This is especially important when your policy may significantly impact how things currently work for some or all groups of interest.
- Consultation is a core element of good governance. It builds knowledge and awareness among groups of interest and contributes to building trust.
- It allows you to identify champions who can assist with your policy's implementation and improvement down the road.

While a thorough consultation process can be time-consuming, it is a crucial step in the policy development process and should be approached mindfully and sincerely. An investment of time and effort at the start of the process often results in dividends as the policy moves through the university's approval processes.

Opportunity to Consult

Consultation should take place as early in the policy process as possible (preferably **before** and **after** policy drafting) to allow a greater range of solutions to emerge. The idea is to consult with your groups of interest before you start writing your policy and then consult with them using your policy draft. In both cases, consider the following:

- Create a working group of representatives from relevant groups of interest to discuss the framework for your policy **before drafting**. If possible, include subject matter experts and those whom a policy will most directly impact or a proposed change to a policy. Discuss the ultimate goal of the policy and gather initial feedback on the proposed changes.
- Consultation before drafting enables a broader range of information sources and unstructured input. It can lead to information, ideas, and knowledge you may not possess,

which helps avoid surprises and a feeling that the path forward is already set among groups of interest.

- Once you have your draft share it with your working group again (including your groups of interest) and gather feedback. Discuss if your policy has hit the mark, whether it is clear enough, overly complex, or too broad.
- At this stage, assess whether key groups of interest have yet to accept the proposed approach and set up a plan of how to address that situation. Also, consider assessing whether you have achieved a consensus view amongst your most affected groups of interest.

Communication of Consultation

To reach out to your groups of interest before or after drafting your policy, communications efforts should invite them to participate in consultation. Communicating your policy draft can be part of an effective change management plan that builds awareness, understanding, and buy-in and facilitates implementation. Consider all possible channels of communication when providing information about consultation opportunities.

You may wish to liaise with the communication contacts of your most relevant groups of interest to get the word out. University Relations should also be contacted if the new policy or proposed changes will significantly impact on the university's operations or have the potential to be controversial. Please reach out to the University Secretariat at policies@queensu.ca for support.

A dedicated webpage, Gazette post, email address, and contact person may be helpful in your communication efforts. Use as many methods as appropriate to ensure your message has a broad reach.

Remember: Posting your draft policy on the Secretariat's webpage is not a communication plan. The webpage is simply a location where the draft policy can be found. You will be responsible for driving traffic from your groups of interest to this site using your communications plan.

Additional Considerations for Consultation

1) Groups of Interest

When determining groups of interest, reflect on who your policy may impact and how. Include off-campus groups and the broader Kingston community, if relevant. Review the Secretariat's consultation plan template for a list of groups of interest. You can always include more groups of interest if you choose.

Keep in mind the groups of interest availability. For example, faculty and students are off campus over the summer term, so it will be harder to reach out to them.

2) Timeline

Ensure you organize the consultation process within the broader policy-making process. Allow yourself enough time to consider the feedback you collect during consultation sessions, edit your documents, and meet the agenda package deadlines for the relevant approval bodies.

To confirm dates and deadlines, contact the University Secretariat.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to the University Secretariat at policies@queensu.ca

Suggested Student Contacts:

AMS – Director of Communications: communications@ams.queensu.ca

SGPS – VP Community: vp.community@sgps.ca