

CONSULTATION GUIDELINES FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

What is consultation?

Consultation gives you, as the sponsor of a new or revised policy/procedure, the opportunity to obtain the points of view of relevant stakeholders regarding the policy document(s) you are developing.

Effective consultation is a crucial piece of the policy development process. It should be thorough, sincere, and meaningful for all involved. It involves active engagement with concerned members of the Queen's community and full and frank conversations about what you are trying to achieve with your policy. It will also include, at times, receiving requests that certain things either be included or excluded from your policy.

Seeking views of the community requires policy drafters to **engage** with those views, even where we don't agree. It means building consensus across groups of interested stakeholders and having conversations which may be difficult about why you don't believe that you can adopt the wishes of all parties. Taking the time to discuss disagreements and the reasons why different approaches are desirable or required helps to build buy-in for a policy throughout the process of its development and supports the change management process necessary to effect enduring change and successful implementation.

Where community members have not received advance notice that their views cannot or will not be reflected in draft policies and the reasons for that, they may express disappointment or anger, generating resistance to change and a sense that they have not been listened to. It will not always be possible to include the views of all stakeholders in policies. Most community members understand this. What is critical in such circumstances is that these interested community members have had the opportunity to voice their views and that the policy proponent **actively demonstrate** that these voices have been heard and that genuine attempts to reflect these views in the policy have been made, wherever possible.

Why consult?

Well conducted consultation allows you to obtain relevant feedback from stakeholders for your policy's development at all stages of the process. It will help you to make informed decisions about your policy's content, to gather input from individuals with different expertise and background from yours, and to "test the waters" with stakeholders. This is especially important when your policy may have a significant impact on the way things currently work for some or all stakeholder groups.

Consultation is also part of good change management processes. It builds knowledge and awareness among stakeholder groups and allows you to identify champions who can assist with your policy's implementation and improvement down the road.

When to consult?

Consultation should take place both **before** and **after** you have drafted your policy documents.

Consultation: Phase One

Before drafting...

Consider creating a working group of relevant stakeholders to discuss the framework for your policy in advance of drafting. This should include subject matter experts and those who will be most directly impacted by a policy, or a proposed change to a policy. Discuss the ultimate goal of the policy and gather initial feedback on the changes being proposed.

Again, do this **before** you begin to draft. Ask questions that will help you in your drafting process. Consultation at this point permits unstructured input and can lead to information, ideas, and knowledge that you may not possess, which helps to avoid surprises and a feeling among stakeholders that the path forward is already set.

After drafting...

If you set up a working group in advance of drafting, share the first draft of your document(s) with it for feedback before expanding your consultations to broader stakeholder groups. Does your draft hit the mark? Is it overly complex or too broad? Does it conflict with requirements contained in other policy statements? Are there key stakeholder groups that have not accepted the proposed approach? Have you achieved a consensus view amongst your most affected communities of interest?

Consensus does not equal consent, although where there is substantial opposition to a proposal, this is a sign that you may need to vary your approach. This may involve slowing the process down or meeting with separate groups of individuals to better understand their points of view. It may also require some frank conversations about why certain directions are being chosen.

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

Whatever way this is done, it should show a predominate focus on attempting to reach a satisfactory, not perfect, outcome for key stakeholders, who will be those persons most directly impacted by a policy or its change. You must strive 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.

Consultation: Phase Two

Once you have achieved a consensus or determined that you must proceed regardless, begin to design a process that will engage more broadly with stakeholders through a detailed communications process as you move into the next phase of consultation.

What is consensus?

Stakeholders may come to a consultation session with differing opinions. Consensus is developed when everyone shares their opinions, a decision is proposed, and those present decide to commit to and support the proposed decision, even though it may differ from their personal opinion.

The following key principles must be kept in the forefront when considering your consultation process:

1) Integrity and Transparency

Consultation should be conducted to hear participants' opinions and consider changes to your documents based on their feedback. Be sure to provide all the information participants will need to make a meaningful contribution, including draft documents, timelines, and so on.

Be transparent with respect to what you will and will not do as a result of consultation. Be clear about who you will be seeking feedback from and how that feedback will be considered in the development of your final proposal. Consider how the feedback will be shared with your initial working group, with senior leaders and with others across the community.

2) Accessibility

Ensure you provide 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. You may wish to provide opportunities for anonymous feedback when dealing with particularly sensitive subject matters.

Ensure you consider both visible and invisible barriers when designing your consultation process and reach out to the 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, you are seeking to establish consensus.

Building Consensus

You can work to build consensus in a number of ways. Hold small group or individual meetings with stakeholders to listen to their concerns and explain your process or appoint an individual trusted by stakeholders to travel between your unit and stakeholders that may be reluctant to meet with you personally. Provide education about what peer institutions are doing with respect to their policies on similar topics and what has and has not worked elsewhere. Acknowledge difficult requests and accept them as good faith perspectives and show flexibility. These should all help you achieve a broadly accepted result.

Aspects of the consultation process

1) Stakeholders

Who may your policy impact, and how? Which groups on and off campus will be affected when your policy is approved and active? Is there a need for campus-wide consultation opportunities or is your stakeholder group more narrow? (The Secretariat's Consultation Plan template provides a list of potential stakeholder groups as a starting point.)

Communication Channels

- *Direct emails to stakeholders*
- *Open town halls*
- *Online feedback forms*
- *Queen's Gazette notices*
- *Student government/society's newsletters*
- *Queen's and Kingston social media channels*
- *Posters in key locations across campus*

2) Communication

Once you have identified key stakeholders, communications efforts should focus on inviting them to participate in the next phase of the consultation process. Consultations are not effective if no one knows they are taking place. 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 stakeholder groups to get the word out. University Relations should also be contacted if the new policy or proposed changes will have a significant impact on the university's operations or have the potential to be controversial.

A dedicated webpage, Gazette post, email address, and/or contact person may be helpful in your communication efforts. Utilize as many methods as are appropriate to ensure your message has broad reach. Remember - posting your draft policy on the Secretariat's webpage is not a communications plan! The webpage is simply a location where the draft policy can be found. It will be your responsibility to drive traffic from your stakeholder groups to this site using your communications plan.

3) Timeline

Determine the ultimate approval body for your policy (i.e., Senior Leadership Team, Senate, Board) and contact the University Secretariat to confirm dates and deadlines. Be sure to allow yourself enough time to consider the feedback you collect during consultation sessions, to make edits to your documents, and to meet the agenda package deadlines for the relevant approval bodies.

Keep in mind that stakeholder groups should be active when your consultation process takes place. It is difficult to consult with faculty and students over the summer term, for example, and this should be avoided in all but the most exigent of circumstances.

4) Context

When providing information to stakeholder groups, keep in mind that many will likely not have the deep knowledge you have on the issue in question. Be sure to provide context for the policy's needs and development so that participants can provide relevant and helpful feedback.

5) Feedback

It is always helpful to "close the loop" with stakeholder groups. 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. Where there is particular opposition or discomfort, this should be viewed as a must. These conversations may be challenging and possibly unlikely to change the outcome but are important parts of actively engaging with good faith participants in your process and demonstrates good will.

Final Thoughts

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. It is often the case that an investment of time and effort at the start of the process results in dividends as the policy/procedure moves through the university's approval processes.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to the University Secretariat at policies@queensu.ca or 613.533.6095 with any questions you may have regarding policy consultation.

Policy developers should also consult with the University Relations Integrated Communications team at unicomm@queensu.ca or 613.533.2035 regarding any questions related to communications plans and resources. Their office will be pleased to assist you with developing your plan and advising on strategies.

Suggested Student Stakeholder Contacts:

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

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