Practical Guide for
Internal Organisation

Points of attention for efficient processes and collaboration around your participation platform

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Introduction

Managing citizen participation is not always easy. When you start a participation project, it is important that your organization has clear **goals**, sets **deadlines** and ensures **good coordination** between different stakeholders. An efficient internal organization is key to the success of your participation projects, and yet it is one of the biggest obstacles (local) governments and organizations face when starting digital participation.

In this guide, we list **important focal points and explain the tasks of the core team**. This way, you will get the right people around the table internally.

Why set up an adequate organisation?

Along with setting up your platform and setting up your first participation projects, it is crucial that you set up **an appropriate organizational structure**. Divide **roles** and **tasks** and make **internal arrangements** for efficient internal collaboration.

Allow an approach in terms of citizen participation that is:

- **transversal** - Divide responsibilities and tasks internally when it comes to managing the platform. This way, all involved departments / administrative divisions will have the same understanding of the role the platform should play and how it can be used to set up their next digital participation projects.

- **centralized** - The creation of a core team allows this group to transfer the knowledge gained from one project to another, for stakeholders to easily coordinate with each other, and for the various projects launched on the platform to be coordinated as effectively as possible.

- **continuous** - A more coordinated approach to managing the platform allows for the identification and organization of diverse projects on a more regular basis. The end goal is always to have a continuous dialogue with the target audience.

We are aware that every organization is different and that all the recommendations in this guide may not be applicable to your situation. This guide serves as an inspiration, and guides you in setting up an organizational structure. The ultimate goal is always to use the platform as well as possible as a central tool in your participation approach.

The **core team** that is responsible for participation

To properly manage the platform and the various projects that will have a place on it, it is important to establish a core team. This team plays a central role in the implementation and deployment of the platform within your organization.

The role of the core team

The core team is responsible for the platform and is the point of contact for everything related to digital participation in general and the platform in particular. The team has an important role in the different phases of the platform:

1. Prepare and set up the platform

The first big challenge is of course the set-up and design of the platform. The core team ensures that the corporate identity of your organization is respected, both in graphic terms and in terms of tone of voice and language used. Moreover, the core team decides on general settings, for example what info a participants has to provide (optionally) why registering.

2. Select and manage projects

The core team also decides, in consultation with the project managers, which projects will be set up and how many active projects can be on the platform at the same time. On the one hand, this is important to secure the participatory identity of the platform, but it also makes it easier to maintain an overview of the activity on the platform.

What is the identity of your platform? What role does your platform play within the participation strategy? These are all issues that give the core team and project project leaders to get a grip and clarity. To determine what will or will not have a place on the platform, it is a good idea to make sure to validate the (participation) Terms & Conditions during the implementation phase. Make sure everyone is aligned!

3. Launch the platform

Once everything is technically in order and the info for the first active projects are completed, it's time for the next milestone: introducing your platform to the general public. It goes without saying that a well thought-out communication strategy is a great added value for a successful launch of the platform and the projects.

4. Making sure the projects are managed

After the launch, it is important to follow up on the input of residents and other stakeholders and continue to ensure activity on your platform. This requires good coordination between the management team and the departments/project manages responsible for the participation projects.

Think of giving feedback on posted input, adjusting the status of projects in time, informing users and continuing to encourage them to make their voices heard... Who does what? How (often) will you respond and provide feedback? How will results and updates be shared?

Agree on important deadlines. This will ensure that the project stays on the radar. If possible, share those (internal) deadlines on the platform. In this way you create clear expectations towards your residents and you can get the most out of your participation platform and the collective intelligence of your community.

Composition of the core team

The participation core team is responsible for executing participation within your organisation and ideally consists of :
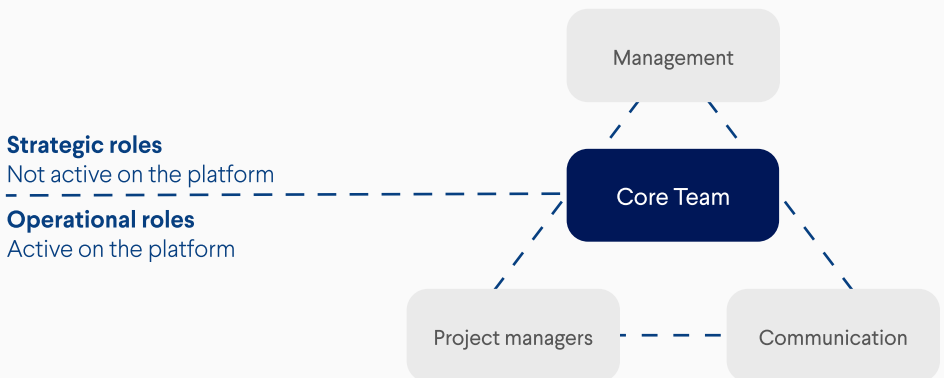
- at least the **head of participation** and/or **the person in charge of the team within the administration in charge of citizen participation.**

- **members** of the administration in charge of (citizen) participation or, if not possible, members of the communication team

Ad hoc the core team is joined by project managers.

The core team ideally brings together communication and organizational skills to best coordinate with the various stakeholders. Since the core team supports the departments or managers for all the participation projects that will be active on the platform, they also best know the in's and out's of the platform.

Interaction between the core team and other stakeholders

As you will probably understand, the broadest possible internal support is needed at various levels to ensure the success of the platform. The involvement of policy people (e.g., elected politicians or members of the management team) is essential, but it is also important that different departments/divisions of the administration provide support.

Strategic roles
Not active on the platform

Operational roles
Active on the platform

Management

Core Team

Project managers — Communication

Each active participation project will involve the following profiles:

1. The communications service/responsible party.

It is important that the communications team participates in the thought process surrounding the launch of a project and remains involved as much as possible throughout the process. Not only to ensure that the target audience finds its way to the platform, but also to help ensure that the information is always tailored to the target audience.

2. The managers/departments involved in the projects.

Project managers are colleagues from the departments involved in the platform's projects. They work closely with the core team and provide input on content and structure. They actively follow the projects and can help process the input gathered.

3. Management (policy-makers, politicians or members of the - political - administration)

Policy makers - whether elected politicians, managers or directors of a particular department - are important internal ambassadors. It is essential to have their support and to involve them directly or indirectly in the implementation of participation projects and in their follow-up. They play an important role when choices have to be made and when there is communication or feedback. Involve have and keep them informed. They can only really take into account input from participants if they are also aware of the progress and results of the participation processes on the platform.

Learn by doing

A good preparation is important, but citizen participation always remains a process of **trial and error**. Projects or unforeseen circumstances can always emerge that thwart processes you mapped out in advance. Mutual communication and constructive cooperation are the key to overcoming any obstacles.

The core team ideally meets-up several times a year and is in close consultation with the various departments/divisions to go over and select projects and project ideas.
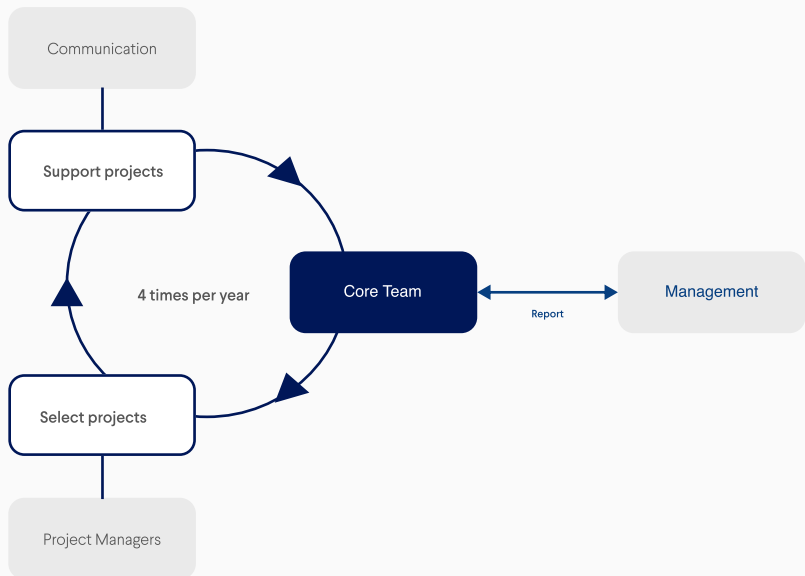
When a project is selected, the core team takes control of the setup and agrees with the project managers and preferably the person responsible for communications on how to manage and follow-up on the projects.

How to engage other **stakeholders**?

Explaining the importance of participation

Managing citizen participation is no small feat. Whether you arer a small or a big organisation, you need to set clear goals, have deadlines and coordinate well between different stakeholders. Efficient internal organization is the key to project success. And this is one of the most difficult challenges for many organisations.

Here are some **arguments** that can help you structure your internal communications aimed at different stakeholders.

Why participation?

- Participation stands for **debate, interaction and confrontation**, and this always produces new, broader and often better insights.

- Participation creates **broader support for the decision(s) taken** and a sense of **co-ownership**. The legitimacy of policy decisions is strengthened, and the more support there is, the more likely it is that the proposed goals and decisions taken will succeed.

- Participation means **openness and transparency** in policy-making. Residents and stakeholders are not only informed about what is about to happen, they also participate in thinking about it. This results in **satisfied citizens** who help disseminate the policy as **ambassadors**.

- Participation is a **learning process.** Participants can share their expertise as experience experts. Moreover, in a participation process there is room to **build up a vision together**, to exchange ideas and to learn through consultation. Citizens therefore also become 'smarter'.

Why online participation?

- Online participation is not just about the results of the decision-making process. **Showing how you arrive at a decision**, and involving your target audience at every step, is just as important.

- Because the discussion takes place online, **stakeholders can participate when and where they want**. As platform owner you always determine the terms and conditions for participation.

- Via the participation platform you can **address and involve your target audience in a targeted way.** Also people who want their voice to be heard when it suits them best, such as **young people, young families or single parents**, get all the chances to participate. With an online platform you broaden your reach.

- By making your processes available online, you provide even **more transparency and structure**. You can easily share all necessary information, and it is easier for residents to talk to policymakers.

Summary

The core team:

- is responsible for the management and implementation of the participation process;

- monitors the progress of and activity on the platform;

- decides (in consultation with project leaders) on the placement of projects on the platform;

- advises project leaders on the translation of projects to tactical implementation.

The core team ideally consists of the following individuals/profiles:

- the employee/official responsible for participation and/or the head of the service/department responsible for communication

- Members of departments in charge of participation, communication or organization-wide support

- ✳ **Ad hoc supplemented by project leaders or colleagues involved in a specific project on the platform**

Also know that the core team does not necessarily have to be large. Depending on how big your organization is, 2 to 8 people will suffice. More important is the diversity of the group. In this way you can increase the reach within the congregation on the one hand, and have different areas of expertise on board on the other.

Division of tasks and description of roles

- Composition of the core team
  ...

- Responsible communication
  ...

- Project managers (members of departments involved in ongoing projects) :
  ...

- How will you select the projects that will be on the platform? What is the procedure?
  ...

- What autonomy and tasks are granted to the core team by the decision makers in selecting the projects?
  ...

- How often are decision-makers informed of the contributions collected on the platform and how are they taken into account in policy formulation?
  ...

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www.citizenlab.co

hello@citizenlab.co