EUROPEAN MOSAIC

How To Engage Citizens

european youth forum

European Movement International

Co-funded by the European Union

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Introduction

This manual is intended to provide advice on creating engaging spaces and events for citizens.

Before we explore how you can design your event to be as engaging as possible, there is one fundamental question that needs answering: 'Why?'

The most straightforward answer is that meaningful participation depends on meaningful engagement. As the organiser of a citizen event, consultation, or dialogue process, you are responsible for creating an environment where people feel motivated to take part, contribute their ideas, and remain involved throughout the process. Citizens are more likely to participate actively when they feel welcomed, listened to, and are able to connect with both the topic and one another. Engagement is not only about attendance; it is about creating experiences that inspire participation and make people feel that their voices matter.

This is particularly important when bringing together people with different backgrounds, experiences, and levels of familiarity with the topic. An engaging event helps create the conditions for richer discussions and more meaningful outcomes. It encourages people who may not usually participate to share their perspectives and ensures that the resulting conversations and reports reflect a broader range of experiences and ideas, rather than only the views of the most vocal participants. You may publish findings, recommendations, or reports after your event, and it is important that they reflect active contributions from a wide range of citizens, not simply a dominant voice.

This manual will guide you through the entire process of creating engaging citizen consultations, from defining your objectives and selecting relevant topics to reaching the appropriate audiences and designing interactive experiences that promote participation. It explores practical facilitation tools, ways to include all participants, and techniques for managing group dynamics. It also helps you to capture citizens' ideas effectively and turn them into meaningful outcomes. Above all, it acknowledges that engagement does not end when the event closes, but continues through communicating results and fostering ongoing participation.

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Preparation: Before Your Event

1.1 Define Purpose & Set Clear Objectives

Before you begin planning any practical aspect of your national consultation e.g. who will attend, what format will it take, or where will it be held, it is essential to be clear about **why** you are organising it. A well-defined purpose is the foundation of every meaningful consultation. It guides every decision that follows, ensures your team is aligned, and makes it possible to evaluate whether the event has been a success. This section will help you define your purpose, set meaningful objectives, and choose the right thematic focus for your national context.

What kind of consultation are you organising?

Not all consultations are the same. Depending on your purpose, you may be organising an event that primarily informs citizens about the EU long-term budget, consults them on their priorities and concerns, or provides them with a space to co-create ideas and proposals together. In practice, most national consultations will combine all three of these aspects. To make a decision, ask yourself:

- Do you want to primarily share information and raise awareness, or are you seeking substantive citizen input?
- Are you looking to understand what citizens already think, or to help them form an informed opinion through the consultation itself?
- What do you want participants to walk away with: new knowledge, a sense of being heard, or both?

Be careful to distinguish between:

Information session	Sharing information on a specific topic. Participants receive information, but do not actively participate.
Consultation	Asking for opinions on a specific topic. Participants share their opinions, needs and ideas. Their input is collected and analysed.
Co-creation session	Co-creating certain project(s) (e.g. campaigns, policy recommendations etc). Participants are involved as partners in the process.

In the case of the European MOSAIC project, we are looking to have the purpose of the national consultations as a mix between the information session and consultation format. The goal of the national consultations will be to gather participants' opinions on a certain topic, as well as to share information on the EU long-term budget.

Set 2-3 clear objectives

→ These should be specific enough to guide your planning and serve as a reference point when you evaluate the consultation afterwards. Strong objectives tend to answer three questions: What do you want to achieve? With whom? And for what reason?

Some examples of well-defined objectives:

"We want to gather the views of at least 50 citizens from diverse backgrounds on the EU's spending priorities in the areas of climate and regional development, to feed into our national report."

"We want participants to leave the event with a clearer understanding of what the EU long-term budget is and how it affects their daily lives."

"We want to identify 3-5 specific citizen priorities that can be formulated as concrete recommendations for policy-makers."

Avoid objectives that are too vague to be measured, such as "raise awareness" or "engage citizens". These are desirable outcomes, but they need to be made specific to be useful.

Connect your objectives to the bigger picture

Finally, consider how your consultation fits into the wider European MOSAIC project and EU-level conversations on the EU long-term budget. Your national event is one piece of a larger mosaic: the input you collect will feed into a national report, which in turn contributes to a European synthesis. This means your objectives should not only be meaningful for your national audience, but should also generate input that is structured and comparable enough to be useful at EU-level.

Ask yourself:

- How will the results of your consultation be used, and by whom?
- How can you ensure that participants will understand that their input will have a concrete impact?
- How will, or can, the topics you are focusing on connect to national debates, while also remaining relevant to the broader EU agenda on the EU long-term budget?

Minimum standards for every consultation

Regardless of the size, format, or thematic focus of your event, every national consultation within the European MOSAIC project should meet the following minimum standards:

- **Participation:** A minimum of diverse participants should be present, representing different ages, genders, backgrounds, and levels of prior knowledge on EU topics. You should actively reach out to people that are not your "usual suspects", and marginalised communities should be meaningfully included, not just welcomed if they happen to show up. You can find more on how to do this in the Manual on how to organise inclusive events.
- **Clear purpose**: Participants know why they are being consulted and are encouraged to share their opinion on the next EU long-term budget, as well as which priorities it should cover the most.
- **Accessible information:** The topic of the next EU long-term budget is explained in simple language, so that people with little or no knowledge can meaningfully participate in the consultation as well. The discussions and the questions during the consultation should be linked to real life needs and problems of the citizens.

- **Interactivity:** The event should include dedicated time for discussion, exchange, and active participation, not just presentations and speeches. Participants should have multiple opportunities to speak, write, vote, or otherwise express their views in a format that suits them.
- **Documentation:** All contributions should be captured in a structured way and fed into the national report. Participants should be told at the start of the event how their input will be used and what will happen to it after the event ends.
- **Feedback loop:** Participants should receive some form of follow-up after the consultation, and as a minimum, a summary of the key outcomes and an indication of where their input goes next.

1.2. Define Thematic Focus Areas

Once you are clear on your purpose and objectives, the next step is deciding what your consultation will actually be about. The EU long-term budget covers a vast range of policy areas, and one of the most common mistakes in organising consultations of this kind is trying to cover too much. Choosing a focused thematic scope and making it feel relevant to the people in the room is what makes the difference between a consultation that produces meaningful input and one that produces vague, hard-to-use responses.

The post-2027 EU long-term budget negotiations are expected to revolve around a number of key policy areas. Below is an overview of the main themes you can draw from when designing your consultation:

Theme	What it covers
Climate action	Energy policy, agriculture, biodiversity, just transition funds
Social cohesion & regional development	Structural funds, reducing inequalities between and within regions
Youth, education & research	Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, skills and lifelong learning, Youth Guarantee
Migration & asylum	Border management, integration support, humanitarian response
Democracy and citizen engagement	Culture, media, democratic resilience, fundamental rights, AgoraEU
Defence & security	European Competitiveness Fund, innovation across the defence sector, military mobility, cybersecurity European Peace Facility
Digital transformation	Connectivity, artificial intelligence, digital public services
External action & enlargement	Support to accession countries, neighbourhood and development policy, Global Europe

We recommend **selecting 2–3 thematic areas** that are most relevant to your national context and will most likely resonate with the communities you are engaging. A list of all negotiated funds and areas can be found here.

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How to choose your focus

Your thematic focus should sit at the intersection of two things: what is genuinely relevant to the EU budget debate, and what your participants already care about. To find that intersection, ask yourself:

- Which EU-funded programmes are most visible or impactful in your country? (e.g. Cohesion Funds, Erasmus+, the Common Agricultural Policy)
- What national debates (on energy costs, youth unemployment, migration, rural decline, security) have a clear EU budget dimension?
- Are there communities or regions in your country that are particularly affected by EU spending decisions, either positively or negatively?
- Which topics are most likely to generate genuine engagement from the specific groups you are targeting?

Translating EU themes into accessible discussions

Even once you have chosen your themes, the EU long-term budget can still feel abstract and technical to most participants. Your job in the planning phase is to think carefully about how to frame each topic so that it feels concrete, relevant, and worth talking about. A few principles that work well:

Start from everyday life, not from policy. Rather than introducing a theme by explaining the funding mechanism, start with a question or scenario that connects to something citizens already experience. For example:

- Instead of "the Common Agricultural Policy allocates X billion euros to farm subsidies" → *"How do you think the EU should support farmers as they face pressure to both produce more food and reduce their environmental impact?"* Or *"Should agriculture be more organic and small-scale? Should it be local or open to global trade?"*
- Instead of "the Cohesion Fund finances infrastructure in less developed regions" → *"What changes have you seen in your region in the last 10 years, and what do you think the EU should invest in next?"*
- Instead of "the EU's defence spending is increasing significantly" → *"How do you think Europe should respond to security threats, and how much of the EU's shared budget should go towards this?"* Or *"How would you prioritise this compared to EU investment in other fields such as culture, climate change, education etc?"*

Use local examples. Identify specific EU-funded projects or programmes in your country that participants may already know (e.g. a renovated train station, a university exchange programme, a renewable energy initiative) and use these as anchors for the broader discussion.

Acknowledge complexity without being paralysed by it. You do not need to simplify to the point of distortion. Citizens are capable of engaging with difficult conversations if they are given the right context. What you should avoid is jargon, acronyms, and abstract institutional language that creates distance rather than understanding.

Frame themes as choices, not facts. The EU long-term budget is ultimately about priorities: what the EU chooses to spend money on, and what it chooses not to. Framing your themes as genuine choices ("Should the EU spend more on X or Y?") invites participation in a more meaningful way rather than presenting them as established facts.

Types of questions you can ask: Case study: Erasmus+

Experience questions: "What is your experience with accessing Erasmus+ opportunities?"

Barrier questions: "What makes it difficult for young people from rural areas to participate?"

Priority questions: "If the EU had more money for youth, where should it go first?"

Policy translation questions: "How should we explain to decision-makers that youth work deserves a dedicated (or higher) budget?"

1.3 Communication & Outreach

The national consultations should be based on dialogue and getting to know people from different sections of your community. They should bring together people of all ages and from all walks of life. You can encourage interaction and idea-sharing between participants of different generations, helping to bridge gaps, build understanding and create collaboration. One of the first steps in planning your consultation is to determine who you want to include. For that, you can reflect on the following questions:

- Who is already attending your events?
- Who is missing?
- Why are they missing (e.g. access, interest, trust, awareness etc)?

Based on your initial assessment, identify the groups you want to target and develop an outreach and communication strategy tailored to them. Use your knowledge of your local/national context to guide your approach. To do this, consider the following questions:

- How will you reach your different target audiences?
- Which channels are most effective? (e.g. social media, partners, direct outreach)
- How can you reach participants with little or no prior knowledge of the EU-long term budget?
- How will you make your invitation relevant and engaging?
- What will participants get out of the consultation?

Tips & Tricks

Local organisations and schools: Partnering with schools, universities, NGOs and local authorities can increase your reach and encourage greater participation. These partners can help you connect with groups that may not typically engage in consultations like this.

Engage with local influencers and 'celebrities': You can also engage with local influencers or well-known community figures. These individuals can help make the topic more relatable – for example, by explaining how the EU budget has impacted their community or why participation matters.

Diversify channels and messaging: Different audiences respond to different formats, so a local newspaper announcement may reach a different group than an Instagram post or a community notice board. Tailor your messages to each platform to speak to your different audiences.

Use visuals: In your communications, use visuals to make the content accessible and appealing. Eye-catching social media posts, clear website design, and short, engaging

videos can help explain the EU long-term budget and the purpose of your national consultation.

Share your agenda: Provide information on what will happen during the event, who will be involved, what activities are planned, and what is expected from participants. This helps people understand what they are signing up for and allows them to prepare in advance, making them more likely to attend and engage. Make sure to use simple, jargon-free terms to make the event easier to understand at a glance.

Explicitly mention who is welcome: Make clear that the event is open to people from different communities and with all levels of knowledge. Make it clear that participants are not expected to be experts – their experiences and perspectives are what matter.

Use incentives: Make people want to attend, even when they don't know much about the topic. For example, offering free food or other small benefits can be a strong motivator for people who might usually attend similar events.

1.4 Choose the Right Consultation Format

Our overall objective in organising the national consultations is to engage diverse groups of people in European democracy by informing and getting their opinion on the EU long-term budget. We strongly believe that people do more for their societies if they see an opportunity to engage constructively on issues that are important to them. It is also important to think about which kind of events different people like to attend to attract a diverse audience – some people enjoy political debates, some learn by watching topical movies, some only go to art performances.

Of course, you are organising the consultation to receive information yourself, but it is very important to also consider what participants will get out of participation. One of the first questions you should ask yourself when starting to plan your consultation are:

- Which format should the consultation be in to best serve the objectives?
- Who will be attending the event and what are their expectations?
- How should I share information on the EU long-term budget?
- How can I create spaces for interaction and discussions?

Think about these questions carefully with the team you're implementing. Designing a well thought-through agenda and methodology will be the basis to make sure your consultation is intentional and meaningful.

Tips & Tricks: Preparing with, and for, your participants

You can add a 'Quick Pre-Event Survey' to your registration form. As part of signing-up, you can use a short survey to find out:

- **Knowledge levels:** Find out how familiar participants are with EU long-term budget topics.
- **What they want:** Learn what they hope to take away from the event.
- **Engagement tips:** Ask what makes events fun and engaging for them.

You can then use survey results to tweak the agenda and activities, ensuring everyone has a relevant and enjoyable time. However, this could also overwhelm participants when registering so consider your audience and make the choice based on your experience.

Part of your agenda should be dedicated to explaining the purpose of the consultation. You need to make sure everyone in your team is on the same page about this.

Make sure you send your presentations and agendas in advance, so that everyone has the same amount of time to go through them. It can also be useful to already share other resources. To make it easily accessible for everyone, please look at the 'Manual on Inclusive Events'.

When planning your event, it is also important to develop a programme that appeals to and addresses the interests and concerns of the diverse communities involved. To support this, we have created a list showing which formats can be used to achieve which objectives, to help you design a balanced and purposeful flow throughout the consultation.

Format	Objective/Outcome
Panel discussion	Inform
'Ask me anything' session/ tabletop table discussion	Inform, encourage discussion
Simulation and role-play	Inform, encourage discussion,
Roundtable	Inform, encourage discussion
Movie screening	Inform
Cultural performance e.g. concert, theater play	Inform
Citizen's panel or deliberative assembly/ debate	Encourage discussions, collect ideas
Training session	Inform, encourage discussion
Workshop	Inform, encourage discussion, co-create ideas, collect ideas
World café	Inform, encourage discussion, collect ideas
Open mic session, poetry slam, collaborative art project on the spot (e.g. mural), letter exchanges	Inform, co-create ideas, collect ideas
Networking session	Encourage discussions, co-create ideas
Focus group	Discussion, collect Ideas
Group discussion	Collect ideas, reach a consensus
Survey	Collect ideas

For a deep dive into how to organise a participatory consultation, we recommend checking out the **handbook on methods and tools produced for the EU Youth Dialogue.** It is specifically designed to support the organisation of national consultations within the EU Youth Dialogue framework, so it has a lot in common with the national consultations organised within the MOSAIC framework.

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Question 1: How do you share information about the EU long-term budget?

Your participants will have different levels of knowledge on the EU long-term budget. For many, it might be the first term they have even heard about it. Part of the consultation will be to make sure that everyone is informed about what they will be consulted on.

To understand what information you should be sharing, ask yourself and research following questions:

- What is the baseline knowledge participants should already have about the EU budget?
- How wide is the knowledge gap within the group (first-time learners vs informed stakeholders)?
- What are two to three things participants must understand before deliberation starts?
- What information is essential for informed input, and what is "nice to know" but not necessary?
- Which parts of the EU budget are most visible in our country (e.g. cohesion funds, agriculture, research)?
- Are there politically sensitive narratives that need careful framing?
- Are there specific groups that may have misconceptions about EU spending?
- What language level and terminology will be accessible to all participants?

Tips & Tricks

- Use different methods and formats to speak to different personalities.
- Use simple language and avoid specialist words.
- Relate it to the everyday life of your participants.
- Make sure you explain why participants should care about the information.

Question 2: How do I create space for interaction and discussions?

It is very important to create spaces for people to talk and discuss things if you want your consultation to be effective. This means more than just collecting input; it involves actively getting people involved, encouraging them to talk and listening to different points of view. It is also important to explain what role participants will have and how they will contribute, so they can take part and have a say in the outcome.

Create a diverse programme: Different session formats and types are useful for different things. One helps to better inform, encourage discussions, co-create ideas or collect ideas.

Add energisers and icebreakers: These are very good at getting people involved, helping them get used to talking to each other, and keeping everyone feeling full of energy. When used the right way, they help to make a more open and comfortable atmosphere, where people want to get involved and interact. When planning icebreakers, consider various accessibility needs, such as neurodivergent participants or individuals. Check out this page for inspiration: www.sessionlab.com/library/energiser.

Create informal spaces: It's just as important to have informal moments where people can connect and exchange ideas as it is to have formal spaces such as workshops and speeches. This will help to build trust. Start the event with food or coffee. People can join earlier if they want to. You could also organise an informal meet-up the night before. These relaxed moments must continue throughout the programme.

Make use of technology: Technology can make consultations better in many ways. It can make them more interactive, engaging and accessible. When used well, digital tools can help get people involved, improve communication, and let you gather input as it happens. Yet, it can also be distracting and there are lots of tools and platforms you can use, depending on what you want to achieve and the format you want.

- **Live polling and Q&A tools:** Mentimeter, Slido, Kahoot (for quick voting, ranking ideas, or live questions)
- **Collaborative documents**: Google Docs, Microsoft 365 (for shared note-taking or co-writing ideas in real time)
- **Digital whiteboards:** Miro, Padlet (for mapping ideas, clustering feedback, brainstorming visually)
- **Survey tools:** Google Forms, Typeform, SurveyMonkey (for structured feedback during or after the session)

Use creative methods: Creative and imaginative elements help spark new kinds of engagement and invite participants to explore the topic from a fresh perspective. This approach opens up a more relaxed, flexible space where discussion flows more freely and where there is more space for co-creating ideas. We have also gathered some specific ideas and examples.

Gamification

Adding gamification elements to your consultation or event is an excellent way to engage your participants. Gamification involves adding games or game-like elements to your consultations. The type of gamification you use will depend on your desired outcome.

Example 1: Treasure hunt

"Where will the EU put its money?"

Treasure hunts engage participants to be active explorers of a topic, helping them engage with complex topics through discovery and decision-making. You can create different stations around the venue. Each station represents one EU long-term budget theme, for example:

- Climate action
- Social cohesion & regional development
- Youth, education & research
- Migration & asylum
- Democracy and citizen engagement
- Defence & security
- Digital transformation
- External action & enlargement

At each station, participants complete a small challenge and get a stamp to put into their booklet (or something similar). The same is possible with different formats of workshops and discussions, so participants have to attend different formats (and get different stickers) to complete their booklet and be able to spin a wheel, win a prize etc. You could also give participants the option of adding priorities to certain topics, such as stating which EU priorities are important to them and should receive funding.

Example 2: Simulation game

"Build the EU budget"

A simulation game transforms the EU budget from an abstract topic into a hands-on decision-making experience.

Participants receive a fixed budget, allocate funds across priorities and justify their choices. You could create several groups that get information on different topics related to EU priorities and the next EU budget. They can take time to learn about the topic.

Question 3: How do you harvest input for your end report?

Collecting input for the final report requires organising, summarising and interpreting the information gathered during the consultation to accurately represent participants' contributions and ensure the final report reflects the discussions meaningfully.

- **Harvesters:** When working in small groups, you can use harvesters. While they are not the facilitator of the session, their main job is to take notes on what is said and summarise the main arguments.
  - Advantages: Very accurate.
  - Disadvantages: You need many people to make it happen.
- **Flipcharts and post-it notes:** When working in groups, you can ask participants to note down their main ideas on a flipchart or on post-its.
  - Advantages: Participants take notes independently.
  - Disadvantages: Only majority options written down; difficulty deciphering handwriting or bullet points after.
- **Digital tools:** When working in groups, you can also ask participants to note down their main ideas on digital platforms such as Padlet or Miro.
  - Advantages: Participants take notes independently.
  - Disadvantages: Only the majority options might be written down; difficulty deciphering bullet points after; participants can become distracted when using their digital devices.
- **Creative outputs:** When working in small groups, you can also ask participants to summarise their results through creative formats such as short videos or theatre plays.
  - Advantages: Encourages engagement, creativity and ownership of the results; could be useful for social media stories and posts; helps participants express ideas in a more memorable and accessible way.
  - Disadvantages: Outputs may be more difficult to standardise and compare across groups and may require extra time.
- **Mixed methods:** This helps reach participants with different communication styles and levels of confidence. This can include group discussions, silent reflections, written input, or plenary sharing sessions.
  - **Advantages:** More inclusive, as quieter or less confident participants can contribute in a format that suits them; captures a richer and more varied range of input; cross-checking between methods improves the reliability of the findings.
  - **Disadvantages:** Needs more preparation, time and facilitation skills; input from different formats can be harder to combine and compare; risk of overloading participants or making the session feel fragmented.

Question 4: How does it all flow together?

The design of the flow of events involves intentional structuring and connection of different elements, such as workshops, panels, and creative activities. Rather than treating each part as separate, the programme should be carefully 'puzzled together' so that each

segment builds on the previous one, creating a coherent and engaging experience for participants. Ask yourself:

- How have you structured your national consultation from start to finish?
- How do the individual sessions flow and connect with each other?
- How much time has been allocated to each part of the programme, and why?
- How do you ensure clarity, coherence, and active engagement throughout the process?
- Is the consultation plan realistic within the allocated timeframes, and is there enough time for participants to process information and contribute meaningfully?

1.5 Logistics & Setting

Your location will have a big impact on how your consultation will go as it will impact the methodology you can use as well as the people that can and will attend your event.

We recommend looking out for the following aspects:

- **Accessibility:** Ensure physical accessibility for people with different mobility needs. Consider proximity to public transport, parking options, and whether the venue offers ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms.
- **Geographic reach:** If you organise several consultations, consider having them in different or decentralised venues to enable participation and attendance from different regions and communities, not just from capitals or major cities.
- **Neutrality:** Avoid political or institutional spaces that could imply ownership of the process. Public libraries, community centres, cultural hubs and educational institutions often provide more balanced settings.
- **Welcoming atmosphere:** Choose bright, well-ventilated environments with flexible furniture arrangements as these spaces allow for more small group discussions and informal exchanges. This will help build safer and braver environments. Also consider the lighting in the room, as the more natural light there is, the more welcoming the setting will be (e.g. a cellar room with neon bright lights might lead to participants feeling tired).
- **Special venue:** You could use a venue that is usually closed or used for private events, like a historical one. This would also attract people and give them the chance to experience an event in a special place in their local area.

Tip: Design your space

Design your consultation space in a way that is easy to navigate and pleasant to be in. A well-planned space should help guide how participants behave and can help make them more interested.

This can include dividing the space into clearly defined zones, each with a specific purpose. You can give each area a distinctive identity. Use visual cues like colours, signage and thematic decoration. For example, you should create zones such as "Learn" "Engage", "Relax", with each representing a different objective. Consistent colour-coding across materials and signage helps participants quickly understand where they are and what to expect.

You can take this a step further by naming individual workshop spaces in a way that reinforces the overall concept. Align the activities in each space by linking the name with the broader goal of the zone. For instance, a "Theatre" space will host performances or creative sessions, while a "City Hall" area will focus on discussion and decision-making.

Weather-based scenarios

When choosing your location, do keep in mind different weather scenarios. Adverse weather is a key risk for larger events, especially those with outdoor components. Conditions such as extreme heat or heavy rain can disrupt both outdoor and indoor activities, and affect the overall flow of the event. Make sure to:

- Monitor weather forecasts closely before and during the event.
- Ensure the programme is flexible and can be adjusted if needed.
- Coordinate with the venue to ensure weather-appropriate infrastructure, and if not available, think about different solutions.
- Prepare clear communication to inform participants of any changes.

Scenario 1: High temperatures during the event.

- Check ventilation and availability of shaded areas (especially at registration).
- Ensure sufficient access to drinking water.
- Consider adapting the schedule to avoid peak heat.

Scenario 2: Strong winds and rain affecting attendance and safety.

- Ensure the venue is adequately protected.
- Prepare indoor alternatives for outdoor activities.
- Anticipate possible travel disruptions for participants.

For more information on how to make sure your venue is accessible and inclusive, check out the Inclusion Manual.

1.6 Prepare Facilitators & Invite Experts

Another important aspect to ensure that the consultation goes well is based on the way you choose and prepare facilitators, moderators and experts who will be responsible for creating the spaces and providing input during the event.

Trainers, Facilitators and Moderators

Trainers, facilitators and moderators are responsible for creating an environment in which dialogue can unfold, encouraging participation from all attendees and ensuring discussions remain focused and respectful. Depending on your objectives, different facilitation formats may be more effective in encouraging participation and gathering meaningful input. We recommend including your trainers from the start of the design process as they may have innovative ideas on how to structure the whole flow of your national consultation.

When choosing facilitators and moderators, ask yourself the following questions:

- Who will facilitate and moderate the discussions, and what criteria will be used to select them?
- What skills, competencies, and subject-matter knowledge do facilitators need to have?

What to look for:

- Experience moderating group discussions and participatory processes;
- Ability to remain impartial and not influence discussion outcomes;
- Ability to communicate clearly and listen actively;

- Ability to manage diverse group dynamics (e.g. dominant voices, quiet participants, conflicts);
- Ability to adapt their style based on the group size, energy, and context;
- Time management skills to keep discussions focused and on schedule;
- Cultural sensitivity, respecting diverse backgrounds and using inclusive language;
- Familiarity with facilitation methods such as a World Café, group work, or digital platforms;
- Subject matter understanding, with basic knowledge of the topic without steering opinions.

Experts

Experts contribute knowledge, evidence and context to enrich the discussion and help participants to better understand the topic. As well as being experts in their field, they should be able to communicate clearly and engage with a non-expert audience. Their role should be clearly defined to ensure that they support the process without dominating it.

When choosing an expert, ask yourself the following questions:

- Which expert(s) will be invited and on what basis?
- What expertise or perspective will they bring to the consultation?
- Can they communicate clearly to a non-expert audience?
- Have they demonstrated experience as an effective public speaker in similar settings?
- Are they credible and trusted? Are experts able to question each other?
- How are they expected to contribute to or influence the consultation (e.g. providing evidence, framing issues or shaping discussion)?
- Are they open to interacting with participants?

❗**Bear in mind that the term 'expert' is broad and can refer to different types of knowledge. Someone can become an expert through academic qualifications, professional experience, or personal experience.**

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Implementation: During the Event

2.1 Create an Inclusive & Safe Environment

Your organisation should have a safeguarding policy for events. If not, it's important that you have one before implementing the event and to present it at the start of the event. Make sure that participants know:

- expected and unexpected behaviours
- reporting mechanisms

For the safeguarding policy to *de facto* create a safe and inclusive environment, make sure your team can answer the following questions:

- Who is responsible for responding to safeguarding concerns if they arise?
- Who is the first point of contact for participants and who can be contacted when assistance is needed?
- Is there a clear escalation process for sensitive or inappropriate situations?

Collective code of conduct: A common facilitation technique is to create and agree to a Code of Conduct in addition to setting safeguarding rules. Co-creating rules often leads to a stronger commitment to them. For more detailed information, look at the Inclusion Manual.

2.2 Welcome & Context Setting

The opening of your consultation sets the tone for everything that follows. Before any discussion begins, participants need to understand three things: why they are here, what will they be talking about, and what will happen with what they say. Getting this right in the first 20–30 minutes of your event is one of the most important investments you can make – a confident, clear, and energising opening creates momentum that carries through the entire day.

Welcoming participants

Your welcome should do more than signal the formal start of the event. It should make participants feel that their presence genuinely matters. What participants need to hear at the very start is simple:

- That they are welcome, regardless of their background or level of knowledge on EU topics;
- That this is a space for open conversation, not a test or a lecture;
- Who is organising the event and why.

If you have a hosting partner (e.g. a local authority, a civil society organisation, a university) this is a good moment for them to say a few words, as it helps anchor the event in the local context and signals community ownership of the process.

Explaining the purpose of the event

Avoid institutional language and acronyms. Assume that most people in the room have never heard of the EU long-term budget before – because most of them probably haven't.

A good explanation on purpose covers three things:

1. **What the EU long-term budget is in plain terms.** You do not need to go into detail here, a simple framing is enough: "The EU has a long-term budget that decides how much money goes to things like farming, regional development, research, climate action, and many other areas that affect all of us. Every seven years, EU countries negotiate and agree on this budget. That process is starting again now, and we believe citizens should have a say in it."
2. **Why this consultation is happening.** Participants should understand that this is not a box-ticking exercise. Be explicit about the fact that MOSAIC is running consultations across multiple countries, that the input collected will be synthesised into a European report, and that this report will be shared with policy-makers involved in the EU long-term budget negotiations. The more concrete you can be about this chain, the more motivated participants will be to engage seriously.
3. **What participants are being asked to do.** Are they sharing opinions? Setting priorities? Debating trade-offs? Be honest and specific about the type of input you are looking for (which is defined in section 1.1). Participants engage more meaningfully when they understand their role.

Generating energy and motivation from the start

Context-setting can easily become dry if it is delivered as a monologue. Think carefully about how to make the opening interactive and energising, even before the substantive discussions begin.

Step-by-step guide

1. **Use an icebreaker that connects to the topic.** Rather than a generic getting-to-know-you exercise, consider an opener that already gets participants thinking about the themes of the event.

   → **For example,** a quick show-of-hands or polling question like "Which of these areas do you think the EU spends the most money on?" can surface the knowledge gap immediately, generate a moment of surprise or curiosity, and transition naturally into the context-setting.

2. **Share a concrete example.** Show how EU budget decisions have affected something tangible in your country or region.

   → **For example,** this can be a funded project, a policy change, or highlight a community that benefited or lost out. This moves the conversation from abstract to personal very quickly.

3. **Invite participants into the process.** Rather than just presenting the agenda, frame the day as something participants are co-authors of.

   → **For example, open with: "**This consultation isn't about us telling you what the next EU budget should look like. It's about hearing what you think it should

prioritise, and your input will feed directly into [xxx]. Throughout the day, you'll be shaping three things: what matters the most, what's missing, and what we should push for."

BUT, **manage expectations honestly.** Be clear about what this consultation can and cannot do. Participants should leave with a feeling that their voice matters, but they should not be given unrealistic expectations about direct policy impact.

2.3 Capture Contributions Effectively

Capturing contributions is one of the most important responsibilities of your team during the consultation. The quality and completeness of your documentation directly determines the quality of your national report and, ultimately, the weight that your citizens' input carries in the broader European MOSAIC project process and EU-level discussions. If contributions are not captured well, the conversation stays in the room.

Why it matters

A consultation that produces rich, diverse, well-documented input can credibly claim to represent citizens' views. One that produces vague summaries, incomplete notes, or only the loudest voices, cannot. Good documentation also signals respect: participants who feel their words have been carefully recorded are more likely to trust that their input will actually be used.

Beyond the event itself, well-structured documentation makes your job significantly easier when it comes to analysis and reporting (covered in section 3.1). The more structure you capture during the event, the less reconstruction you will have to do afterwards.

What should be captured

Not everything said in a consultation needs to be documented, but the following should always be recorded:

- **Opinions and positions:** what participants think about a topic, including minority or dissenting views, not just majority sentiment;
- **Priorities:** what participants identify as most important, especially when they are asked to rank or choose between options;
- **Trade-offs:** where participants acknowledge tension between competing values or interests (e.g. "we want more climate investment but we're worried about costs for farmers");
- **Concrete proposals or ideas:** specific suggestions that participants make about what the EU should do;
- **Patterns of agreement and disagreement:** where strong consensus emerged, and where significant divergence of views were present.

You do not need to transcribe every word. What you need is a structured, honest record of the range of views expressed and how they were distributed across the group.

How to capture and when

Effective documentation requires preparation, not improvisation.

- Before the event, **clearly decide who is responsible** for capturing what, in which format, and at which moments.
- **Assign a dedicated note-taker per group**. Every breakout group or table discussion should have someone whose primary role during that session is to capture contributions – **this is different from a facilitator**.

- **Use a structured template**. Rather than open-ended notes, give your note-takers a simple template aligned with your thematic focus areas and the type of input you are collecting. This makes cross-group comparison much easier afterwards.

  → **For example,** a basic template might include: the theme being discussed, the main points raised, areas of agreement, areas of disagreement, notable quotes, and any proposals made.

- **Capture in real time, not from memory**. Notes taken during a discussion are always more accurate than notes reconstructed afterwards. Brief your note-takers to write continuously during discussions, even if their notes are rough; they can be tidied up immediately after the session while the memory is fresh.
- **Use visual capture where possible**. If participants are working on shared materials such as sticky notes, priority boards, voting cards, ranking exercises etc, photograph these before they are moved or cleared. These materials are primary evidence of the group's work and should be preserved.

2.4 Manage Challenges & Conflict

As your national consultation is a public event attended by many different people, it is normal for challenges and conflicts to arise. There are, however, some mechanisms that can help you prepare for and respond appropriately to such situations.

Pre-meeting: Before the national consultation begins, organise a meeting with the team, including facilitators and moderators, to discuss different scenarios and how to handle them. This is also an opportunity to ensure that everyone knows who is responsible for what, and who to approach in each case.

Check-in meetings: Create opportunities during your consultations where your team, or at least part of it, can check-in, discuss different challenges, and respond to them. Part of these check-ins should also be to check-in on each other to make sure that everyone in the team is feeling comfortable.

Support person/co-facilitator: Ensure that, in all sessions, there are people present who are not responsible for moderating or facilitating, but who can provide background support. If you are a facilitator or moderator, it can sometimes be difficult to intervene immediately, as you have to consider many things and may miss certain behaviours if you are caught up in the flow of the session. A support person (e.g. a co-facilitator) can help to spot and react to behaviour that breaches the code of conduct or endangers safeguarding.

Person of confidence: Appoint two people from the team as persons of confidence. Ensure that the awareness team comprises different genders to ensure that participants feel comfortable approaching various topics. These people also need to be available and approachable for participants during the event. This means that participants should know who they are, and they should not seem busy or be absent.

Anonymised feedback: Provide participants with the opportunity to report breaches of the Safeguarding Policy or Code of Conduct anonymously. This can be done via an online form or a physical box. It is important that these are accessible, either by making a QR code for the form widely available, or by placing a box in an easily accessible but not overly visible location. You need to make sure that this is checked regularly to be able to respond.

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Managing Conflicts

There are also many situations and challenges that do not include a breach of Code of Conduct, but can still be challenging to handle. As a facilitator or moderator, your role is to create an inclusive and balanced discussion environment in which all participants feel comfortable contributing. This involves supporting different communication styles and managing group dynamics. Below are some tips on how to deal with different situations and behaviours.

Before attempting to manage a 'conflict', ask yourself: is this a breach of the Code of Conduct? If yes, take appropriate measures (see next chapter on breaches of the Code of Conduct). If no, you or your colleagues may want to attempt to manage the conflict.

Not every heated disagreement should be automatically treated as a personal conflict requiring separate mediation or resolution between individuals. In many group discussions, particularly those involving complex topics such as values, trade-offs or public policy, participants may strongly disagree without having an interpersonal conflict. For instance, one participant might advocate for intensive farming to ensure affordable food, while another might prioritise climate mitigation to protect the planet. Such disagreements may reflect legitimate differences in values and priorities, rather than an actual conflict.

In these situations, facilitators can consider a range of approaches, depending on the context:

- You can close the discussion and move on if the exchange is no longer productive or if sufficient perspectives have already been heard. Participants do not always need to reach an agreement.
- You can acknowledge the legitimacy of multiple perspectives. Recognise that competing values and priorities may both be understandable and important, and that complex issues often require consideration of different viewpoints.
- You can encourage broader participation. Check the room to understand where support or different perspectives lie, or invite contributions from participants who have not yet spoken, especially if the current speakers are becoming increasingly heated.

However, some conflicts need to be resolved. In order to resolve a conflict, both parties must be willing to resolve the conflict, and have open and honest communication.

If a conflict arises during your activity:

Acknowledge the conflict. If it only involves a few individuals, invite them to speak separately from the rest of the group. It can help to bring them to a different environment when doing this.
Gather information by asking each party about their perspective on what happened. It may help for each party to take a short walk, with or without company.
Identify the underlying causes. What are each party's needs that need to be addressed or even acknowledged? Make sure all parties involved are aware of these needs.
Invite the parties to propose a resolution. This should take into account the above mentioned needs. It will likely involve one of five outcomes: competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising or collaborating.
Implement the solution. If the conflict persists, escalate the issue to the person dedicated in your safeguarding policy.
Where possible, **follow up with each party** to ensure the conflict is resolved.

Finally, remember:

"The goal of conflict resolution is to establish, as soon as possible, a situation in which both sides benefit."

Below you can find some situations that might arise during your consultations and strategies on how you could respond:

Situation	Signals	Strategy
Dominant speaker	One person talks for longer stretches of time repeatedly, while others disengage	Redirect + introduce a time limit Try saying: ● "Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet." ● "I'm going to pause you there – can you wrap in 10 seconds?" ● "Quick round: one sentence each."
Quiet participants	Some participants do not speak up in a group.	Gentle check-in during break (1:1) Try saying: ● "Hi, how are you finding the session so far?" ● "Just checking-in! How is it going for you?"
Silence / low energy	No one responds, awkward pauses, low participation.	Switch format → pairs or small groups Try saying: ● "Take 1 minute in pairs, then we'll share back." ● "Write down one idea, then we'll go around." ● "Discuss with the person next to you."
Conflict / tension	Interruptions, defensive tone, escalating disagreement.	Reframe + refocus on goal Try saying: ● "Sounds like we have two perspectives – let's look at both of them." ● "What's the underlying concern on each side?"
Confusion / overwhelm	Blank looks, scattered answers, repeated questions.	Simplify + make it visual Try saying: ● "Let's simplify: there are just two parts..." ● "Step 1 is X, step 2 is Y." ● "Think of it like this..." (analogy)
Off-topic drift	Conversation veers away from the objective	Acknowledge + park it Try saying: ● "That's useful, but slightly off our focus – let's park it."

		• "I'm adding that to the parking lot so we don't lose it." • "Let's come back to our main question..."

Breach of Code of Conduct

Many conflicts will not include a breach of code of conduct, however, some will and it's especially important to think closely about what to do if it does happen. Large public consultations may attract disruptive behaviour, including the coordinated participation of anti-democratic groups and incidents of hate speech. Organisers should be prepared to respond quickly while maintaining a safe and respectful environment.

In these situations, you can try to:

- Clearly communicate and enforce rules around code of conduct and safeguarding.
- Establish clear escalation procedures and define the roles of those who will intervene, and when and how they will intervene.
- Ensure there are mechanisms and procedures that support victims/survivors, not only perpetrators.
- Brief facilitators on how to identify and manage disruptive behaviour.

Scenario 1: Groups attend or engage with the consultation with the intention of disrupting discussions

- Monitor registrations and online engagement where possible.
- Ensure that facilitators can maintain focus and prevent the discussions from being dominated e.g. through having a facilitator and co-facilitator.
- Be prepared to limit participation or remove individuals if necessary, in-line with the rules.

Scenario 2: Participants engage in offensive, discriminatory or harmful behaviour

- Set clear expectations that such behaviour will not be tolerated.
- Intervene immediately to stop harmful speech and protect participants.
- Follow established procedures for issuing warnings or removing individuals if necessary.

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Follow-up: After the Event

3.1 Analyse & Synthesize Results

An analysis is not about selecting the quotes you liked best or summarising the most memorable moments. It is a systematic process of working through everything that was captured, identifying patterns and tensions, and translating raw citizen input into findings that are honest, structured, and useful. Done well, it is what gives your national report credibility.

Who should do the analysis?

Before diving into the method, decide who is responsible for the analysis. A few principles:

- **More than one person should be involved.** Single-person analysis is more prone to unconscious bias and selective reading. Having at least two people work through the material independently, and then compare their findings, produces more reliable results.
- **Analysts should be familiar with the consultation, but not be too close to it.** Ideally, the people doing the analysis will have attended the event and understand its context, but they should not have such a strong stake in a particular outcome that it shapes what they see in the data. If the lead organiser is also the sole analyst, ask a colleague to do a second read of the findings before they are synthesised.
- **Involve your note-takers.** The people who captured contributions during the event hold important contextual knowledge as they remember nuances, body language, moments of strong emotion or consensus. So, we suggest a debrief with note-takers before starting the formal analysis.

Let's go step-by-step

Step 1: Organise your raw material
Before you can analyse anything, you need to assemble and organise everything that was captured. This includes written notes from all group discussions, physical materials (e.g. sticky notes, ranking boards, voting results), outputs from any digital tools used, and any written responses collected from participants.

Consolidate everything into a single working document or shared workspace, organised by session or thematic area.

Step 2: Thematic analysis and clustering
Read through all the material once without coding or categorising, just to get a feel for the overall texture of what was said.

On a second read, start tagging or highlighting statements according to the theme they relate to. Here, you will use your pre-defined thematic focus areas (from section 1.2) as

a starting framework, whilst staying open to themes that emerge organically from the discussions.

Proceed with grouping the statements that express the same underlying concern or proposal, even if they are worded differently. A participant who says, "We need cheaper public transport" and one who says, "People can't afford to get to work", may both be pointing to the same underlying priority.

Look for sub-themes within broader categories: for example, within a theme like "climate action", you can find distinct clusters around energy costs, agricultural pressure, and youth concern for the future. Note which themes appeared across multiple groups and which were specific to a particular table, region, or demographic.

Step 3: Identify key insights, trends, and tensions
Once your material is organised thematically, move from description to interpretation. Ask yourself:

- Was there any strong consensus? Identify moments where participants across different backgrounds and groups converged on the same priority, concern, or proposal.
- Were there any significant tensions? If participants were divided on a topic and there is tension, then this should be named as a finding in itself.
- What surprised you? Topics that generated unexpectedly strong reactions or concerns that came up unprompted, are worth flagging explicitly, as they often carry the most insight.
- What was absent? Sometimes what participants did not say is significant in itself. If a topic you expected to be central barely came up, that is worth noting.

Step 4: Structure findings for policy use
Raw insights need to be translated into a format that is useful for policy-makers. A useful structure for each thematic finding is as follows:

- **The finding:** a clear, one-sentence statement of what participants said or prioritised.
- **The evidence:** specific examples, quotes, or data points from the consultation that support it.
- **The implication:** what this finding suggests in terms of policy direction or priority, framed as citizen input rather than as a policy recommendation from your organisation.

Example: "Participants consistently identified affordable housing as a priority area for EU cohesion funding, particularly in mid-sized cities that they felt had been overlooked by previous investment cycles. One participant put it directly: 'The money always goes to the capital or the very rural areas while the towns in between are invisible.' This suggests strong citizen support for a rebalancing of cohesion fund allocation towards secondary urban centres."

Step 5: Quality check your analysis
Before moving to the report, run a final check on your findings:

- Are the full range of views represented? Make sure your synthesis does not only reflect the majority or the most vocal, but that minority perspectives and dissenting voices are also present in the findings.
- Are your findings grounded in evidence? Every key finding should be traceable back to specific, documented contributions, and not just be a general impression of how the day went.
- Have you distinguished between what participants said and your interpretation of it? Both are valuable, but they should be clearly separated in your analysis.
- Does your synthesis fairly represent participants across different demographic groups? If your findings disproportionately reflect the views of one group, flag this as a limitation.

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3.2 Communicate Results

1. Communicating with participants

Your first obligation after the consultation is to communicate to the people who took part. People who feel their contribution was taken seriously are far more likely to engage again in future processes.

Send a summary of results promptly. Aim to share a summary of the key findings with participants within two to three weeks of the event, while their memory of the consultation is still fresh. This should be a concise, readable, two-page summary or a short email. What matters is that participants can recognise their own contributions in what you send back to them.

Use plain, accessible language. Your summary should be written for a general audience, not for policy-makers or researchers. Avoid jargon, keep sentences short, and lead with the most important findings. If your consultation covered multiple themes, use a simple structure of one paragraph per theme, as summarising what participants said is usually enough.

Be honest about what happens next. Tell participants clearly about what will be done with their input, when the national report will be published, how findings will feed into the European MOSAIC project synthesis, and when and where they can expect to see the results used.

Acknowledge the diversity of views. Resist the temptation to present a single, unified message from the consultation. If there were significant differences of opinion, your summary should reflect that. Participants who held minority views should be able to see that their perspective was heard and recorded.

2. Communicating with stakeholders

Use your networks actively. Share findings through your organisation's existing channels (e.g. newsletters, social media, partner networks) and encourage stakeholders to do the same. If a media partner or journalist covered the consultation event, follow-up with them when the results are ready.

Consider a stakeholder briefing. For high-priority stakeholders such as those influencing national policy debates, a short in-person or online briefing can be more effective than a written document alone. It leaves the space for questions, discussion, and a stronger sense of connection between the citizen input and the stakeholder's own work.

3. Communicating with policy-makers

Policy-makers are a distinct audience with distinct needs. They are typically time-poor, focused on specific policy areas, and interested in actionable findings rather than process descriptions. Reaching them effectively requires a different communication approach than the one you use for participants or civil society.

Lead with the findings, not the methodology. Policy-makers do not need a detailed account of how the consultation was run. What they need is a clear, concise statement of what citizens said, and what it implies for the decisions they are proposing to make.

Be specific about policy implications. Where your findings have a clear implication for a specific policy debate or budget decision, name it. For example: “Participants across all age groups expressed strong support for maintaining and increasing EU investment in regional transport infrastructure, particularly in areas that have seen service reductions in

recent years. This finding is directly relevant to the current debate on the allocation of the EU's cohesion funds in the post-2027 EU long-term budget."

Use the right channels. Consider who the relevant policy-makers are at the national level (e.g. members of parliament, ministry officials, national EU coordinators) and how they typically receive and engage with input. A formal briefing note, a meeting request, or a presentation at a relevant parliamentary or ministerial event may all be appropriate depending on your context and relationships.

Making results accessible and engaging

Regardless of the audience, how you present your results will shape how they are received. A dense, text-heavy document is less likely to be read and shared than findings that are communicated in a clear, visually engaging format.

Use visuals to communicate patterns. Simple charts, word clouds, or infographics can make findings immediately legible in a way that paragraphs of text cannot. If participants ranked priorities, show that ranking visually. If a particular theme came up across every group, make that visible.

Let citizens speak for themselves. Well-chosen quotes from participants are one of the most powerful communication tools available to you. They bring the findings to life, humanise the process, and make it harder to dismiss the results as abstract or manufactured. Select quotes that are representative, that capture a perspective clearly, and that reflect the diversity of voices in the room.

Keep it short where possible. Produce a full report for the record (covered in section 3.2), but equally invest in shorter, sharper communication formats: a one-pager, a visual summary, a short video, or a social media thread that can reach people who will never open the full document.

Feeding insights into national and EU-level processes

Your national consultation does not exist in isolation. Its findings feed into the European MOSAIC projects European synthesis, which in turn is intended to contribute to the EU-level conversation on the post-2027 EU long-term budget. Understanding and communicating this chain of impact is important.

Be explicit about the European connection. When you share results nationally, make clear that your country's findings are part of a larger European picture. This adds weight to the findings and helps national audiences understand that the conversation happening in your country is happening across the continent simultaneously.

Flag findings that have particular European relevance. Some findings from your consultation will be specific to your national context. Others are likely to resonate across multiple countries and carry particular weight in the European synthesis. Where you can identify these, note them explicitly in your communication.

Connect citizen input to live policy debates. The EU long-term budget negotiation process has a specific timeline, and your findings will be most impactful if they arrive when they can actually be used. Stay informed about the key moments in the negotiation calendar and time your communication accordingly.



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