



**Women. Men. Different. Equal.**  
Equal Opportunities Commission

# **Consulting stakeholders on gender equality**

**Guidance for GB public authorities**

**gender**  
equality duty

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## **1. TOP TIPS ON CONSULTATION AND THE GENDER EQUALITY DUTY**

1. You are required to consult stakeholders and take into account any relevant information in choosing your gender equality objectives under the specific duties.
2. Your gender equality scheme must include an outline of your plans for consultation.
3. Many organisations will have well-established consultation systems in place that they can build on to meet the gender duty.
4. Consulting under the duty means consulting both women and men, making sure your consultation process asks questions about gender equality issues and ensuring both women and men are able to contribute to consultation processes.
5. In some situations it may be appropriate to hold consultations for specific groups or in a single-sex environment.
6. Where women or men have been under-represented or disadvantaged in a policy or service area, you may need to make special efforts to encourage participation.
7. Many voluntary and community organisations have valuable insights into gender equality issues.
8. The gender equality duty does not prescribe the number of people who should be involved in your consultation, but we recommend that you consult a representative sample of stakeholders.
9. Your consultation findings should feed into your information gathering processes, your gender impact assessments and your gender equality objectives.

## 2. CONSULTATION AND THE GENDER DUTY

The specific duties require you to consult stakeholders and to take into account any relevant information in choosing your gender equality objectives.

In light of the wide range of information that is available on consultation across various sectors, this guidance is relatively brief. It provides advice for public authorities on the implications of the gender equality duty for their consultation processes. It recognises that public bodies will already be carrying out consultation which they can build on to meet the gender duty.

### What is consultation?

Consultation means taking into account the views of anyone who could have an interest in your work. Thus could mean employees, service users and others, including trade unions.

For example, in a school the stakeholders would include staff, pupils, parents, potential parents, governors, unions and people who use the premises for other activities.

### Why carry out consultation under the gender duty?

The specific duties require listed public authorities to consult stakeholders when identifying their gender equality objectives. The requirement is to consult employees, service users and others (including trade unions) who appear to the authority to have an interest in the way the authority carries out its functions. In addition, the scheme itself must include an outline of the actions which the authority intends to take or has taken in order to consult.

Consultation can bring many benefits to your work on the gender equality duty, including:

- Building a better picture of the most important gender issues in your work.
- Gathering evidence to use in determining priorities
- Gathering evidence for your impact assessment process
- Receiving feedback on your draft objectives
- Improving ownership of your gender equality objectives
- Improving accountability to your staff, service users and the general public
- Building a useful baseline for use in monitoring

### What would good consultation look like under the gender duty?

As most public bodies already undertake consultations on a variety of issues, we recognise that many organisations will have well-established systems in place that they can build on to meet the gender duty. As with any consultation, it is important that your consultation is meaningful. This means that it should be carried out before your policies have been decided and your objectives chosen, and that those who have been consulted should feel that their views have been taken into account.

Consulting under the gender duty means that you need to:

- **Consult both women and men (and, where appropriate, girls and boys).**
- **Make sure your consultation process asks questions about gender equality issues.**
- **Make sure women and men both feel able to contribute to your consultation processes.**

The second point involves making sure that questions are structured to bring out any differences between women and men. For example, when consulting on maternity services, a hospital should ensure their consultation processes are able to pick up any differences in the experiences of service users as a result of their gender. They should not assume men do not have anything to contribute about their own experiences or their partner's maternity care.

The third point means using methods that both men and women feel confident and comfortable with. For example, some women may be less likely to attend, or to speak out at a public meeting if they do not feel sufficiently confident, if their community discourages women taking up public roles, or if there are language barriers.

In some circumstances it may be appropriate to hold consultations for specific groups or in a single-sex environment. We recommend that consultation on employment and service issues with transsexual people should be conducted separately, although they should be actively encouraged to participate in mainstream consultation processes.

Where women or men have been under-represented or disadvantaged in a policy or service area, you may need to make special efforts to encourage participation. For example, women have rarely been involved in decision-making on regeneration. Similarly, men may not have been previously included in discussions on childcare services. Consultation is also important where one sex is under-represented in the decision-making processes of an organisation. For example, a much lower proportion of local authority councillors and chief executives are women than men.

Many voluntary and community organisations have valuable insights into gender equality issues and we expect them to be important contributors to this process.

#### **Examples of experiences that voluntary groups can bring include:**

- Men's health groups contributing to the planning of GP services
- Older women's organisations giving insights into transport design
- Bengali men's groups responding to adult education planning
- Youth organisations advising education bodies on the development of sex education materials by holding separate consultations for boys and girls.

You should bear in mind, however, that many organisations have limited capacity and resources and others may need support in developing their capacity.

#### **How big does my consultation have to be?**

The gender equality duty does not prescribe the number of people who should be involved in your consultation. Your objective should be to involve a representative sample of your

stakeholders in your consultation processes. This means making sure that women as well as men, girls as well as boys are involved in your processes and are **equally able to contribute to the process**.

### **What methods can I use to encourage both men and women to get involved?**

The GEM project in Manchester has developed guidance on engaging with women and men in your community which you may find useful in developing your consultation process, in particular during formal consultation meetings. You can download a copy of the recommendations here- <http://www.eoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=19995>. Some of their recommendations are set out below:

A range of methods can be used to encourage both women and men to get involved in consultation:

- Use different methods of consultation (such as focus groups, surveys or interviews as well as formal consultation meetings)
- Rotate the chair of meetings so men and women have this role
- Try different meeting formats (such as including small group discussions in addition to large plenary sessions which can be intimidating for many people)
- Make sure there is a good balance of men and women being consulted
- Analyse men and women's contribution to meetings to ensure a better balance (so you can take steps to change consultation methods and meeting formats if it is clear that one group are less willing or able to participate in your current structures)
- Use male and female images in non-stereotypical roles in marketing materials
- Hold meetings at varied times so men and women can attend
- Hold women and men-only meetings where appropriate

### **How should I report on my consultation?**

In your gender equality scheme you are required to set out your plans for consultation. This could include information about who you will consult, how, when and why. The extent to which you consult should be determined by your size, remit and resources. You may find it useful to adapt your existing consultation processes to take account of the duty rather than setting up something new. You may also find it useful to consult stakeholders again, e.g. during implementation or within a review of your scheme. The clearer you are about your plans, the easier it will be for enforcement bodies to measure the action you have taken.

### **How should my consultation link to other areas of the duty?**

Remember that consultation is not a stand-alone process. Your consultation findings should feed into your information gathering processes, your gender impact assessments and your gender equality objectives.