



Open Government Support Package*

(*please note that this document is an unofficial translation by the OECD and is no official document of the Government of Finland)



VALTIOVARAINMINISTERIÖ

Open Government Checklist

- ❑ Employees at our organisation are familiar with the principles of open government.
- ❑ The language used by our organisation has been made clearer.
- ❑ Our organisation offers material in simplified language.
- ❑ Documents prepared by our organisation have been made easier to understand with visual aids.
- ❑ Our organisation's website is accessible.
- ❑ When initiating a project, we always plan ways for citizens to participate in its planning.
- ❑ We offer a variety of channels for participation to meet the needs of people with varying requirements and abilities.
- ❑ We pay attention to accessibility, including with regard to electronic channels.
- ❑ To enable participation, we utilise methods that are appropriate for the target group and the matter in question.
- ❑ During the initial stages of decision-making, we use the Otakantaa.fi online tool for public involvement.
- ❑ During the planning stages, we use the Lausuntopalvelu.fi online service, which enables citizens to respond to official initiatives.
- ❑ Our organisation has opened data.
- ❑ Instructions on open data are available to users.
- ❑ We have assessed the functioning of our public participation methods and have developed them on the basis of the assessment results.

Contact us: avoinhallinto.fi / avoinhallinto@vm.fi

The background is a solid teal color. Scattered across the page are several white icons of hands shaking, representing agreement or partnership. The icons vary in size and orientation, with some appearing larger and more prominent than others. The central text is in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

Open Government

What Is Open Government?


Open government means

- › transparent governance,
- › accessible government information and services,
- › government that is receptive to new ideas, requirements and needs.

Open governance practices offer a tool for improving the quality of democracy to better meet the needs of citizens.

Why Is Open Government Developed?

- › To strengthen citizens' trust in government.
- › To provide citizens and civil society with opportunities to participate in societal development.
- › To make government data open to ensure transparency in governance.
- › To prevent corruption.

The background is a solid teal color. It features several white icons of hands shaking in a firm grip, arranged in a circular pattern around the central text. There are five icons in the top row and five in the bottom row, with a larger central icon in each row.

The Principles of Open Government

Shared Principles of Open Government

› CITIZENS' RIGHTS

- We promote the right of citizens to have access to information and to participate in the development of public solutions and services.
- We offer information on matters during the early stages of decision-making to ensure that public opinion has a real influence on the final decisions.

› OPENNESS

- We allow access to information on government actions and to government data resources in an equal and fair manner. The information is easy to access and utilise.

› RESPONSIBILITY

- We ensure that citizens' views are taken into account at various stages of the decision-making and implementation processes.
- We offer information in advance on all the stages, goals and limitations related to the gauging of public opinion and citizen involvement.
- We ensure that the information we provide is accurate and up to date.

› EQUAL ACCESS

- We offer all citizens the opportunity to participate in the preparatory work and development of decision-making.
- We use both traditional methods and electronic channels for participation and the provision of information.

› SEAMLESS OPERATIONS

- We plan our operations in collaboration with various administrative authorities in order to avoid overlapping work and conflicting and fragmented operations.

› RESOURCES

- We strive to create an organisational culture based on open governance, ensuring that we possess sufficient expertise and resources to guarantee open decision-making using electronic and traditional channels.

› ASSESSMENT AND CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT

- We regularly assess the realisation of open government practices and use these assessment results in the planning of development measures. The extent to which we succeed in open governance is determined by whether citizens truly feel that their views have been taken into account in the decision-making process.

All of us in public administration take pride in performing our work in line with the principles of open government.



Legal Basis



Legal Basis

In terms of legislation, the following acts have provided the most support for openness and public participation in governance: the amended Constitution, the Act on the Openness of Government Activities, the Administrative Procedure Act and the Local Government Act.

- › **Section 2** of the Finnish Constitution emphasises the importance of citizen participation: “Democracy entails the right of the individual to participate in and influence the development of society and his or her living conditions.”
- › **The Act on the Openness of Government Activities** provides for the right of citizens and media to access official documents. As a rule, such documents have been defined as public unless specific grounds exist for keeping them confidential. In addition, pursuant to this act, authorities are obliged to provide information actively.
- › **The Administrative Procedure Act** emphasises citizens’ rights to receive information from authorities and to offer their opinion on matters that have general and wide-ranging effects. When the purpose of the administrative Procedure Act was defined, the focus was on openness and good data management practices in administration, but particular attention was also paid to citizens’ opportunities to influence the use of public power and to monitor the realisation of their rights and benefits and the use of public funds.
- › **Pursuant to the Local Government Act**, municipalities are obliged to ensure that local residents have the opportunity to participate and have a say in the operations of their municipality.

In addition, various areas of specific legislation (such as the Youth Act) lay down certain obligations with regard to openness and participation.




Shared Values



Promotion of open government is based on shared values in governance. Related skills must be continuously developed.

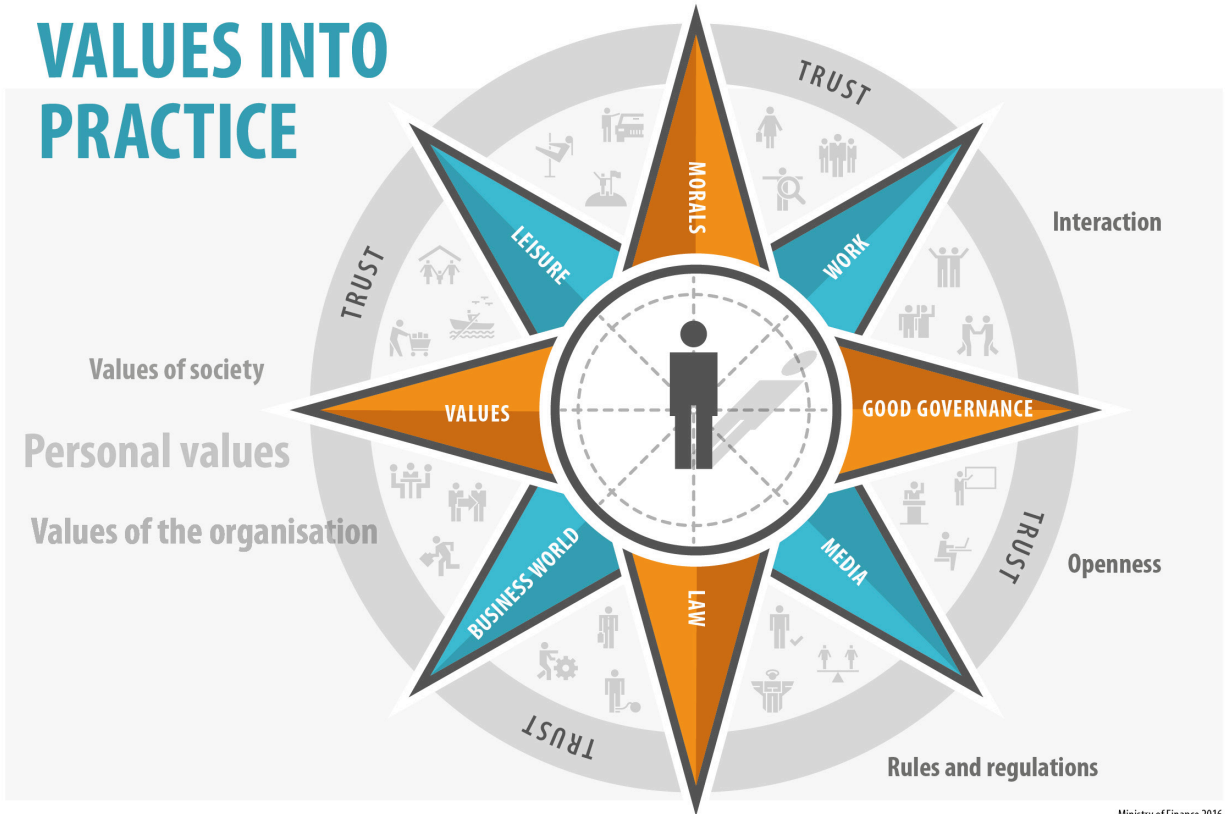
Shared Values:

- › **Effectiveness of operations**
- › **Openness**
- › **Quality and strong expertise**
- › **Trust**
- › **Service principle**
- › **Impartiality and independence**
- › **Equality**
- › **Responsibility**
- › **Innovativeness**

The background is a solid teal color. It features several white icons of hands shaking in a firm grip, arranged in a circular pattern around the central text. There are five icons in the top half and five in the bottom half, with a larger central icon in each half.

Values in Daily Life

VALUES INTO PRACTICE



The background is a solid orange color. Scattered throughout are several magnifying glass icons. Each icon consists of a circular lens with a plus sign (+) inside, and a handle extending from the bottom right. The icons vary in size and are positioned around the central text.

Clear Language

Clear Language

Why?

- › Citizens are able to participate in the development of society and decision-making when they can understand the matters being discussed.
- › Effective language in official materials saves citizens' time and trouble and enhances the productivity of authorities' activities.
- › The Administrative Procedure Act obliges authorities to use language that is clear, appropriate and easy to understand.
 - › Instructions, customer letters
 - › Web pages
 - › Reports, studies and memos

What?

- › Work together to set goals for the quality of the language and organise work accordingly.
 - › Use language that is easy to understand.
 - › Be concise.
 - › Consider who you are writing for.
- › Offer guidelines and training on writing.
 - › On your intranet, add a link to the guidelines for good official language published by the Institute for the Languages of Finland.
 - › Make a habit of commenting on each other's texts.
- › Pay particular attention to the clarity of language used in materials intended for the general public.
 - › Invite customers to test read the texts.
- › Publish the most important material also in plain language.

Guidelines for good official language published by the Institute for the Languages of Finland:

kotus.fi/ohjeet/virkakieliohjeita (in Finnish)



**Visual Aids and
Infographics**



Visual Aids and Infographics

Why?

- › Visual aids and info graphics make information easier to understand.
- › They can be used to highlight central content in a concise format.

How?

- › Visualisation encompasses images, patterns, videos, charts and tables.

What?

- › Use graphics to clarify, compile and summarise the information.
 - » In documents, such as reports and presentations
 - » On websites and social media
- › Create short video clips.
 - » The quality produced by mobile phone cameras is often adequate



**Clear
Government**

Clear Government

Why?

Citizens and companies have the right to know how government operates.

- › How decision-making in government is organised.
- › Which authorities are responsible for what tasks.
- › Where citizens and companies can find the services they need.

What?

- › Describe the tasks, services and structure of your organisation as part of the operating environment.
- › Add a description of your services in the Suomi.fi online service and its service catalogue.
- › Ensure that the information also reaches those who do not have access to electronic channels.
- › Submit the text for evaluation to citizen, customer and expert groups to assess its clarity.
- › When reforms take place, choose the names of the organisation and services carefully.

The Institute for the Languages of Finland has published guidelines on official names in Finnish:

kotus.fi/kielitieto/nimisto/virallinen_nimisto



Communications

Communications

Why?

- › The principles of communications are based on basic rights
 - » Freedom of speech, equality, the right to participate and have influence, protection of law, the right to one's own language and culture.
- › The implementation of changes requires timely and clear communications.

The Prime Minister's Office has published guidelines on communications:

vnk.fi/viestintasuositus (in Finnish)

What?

- › Up-to-date and easy-to-understand Websites and press releases
- › Seminaarit sidosryhmille
 - » Events
 - » Webinars
 - » Participation in events arranged by other operators
- › Social Media: Twitter accounts, Facebook and Instagram.
Once you have selected the channels, you should ensure continuous presence in them.

How?

- › Ensure that public officials have the skills and tools required for the realisation of communications.
 - » The top management is the organisation's public face and bears the responsibility for the organisation's communication culture.
 - » Officials communicate on matters that come under their responsibility with the assistance of communications professionals.
- › When planning communications, take the following factors into account:
 - » Timeliness
 - » Needs and special characteristics of various groups
 - » Use of various means and channels of communication
- › Forge collaboration with stakeholders
 - » Regularly and with clear goals

The background is a solid yellow color. Scattered across the top and bottom areas are several yellow speech bubble icons of various sizes and orientations, some overlapping. The central text is white and reads "Varying Needs in Participation".

Varying Needs in Participation

Varying Needs in Participation

Why?

People differ in their ability to participate. It is also important to reach people who do not adopt an active approach to public involvement.

What?

Ensure that everybody has equal opportunities for participation. Pay particular attention to ensuring that interaction is not restricted to established stakeholders.

How?

- › When planning participation channels, take into account individuals' varying needs and abilities.
- › Do not generalise on the basis of factors such as age, education or place of residence.
- › Pay attention to accessibility, also with regard to electronic channels.



The background is a solid yellow color. Scattered across the top and bottom areas are several yellow speech bubble icons of various sizes and orientations, some overlapping. The central text is white and bold.

Channels for Participation

Channels for Participation

Why?

Involve citizens in the early stages of decision-making. To achieve the optimal outcome, adopt methods that are appropriate for the target group and the matter in question.

What?



Plan hearings, participation and co-development at the initial stages of decision-making.



Take advantage of a variety of methods, electronic tools and face-to-face meetings.



Ensure that individual citizens, as well as civil society organisations, have the opportunity to engage and be heard.

How?

- › Arrange face-to-face meetings: events, workshops, customer and community councils, public and expert hearings and pop-up events. Participate in events held by other operators
- › Use the [demokratia.fi](#) –services, surveys, online think tanks, webinars, video negotiations, social media and co-development methods.
- › Take advantage of good practices already in place, such as the open government information and experience cards in the [avoinhallinto.fi](#) service.

The background is a solid yellow color. Scattered throughout the page are several white speech bubbles of various sizes and orientations, some overlapping each other. The text is centered in the middle of the page.

Democracy Services

Use Online Services for Participation in Decision-making

- › **Otakantaa.fi** is an online service designed to enhance interaction among individuals, organisations and authorities. The service facilitates civic engagement and access to information and promotes transparency in the planning of initiatives and decision-making while improving their quality.
- › **Nuortenideat.fi** is a national service established to provide young people with a channel for putting forward their proposals, participating and having a say on matters that relate to them.
- › **Kuntalaisaloite.fi** online service enables individuals to submit residents' initiatives to municipalities that have adopted the service and to follow initiatives submitted by others.
- › **Kansalaisaloite.fi** is a digital service that enables citizens to launch a citizens' initiative with a view to proposing a new law, amendments to an existing law or the repealing of a law. The Finnish Parliament is obliged to process the initiative if 50,000 citizens who are eligible to vote express their support for it within six months.
- › **Lausuntopalvelu.fi** is a tool for requesting and submitting statements in digital form. All central government agencies may publish requests for statements via the service. Statements may be submitted by all organisations and individuals.

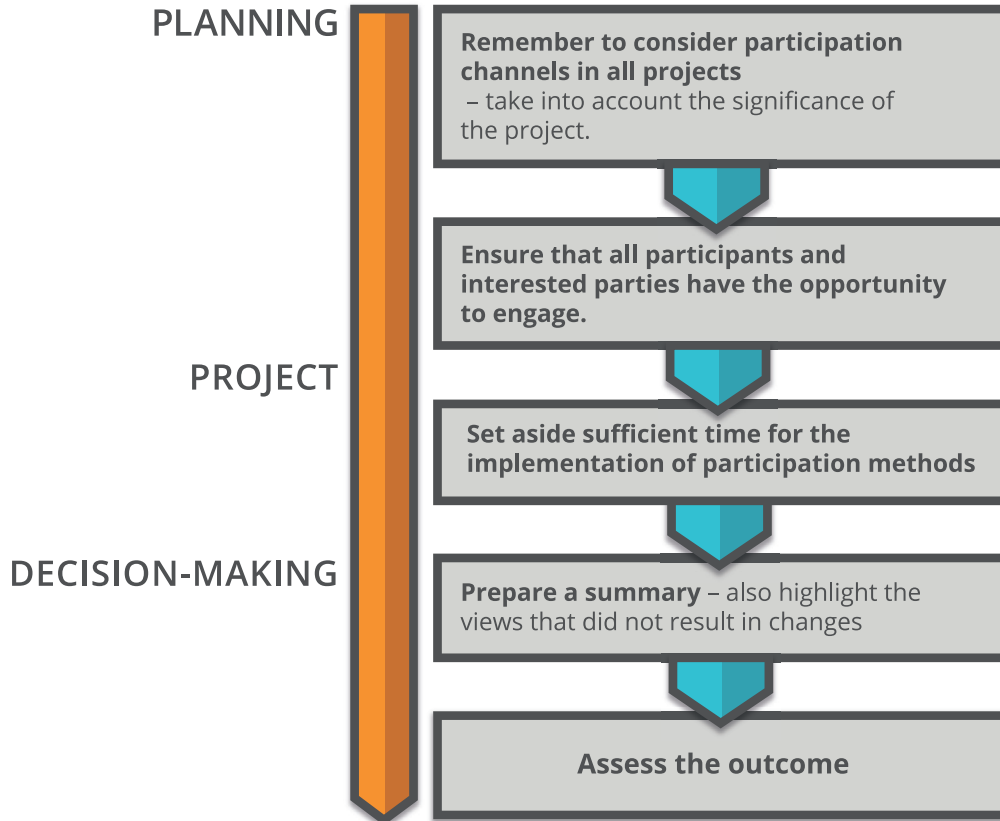
Why?

- › The Democracy.fi services are easy to access via a single website and they can be used free of charge
- › They offer citizens equal opportunities to follow decision-making on issues of common interest and to participate in the development of society.
- › They include dedicated participation channels for the various stages of the development process.



Golden Rules for Participation

Golden Rules for Participation



- › Use clear and unambiguous language.
- › Offer information at every stage of the process.

The background is a solid yellow color. Scattered across the page are numerous yellow speech bubble icons of various sizes and orientations, some pointing up, some down, and some to the side. The text is centered in the middle of the page.

Internal Participation

Internal Participation

Why?

- › An organisation may only be open externally if the work community is open.
- › Staff must have access to the full picture of the organisation's operations and the basis of those operations to be able to perform their tasks appropriately.
- › Openness and participation in a work community improve commitment to work.

How?

- › Publish information on your organisation's operations on your intranet.
- › Involve your staff in the development of your operations.
- › Hold informal events on topical matters to encourage discussion and the creation of new ideas.
- › Make your case processing system and shared directories as open as possible.

The image features a solid green background with several yellow folder icons scattered throughout. The folders are depicted in various orientations and sizes, some appearing to be stacked or overlapping. The central focus is the text 'Open Data' in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

Open Data

Open Data

Open public data is data generated or managed by a public organisation in a digital form that is made freely available to any individual or organisation to use, edit and share for private and commercial purposes.

What?

- › Determine whether your organisation has any data that could be made open. Analyse your organisation's information systems and resources. Determine also whether there are any legal restrictions or other factors limiting their use.
- › You can publish your open data via the avoindata.fi service.
- › Companies may also publish their open data in the service.
- › Before publishing any data, ensure that the content does not involve any copyrights belonging to a third party, or any personal information or other information that must be kept confidential for legal reasons.

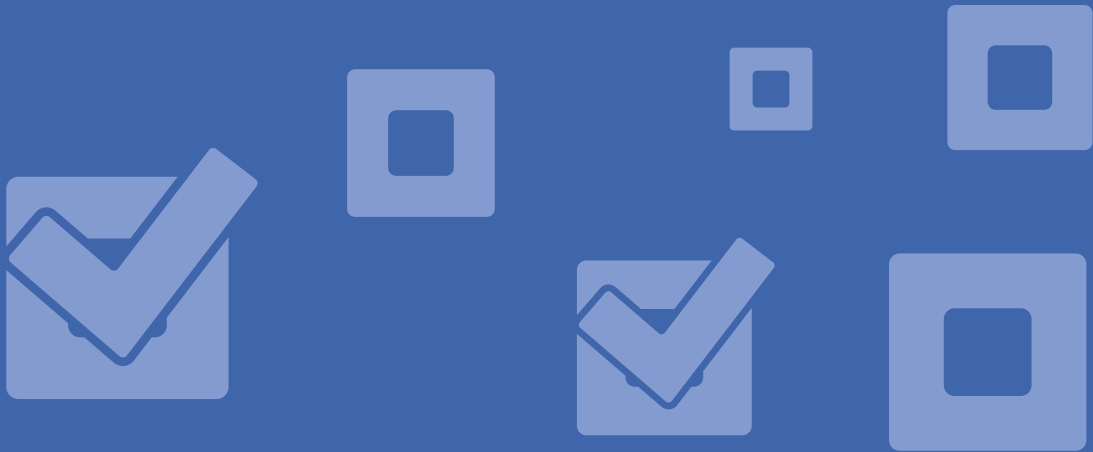
Why?

- › Open data improves opportunities for using the information for purposes it is most useful for.
- › Open data promotes active citizenship, societal research and journalism by increasing transparency in governance.

www.avoindata.fi



Assessment



Assessment

Why?

Experiences of participation methods should be assessed to allow for their further development.

What?

Ensure that the selected methods can reach the right focus groups and highlight the required viewpoints.

How?

- › Integrate these assessment activities into your standard planning and assessment procedures.
- › Perform self-assessment with the assistance of the checklist.
- › Utilise national and international comparative data.