HOW TO ORGANIZE PARLIAMENTARY HEARINGS

MANUAL
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Manual

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PREFACE

This Parliamentary Hearings Manual has been developed by the working group comprising experts from the standing committees of the RA National Assembly with the assistance of the SANAP Project. The Manual describes the best practices of organizing and holding parliamentary hearings by standing committees which are built on the requirements of the RA Law 'Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly' and the already established parliamentary tradition.

In addition, the Manual attempts to propose the steps and tools for enhancing the challenging processes as identified in the course of organizing and conducting hearings.

Templates of some procedural documents related to the organization of parliamentary hearings have been designed by the working group.

The working group tasked with the development of the Manual aimed to consolidate in a single document the existing experience of the National Assembly in holding efficient hearings, and the recommendations on improving certain challenging processes related to hearings.

The main purpose of this Manual is to strengthen the practice of organizing efficient parliamentary hearings in the National Assembly through the daily use of this comprehensive document.

The draft Manual has been improved significantly as a result of preliminary discussions around this Manual conducted in different formats with the standing committees and representatives of the Staff of the National Assembly.
I. INTRODUCTION

Notion of parliamentary hearings

*Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly, Art. 32, p.1*

At least once in each regular session committees organize parliamentary hearings on issues conferred on them by this Law notifying the Chairperson of the National Assembly thereof.

Parliamentary hearings are most often defined as *information gathering and spreading mechanisms used by parliamentary committees as tools for analyzing and designing policies and for oversight and scrutiny purposes*. Parliamentary hearings benefit to awareness, legitimacy, alternative knowledge, empowerment, trust, conflict resolution.

**Purpose of parliamentary hearings**

The main purpose of parliamentary hearing is providing, obtaining and exchanging information among parliamentarians, executive, experts, stakeholders in the hopes of producing more effective and sounder legislation and achieving its proper implementation.

Parliamentary hearings are an important part of all three main functions of a legislature: legislative, oversight and representative. With respect to the latter, parliamentary hearings have always been main tools for ensuring public participation in parliamentary affairs.

Participation of public in the legislative process has been increasingly seen as a milestone of parliamentary democracy and has been included as a benchmark in various tools for self-assessment of parliaments, developed by different international organizations and parliamentary associations.
Types of Parliamentary Hearings

Legislative hearings are used to discuss issues and problems related to particular draft laws (hearings on draft laws) or to discuss the necessity for new legislation on a certain topic (subject matter or thematic hearings).

Oversight hearings are intended to examine the performance of government, including implementation of the laws, and attempt to find out to what extent letter and spirit of the laws is being kept and public interest is being pursued by the government.

Investigative hearings are held in the course of investigation of particular activities. Investigative hearings are usually performed in Armenia by temporary parliamentary committees on enquiry.

The Building Blocks of a Successful Hearing:

In this section are presented the possible building blocks for a successful hearing.

- **Familiarizing with the topic** (discussing the draft law (or draft of NA decision) in the committee, having preliminary working discussions with the stakeholders on the topic, creating a subcommittee or working group to investigate the issue)

- **Defining the purpose of the hearing** (enlightening of society or getting info, also the type of the hearing) and the strategy of the hearing (content and structure)

- **Ensuring maximum transparency** (ease of access, notification well beforehand, broadcasting, posting all the materials and the transcript on the website)

- **Ensuring participation of valuable stakeholders** – based on the purpose (defining the list of invitees and inviting, ensuring oral and written representation)

- **Ensuring maximum predictability** (getting the presentation of rapporteurs and defining questions of the Committee) and maximum opinion sharing (through questions and speeches of participants)
• **Follow up** on the purpose of the hearing (summary notes on the hearing approved by the committee, committee decision (positive conclusion about the draft law (or draft of NA decision), committee report with finding and recommendations to be presented in the plenary and sent to the Government), decision to establish a working group, etc.)

• Mounting **an effective information campaign** (pre-hearing discussions and info-sharing, pre-hearing press releases, announcements, post-hearing press-conferences and participation of media)
II. PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION OF PARLIAMENTARY HEARINGS

Initiating the parliamentary hearing

Parliamentary hearing is organized by committee. The Speaker of the National Assembly is also entitled to organize parliamentary hearings. In this case, he is the one who decides on manner in which hearings are going to be arranged (day, time, procedure, etc.). See Art. 18, p.1.c1 and Art. 32, p. 7 of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly.

When drafting this Manual the working group mainly considered the hearings organized by the Committees.

The initiative to organize a hearing can therefore come from the committee chair or committee members. However, initiative to organize parliamentary hearing on a certain topic can come from other sources as well – parliamentarians from other committees, political appointees, civil society or governmental organizations and agencies. Usually proposals to organize parliamentary hearing are addressed to the chair of the committee. Those who propose need to present a Hearing Proposal to be discussed during a committee sitting.

The committee approves the topic of the parliamentary hearing. The process undergoes the following stages:

a. Hearing Proposal(s) is presented to the committee.

b. The committee has a discussion on all proposed topics. For planning purposes, it is more efficient to have such discussion at the end of the previous session or at the beginning of the current session, in the framework of approving committee plan for the session. However, one can always suggest to organize a parliamentary hearing on an important issue during the session, which will be subject to discussion in the committee

c. The Committee approves the Hearing Proposal, with all necessary modifications.

Checklist for planning and organization of parliamentary hearing is attached in Annex 1.
d. The Committee appoints one of its members to coordinate preparation for the hearing.

e. The Committee Chair assigns committee expert (experts) to assist the MP in preparation for the hearing.

**WHAT IS A HEARING PROPOSAL?**

The Hearing Proposal\(^2\) is a document, which outlines the following information:

a. **Topic of the hearing**

Topic of the hearing can be a draft law, an area requiring legal regulation, practice of law implementation in a certain area, or just a subject of high public interest and importance within the remit of the committee.

b. **Goal of the hearing**

Both legislative and oversight parliamentary hearings can be conducted for different purposes, such as:

- To initiate discussion about an issue the committee cares about.
- To communicate and clarify needs of a group and/or an issue.
- To communicate a sense of community concern about an issue.
- To increase community awareness about the issue.
- To bring more of the public over to your way of thinking
- To re-open public dialogue on issues that have fallen out of the public mind
- To counter your opponents’ arguments against your group or initiative
- To find a solution to a legislative problem or implementation issue
- To gather information
- To gain support
- And others...

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\(^2\) *See the template of the Hearing Proposal in Annex 2.*
It is quite typical for the hearing to have more than one goal, for example, the committee might be both willing to initiate discussion, gather information and find a solution. At the same time, most hearings are organized either to gain information for further use in the committee, or to communicate information or “enlighten” the public.

c. Actions to be taken before the hearing

For each goal of the hearing the committee decides on the strategy, i.e. plan of actions necessary to achieve the goal. Actions to be taken before the hearing may include background research, working discussions with different stakeholders (government, civil society organizations, etc.) if needed, field visits or outreach sittings of the committee, working with the media. One of important steps should be establishment of a working group, which includes MP (MPs) from the committee and committee expert(s), and defining their tasks.

d. Expected result

When initiating a parliamentary hearing, the committee has in mind what it intends to have as a result of the hearing. This may be:

- Legislative initiative (draft law or NA decision)
- Committee report, emphasizing committee conclusions on the issue and/or containing recommendations to authorized state bodies on implementation of the law,
- Committee decision on establishment of a subcommittee or working group (to do monitoring/oversight activities, to work on the text of the draft law or NA decision, etc.)

The expected result is highly connected with the goal of the hearing. Sometimes, the course of the hearing can change the expected result (e.g. the Committee might be willing to introduce a draft law or NA decision, but the hearing can reveal a necessity for further consultations and the Committee might delay the introduction of a draft law or NA decision and establish a subcommittee or working group to examine the issue. Or, the discussions can lead to the understanding of the fact, that no amendment in the law is needed).
e. Groups of possible stakeholders/witnesses

Groups of potential stakeholders must be identified at the initial stage. Usually, it is the Government, civil society (NGOs, interest groups, media and citizens, who have an opinion to voice or have been or would be, affected in legislation in questions), representatives of business sector. The groups can more specifically be defined based on the topic selected (e.g., for the hearing on professional development of doctors the committee would consider Ministry of Health, health sector NGOs, administration of medical institutions, doctors and patients as potential stakeholders).

Although at the stage of initiating the hearing it may be hard to identify witnesses, the Committee may decide on potential witnesses to testify (e.g., if an NGO has lately published a research study on the topic of the hearing, it can be considered as a potential witness).

f. Proposed venue

Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly do not specify the location for holding parliamentary hearings. Generally, the hearings are organized in the National Assembly Building. However, the parliamentary committee may decide to hold the hearing elsewhere for several reasons. First, the parliamentary hearing brings the parliament closer to people. By organizing the hearing outside, the committee can hear testimonies from witnesses who would be unable or unwilling to attend the hearing in the parliament (e.g., organizing the hearing in a hospital, in an army unit, in an orphanage, etc.). Second, by organizing a hearing in the region/local community, the committee brings public attention to the issue in the community and also promotes local interest and participation (e.g. if the committee is discussing the issue of impact of certain mining activities on the environment, holding the hearing in the community affected will largely contribute to active public participation and input from the community).

Background research

As soon as the committee has approved the hearing proposal, the MP in charge of coordinating the hearing activities and the assigned committee staff start preparation for the hearing.
Background research to be performed prior to the hearing actually involves collecting and processing all the relevant information on the topic of the hearing. In order to minimize the bias, it is important to use different sources and forms of information:

1. Government (reports of state bodies, government strategy documents, etc.)
2. LSG bodies
3. NGOs, think tanks, interest groups, professional organizations (research and analysis, monitoring reports)
4. Academia (expertise and opinion, academic articles)
5. Citizens (individual stakeholders)
6. Individual experts
7. Private sector organizations
8. Independent assessments (reports of Chamber of Control, assessments by international organizations)
9. Media (media publications, investigative media reports)
10. Other sources (Central Bank's reports and programs, statistical data, public opinion surveys, etc.)

**Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly, Art. 31.1**

**Inquiries of the Committee**

*By its decision the committee may make inquiries to the bodies of public administration and local self-government, public officials, institutions and organizations on drafts of legislative acts and other issues submitted for its discussion. The latter must:*

*a. examine the written inquiry of the committee and respond in writing within a 20-day period;*

*b. notify the committee in writing on the examination of the issue raised no later than three days prior to the discussion.*
The committee can use different tools to obtain the necessary information. For example, pre-hearing discussions are one of possible methods, which help the committee to shape its opinion about existing gaps and problems and discuss alternative solutions. Pre-hearing discussions can also be organized in the field. Written enquiries to the Government are another way for the committee to get information on the issue.

Results of the background research must be documented\(^3\).

Summarizing the results of the research, the expert prepares draft list of candidate rapporteurs and list of invitees.

**Planning the agenda**

### Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly, Art. 32, p. 2 and 4

*The date, hour and place of the hearings, as well as the list of speakers and invitees are approved by the decision of the committee. The date of the hearings must not coincide with the date of a sitting of the National Assembly.*

*The hearings are held according to the procedure approved by the committees having organized them.*

Based on the results of the background research the committee approves the date, hour and place of the hearing. The committee also discusses and approves the list of rapporteurs and the list of invitees (including the witnesses). The committee also votes on the agenda of the hearing.

The agenda\(^4\) is essential for organization of an effective hearing. The agenda establishes the structure for discussion and reflects the logical outline of the whole process of the hearing. Essential elements of the agenda are:

- Topics/issues
- Speakers on each topic (rapporteurs)
- Witness testimonies on each issue

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\(^3\) See the template for background research in Annex 3.  
\(^4\) See the template of an agenda in Annex 4.
• Time for debate
• Time for summarization.

Draft agenda is prepared by the expert in consultation with the committee chair and the MP responsible for coordinating the preparation of the hearing. When preparing the agenda, it is useful to answer the following questions:

• What is the goal and expected result of the hearing?
• What background information do participants need?
• Who will chair the hearing?
• How will the hearing proceed and be managed?
• What are the important topics to be covered?
• How much time should be devoted to each topic?
• Who is the best person to present information on each topic?
• Who can testify as a witness?
• How should the discussion be structured?
• What specific questions can be asked to stimulate and guide the discussion?
• What follow-up activities will likely result from the hearing?
• Who should be responsible for each activity?
• What is a reasonable schedule for accomplishing each follow-up activity?
• How can every participant's contribution be acknowledged?

Information on topic, date, time and venue of the hearing, as well as the agenda should be posted on the web page of the committee.

Official notification and invitations

Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly, Art. 32, p.3

Information on organizing a hearing is disseminated to the mass media at least three days prior to the date of the hearing.
Official notification about the hearing should be done in a way utmost ensuring that wide circles get information about the topic, date, time and venue of the hearing. Following this notification, the committee has a chance to get additional materials and submissions on the topic. It is therefore important that the stakeholders have enough time to prepare for the hearing. The first official notification should be done according to Article 32, p.3, possibly 7 days before the date of the hearing, with reference to committee web page with additional information, including agenda and other relevant materials. The committee should then organize a final reminder about the hearing 2 days before, posting announcement in the news stream of NA website, newspapers, TV, radio or using the “Parliamentary Hour” official TV program.

Invitation letters are sent by the committee to all the stakeholders, whose presence is desirable for the committee (government officials, civil society, analytical media, citizens, etc.). Invitation letters can be sent by email.

Committee members shall be informed of the time, place and topic of the parliamentary hearing and should supply members, in advance, with all the relevant materials (prepared or received by the committee).

**Selecting and inviting rapporteurs and witnesses**

**Rapporteurs**

The task of the rapporteur in the parliamentary hearing is to present the issue and provide basic information for its discussion. The chairman of the committee or the MP (MPs), who has coordinated the organization of the hearing process, can act as a rapporteur. The committee may also invite the author of the draft law at stake to act as a reporter.

**Witnesses**

In the context of the parliamentary hearings witness is the person, who presents the information, position or opinion he has on a certain issue. Witness is invited

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5 Sample of official notification is attached in Annex 5.

6 Sample of invitation letter is attached in Annex 6.
by the committee. He/she is informed in advance on which issue (issues) he/she is especially expected to give information and express opinion within the framework of the hearings.

The selection of witnesses is one of the most important steps of parliamentary hearing planning. While identifying the witnesses the committee should consider the goal and the strategy of the parliamentary hearing as well as the existing various stances and arguments on the issue. While choosing the witnesses the committee should strive to ensure presentation of various viewpoints, which will provide completeness, balance and a higher reliability to the decision made as a result of the hearings.

One can be invited to appear as a witness in the following cases:

- The person is an expert and due to his/her professional knowledge can clarify the problematic or controversial issues
  
  *(For example: chemist or ecologist when discussing the problem of change in chemical composition of Lake Sevan)*

- The person due to his/her official position possesses information or is responsible for policy development and implementation in a certain field
  
  *(For example: the mayor, when talking about the number of environmental impact examinations in the community, or the chairman of the Confederation of Trade Unions, when discussing the obstacles of the effective functioning of Trade Unions, or the Minister on Social issues, when discussing orphanage graduates housing issue)*

- The person is a stakeholder and testifies about the existing or potential problems related to the issue at stake
  
  *(For example: the electronic media editor, when discussing the moderation of written comments on the internet, or a disabled person, when discussing the issue of accessibility provision in the urban development norms)*

- The person is a beneficiary and bearer of certain consequences regarding the problematic issue
In addition to general information about the hearings, the invitations to witnesses should contain information about the maximum duration of the speech.

The invitation should also contain detailed description of the issues, to which the witness should refer in his/her speech.

In the international practice there are also other ways to act as a witness during the parliamentary hearings.

For example one may register for his or her speech noting his/her stance and orientation (in favor, against or just for informational purposes) and submit a written testimony to the committee or just submit the written testimony to the committee without oral speech.

In addition to the speakers invited by the committee, other participants are also encouraged to submit written testimony to the committee.

In some countries (e.g. USA) during the hearings on draft laws the committee distributes between the participants (except from the MPs) so called witness card, which needs to be filled in to reflect the position of the witness around the issue (in favor, against, abstention).

The committee may propose the rapporteurs and the witnesses to present the written versions of their speeches (written testimony), defining deadline for their submission (the written version of the speech can be needed before or after the hearings).

Organizational Issues

In the process of planning and organizing the hearing there are a number of organizational/administrative issues, dealing with which is the responsibility of the committee staff.
If the hearing is conducting in the plenary hall the staff should pay special attention to following organizational issues:

- Circulation of registration list among all participants: in case of doing the registering of participants at the entry of the hall, the staff should take into account three available entries to the hall and two upper balconies for media representatives

- ensuring the proper registration for questions and speeches, since in the big plenary hall it’s difficult for the presiding chairman to manage proper registration of a big number of persons willing to speak or ask questions.

Cooperation with media will be presented in details in the "Publicity and work with the media" section.

The committee staff ensures the recording (video recording) of the hearings through the NA Telecommunication Systems Division. For this purpose the committee staff informs this division about the day, time and place of the hearings in advance in written form.

In case the hearing is organized outside the Administrative building of the National Assembly the committee staff is also responsible for reserving the venue of the hearing, obtaining appropriate agreements, covering catering needs and transportation, ordering equipment (audio system, microphones, etc.).
III. CONDUCTING A PARLIAMENTARY HEARING

Process of the hearing

As an information gathering mechanism and discussion forum, parliamentary hearing can be conducted in any format, provided that the format chosen best suits the goal and the strategy of the parliamentary hearing. Agenda of the hearing is approved by the Committee and the hearing is generally presided by the Committee Chair.

Before the discussions the Committee Chair or the presiding MP announces the order of registration for questions and speeches.

Below you can find several models of conducting hearings, which of course do not exclude other possible ways and methods of facilitating the hearing.

Q&A mode:
After the speech, the speaker can be asked questions by participants and answers those questions right away. Questions per participant are not limited; the facilitator can however limit the questions if the hearing is going beyond the agenda timeframe.

Follow up questioning:
When the speaker (rapporteur or witness) is on the floor, each committee member has a right to question the speaker for limited time set in the agenda (e.g. 5 minutes). During this time period, the questioning member can ask as many follow up questions, as the time allows.

Discussion mode:
The speakers are not questioned after their speeches. Following the speeches, the facilitator opens a discussion on the topics of the speeches. In the course of discussion, any participant can register to ask question or make comment. After
the first registration and speeches, the second registration is announced. Number of circles of registration is not limited.

**Working group discussions:**

This model can work in case of a complicated topic with different aspects. After general part of the hearing and speeches the participants can break into working groups and discuss certain aspects of the issue. Each group should have a facilitator. Results of discussions in the working groups are then summarized in the hearing.

**Role of the staff**

During the hearing, the Committee staff is responsible for the following tasks:

- Dissemination of press release and hearing materials to the participants
- Circulating a Registration list\(^7\) to gather the data about the participants
- Performing registration of participants for speeches
- Taking notes to ensure further preparation of a hearing summary

\(^7\) *Sample Registration list is attached in Annex 7.*
IV. FOLLOW UP: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE HEARING

Parliamentary hearing is a part of overall strategy of the Committee with respect to reaching the goals set by the Committee. Consequently, the hearing itself can never be a final step in the process. In case of legislative hearings on a draft law, the Committee takes into account the information obtained as a result of the hearing and makes a decision whether to approve the draft law, to reject it or to work towards its amendment and improvement. This information may influence the position of the committee towards the contents of the draft law and its further destiny. In case of oversight hearing, the committee uses the information obtained to define its further steps, which might be questioning the Government, proposing to establish a working group to propose legislative amendments, recommendations to the Government on how to proceed to solve the problem revealed in the course of oversight action. In case of thematic legislative hearing, the Committee may also prepare a parliamentary report on the topic or through its member, prepare a legislative initiative and submit it to the parliament.

For all the cases, described above, it is extremely important to ensure, that the results of the parliamentary hearing are documented.

Documenting the results of the hearing: Recording and the Hearing Summary

It is highly advisable to ensure audio/video recording for the whole process of the hearing. The recording should be made public through posting it on the committee web page.

Hearing Summary is a document prepared by the committee expert, who was involved in the process of planning and organization of the hearing. The aim of the summary is to provide the committee members with brief though comprehensive outline of what was discussed during the hearing, what were the
main positions and opinions expressed and what was agreed (if applicable). Unlike the recording, the Hearing Summary is intended for Committee use, it is not a public document, and it serves as a source of information for further decision-making in the Committee.

The Hearing Summary outlines the following information:

a. **Topic, date and venue of the hearing**

b. **Introduction** – goal of the hearing, initiative, background, description of main groups of participant

c. **Discussion** – summarized content of reports, speeches, testimonies

d. **Results** – findings of the committee (if any), proposals, arrangements reached

The Hearing Summary should be submitted to the Committee Chair and approved by the later.

The following documents should be attached to the Hearing Summary:

- Hearing Proposal
- Summaries of pre-hearing meetings and working discussions
- List of participants of the hearing (attendance sheet)
- Hearing materials
- Presentations of rapporteurs and written testimonies (if available).

The documents should be archived by the assistant of the Committee and kept for further reference.

**Parliamentary Report of the Committee**

Sometimes parliamentary hearing does not require immediate action of the committee (e.g. turning down the bill or initiation of draft law by committee members). However, the background research and the hearing itself may lead the committee to policy conclusions around a legislative or oversight issue. These policy conclusions are important, and recording those is an important means of preserving legislative intent of the committee with respect to an area of legal
regulations, ensuring continuity and allowing the committee to analyze and define its strategic plans for future.

Policy conclusions of the committee, resulting from the hearing, can be reflected in the parliamentary report of the committee. This report is prepared by the MP and the experts who have coordinated preparation of the hearing. The Committee may also decide to extend the group working on the report by inviting certain civil society representatives and outside experts to participate in preparation of the report.

The report is submitted to the Committee, discussed at its sitting, modified if necessary and approved. The Committee representative then presents the report in the plenary.

The thematic report has the following structure:

- Table of contents
- Executive summary (describes in several paragraphs the main findings of the report)
- Introduction (background of the issue, historical aspects, etc.)
- Discussion (main body of the report, providing analysis for every issue at stake)
- Conclusions (findings, conclusions and recommendations of the committee)
- Appendices
- References

Establishment of a working group

Following the hearing the Committee can face the necessity to establish a working group to perform oversight activities or work on legislation. The working group is formed of Committee MPs, experts, as well as external members – experts, academia, practitioners, etc. (if needed). The Committee decides to establish the working group during committee sitting and approves its Terms of Reference.

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8 The sequence of steps and contents of the ToR is described in Annex 8.
V. PUBLICITY AND WORK WITH THE MEDIA

Awareness Campaign

An adequately organized awareness campaign is crucial for the effective conduct of parliamentary hearings. Well-informed stakeholders can have their really valuable input during the hearing discussions. On the other hand, misinterpretation and lack of information lead to a situation where hearings no longer serve as a key legislative policy tool and become of a formality which stirs the feeling of mistrust and negative attitude among interested parties.

Who is the target of an awareness campaign? In contrast to the common approach, it is targeted not only at the mass media and hence, the civil society, but also all interested parties, including the government and parliament members.

Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly, Art. 112, p.3

The mass media coverage of the work of the National Assembly shall be organized by its Staff Administration.

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The Information Department of the NA Staff Administration shall release information materials, carry out the production of “Parliamentary Week” and other TV programs, conduct press interviews of parliament members, carry out the release of official statements (briefings) of the National Assembly by the Public TV and Radio Company.

Tools of Awareness Campaign

1. Press Release

The preparation and dissemination of press releases requires close collaboration between the committee staff and the NA Information Department by following
the below steps:

1. The text of the press release (as example attached as an Annex 9) is prepared by the committee expert,
2. The text is agreed with the NA Information Department,
3. The Information Department organizes the dissemination of the press release,
4. The committee includes the press release in the hearing information package, and during the hearings the committee provides it to the attending mass media representatives upon their request.

2. “Parliamentary Week”

*Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly, Art. 112, p.4*

...The media coverage of the parliamentary activities of the National Assembly committees shall be provided by the NA Staff Administration through the *Parliamentary Week* TV program....During the program committees shall be given up to three minutes for presentations. The Parliamentary Week shall be released on Sundays.

The Parliamentary Week TV program is a public platform where a parliament committee can consistently draw the attention of the public to a hearing topic. Thus, the committee chair or the MP who has initiated the hearing can make a presentation on the hearing once the topic, day and time of the discussion are approved at the committee. A communication can be released on the invited discussions during the hearing preparatory phase as well.

3. Press Conference

A press conference can be organized before the hearings in order to present in more detail the purpose, topic of discussion, the committee views on the subject matter and the analyses conducted by the committee to the mass media and the public.
A press conference can also be organized after hearings. In this case the purpose of the press conference would be to present the topic discussed during the hearings, the views of different interested parties, the type of the committee and its further steps in relation to the concerned topic.

4. Other Tools

Depending on the purpose of hearings and the importance of their publicizing, the use of other tools can also be considered. These include participation in a TV program, participation in talk shows, organization of special TV discussions on the hearing topic, interviews, and meetings with journalists.

The above listed tools can be used not only for making the subject matter public but also for presenting the viewpoint of the committee and forming public opinion about the topic.

Information Package

An information package is a set of documentation pertaining to a parliamentary hearing. In preparing the information package, the principles of completeness and comprehensiveness of information should be maximally observed. Sometimes, especially when a hearing seeks to make public or substantiate an idea or approach, inclusion of information on all related potential approaches in the information package is apparently impractical. However, if such information is available, then alternative views on the subject matter should be incorporated in the information package.

The information package includes:

- Hearing procedure
- Press release
- Materials of presentations made by speakers
- Texts of related speeches, if any
- Analyses on the topic of hearings, including the alternative ones
- Draft legislation (for legislative hearings) with attached documentation
Apart from the above documentation, the information package for the committee chair and parliament members includes the list of possible questions to presenters of related speeches, and for the hearing moderator, the necessary information for the opening and closing remarks, and for the organization and conduct of discussions. For committee members, the package can also include analytical press publications concerning the topic of hearings.
VI. INFORMATION GATHERING MECHANISMS

As a result of background research prior to the hearing, or following the discussions during the hearing, the Committee may find it useful to clarify additional questions or discover the public opinion about specific issues. Questionnaires and surveys are the easiest way to reach this goal, especially nowadays in terms of developed IT, when this can be done through internet tools⁹.

Tips of preparing questionnaires

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**General Rules for Writing Survey Questions**

**Avoid technical terms and jargon.** Words used in surveys should be easily understood by anyone taking the survey.

**Avoid Vague or Imprecise Terms.** Usually, it's best to use terms that will have the same specific meaning to all respondents.

**Define Things Very Specifically.**

**Avoid Complex Sentences.** Sentences with too many clauses or unusual constructions often confuse respondents.

**Avoid Double-Barreled Questions.** Questions should measure one thing. Double barreled questions try to measure two (or more!) things.

**Answer Choices Should Anticipate All Possibilities.** If a respondent could have more than one response to a question, it's best to allow for multiple choices. If the categories you provide don't anticipate all possible choices, it's often a good idea to include an “Other-Specify” category.

**Avoid Questions Using Leading, Emotional, or Evocative Language.**

---

⁹ For tips on using the most common internet tools of surveys see Annex 10.
Keep Your Questionnaire Short

Respondents are less likely to answer a long questionnaire than a short one, and often pay less attention to questionnaires that seem long.

Keep Question Order in Mind

- Start a questionnaire with an introduction. If a respondent reads the survey, provide a title for each section.
- Survey responses can be impacted by previous questions. Think about the context that respondents are hearing your questions.
- It's usually best to start a survey with general questions that will be easy for a respondent to answer.
- It's usually best to ask any sensitive questions, including demographics (especially income), near the end of the survey.

Open Ended versus Closed Ended Questions

Open ended questions ask respondents to respond to a question in their own terms.

Closed ended questions are questions where the respondent is asked to place themselves into one of a limited number of responses that are provided to them.

- Open-ended questions allow the greatest variety of responses, but are time consuming to ask and require a lot of work to analyze
- Closed ended questions, when well designed, ensure that respondents interpret questions the same way.
- Respondents are more likely to skip an open-ended than closed-ended question.

Therefore, keep the number of open ended questions to a minimum.
Clearly introduce the questionnaire
Always include a short introduction that makes clear:

- the purpose of the questionnaire
- indicate that survey is anonymous in case it is
- why it is important for you (and why it could be useful for the respondent)
- how long it should take to complete
- what will happen to the results
- complete contact details
- final date for reply

Pre-Test Your Survey
Make sure you pre-test your survey with a few members of your target audience and/or co-workers to find glitches and unexpected question interpretations.

The Mode of Your Survey
Surveys can be administered by mail, phone, in-person, or online, and there are different questionnaire considerations for each mode. If an interviewer is asking the questions, think about how they will sound. If a respondent is filling out the survey on paper or online, think about how it will look.

With online surveys, you can gather a plethora of information about customers and employees faster and with more accuracy than ever before. When designed in a right manner, online surveys provide valuable insight into otherwise unseen perspectives.

Evaluation of the hearing through questionnaires
Earlier in this Manual the notion, goals and objectives of parliamentary hearings were described. As any other activity with a specific aim, the parliamentary hearing may be a successful one if it has reached the goals set by the Committee.
In this regard the Committee might find it useful to evaluate the hearing, by distributing a questionnaire to the participant's right after the hearing or later on asking the main stakeholders to fill in an online evaluation form. Feedback of the participants may serve as a valuable source of information on how to improve the process of the parliamentary hearing and therefore its effectiveness as a tool for the Committee.  

---

10 *Attach the sample evaluation questionnaire as Annex 11.*
## Checklist for preparation for parliamentary hearings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Responsible party</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Approve the hearing topic/title, time, date and venue</td>
<td>At committee meeting</td>
<td>Committee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Inform the National Assembly Chairman</td>
<td>Upon taking the decision</td>
<td>Committee chair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Select nominee speakers, co-speakers, other invitees</td>
<td>20-18 days prior</td>
<td>Committee chair, members</td>
<td>(upon expert’s recommendation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Conduct preliminary discussions with potential speakers, beneficiaries</td>
<td>18-12 days prior</td>
<td>Committee chair and members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Design the hearing procedure</td>
<td>12 days prior</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Approve the list of reporters and invitees, and the hearing procedure</td>
<td>At committee meeting</td>
<td>Committee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Reserve the hearing venue, as well as arrange for meal and transportation, equipment (microphones, recording system)/(as necessary)</td>
<td>12 days prior</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Prepare the brief presentation of the speaker deputy (results of background research)</td>
<td>10-5 days prior</td>
<td>Speaker deputy / deputy assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Prepare invitations for reporters, co-reporters, other invitees (the chair invites, the invitation mentions the purpose for inviting and proposes a timing for presenting the speech)</td>
<td>12-11 days prior</td>
<td>Expert / Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>Responsible party</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Prepare questions to co-reporters</td>
<td>12-11 days prior</td>
<td>Expert, committee chair, coordinating deputy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Send invitations (including via email)</td>
<td>11-10 days prior</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Prepare and distribute the announcement by sending it to the Staff and committee chairs, update the website</td>
<td>10 days prior</td>
<td>Expert/Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Prepare the press release and the media package</td>
<td>8 days prior</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Provide the press release to the Department for Public Relations and Media</td>
<td>8 days prior</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Confirm the reporter participation / make arrangements with their substitutes</td>
<td>7 days prior</td>
<td>Expert/Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Obtain presentation materials from reporters, co-reporters, (as necessary)</td>
<td>5-3 days prior or 3 days after the hearing</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Confirm the hearing venue, arrangements for meal and transportation, equipment</td>
<td>5 days prior</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Prepare the list of hearing participants with a special space allocated for their contact details (for creating a database of hearing attendees in future)</td>
<td>5 days prior but not late than the day before the hearings</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>As a reminder, contact the reporters and co-reporters,</td>
<td>2 days prior</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Prepare and distribute to committee members the provided materials (including the agenda and presentation materials)</td>
<td>3 days prior</td>
<td>Expert / Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>Responsible party</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Submit to the Staff the list of persons registered for participation in hearings in order to get their entry access to the NA building</td>
<td>as possible 1 day prior</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Distribute a sign-in sheet during the hearing in order to record the attendees’ names and contract information</td>
<td>Date of hearings</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Take notes during the hearing for preparing a synopsis of hearing results in future</td>
<td>Date of hearings</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Prepare the synopsis of parliamentary hearing results and provide it to the committee chair and members</td>
<td>Within 10 days of completion of hearings</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PROPOSAL FOR ORGANIZATION OF PARLIAMENTARY HEARINGS

1. Topic of hearing
2. Purpose of hearing
3. Steps preceding the hearing
4. Expected outcome
5. Potential reporters/beneficiary groups
6. Proposed venue
Background Research

Name of the document _____(bill analysis, report)________________________
Topic/question:___________________________________________________
Prepared by:__________________(name, position)______________________
Date:______________________________

Clearly state the topic assigned or the question being asked. If you need to recheck, do so. There is little more frustrating than working on an issue only to be told “that isn’t what I asked”.

I. SUMMARY (100 words or less 5% of text)
This section should contain the brief outline of the whole document (background, analysis and conclusions): for short documents it can be one or two paragraphs long, for more comprehensive research papers it can be broken down into chapters according to the structure of the analysis. It should be completed AFTER background and analysis are complete.

II. OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY
This section indicates why you are engaged in the exercise and what methods you use. Methodology is extremely important when you are doing a compilation of CSO opinions or other data collection activities.

III. BACKGROUND (no more than about 25% of the text)
This section should place a specific question in context. It should be brief, but relatively heavily referenced.
* For example, a question regarding water diversion from Lake Sevan for fish could also provide background on overall water supply predictions, current water supply loses through leaking pipes / leakage, value of fishing industry in Armenia (revenues / jobs), historical context, appropriate laws

* For example a question on parking could also provide background on auto ownership and traffic trends, parking capacity, the links between land use – street parking – traffic, various parking models, appropriate laws

* For example a question on cemetery regulation could provide background on the usage trends (current/future), current capacity, land use regulation, environmental issues, private v. public models, government regulation models, and appropriate laws

For bill analysis the section should include:

a) The aim of the draft law

b) The main provisions of the draft law

IV. ANALYSIS (main findings, about 70% of the text)

This section is the body of your report. Using context and background information, narrow your focus to answer the question presented.

Structure your work logically using outlines, headings / sub-headings, tables so the reader can efficiently scan for information.

Cite all facts. Reference to any material should be footnoted. You should provide references to relevant international documents.

For example:

* If international comparison is asked for, use a table comparing key factors by country.

* If options are asked for, list option and perhaps locations where used and references on strengths and weaknesses of the alternative.

* If condensation of interviews / hearing testimony / etc, organize the conversations by key factors, use table to list highlights, list sources, use quotations when possible that illustrates the key point.

* If media is referenced, provide complete sourcing of the article.
REMEMBER: No opinions / no policy recommendations / respect all perspectives of an issue as your memorandum (unless otherwise specified) is for ALL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

V. QUESTIONS/ISSUES FOR FURTHER CLARIFICATION

This section should include a list of all possible questions that MP might find useful to ask for further clarification of the issue. Base questions on research and consider all perspectives.

A good question starts with a fact that you seek to contrast with reality. For example:

Question 1. Example .... International practice generally refers to specific parking solutions in the context of an overall municipal parking/traffic strategic plan. Is there a municipal plan that considers parking in the context of housing regulation and traffic congestion?

Question 2. Example .... Most recent parliament structures, in relevant European nations appear to provide committees with various authority to shape legislative proposals. What are the reasons why Armenian parliament committees should be without similar authority?

Question 3. Example ... here is general international expert consensus that local government reform should have as its goal, better service for citizens. Can you offer examples of how local consolidation will improve services for affected Armenian citizens?

VI. SOURCES: (List all sources used and cite sources in background and analysis)

VII. APPENDICES
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ...

Agenda of the Parliamentary Hearing ...

Date:
Venue:
Presiding:

10:00 – 10:15 Opening Speech
10:15 – 10:45 Topic 1: Rapporteur 1
10:45 – 11:30 Q/A
11:30 – 12:00 Break
12:00 – 12:20 Topic 2: Rapporteur 2
12:20 – 13:00 Q/A
13:00 – 13:30 Witness 1
13:30 – 14:30 Break
14:30 – 14:45 Witness 2
14:45 – 15:30 Q/A
15:30 – 16:00 Discussion/Speeches
16:30 – 17:45 Concluding speeches by the speakers
17:45 – 18:00 Wrap up
ANNOUNCEMENT

On [date], at [time], the __________ Standing Committee of the RA National Assembly organizes parliamentary hearings on [topic].

The hearings will take place in the building of the RA National Assembly at: Room 334, 19 Baghramyan Ave., Yerevan).

Apart from the MP's and invitees, persons that have filed their requests for participation in the hearing may attend the hearing.

Requests for participation in the hearing can be filed by [date] at [phone number] or via email [email address].

The hearing materials are posted in the website of the RA National Assembly [website], at the page of [name] Standing Committee.

Any further available materials on the topic to be discussed at the hearing can be sent to the Committee by [date] at [email address].
INVITATION

Dear ...

You are invited to participate in the parliamentary hearings on [topic] organized by [name] Standing Committee of the RA National Assembly.

The hearings will take place on [day, month, year] at [time], in the building of the RA National Assembly at: Room 334, 19 Baghramyan Ave., Yerevan).

The hearing materials are posted in the website of the RA National Assembly [website], at the page of [name] Standing Committee.

Should you have any materials or presentations concerning the topic of the hearings, please provide them to the Committee by [date] at [email address].

Please confirm your availability at [phone number] or via email [email address].

Your active participation is important for us.

Sincerely,

Committee Chair
# SIGN-IN SHEET

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

... STANDING COMMITTEE

Parliamentary hearings
......

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Venue</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name, surname</th>
<th>Name of organization/agency</th>
<th>Contact information (telephone, email)</th>
<th>Signature</th>
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</table>
Creation of a working group within the committee

1. The Committee approves the members and the terms of reference of the working group (one of the experts of the committee should also be included in the working group)

2. The Committee disseminates information about establishment of the group and invites the stakeholders to present submissions (reports, letters, articles, etc.)

3. The working group examines the issue through:
   – study of the submissions
   – research of other relevant materials
   – working meetings and discussions, including parliamentary hearings
   – field visits

4. The working group prepares a report

5. The Committee discusses and approves the report

6. The report is posted on the committee web page

7. The report is presented during the plenary session.

Terms of Reference for the Working Group

1. Introduction: background and purpose of creating the group

2. Issue to be enquired into (the more specific the issues are, the more efficient the work of group will be)

3. Terms
PRESS RELEASE SAMPLE

Press Release
20 June, 2014
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Support to the Armenian National Assembly Program (SANAP) and the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia concluded first joint Fellows Program: SANAP and Fellows had their efficient contribution to the activities of the RA NA standing committees

Yerevan, 20/06/14, 11:00AM - Recently the USAID Armenia funded Support to the Armenian National Assembly Program (SANAP) jointly with the Republic of Armenia National Assembly (NA) concluded the first joint Fellow Program.

Introduced jointly by SANAP and the NA late 2013, the Fellows Program aimed to enhance professional capacities of the target NA standing committees while providing opportunity for young Armenian professionals to participate in legislative process. From more than 200 applicants, eight accomplished professionals were
jointly selected to participate in the program. Fellows were assigned to parliament committees and contributed to research, policy analysis, report writing, and organizational support.

Ms. Anush Sukiasyan, JD, SANAP fellow at the RA NA Standing Committee on Health Care, Maternity and Childhood stated, “It was a great opportunity and experience to apply my knowledge and skills into legislative process as well as acquire new expertise in legislative sphere. I would specially thank SANAP and the committee for the support their have provided throughout this special experience”.

Mr. Shaun McNally, the SANAP Chief of Party, stated that the first year success means that SANAP will continue to support the Fellows Program and encourages interested young professionals to apply for the fall session of parliament.

For more information, please contact: e-mail or visit the official website. .................................

About SANAP: Launched in September 2012, the USAID-funded Support to the Armenian National Assembly Program (SANAP) in Armenia aims to strengthen democratic governance by expanding the representational, oversight and analytical capacity of the National Assembly. The four-year
project is designed to build on and extend the prior accomplishments gained through previous USAID-funded projects and cooperation with the National Assembly (NA). SANAP works to strengthen the National Assembly's institutional capacity by building the competencies and operations of selected committees.
Internet tools for surveys

Some websites and tools provide good opportunity to conduct evaluation surveys through internet. For this you will need to have the e-mails of participants.

Well-developed online survey tools (*SurveyMonkey, Zoomerang, Google Forms, and SurveyGizmo, Qualtircs and etc..*) will allow you to easily define your survey questions and possible responses and then send users a link to the survey – all in a free or basic version. All of these tools offer free versions which can be limited in two ways: the number of surveys/questions and or the number of responses.

As *Google Forms* offers an unlimited amount of surveys and space for well over 1,000 responses it is the most applicable tool for conducting evaluation surveys for hearing participants.

1. **Create a form from your Google Drive:**
   a. Click the red Create button, then Form.
   b. In the form template that opens, you can add any questions you'd like. You can also organize your form by adding headers and dividing your form into several pages.

2. **Add a question**

To add a question to your form, click the arrow next to the *Add item* button and select question type (Text, Multiple choice, Checkboxes, Scale, Grid and etc.):

When you've selected your question type, you can then fill in the possible responses to your question. If you want to further explain your question, add a description to the *Help text* field. If you want to prevent respondents from leaving a question blank, check the *Required question* box, which makes sure users answer a question before submitting your form.
3. **Edit questions, headers, and page breaks**

For each question, header, and page break you've added to your form, you can perform the following actions:

- **Edit:** To edit an existing item, just click the Edit button ![Edit button](image) to the right of the question you want to edit.

- **Duplicate:** To duplicate an item, click the Duplicate button ![Duplicate button](image) to the right of the question you want to duplicate.

- **Delete:** To delete an item, click the Delete button ![Delete button](image) to the right of the question you want to delete.

4. **Send your form to respondents**

When you've completed your form, you can send it to respondents via email or by sharing the form via social media. Just click the blue Send form button at the bottom of your form or at the top-right corner of your browser window. You can choose to share a link to your form, or you can add names, email addresses, and groups to the Add people field. Click the Done button, and the people you've added will receive an email directing them to your form.
Below a large number questions is listed which can be useful for evaluating the participant satisfaction. But the evaluator should determine which of the below questions are most important for the concerned hearings, as well as consider the possibility for including other questions for evaluation.

**SAMPLE EVALUATION SHEET**

*Please mention how satisfied you are with the below issues*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your satisfaction with the process: how satisfied are you with the ...?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness of the participation process</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your opportunity to participate in the hearings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relevance of problem discussed during the hearings</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised questions concerning the subject matter</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of people involved in the hearings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of views expressed during the hearings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Your satisfaction with the process results: How satisfied are you with the ...?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairness of the process results</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your contribution during the hearings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Your impact on the hearing results</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The extent to which these results represent the interests of the public</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your satisfaction with the facilitator. How satisfied are you with the ...?</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency of work of the facilitator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitator's neutrality (objectivity)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitator's fairness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your perception of the facilitator's attitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitator's attitude to others</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Your satisfaction with the provided information: How satisfied are you with the ...?</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided information about the hearings</td>
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<td>Size of the provided information which helped you understand the problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Size of the provided information which prepared you for effective participation in the hearings</td>
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<td>Size of the provided information which prepared others for effective participation in the hearings</td>
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<td><strong>Your satisfaction with the discussions. How satisfied are you with the ...?</strong></td>
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<td>Discussion quality</td>
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<td>Discussion courtesy</td>
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<td>Attitude towards you during the discussions</td>
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<td>Level of tolerance for people with varying views</td>
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<td>Extent to which the discussions were open, honest and clear</td>
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