

GUIDELINE

**for Planning, Organization, Facilitation
and Follow-up of Budgetary Hearing
in Municipalities**





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May, 2024

This publication was co-funded by the European Union, Switzerland and Sweden. Its content is the sole responsibility of the DEMOS project/Helvetas, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union, Switzerland and Sweden.

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INTRODUCTION

Budget is an essential element in the decision-making process at the local level and remains fundamental for putting any policy into action. Most importantly, the budget in a municipality is not simply a financial document but it shows the municipality's priorities, reflections of the political, social and economic priorities of a community. A budget allocates resources for public services, infrastructure, and development projects, affecting the daily lives of citizens.

Thus, an inclusive budgetary process that meets citizen demands and understands necessary tradeoffs and compromises should take place in each municipality. This given, public consultations with citizens are an effective tool for municipalities to ensure transparency in how budget is allocated. Their role in promoting transparency, accountability, and public trust is significant. These hearings provide a platform for citizens to participate actively in the budget-making process, offering them a voice in how public funds are spent and ensuring that the budget aligns with the citizen's needs and priorities.

In this context, according to the Administrative Instruction no.04/2023 for an Open Administration in the Municipality (the instruction), budgetary hearings are obligatory for each municipality in Kosovo.¹ Article 17 to 33 of the Instruction discusses in more detail forms of citizen involvement in decision-making processes. Article 17 specifically identifies budgetary hearings as one form of citizen involvement in decision making, alongside public meetings, public consultations for draft normative acts and policy documents, and consultative meetings with citizens. Furthermore, the Instruction stipulates that the Municipality is responsible for issuing invitations, providing necessary materials and facilities, documenting meeting minutes and preparing reports from meetings and activities involving citizens in discussions. Additionally, the Instruction tasks the public communication office to notify citizens about the venue, timing, date, agenda and additional accompanying materials.

This Instruction also obliges each municipality to inform citizens about any programs or plans of national interest, while it encourages them to organize meetings on issues related not only to budget, but to local economic development and spatial planning, amongst others. Overall, when citizens are actively engaged in the budgeting process, they understand better the process of how funds are allocated and their trust towards decisionmakers increases.

Thus, budgetary hearings, are not and should not be considered only a legal obligation, but they are instrumental in engaging all citizens (women, men, youth, non-majority groups, and people with disabilities), understanding their needs, and fostering a collaborative environment where citizens and municipalities work together to shape the financial landscape of the municipality. This process is vital for cultivating a sense of ownership and responsibility among citizens, leading to more sustainable and accountable local governance.

Considering the importance of municipal budgetary hearings and their preparation, this municipal guideline is designed to help each municipality plan, organize, facilitate & follow-up budgetary hearings. Each municipal budget team will be trained in advance and is expected to comply with this guideline when organizing, facilitating and following-up budgetary hearings.

¹ Administrative Instruction (MAPL) No.04/2023 on Open Administration in Municipalities. Ministry of Local Government Administration. Government of Kosovo.

KEY DEFINITIONS

THE MUNICIPALITY'S BUDGET: The annual budget of a municipality represents a financial plan detailing its income and spending for a year. This budget is formulated and ratified by local governing entities, including the municipal assembly and the mayor. It encompasses expected income from diverse sources, including local taxation, government transfers, and fees charged for municipal services. Furthermore, the budget delineates the allocation of funds across different areas such as infrastructure, education, healthcare, culture, environmental initiatives, and public safety. As a crucial tool for municipal financial management, the budget facilitates the planning of projects and expenses at the local level, ensuring financial stability and helping to prioritize expenditures based on the community's needs and requests.

BUDGETARY HEARINGS, also known as the public budgeting process, are a practice where citizens, non-governmental organizations, interest groups, and other municipal actors have the opportunity to contribute to the formulation and decision-making of the municipal budget. They can have a direct impact in budget reallocation.

This public consultation process allows citizens and other stakeholders to have a say in determining municipal priorities and express their views on planned expenditures, revenues, fiscal policies, and other budgetary matters. Budget consultations typically involve public consultations- the so-called budgetary hearings, online meetings, online surveys, amongst other mechanisms to ensure broad public participation.

INCLUSIVITY is an approach of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for every member of society including women, men, girls, boys, and all non-majority groups, and people with disabilities. Embracing inclusivity as a municipality involves recognizing and appreciating diversity while creating a safe environment during municipal budgetary hearings, where all citizens feel empowered to voice their opinions freely.

EQUALITY refers to the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities. Each individual is given the same resources and opportunities no matter their differences including gender.

EQUITY is fairness and justice in the distribution of resources or opportunities. It recognizes that people have different needs and circumstances, and it aims to ensure that everyone has access to the same opportunities and resources needed to reach an equal outcome.

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS means the inclusion of citizens and interested parties in the consultation process before decision-making takes place in the executive or legislative level of the municipality.

MUNICIPAL BUDGET TEAM is the group tasked with overseeing and organizing the consultation process for the municipal budget, both internally within the municipality and with external actors. This team is assembled at the discretion of the Mayor of the Municipality.

BUDGET CALENDAR

This budget calendar is a tool that shows the timeline for the completion of each step in the budget process leading up to the new fiscal year. This budget calendar includes deadlines for budget circulars, discussions within the municipality, budgetary hearings with citizens, and the adoption of the budget.

DATE DUE BY	ACTION
First week of march	Approval of Municipal Grants from the Grant Commission in the Government
30 April	Approval of the Medium-term Budgetary Framework by the Government
15 May	<i>Issuance of first budgetary circular by the Ministry of Finance</i>
16-22 May	Development of the internal budgetary circular by the Chief Financial Officer and the Directorate for Budget and Finance in consultation with other municipal directorates
23 May	Announcement on budgetary hearings for Medium-term Budgetary Framework
8 June	Budgetary hearings with citizens for Medium-term Budgetary Framework
11-21 June	Review of proposals/requests and organization of meetings with each municipal directorate
22 June	Review of proposals/requests/ideas/comments of citizens from budgetary hearings and those submitted in written and publication of the report
23 June	Committee for Politics and Finance in the Municipal Assembly is informed seven days prior to the meeting when the Medium-term Budgetary Framework is approved
30 June	Approval of the Medium-Term Budgetary Framework in the Assembly
1 July	Announcement on the calendar of budgetary hearings for the annual budget proposal of the Municipality
15-30 July	Organization of Budgetary hearings for the annual budget proposal from the Executive
1-14 August	Review of proposals/requests/ideas/comments of citizens from budgetary hearings and those submitted in written for the municipal annual budget proposal
15 August	<i>Issuance of the second budgetary circular by the Ministry of Finance</i>
16-22 August	Publication of budgetary hearing reports for the annual budget proposal
1 September	Approval of the municipal Budget by the Mayor
2 September	Announcement on the calendar of budgetary hearings for the annual budget proposal of the Municipality
10-15 September	Organization of Budgetary hearings for the annual budget proposal from the Municipal Assembly
22 September	Publication of budgetary hearing reports for the annual budget proposal
23 September	Announcement of the Committee for Politics and Finance regarding the meeting of the Assembly
30 September	Approval of the Municipal Budget by the Municipal Assembly and its submission to the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers
31 October	The Government approves the budget-proposal and sends it to the Parliament
31 December	The Parliament approves the annual budget for the upcoming fiscal year

Guiding principles of budgetary hearings

The guiding principle of the municipal budget is **inclusiveness**. In this context inclusiveness refers to municipalities ensuring that budget is more than a fiscal exercise, it is a democratic process that **reflects priorities and needs of all citizens** (women, men, youth, minorities, people with disabilities, elderly, etc), where everyone feels included and welcome in the budgetary process. It involves creating an open and accepting atmosphere for all individuals, irrespective of their gender, religion, or other traits that may make them different. Therefore, inclusiveness is more than just equal opportunities and access to resources. It's about **giving everyone a voice** and ensuring they are heard in the process and that the process reflects their needs. It's about **recognizing and valuing diversity**, and not just tolerating it, but celebrating it, while building robust communities and organizations, as it **promotes a sense of belonging and encourages collaboration and cooperation among members**.



Once the approach of inclusivity is embraced during the municipal budget process preparation, it will foster citizen involvement, collective ownership, shared responsibility and enhance the credibility and

acceptance of the budget. Ensuring inclusiveness, among others, will increase citizens' trust towards the municipality.

How to ensure inclusiveness during the municipal budget process?

Information, Education, and Communication:

- Conduct educational sessions directly with all citizens to help them understand how budget is made, how decisions are made, and the impact they can make with their participation/active feedback.
- Carry out an identification process of categories of the populations that might be left behind or are usually underrepresented.
- Convene their representative (someone they choose) to participate in the budgetary hearings and represent their views/speak on their behalf.
- Create an inclusive exchange platform where citizens feel confident during the process so they can express their views, etc.

Citizen engagement: Involve all citizens (women, men, youth, minorities, people with disabilities, elderly, etc) in the budget process through budgetary hearings, surveys, and other outreach mechanisms.

Accessibility: Make budget information easily accessible, readable, and understandable to all citizens (women, men, youth, citizens with disabilities, citizens with language barriers, elderly, etc.).

Transparency: Publish all information related to municipal budget process including budget document, meeting minutes with citizens, reports with feedback and comments on why a citizen request has been rejected/accepted, functional and updated municipal web-page, usage of social media platforms.

Equity considerations: Try to reallocate the municipal budget in such a way that addresses the needs of all citizens, in particularly marginalized groups of the society.

Adaptability: Remain open as a municipality by building feedback mechanisms to allow citizens to present their evolving and changing needs. Continuously improve inclusivity efforts to ensure they remain effective and responsive to all citizens (women, men, youth, minorities, people with disabilities, elderly, etc).

The budget process: who does what?

Chief Financial Officer

- In charge of the budgeting process including the development of the medium-term budgetary framework (MTBF), consultations with municipal actors, and drafting of the budget
- Responsible for the coordination of the budgetary process consultation within the municipality, will all municipal directors
- Responsible to ensure that the budgetary process complies all financial and legal obligations as a municipality
- Responsible to chair the meeting and present the budget, in the simplest form, during budgetary hearings, so that citizens who participate can understand and contribute by sharing their needs and concerns

Municipal Directors

- Responsible to draft and submit their department financial requests to the Chief Financial Officer within the specified budgetary deadline
- Responsible for giving their contribution to the working groups for the organization of budget hearings either directly or through the representatives of the directorates they lead - always for the parts of the budget that are related to their mandate as directors

Public Information Officer

- Responsible to inform citizens regarding the timing and place of budgetary hearings
- Responsible to prepare the agenda and meeting materials for budgetary hearing
- Responsible to keep the meeting minutes during budgetary hearings
- Responsible to bring to the municipal budget team for review all citizen requests received via email
- Responsible to prepare public consultations reports, in all municipal official languages, and submit them for publication in the municipality website

Public Input

- Through public consultations, citizens participate in the process of drafting the budget. This given, that have the opportunity to share their needs and requests which are later on assessed by the municipal budget team.

Municipality Mayor

- Sign the decision to form the working group, otherwise referred to as the Municipality Budget Team, to organize budgetary hearings and plan everything related to the municipal budget.
- Sign the budget proposal and send it to the Municipal Assembly.

Municipal Assembly Role

- Reviews the proposed budget and discuss about it in the assembly session.
- Organize budgetary hearings with citizens to hear their concerns and needs regarding the municipal budget proposal.
- Approves the municipal budget and submits it to the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers.

I. PLANNING OF THE BUDGETARY HEARINGS

Three most important aspects for the well-preparation of budgetary hearings, which the municipal budget team should have in mind, include:

1. Timeline for the budgetary hearings – organize budget discussions within municipality (with directorates), send citizen notifications out early, prepare an agenda and meeting materials, publish minutes of each meeting and consultation reports on time;
2. Reach out to all citizens utilizing methods such as identification of groups of interests/citizens;
3. Ensure proper organization of the budgetary hearings in terms of time, location, supporting documents, language aspects.

1.1 Establishment of the budgetary hearing working group

In early February, the mayor is expected to make a decision regarding the establishment of the budgetary hearing working group, also known as **the municipal budget team**, tasked with drafting the medium-term financial framework (MTBF) for the next three years. This decision should encompass the selection of all team members and **clearly delineate the responsibilities of each member**.

The core municipal budget team should consist of the Chief Financial Officer, the Public Information Officer/Coordinator for Public Consultations and the Director or official/representative of the Directorate for Budget and Finance. However, the composition of the team should not be restricted to only these members; other individuals should be encouraged to join as necessary. For instance, a public official/or Director of the Directorate of Public Services and Urban Planning should participate, considering the significant portion of the budget allocated to infrastructure projects and public investments. Similarly, representatives from the Directorates of Agriculture, Economic Development, Culture and Youth, Education and Health should be included due to their involvement in subsidy and grant schemes. Additionally, representatives from all other relevant directorates should be invited to participate as deemed necessary. Each team member, beyond the core municipal budget team, should be assigned specific roles before, during, and after the budgetary hearings based on the requirements of the core team. The following three boxes include the list of tasks to be divided amongst the group before, during and after the budgetary hearing:

CORE MUNICIPAL BUDGET TEAM

- Chief Financial Officer
- Director/official of the Directorate for Budget and Finance
- Public Information Officer/Coordinator for Public Consultations

TASKS BEFORE THE BUDGETARY HEARING

- Identification of citizen groups utilizing asset mapping and the municipal database (developed with the support of DEMOS team)
- Determination of the number of budgetary hearings
- Determination of the venue and time while considering convenience for all marginalized and people with disabilities
- Preparation of the invitation for budgetary hearings
- Publication of the invitation via social media, amongst others (see the outreach strategy below)
- Sending via email invitations for budgetary hearings to specific citizen groups
- Preparation of the budget information in a visualized format
- Preparation of the minutes of the meeting template
- Preparation of the participants list

TASKS DURING THE BUDGETARY HEARING

- Presentation of the budget information
- Sharing participant lists for signature
- Keeping meeting minutes
- Moderation and facilitation of budgetary hearings
- Facilitating the meeting (please follow the guidelines in the facilitation part of this guideline)

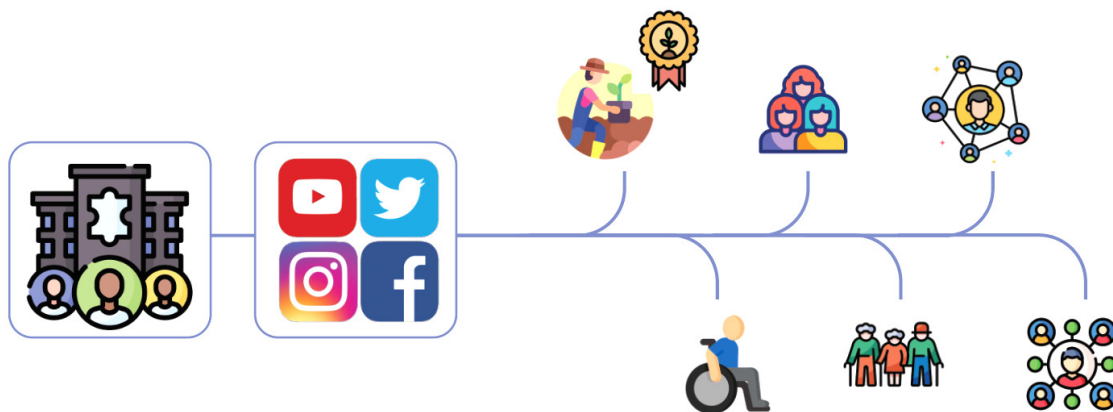
TASKS AFTER THE BUDGETARY HEARING

- Compilation of criteria for the review of citizens' requests and categorization and prioritization for acceptance and rejection
- Review all the requests received during the budgetary hearings and online (via email)
- Compilation of a detailed public consultations report and its publication in the municipality webpage

1.2 Identification of citizen groups and cooperation with civil society

Immediately after the establishment of the municipal budget team, the public information official should go beyond the current practice of identifying citizen groups about budgetary hearings. This can be achieved by utilizing the following means/tools and approaches:

- **Screening of key and relevant groups of interest:** The official can identify individuals, institutions, citizens belonging to marginalized groups of society, citizens' associations, etc., through social media such as Facebook and Instagram that serve as a source to connect and inform citizens. The following groups should also be targeted including municipal bursaries, agricultural grant/subsidy winners, women's associations, disabled persons' associations, local councils and other associations and informal groups that can be identified through social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram.
- **Categorizing groups of interests in a municipal database and regularly updating these databases:** The public information official should be responsible to keep the list of all identified individuals, institutions, associations, and informal social media groups and update the database on regularly basis, especially before the municipal budget planning process is about to convene. It is suggested that this list is shared also with heads of departments, who can share it with their staff and add additional sources that would connect the municipality with citizens during budgetary hearings. This form of outreach is targeted and has the potential to reach a higher number of citizens in budgetary hearings.



Moreover, during this phase, the municipality should establish collaboration with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and leverage its existing partnerships with other local CSOs, such as women's organizations and non-majority led CSOs, to engage with citizens and educate them about their role in the budgetary process, specifically budgetary hearings.

It is also important to engage with women and other citizen groups from non-majority communities to discuss their needs and priorities and emphasize the importance of communicating these during budgetary hearings if they wish to have their concerns addressed. It is crucial that these efforts occur within this timeframe to ensure that citizens, particularly women and other vulnerable groups, feel empowered to share their needs and priorities during budgetary hearings for the MTBF and the draft budget and understand the significance of these hearings. Citizens need to understand the budget and its importance in policy implementation.

1.3 Budgetary hearing logistics

The latest, in early to mid-April, **the municipal budget team**, should plan the number of budgetary hearings to take place, physically and /or online, for the MTBF and the draft budget, and draft a detailed agenda including the time and the venue for all budgetary hearings.

The higher the number of budgetary hearings, the higher the possibility to consult a larger number of citizens.

Moreover, if it is expected that citizens in any of the venues will be from the non-majority communities, the agenda along with all other supporting materials should be translated into the relevant languages. Additionally, the agenda should include a municipality contact point, for any inquiries citizens may have before the meeting. The contact point information should stand out in the agenda.

Also, as a supplementary document in addition to the agenda, **a visual presentation of the budget should be provided with information that is easy to understand for citizens.** This will enable citizens to familiarize themselves with the budget in advance, understanding its structure, key economic categories, expenditures and other relevant details.

Extra consideration needs to be given to the timing and venue of the budgetary hearings.

Before deciding for these two aspects, always think whether the proposed location and timing is easily accessible and convenient for a woman, a handicapped person, and a non-majority community member?!

1.4 Approach to budgetary hearings

1.4.1 Municipalities should not limit themselves to conducting budgetary hearings in person.

They should explore online formats for these events. Holding online budgetary meetings could result in increased participation, particularly from women and other marginalized groups who might face difficulties attending in person due to transportation or scheduling conflicts. These groups can more conveniently participate online without incurring any expenses. Likewise, the form of using social networks or simply consulting in writing enables even a part of the citizens of the municipalities belonging to the diaspora to give their contribution. Utilizing platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams could be one viable approach.

Holding budgetary hearings online should be a standard municipal practice.

Furthermore, citizens' opinions on specific priorities can be collected through online surveys or feedback forms. For example, in the case of prioritizing infrastructure projects, it's crucial for the municipality to solicit input from citizens. In these cases, utilizing platforms like Google Forms or Survey Monkey to

distribute online surveys can prove highly beneficial. Additionally, Viber groups offer another source for gathering information, wherein a list of capital projects can be shared and group members can vote for their preferred priority project. This data can then enable the municipality to make informed decisions benefiting citizens.

1.4.2 The approach to budgetary hearings can be focused both on the specific topics under discussion, such as health and education, and on the needs of targeted demographic groups like women, youth, and minorities. This strategy ensures that budget allocations are not only adequate but also equitable, addressing the unique challenges and opportunities within each sector. For example, in health budget discussions, it's crucial to consider the specific needs of different demographic groups, such as prenatal care for women or mental health services for youth. This dual-focus approach allows the municipality to create a more inclusive budgeting framework that acknowledges and addresses the diverse needs of the community. These two methods of conducting budgetary hearings foster a more just allocation of recourse that accommodate citizen demands.

1.5 Outreach strategy

The list of associations, institutions, informal citizen groups, and individuals, utilizing the municipality database (developed with the support of DEMOS team), for budgetary hearings, should be finalized by the end of February.

Please, remember that citizens need to be informed about budgetary hearings two weeks in advance, at least.

When citizens are informed about budgetary hearings, a focused outreach approach should be used to include various categories of citizens in the hearings. We already have the community asset map identified and updated during early February; thus, as requested, two weeks in advance of budgetary hearings, both for the MTBF and budget proposal, the agenda should be shared with all groups/citizens identified.

This approach fosters transparency and inclusivity, allowing for broader citizen engagement and input in shaping the budget priorities of the municipality.

Where to share the information for budgetary hearings?





- *Municipal webpage*
- *Municipal social media pages*
- *Shared by the Mayor in his/her social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram*
- *Encourage other municipal officers to share the post in their social media*
- *All chairs of local councils, informal groups, associations, and individuals should receive the agenda via email or social media platform or viber groups*
- *Local media online*
- *Local radios*
- *Primary and Secondary Schools*
- *Bus stations*
- *Bakery stores*
- *Big markets*
- *Municipality building*
- *City library*

II. FACILITATION OF THE BUDGETARY HEARINGS

The **municipal budgetary team** should participate in all budgetary hearings. While it is recommended that the meeting is chaired by the chief financial officer, it remains at the discretion of the team to decide among themselves who is assigned this responsibility. Most importantly, in each meeting the chief financial officer should clearly explain the budget in disposal, which can accommodate citizen's request and the budget should be presented in a user-friendly manner (see below for more details).

The budget of the Municipality for the year 2024





Some of the capital investments from the municipality (construction projects such as sidewalks, sewerage, public lighting)

	Road construction at the exit of the city	2,300,000 €	<div></div>
	Regulation of the river bed	350,000 €	<div></div>
	Construction of roads with asphalt in the villages: Village 1, Village 2, Village 3, etc.	500,000 €	<div></div>
	Fixing the roads "Road 1" and "Road 2"	250,000 €	<div></div>

The budget of the Municipality for the year 2024

Sectoral budget 2024

(budget allocated by the Municipality for education, health, recreation and general public services)

	Education	655,000 €	<div></div>
	Health	217,000 €	<div></div>
	Recreation and culture	1,533,000 €	<div></div>
	General public services	700,000 €	<div></div>

All internal consultations in the Municipality related to the inputs of the various directorates and which are planned for MTBF, must take place during the month of May. Thus, with the release of the first budget circular in mid-May, the municipality should have already completed most of its internal consultations and as a result, the representatives of the municipal directorates will find it easier and more realistic that the requests and ideas for MTBF have them ready in time to send them to the chief financial officer who develops the internal budget circular. While the budget hearings for MTBF that the Municipality organizes directly with the citizens, it is recommended that they take place in the first two weeks of June. Also, all budget hearings for the draft budget that are organized by the executive of the Municipality must be held from mid-July to the beginning of August. Therefore, with the release of the second budget circular, the municipality must have already completed all consultations with the citizens, that is, it is familiar with the demands of the citizens. As a result, it may be easier for the municipality adapt to the demands of the citizens and the recommendation which are proposed to enter the draft budget according to the ceilings determined by the second budget circular.

The decisive moderator's role

The facilitation of budgetary hearings is a critical aspect of the budgetary process, ensuring that all citizens including women, men, girls and boys are heard and that their contributions are integrated into the final budget. Effective facilitation promotes inclusivity, clarity, and efficiency during these meetings. Thus, the role of the moderator from the municipality is critical in ensuring a safe environment for all participants to feel empowered to voice their concerns and requests. Here is a list of aspects a moderator should have in mind and apply during each budgetary hearing:

Moderator's to do list:

- *Do not let one person dominate the meeting*
- *Encourage everyone to talk*
- *Encourage women to sit upfront*
- *Create a sense of community*
- *Try to summarize and validate someone's idea in the group*
- *Try to use a flipchart and write citizen requests or key points*
- *Use visualizations for showing data related to budget*
- *Be patient and let citizens finish their arguments*
- *Be cautious of bullying or misogynistic language among citizens*
- *Try to utilize U- shaped tables during discussions*

Do not let one person dominate the meeting:

Ensure that no single participant monopolizes the conversation. This can be managed by setting time limits for each speaker and gently steering the discussion to allow others to contribute.

Thank you for your input, let's hear from someone else on this topic. Does anyone else have a different perspective or additional point to add?

I notice we haven't heard from some of you yet. Would anyone like to share their thoughts or concerns about the budget proposals we're discussing?

Encourage everyone to talk: Create an inviting atmosphere where all attendees feel comfortable sharing their views. This may involve asking open-ended questions and directly inviting quieter participants to express their thoughts.

Encourage women to sit upfront: Promoting gender inclusivity by encouraging women to take prominent seats can help ensure their voices are heard equally, combating traditional biases in public speaking environments.

We want to ensure we're hearing diverse perspectives today, so I would encourage women participants to move to the front seats if you are all okay with that?!

Before we dive into the budget details, let's go around the room and briefly introduce ourselves. What are your expectations from this budget?

Create a sense of community: Foster an environment where participants feel a shared sense of purpose and belonging. This can be achieved through ice-breaker activities or by highlighting common goals at the beginning of the meeting.

Try to summarize and validate someone's idea in the group: After a participant speaks, summarize their point to ensure it is understood correctly and to validate their contribution, showing that their input is valued and considered.

So, if I understand correctly, you're suggesting [summarize the point]. Did I capture that right? It's a valuable perspective because [give a reason or validate].

Let's list your suggestions on this flipchart as we go along. This way, we can ensure all key points and requests are visually represented and considered.

Try to use a flipchart and write citizen requests or key points: Visual aids like flipcharts can help in organizing thoughts and keeping track of the discussion, making the meeting more productive and focused.

Use visualizations for showing data related to the budget: Visual tools such as charts and graphs can make financial data more accessible and understandable to all participants, aiding in clearer discussions.

Let me show you a graph of our budget allocation. How do you think we should adjust these figures to better meet our community's needs?

Please take your time to finish your point, we're here to listen to everything you have to say?

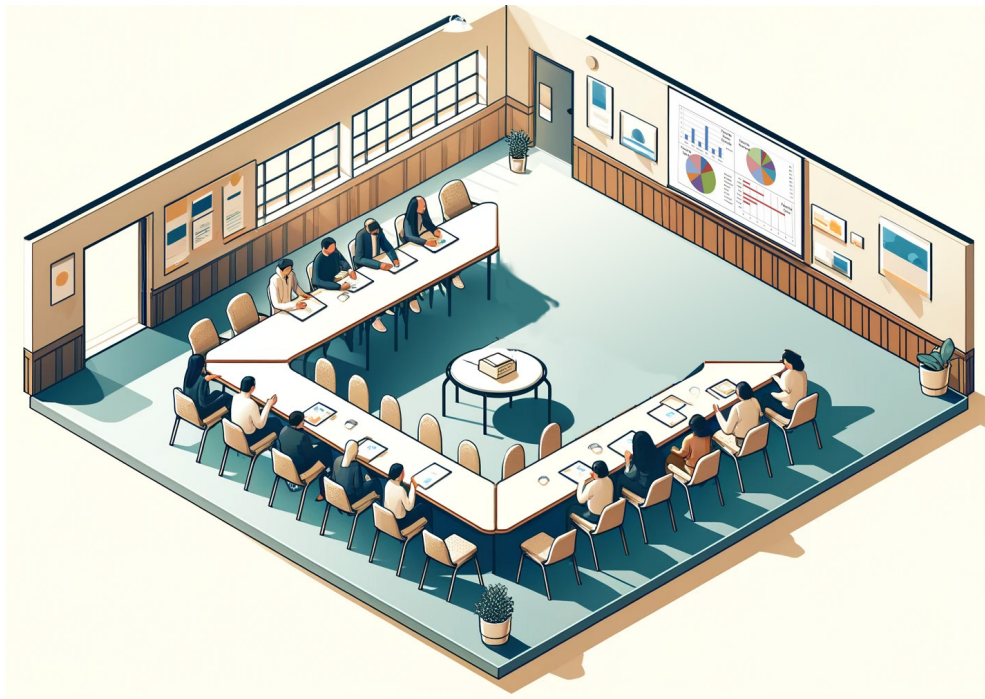
Be patient and let citizens finish their arguments: Demonstrating patience allows for a more respectful and thorough dialogue, ensuring that participants feel their contributions are important.

Be cautious of bullying or misogynistic language among citizens: Actively monitor and address any form of bullying or discrimination to maintain a respectful and safe environment for all participants.

It's important that our discussion remains respectful to all participants. Let's focus on the budget details and avoid personal comments or generalizations.

I suggest we arrange our tables in a U-shape to better see and hear each other. This way, it feels more like a conversation among us all on an equal footing.

Try to utilize U-shaped tables during discussions: This seating arrangement can facilitate eye contact and interaction among participants, making the discussion more engaging and inclusive.



Moreover, budgetary hearings must be conducted in all planned neighborhoods and villages, as well as online. **At the beginning and at the end of each budgetary hearing, the moderator, preferably the Public Information Officer/Coordinator of Public Consultations should clarify and inform citizens who participated in the budgetary hearings as to when the feedback about their requests will be available and inform citizens about the possibility and timeframe of submitting additional requests after the meeting, referring to the municipal contact point.**

Structure of the budgetary hearings' meeting

1. The chairperson of the meeting, preferably the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), will start the meeting by sharing budget visualizations and explaining the details of the budget in a user-friendly manner (ten minutes maximum). Ideally, the CFO should use the visualization to explain the budget information and also present for discussion the list of capital projects that the municipality considers a priority, especially those derived from municipal strategic documents such as the municipal development plan, or even indicate which investments will continue to be implemented even during the fiscal year for which the budget is planned because they are carried over from previous years, so they are multi-year investments.
2. Then, a representative from the president's cabinet should undertake to discuss the budget and its intended priorities, which may be related to the electoral promises of the President, i.e. which of them may have come to be realized during the year for which the draft budget is specifically planned (maximum five minutes).
3. The moderator will lead the session, adhering to the previously outlined principles of effective moderation, and will facilitate the discussion until all citizen requests have been addressed and responses from the attending municipal members have been heard during the meeting (both in person or online).

Always remember to leave more space for citizens to share their opinions compared to municipal officers.

Roles of the municipal budget team during the facilitation process

The role of each municipal budget team member should be clarified before the meeting. The following roles should be assigned:

- 1** The **Chief Financial Officer** should start the meeting by presenting the budget information in an easy-to-understand format, focusing on capital investments that touch upon the interests of the citizens living in the area where the budgetary hearing is being held.
- 2** The **Director or other representatives from the Directorate for Budget and Finance** may participate in the conversation, providing further details to support the Chief Financial Officer.
- 3** The **Public Information Officer** should be well-suited to moderate the session because the work nature of such an officer typically involves communication and facilitation skills with the public and inform participants about the timing and the aim of the discussion.
- 4** **Someone from the team**, preferably an officer from any of the directorates, should be assigned to take notes from the discussion and share all accompanying materials including the signing sheet and taking picture, prior to the beginning of the meeting,

III. FOLLOW-UP AND EVALUATION OF BUDGETARY HEARINGS

This phase is critical to ensuring that citizen requests are taken seriously and reviewed; thus, increasing societal trust in the municipality. After the budgetary hearings, the municipality should undertake a comprehensive review process to evaluate each citizen request received during the meetings and via email. This review process should involve the **municipal budget team** gathering to review and assess carefully each request. The objective should be to ensure all citizens (women, men, girls and boys, non-majority groups, and people with disabilities) requests are given proper consideration, fostering a culture of transparency, accountability, and equality in the budget allocation process. The municipal budget team should consider the following steps in addressing properly each citizen request:

1. **Compilation of Citizen Requests:** The first step is to compile all the citizen requests received during the budgetary hearings. This includes requests submitted both physically and online, ensuring that every voice is accounted for.
2. **Review and Evaluation:** The municipal budget team should thoroughly review each citizen request. This involves assessing the budget feasibility, impact, and alignment with the municipality's goals and priorities.
3. **Analysis of Budget Implications:** The team should analyze the budgetary implications of each citizen request. This involves considering the financial resources required to fulfill the request and its potential impact on other budgetary allocations.
4. **Decision Making:** The review of the comments is done by the **municipal budget team** of the project proposal, which **decides on the acceptance or rejection of the requests received by citizens**. It is crucial that the team also is **transparent** towards mentioning and concretely specifying which were the **criteria used** to decide whether an idea or request made by citizens was categorized as either accepted, partially accepted, or refused.
5. **Communication of Decisions through Public Consultations report:** Once decisions are made, the public consultations report should be made, and each citizen request should be included in it. Transparency helps build trust and confidence in the municipal budgeting process and creates a feeling of ownership.

Accepted Request: *If a citizen request for additional funding for a local park renovation project is accepted, the municipality should communicate the decision along with details on how the allocated funds will be used, the timeline for the project, and how citizens can stay updated on its progress.*

Rejected Request: *If a citizen request for a new football center is rejected due to budget constraints, the municipality should provide a detailed explanation of the decision. This may include information on the current budget limitations, alternative solutions considered, and opportunities for citizens to participate in future discussions.*

The municipal budget team should **draft and publish a public consultation report**² at least fifteen (15) days and no more than thirty (30) calendar days from the day of the end of the deadline for submitting proposals and written comments, respectively from the day of the completion of the final budget hearing, in accordance with legislation.

DESPITE WHAT LEGISLATION REQUIRES, MUNICIPALITIES SHOULD ATTEMPT TO PUBLISH THIS REPORT AS SOON AS BUDGETARY HEARINGS AND ALL CONSULTATION REGARDING THE MUNICIPAL BUDGET PROCESS IS FINALIZED.

That is why consistent and up-to-date minute taking and **evidence of ideas and requests** received from citizens is crucial. This report must be thorough and detailed, encompassing all requests from citizens and the **municipality's responses to each**. If any citizen's request is rejected, no matter the reason, the municipal budget team must provide a **clear justification for the rejection**.

Moreover, the format of the report should be reader-friendly, organizing all requests in a tabular format. This table should have columns that display the citizen's name and surname, the nature of the request, and separate columns indicating whether and why the request was accepted or rejected by the municipality. If possible, the municipal budget team, should aim to **group citizen demands into major categories** like infrastructure projects and then list all such requests, followed by health, water and sewerage, lighting, culture and sports, and similar. This given, they will be clearer to read, understand and follow, for all.

Budget hearing topics	Requests / Suggestions / Comments	Who gave a request / suggestion for the 2023 budget project	The status of the request / suggestion (accepted, partially accepted or not accepted)	Reasoning (comment on partial acceptance and non-acceptance of comments is mandatory)
Draft budget of 2023	For example, a request for the realization of the project of the sewerage network and the paving of the road with cubes in the village X, Rr. X	Filan Fisteku – residents of the village or chairman of the local village council	Partially accepted	<p>The answer:</p> <p>The working group, after examining and analyzing the request, on the basis of budget opportunities and budget distribution in the most rational way, has taken as a basis and has partially incorporated such a request in the budget projections of 2023, regarding the realization of the network laying project sewerage in the village X, Rr. X until the paving of the road with domes is rejected due to the lack of current budget possibilities that the municipality has, as well as the approach of the municipality that the 2023 budget project be as comprehensive as possible.</p>

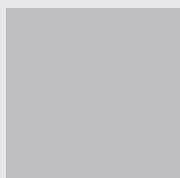
² Two weeks after budgetary hearings for MTBF are finalized, a public consultations report should be prepared and published. The same logic should be applied two weeks after budgetary hearings for the draft annual budget are finalized.

Additionally, members of the Committee on Politics and Finance in the municipality assembly should be informed seven (7) days prior to the meeting for the approval of the MTBF in June and for the budget proposal in September.

The summary report of the budget hearings, especially those organized for the draft budget of the municipality, is suggested to contain the following elements/aspects, but not be limited to them:

- Narrative of the calendar of budget hearings and the details of where, when and with whom they were organized and the disaggregation into as many elements as possible of the participants present (gender, ethnicity, ability, age)
- Determining the criteria – the criteria defined by the team to decide which requests are accepted to enter the budget, which partially, and which are rejected, as well as the criteria for deciding which of the received requests are prioritized to enter the budget
- Narrative about requests that have come as a result of physical hearings and those in written form
- Categorization according to the nature of the requests - that is, which category they belong to (subsidies, capital investments, goods and services, etc.)
- The assessment of requirements is also based on the aforementioned categorizations
- Detailed reasons for each request, especially those partially accepted and rejected

APPENDIX I: Invitation template



Municipal Logo

MUNICIPALITY OF XXX
[WRITE THE NAME OF THE MUNICIPALITY]

No.	Budgetary Hearings (list neighborhoods covered)	Venue	Date and Time	Municipal officers/directorates/offices part of the meeting
1				
2				
3				
....				

XXX [name and surname and email address]
of the municipal officer who can be contacted prior to
the budgetary hearing meeting to get more
information related to the budget/meeting

APPENDIX II: Personalized Invitation template

Dear Sir/Madam,

The municipality of XX, is organizing budgetary hearing; thus, you are cordially invited to participate in the meeting. Your opinion is highly valued and will aid our municipality to make informed based decision. Please, remember that your participation and input will contribute to the transparency and accountability of our municipality, ensuring that your needs as citizens are considered in the budgetary decision making.

**The budgetary hearing is scheduled
for (date) and
will be held at (location),
from (time).**

Please respond by (deadline) to confirm your attendance and indicate any accommodation needs you may have. If you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact (name and surname) at (email address) or (phone number).

Thank you for your commitment to our community, and we eagerly anticipate your participation in this important event.

Sincerely,

Mayor of the Municipality
(name and surname)

APPENDIX III: Agenda template

Municipal Logo

MUNICIPLITY OF XXX
[WRITE THE NAME OF THE MUNICIPALITY]

**Theme: Municipal Budgetary hearings with citizens in the
XXXX [write the name of the neighborhoods covered]**

Venue: [clearly write the venue]

Time: [write the time when the meeting is expected to start]

Date: [write the complete date, day, month and year]

18:00 -18:10	[supposing that the meeting will start at 18:00] – Presentation of the budget by the Chief Financial Officer
18:10-18:15	Short presentation by the mayor's cabinet on municipal priorities and opportunities
18:15 -19:30	Open discussion with all citizens -this session is moderated by the Public Communication Officer
19:30 -19:45	Conclusion and information regarding the possibility to send requests via email

XXX [name and surname and email address]
**of the municipal officer who can be contacted prior to the budgetary hearing
meeting to get more information related to the budget/meeting.**

APPENDIX IV: Minutes of the meeting template

Minutes of a meeting serve as an official record of what was discussed, decisions made, and actions agreed upon during the meeting. Thus, it should include the following elements:

MINUTES

Date: [Date of the Meeting]

Time: [Start Time - End Time]

Location: [Physical Location or Virtual Platform]

Signing sheet: [Name, surname, gender, ethnicity, email, phone number]

Discussion points: [Write the name and surname of the participant who talks and what each participant has said during the meeting. For instance, citizen XY has said that she is concerned with the lighting in the neighborhood since after 20:00 pm there is no lighting and it is becoming dangerous... if she further elaborates, write she continued to provide more details as to why this is needed and the problems caused. If the citizen did not provide any information, then state that this citizen made this request but it was not further explained by her/him.]

APENDIX V: Participation sheet template

PARTICIPATION

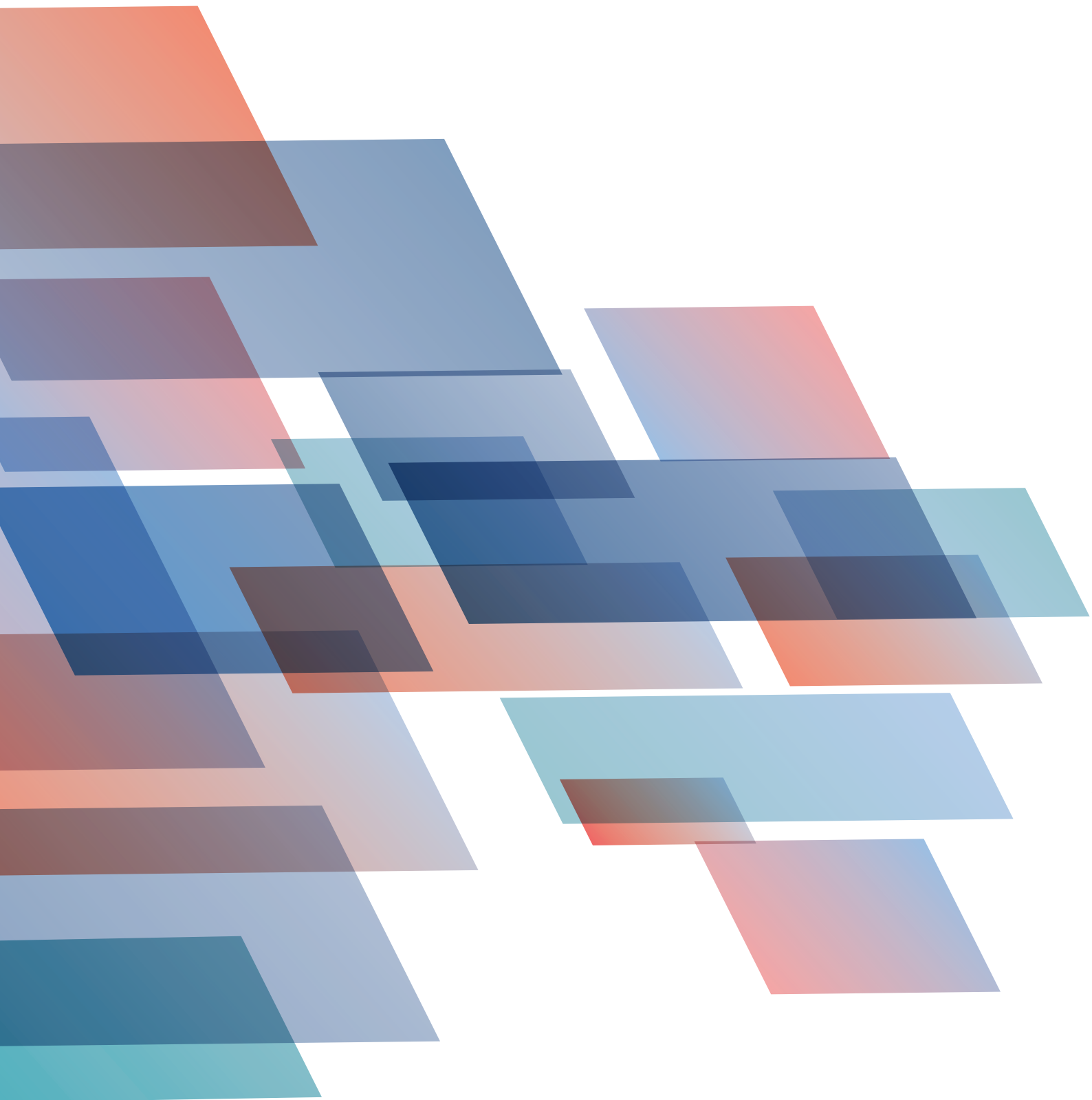
No.	Name	Surname	Number	Email	Gender	Ethnicity	Signature
1							
2							
3							
4							

APPENDIX VI: Public Consultation report template

The public consultation report should encompass both a descriptive section and a detailed table highlighting individual citizen requests. The descriptive section should cover key aspects such as the date, location, duration, municipality participants, number of citizens participating, and discussion topics. Meanwhile, the table should outline each citizen request, including the requester's full name, and provide a comprehensive rationale for the acceptance or rejection of each request.

A table like the following can be used for illustration:

Budget hearing topics	Requests / Suggestions / Comments	Who gave a request / suggestion for the 2023 budget project	The status of the request / suggestion (accepted, partially accepted or not accepted)	Reasoning (comment on partial acceptance and non-acceptance of comments is mandatory)
Draft budget of 2023	For example, a request for the realization of the project of the sewerage network and the paving of the road with cubes in the village X, Rr. X	Filan Fisteku – residents of the village or chairman of the local village council	Partially accepted	<p>The answer:</p> <p>The working group, after examining and analyzing the request, on the basis of budget opportunities and budget distribution in the most rational way, has taken as a basis and has partially incorporated such a request in the budget projections of 2023, regarding the realization of the network laying project sewerage in the village X, Rr. X until the paving of the road with domes is rejected due to the lack of current budget possibilities that the municipality has, as well as the approach of the municipality that the 2023 budget project be as comprehensive as possible.</p>



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