TOOLKIT
FOR CITIZEN FEEDBACK MECHANISMS
ON LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT ISSUES

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Zoran Jacev.

The authors views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

Content

1. Foreword 2

2. Message from Macedonian Local Government Activity 4

3. Introduction 6

3.1. What is citizen feedback 7

3.2. Necessary conditions for citizen feedback 7

3.2.1. Availability of municipal operations information 8

3.2.2. Positively inclined citizens for feedback 9

3.2.3. Local self-government's willingness to receive feedback 11

3.2.4. Administration capable of collecting feedback 11

4. Manners of obtaining citizen feedback 12

4.1. Open sessions of the municipal Council 13

4.2. Public opinion poll in the municipality 17

4.3. Survey for certain categories of citizens 20

4.4. Evaluation survey for the services in the municipality 23

4.5. Participation in radio and television programs 26

4.6. Meetings with citizens (Public debates) 29

4.7. Meeting with neighborhood units and urban communities 32

4.8. Meetings with citizen associations and business community 35

4.9. Open days with the Mayor 39

4.10. Interactive municipal website 42

4.11. Open telephone line for citizen complaints and suggestions 45

4.12. Meetings with citizens at public places 48

5. Analyses and use of citizen feedback 52

6. Positive effects from citizen feedback 54

1

Foreword

Republic of Macedonia is going trough an intensive decentralization process, which among others should also bring decision-making, which is in interest of the local self-government, closer to the citizens. This would create conditions for citizens' more closer and more direct impact and participation in the management of the local community.

In order to be able to influence the decision-making, citizens should be able to express their opinions, desires, expectations and priorities to the competent officials in the local government. On the other hand, the local self-government must have ways and means to learn citizens' opinion, so that the procedures and activities can be adjusted accordingly.

This aspect from the work of the local self-government is precisely the subject topic of this Toolkit. It is primarily intended for the management and staff in the units of local self-government in Republic of Macedonia. It is created to assist the municipalities, which do not have citizen feedback mechanism- to establish them in easier and more quality way, and for the municipalities, which apply such measures in their work- to assist in extending them and their easier application.

It will also be of assistance to the citizens and their associations, business communities as well as the other stakeholders on local level. It will serve them to become familiar with the possibilities for expressing the personal opinion and manners in which they can influence the decision-making by the local self-government. This can and should encourage them to initiate and assist the introduction of such mechanisms in the local community.

The Toolkit is developed for easy understanding and use, with practical presentation of the manner in which citizen feedback can be organized and function. Most efficient practices for citizen feedback, which have been used in the local self-governments in the world, are individually elaborated.

The Toolkit also contains practical tips for the application of those mechanisms, including the necessary resources in general, as well as list of all advantages and disadvantages for each mechanism separately.

It is expected that the Toolkit will be of significant assistance for establishing or improving the consultations with the citizens on matters, which are under the competencies of the local self-government in Republic of Macedonia, and therefore for improving its operations and quality of citizens lives in the local self-governments.

2

Message from USAID Macedonian Local Government Activity

Over the last three years the municipalites in the Republic of Macedonia have taken over a large number of new responsibilites which they have to execute in situations of insufficient financial resources and in often difficult economic times.

Even in these hard times, with newly decentralized functions local government officials in the Republic of Macedonia should even more open the decision making process to the citizens. Although, the local governments are committed to serving citizens' interests and providing high quality, efficient government services, still, there is much evidence that citizens do not feel that they are being heard or that local government is addressing their priority needs. Therefore, there is a need for good and working mechanisms for citizen feedback to empower citizens to express needs and satisfaction (or lack thereof) with municipal services.

Certainly, this is not an easy thing. Invloving the citizens by listening to their ideas takes time and resources. And this process does not always go smoothly. But when it happens, a partnership between the citizens and local administration is established and as a result the citizens' confidence in their local government as well as local democracy is increased.

The results of the recent survey MLGA Transparency and Accountability team conducted for the purpose of evaluating the present situation in transparency and accountability, show that the officials want to improve the already existing ways of enabling citizen input, if they are already using some, or put in place mechanisms, in cases where this has not been done before.

For this purpose USAID MLGA created this manual which offiers a wide range of effective citizen feedback mechanisms for municipalities of Macedonia that will enable genuine and continuous citizen influence on the work of local government elected officials and administration in municipalities.

We at MLGA believe that this manual will help local government officials and staff to continuously improve the quality for local government services, advance the municipal administration attitude and behaviour towards citizens and address the real priorities of the citizens.

This manual is available on the MLGA and ZELS web sites (www.zels.org.mk). Your feedback and questions are welcome.

Contact: nvucinic@mlga.com.mk, tel: 02 3094 734, 071 341 832

Nada Vucinic-Gavrilovska

Transparency and Accountability Team Leader

USAID Macedonia Local Government Activity

3

Introduction

Local self-government exists, on behalf of the citizens, to arrange the life in the local community through production and delivery of so-called public goods and services, which will alleviate and improve their lives. Familiarity with local policies, continuous living and working in contact with local problems, enables the local self-government to be more adequate than the central government regarding the needs of citizens on local level. In order to respond to these expectations and needs, the local self-government must, as much as possible, have clear picture of citizens' needs and priorities, as well as the expectations they have from their municipality.

Efficient and well-organized local government always takes citizens' attitudes as starting point for planning the work and the respective decision-making.

Such local self-government always enjoys more trust and support from the citizens, as opposed to the local self-government that does not pay much attention to their interests. Insufficient information and lost interest in citizens' views, inevitably leads towards losing their trust and support and alienating the local self-government. Hence, this reduces the quantity and quality of goods and services which are delivered to the citizens, and results in lower chances for the leadership to be reelected.

Receiving citizen feedback and acting accordingly is neither an utopian concept, nor some "trendy" procedure- it is a real need and very important management asset of the local self-government.

3.1. What is citizen feedback?

Receiving citizen feedback is a system of thoughtful, coordinated and efficient mechanisms, whereby the citizens can express their needs, priorities, expectations and proposals, and the local self-government can learn their attitudes in order to take them into consideration in decision-making and planning of the work.

Citizen feedback mechanisms must be part of a system, and should not be occasional and usually pre-election activities for the purpose of acquiring bigger trust and support from citizens. The regular application of the mechanisms gives more clear and more realistic picture about citizens' views and considerably alleviates the implementation of mechanisms, as the citizens make a habit of participating in those mechanisms. The irregular implementation of mechanisms make the citizens have insufficient trust in the mechanisms and the local self-government, and this will aggravate the mechanisms implementation.

The mechanisms need to be coordinated in order to avoid the unnecessary overlapping, which might confuse the citizens, reduce their willingness to participate and to present the municipality as inadequately organized. Coordinated mechanisms shall create impression among the citizens that the municipality is organized, that it is taking regular and continuous care about it, and this, in return shall improve the municipality's rating.

Feedback mechanisms need to be efficient in order to justify the resources, which have been invested for the implementation. The mechanisms, which have results and effects that exceed the invested efforts, are the ones that should be implemented. Expensive activities without adequate results shall annoy the citizens, and they will consider it as irrational spending of their money. Modest results against obviously big funds invested, create the impression of an irresponsible local self-government.

Which mechanisms will be used is a matter of assessment by the municipal leadership, and will depend on what is wanted to be achieved and whether the invested human and financial resources respond to the achieved results.

3.2. Necessary conditions for citizen feedback

In order to enable receiving citizen feedback and this to be carried out smoothly, it is necessary that several conditions be met, which refer to the management and administration of the municipality, as well as to its citizens:

- Information about the municipal administration should be available to the citizens
- The public opinion should be positive towards giving feedback
- The municipal leadership must be willing to receive feedback
- The municipal administration must have capability of collecting the feedback.

Receiving feedback and using it in decision-making in the local self-government is only one part of a more complex chain of events, whereby all phases are mutually related and interdependent. The successfulness of receiving feedback depends on other previous events, which are constituent part of the cycle of activities, which goes in the following order:

- The municipality actively informs the citizens about its work,
- The citizens' interest about the work of the municipality is provoked and they develop their position accordingly,
- The municipality's leadership is willing to learn their considerations,
- The municipality works on receiving the citizen feedback and
- The municipality takes into consideration the feedback in the planning of future decisions and activities.

Once this cycle of activities is initiated, it continues further, but on a higher level. If the citizens are as-

sured that the local self-government is willing to hear their suggestions and is prepared to accept them, the citizens' interest in giving feedback will be increased. This will lead towards closer cooperation among the citizens and the local self-government, and leads towards more active citizen participation in the decision-making by the municipality.

On the other hand, when the citizens have the feeling that they can be consulted during decision-making, their interest in the work of the municipality will be increased. Increased interest about the work of the municipality would also bring bigger number of citizen suggestions for resolution of issues under the competence of the local self-government and improving the work of the municipal administration. The more suggestions the bigger the willingness, but also increasing obligation on the part of the local self-government to collect citizen feedback, whereby the municipal administration shall acquire skills for implementing the respective process.

3.2.1. Availability of municipal information for the citizens

The publicity of the work of the municipality, i.e. informing the citizens about the municipal plans, decisions and activities ,is of great importance in order to receive feedback from them.

Many municipal administrations refrain from active publicity of their work, thus considering that it would open more space for criticism by the opposition in the Council, media, citizens and their associations. This is a wrong approach, because in most of the municipalities where the citizens know each other, it is practically impossible to hide information about the work of the local self-government.

Absence of information on the work of the municipality creates feeling of distrust among the citizens that decision is made „behind closed doors" for their money and needs. The municipal administrations, which work properly – in accordance with the legislation and the interests of the citizens, make the biggest mistake if they don't have publicity in their work. Besides good intentions and proper work, the local population does not get trust into the municipality, although the municipality deserves it.

There are several ways in which the municipality can be open towards the citizens, which depends on the manner and time when the municipality provides information about its work. With regard to the manner, it can be passive – when information is provided only when this is requested from the municipality, or active- when information is provided on regular basis without being requested from the municipality to do so. With regard to the time when information is provided, the municipality can inform the citizens about its decision-making once the decision on certain issue is reached or prior to reaching the decision.

There is no doubt that the best approach is the active publicity about the work of the municipality, whereby information on the intentions for decision-making should be communicated in the preparatory process of decision-making. This creates possibility for a consultative process, so that the citizens and their associations can state their opinion on the respective issues and suggest their views.

Active publicity, especially information about the municipality's plans on one hand is very useful corrective mechanism for prevention of possible violations in the work of the municipality, and on the other hand, it is excellent means for acquiring the trust of the local population.

Therefore, in the framework of its possibilities, the municipality can use all mechanisms that enable the citizens to get access to information about the work of the municipality. There are many ways to inform the public, and the most frequently ones are:

- Press releases
- Newsletter of the municipality,
- Informative leaflets,
- Citizen information center,
- Guidebook for the municipality,
- Informative boards on public places,
- Automated telephone calls.

3.2.2. Positively inclined public opinion for giving feedback

Of course, the most important element for receiving citizens' feedback is the willingness of the citizens to communicate their opinions to the local self-government. In traditional countries where local self-government does not have long tradition, citizens are not used to being asked about their opinion, and some of them do not trust that their opinion will be utilized for the good of the local self-government. Moreover, some citizens think that they should not invest efforts and time into something that does not bring personal benefit or does not improve the situation of their families and relatives.

In highly politicized societies, the willingness of some of the citizens for such cooperation may depend on whether there are members of the political party of their affiliation in the municipal leadership. Yet, if they agree to cooperate, the political affiliation can influence the objectivity of their responses. Those citizens might approve certain procedures of the local self-government, which is guided by the political option, which they support, and shall criticize the same procedures if the government in the municipality is from another political party.

Low life standard can influence the opinion of the citizens about the work of the local self-government. In local communities where the income is very low, dissatisfaction from the personal situation can affect the feedback given to the local self-government. In such cases, even the local self-government that does proper work shall be criticized because of personal dissatisfaction, which is not related to the quality of its work.

All this should not be an obstacle for receiving citizen feedback, yet, it needs to be taken into consideration when such measures are planned and applied.

In order to be an active factor for balancing the power in the local community, and to give useful feedback, the citizens should:

- Be interested in the work of the local self-government
- Understand the processes within the local self-government
- Be prepared to communicate their opinion in an organized manner

Citizen interest about the work of the local self-government

Citizens should be interested in the work of the local self-government, as it reaches decisions on issues, which influence their lives. On the contrary, they create possibilities for decision-making which is not in general interest and enable violations for personal, group or party's interests.

With a passive attitude, the citizens accustom the municipal leadership to freely reach decisions, which are not in the interest of the majority of citizens in the municipality. In this way, the citizens send signal to the municipal leadership that it can reach decisions on its own behalf and interest and manage the life in the local community, without showing concern whether the citizen will state a contrary opinion.

The interest of the citizens, among other things, depends on the local mentality, quantity of information that they receive about the work of the municipality, its orientation to cooperate with the citizens, as well as the manner in which the municipality is represented in the public.

In order to receive citizen feedback, it is necessary that the citizens are informed, engaged, motivated and organized. In this process, besides the local self-government, the media and citizen associations have the key role in order to help the citizens and the municipality to establish and maintain two-sided communication.

Most important to provoke interest among the citizens, is still the local self-government, which should assure the citizens that their opinion and suggestions are welcome, and that they would be really heard, and will be accepted if they are rational and useful.

Citizens' understanding of the processes in the local self-government

In order to give constructive contribution to the work of the local self-government, the citizens should understand the competencies of the local self-government and the manner in which the municipality works. On the contrary, they might submit irrational requests, decelerate the work of the municipality and create unnecessary dissatisfaction among the citizens.

It is very important that during the process that the municipality informs the citizens about its work, competencies, plans, resources (especially the budget of the municipality), regulations and procedures for the work of the municipality. They should be informed about the process of decision-making in the local self-government and the necessary time, so as not to make unnecessary and contra productive pressure.

For the majority of the citizens to acquire the necessary level of understanding about the work of the municipality, the local self-government should independently or in cooperation with the local citizen associations, organize events where the work of the municipality will be explained to the citizens. This should be done along with the issuance of brochures and leaflets such as „Guidebook through my municipality", which would be distributed to the citizens.

The same content should be posted on the municipality's website, along with the so-called 'most frequently asked questions". Very useful practice is when information is compiled and distributed about the manner in which common services are delivered in the municipality.

The end product of such activities should be – the majority of the citizens have basic understanding of the work of the municipality, its competencies and resources.

Preparedness of the citizens to communicate their opinion in an organized manner

In order to receive citizen feedback, besides the fact that it is important for the citizens to be informed and to have understanding about the work of the municipality, it is also necessary that they have their own position/opinion and are prepared to communicate it to the local self-government. The opinion of the citizens about certain matters is considerably influenced by the local and national media, i.e. the manner in which they report about the processes in the local self-government.

Media have great impact on shaping the opinion of the citizens, who frequently accept the opinion of the media in a non-critical manner as their own opinion. In highly politicized societies, where media are influenced by politics, it might happen that media reporting is not fully objective. Therefore, local self-government should be present in the media as often as possible with its own statements and opinions, so that it will provide direct information about its work to the citizens.

Once the citizens have developed their own opinion about the work of the local self-government, it is especially important that they are prepared to communicate it to the local self-government in an organized and constructive manner. This will be influenced by the acting of the municipality, i.e. whether it is prepared to hear the suggestions from the citizens, how it will be done and which will be the follow up on those suggestions.

Equally important positive influence will have the forms in which citizens are organized within the municipality. Wherever there is an organized civic sector, there is great probability that citizen feedback will be better articulated and transferred to the local self-government in a more efficient manner.

Most desirable situation regarding citizen feedback is as follows – simultaneous existence of willingness among the leadership of the municipality, organized and active citizen sector and established regular communication among them. In such situation, the two-sided channels for communication among the citizens and the municipality are existent and operational, which enables efficient and productive consultations for issues of common interest.

3.2.3. Local self-government's willingness to receive feedback

Equally important as the citizens' willingness to state their opinion, is also the willingness of the municipality to receive the opinion, and take it into consideration in decision-making on certain issues.

Some municipalities do not deal with receiving citizen feedback, as there is lack of the necessary resources. Others fear that if the citizens are asked for their opinion, they will have additional requests from the local self-government, which can present more work and financial burdening for the municipality.

In certain cases, municipal leadership does not want to ask for citizens' opinion, as they believe it will open space for criticism at the account of the local self-government, which can influence their rating. Sometimes lack of willingness can be due to insufficient democratic culture of the leadership, which considers that there is no need to consult the citizens.

None of these reasons for the lack of willingness to collect citizen feedback is well founded and should not be an obstacle for the municipality's consultations with the citizens. This means that the intensity of consultations should be adjusted to the objective resources. For application of most of the mechanisms for collecting feedback, there is no need for big financial or human resources. They mostly depend on the willingness of the leadership, good planning of resources and assuredness that both the municipality and the citizens will benefit from it.

Municipal leadership should not fear that consultations with the citizens will bring additional difficulties, but they should be assured that the cooperation with the citizens will alleviate the work and will increase the trust in the local self-government.

3.2.4. Administration capable of collecting feedback

The local self-government's willingness to receive citizen feedback will not be sufficient, if the municipal administration is not capable of doing that. In countries where citizen feedback is relatively new practice in the work of the local self-government, one cannot expect that the administration in all municipalities is prepared and capable of work in this respect.

In some municipalities, the objective overburdening of the administration with assignments can be an obstacle on the road to successfully receiving citizen feedback, as well as the resistance to additional assignments, which result from the employees' conformism.

Therefore, receiving feedback should be initiated and conceptualized by the municipal leadership, which implies preparations on the part of the administration to work on this topic. The process should not only include training on receiving feedback, but also explanation about the importance of this process in the work of the municipality. This is important because the employees, who understand the importance of receiving feedback, can perform those assignments in more quality and more dedicated way.

Conceptualizing the process shall imply existence of plan and program for receiving feedback, and precisely specifying the responsible people, deadlines, obligations, schedule and time to implement the mechanisms. In order to alleviate and make the feedback receiving process more efficient, it is necessary that the plan and the program are adopted with an official document by the Mayor and the Council. This will enable smooth cooperation among all departments and staff in the municipality regarding the measures for citizen feedback.

Well-organized and trained administration will enable getting feedback in the right way, respective professional analyses and objective presentation of obtained results to the municipal leadership.

4 Manners of Obtaining Citizen Feedback

Efficiency and application of citizen feedback mechanisms depend on the specifics in the country and the respective municipality where it is implemented, mentality of the citizens living in the municipality, and financial and administrative capacity of the local self-government. One cannot give general recommendations about the mechanisms which are best to be implemented in concrete municipality, it would be best if the leadership of the local self-government makes the respective decision. According to the experiences so far, most frequently applied mechanisms for this purpose, which are used in the countries with similar social and democratic level of development like Republic of Macedonia, are:

- Open sessions of the Council of the municipality
- Public opinion poll in the municipality
- Public opinion poll for certain categories of citizens
- Surveys for evaluation of the municipal services
- Participation in radio and television programs
- Meetings with citizens (Public debates)
- Meetings with neighborhood units and urban communities
- Meetings with citizen associations and business community
- Open days in the Mayor's office
- Interactive municipal website
- Open telephone line for complaints and suggestions from citizens
- Meetings with citizens at public places

4.1.
Open Sessions Of The Council Of The Municipality

When and for which reasons it is used?

Open sessions of the Council of the municipality are used for:

- Introducing the citizens with the manner in which the Council is functioning
- Introducing the citizens with the decision-making of the Council
- Enhancing the publicity of the work of the Council of the municipality
- Citizen feedback on agenda items

According to the Law on Local Self-government, the sessions of the municipal Council are public, but this is not practiced often in reality. Often there is not enough interest shown by the citizens, somewhere the municipal leadership is not willing to provide the necessary conditions or the meeting hall for the sessions of the Council is not accordingly adjusted for this purpose.

Most of the citizens do not have clear understanding of the manner in which decisions are made in the municipality, and how complex is this work. Therefore, many citizens have remarks that the work of the municipality is slow or are not satisfied with the decisions reached by the Council. On the other hand, sessions of the Council held „closed" for the public heat up the thinking and doubts about the correctness of the Council's work and the work of the municipality as a whole.

The biggest benefit from the citizens' presence at the Council's sessions is the opportunity that they have to state their opinions and proposals regarding the items of the agenda. If it is well conceptualized and organized, the direct contribution of this type is an exceptional possibility to exercise direct democracy. This will contribute to reaching decisions, which are in the interest of the citizens, creating more trust among the citizens and the councilors, and opening possibilities for new initiatives for improved work of the local self-government.

How it is implemented?

The core of this practice is to enable citizens to directly follow the course of the municipal Councils' session, and according to previously specified conditions to enable the citizens to give their opinion about issues, which are on the Council's agenda.

In order to accomplish the citizen presence and participation at the sessions of the municipal Council, the following would be necessary:

- Create physical and technical conditions for citizen participation at the Council sessions. There are two possibilities to follow the sessions – physical presence of the citizens in the same hall where the session is held or audio-video broadcast of the session in another room where the citizens would be accommodated. The first possibility is more adequate for receiving citizen feedback, as it enables direct communication between the citizens and the councilors. Combination of the two solutions is possible, whereby the video broadcast can be followed by bigger number of citizens, and less number would be physically present at the session. If such session broadcast is introduced and the municipality has the adequate technical conditions, it would also be possible that direct broadcast can be enabled on the municipal website.

- If there is sufficient space in the meeting hall where the sessions of the Council are held, the possibility for comfortable accommodation of certain number of citizens in the hall should be planned and performed. This would imply providing chairs, and if possible some surface on which they can write. Depending on the financial capabilities of the municipality, it is desirable that the seating conditions provided for the citizens are not different from the seating arrangements for the councilors. In this way, citizens can feel equal to the councilors, which will considerably influence their opinion of the municipality. This does not mean that the citizens should be put in identical conditions like the councilors, as this will create the impression that they have the same role. In such cases, they might wish to take the floor more often and enter into non-productive discussions.

- The place where the citizens will be accommodated should enable that they can easily see and hear during the session, but not to sit on the same conference table or in the same chairs like the councilors. It would be best to organize a visibly separated part of the hall, which is clearly indicated that the seats are reserved for the citizens who will attend the session. If the councilors have technical equipment to follow the session (monitor, headphones, microphone etc), it would be desirable if the same were provided for the citizens as well. This especially refers to sessions with simultaneous interpreting. The person who is in charge of the equipment for the councilors should control the use of the equipment. This especially refers to microphones, which should be switched on only during the time foreseen for suggestions and proposals by the citizens – on the contrary there might be uncontrolled interruption by the citizens in the course of the session.

- The possibility for citizen participation at the municipal Council sessions should be announced in an adequate way. It is most appropriate if this is announced by the municipal officials when they have their appearance in the media, on the notice board or the municipality's website. Hence, the conditions and rules for citizen participation at the sessions need to be explained. The announcement of the possibility for participation should be dosed, and should not create more interest than the available seating capacities. Attention should be paid that citizens should not be often returned because of insufficiently available seats. This will create contrary effect, and would dissuade citizens from participation at sessions, and would spread the opinion that the local self-government would not listen to the citizens.

- Before starting the practice of citizen participation at the sessions of the Council, it is compulsory that the municipality prepares regulation how to conduct it. The best way is to prepare Rules for citizen attendance and participation in the work of the Council of the municipality, and they should be adopted by the Council and made available to the citizens. The purpose of the Rules is not to limit the citizens in their contribution to the work of the Council, but to enable their efficient and constructive participation. The content should be specified by the municipality, and it is recommended that it should contain the following elements:
  - Maximum number of citizens to participate at the same time at the session of the Council
  - Manner in which citizens can announce their participation at the session of the municipal Council
  - Procedure when there is bigger number of citizens willing to participate than available seats (best concept is- first come first serve)
  - Rules for behavior during sessions (non-interrupting of the course of the session, discussion only when the floor has been given, duration and number of interventions and similar.)
  - Place for discussion and proposals and rules for discussion from the citizens (who gives and takes the floor, necessity from constructiveness of the intervention etc.)
  - Conditions under which the citizen can be removed from the session of the Council (this measure should be avoided, but it is better to be foreseen)

- In order to make sure that the citizens will not interrupt the course of the sessions, each citizen should be familiar with the Rules before entering the hall. There might be consideration of introducing a practice that each citizen who participates at the session signs a symbolic statement, whereby he/she will confirm that the citizen is familiar with the rules and will respect them accordingly.

- Before the beginning of the session, it is desirable that the President of the Council acknowledges the presence of the citizens and welcomes their interest in the work of the Council. Afterwards, the president can briefly formally set the rules for following the sessions and can invite the citizens to give their opinion and proposals, when they are invited to do so. In order to avoid slowing down the course of work of the Council because of citizen participation, the President of the Council should state precisely when the citizens would be given the floor. It is recommendable that it is done at the end of each session, i.e. when the councilors complete the respective discussion. It is possible that citizens might not be focused on the topic which is being discussed, and that is why the President should take care that the discussions and proposals are productive. The president should not refrain from making interventions or taking the floor from the citizen whose discussion is not in accordance with the discussed topic.

- For the opinions and proposals given by the citizens to have effect, there should be written evidence about them in the documents that arise out of the work of the Council. Depending on the regulation, they can be recorded in the official minutes of the Council session or recorded separately and attached to the minutes. In order to increase the efficiency and accuracy, the citizens may be asked to give their proposals officially, in written or by e-mail.

Necessary resources

Creating conditions to accommodate the citizens might incur costs to adapt the meeting hall and for the procurement of chairs and tables. If the councilors use technical equipment during the session of the Council, depending on the financial opportunities of the municipality, they can procure additional headphones, microphones, monitors etc.

Cost for making copies and distribution of the agenda as well as other materials from the session for the present citizens will be considered as a regular cost.

During the implementation of the practice, the need for human resources should be reduced to minimum. There is need for one junior associate in the municipality, who will be responsible for the citizens that announced their presence, take them to the seats and take care that the citizens respect the Rules for attendance at the sessions of the municipal Council.

Advantages

If well prepared, the practice can be easily introduced and implemented. By utilizing small resources, great results can be achieved. Opening the municipal Council sessions for the public will enable the citizens to get direct insight into the work of the Council of the municipality, manner of decision-making, complexity of the work and the level of dedication of their representatives for the good of the municipality.

This will increasingly contribute to increasing the publicity in the work of the local self-government and the trust of the citizens. On the other hand, the presence of the citizens at the sessions of the Council can influence the councilors to do their work professionally and impartially.

Disadvantages

Efficient implementation of the practice implies well-informed citizens who understand the work of the municipality sufficiently, in order to give constructive and useful proposals.

Possible difficulties for implementation

It is likely that at the very beginning there will be resistance on the part of some councilors about the practice, who consider that the presence of citizens will disrupt the comfort in the work and that their presence is a kind of control over their work.

It is possible that there might be presence of citizens who have not developed democratic awareness and culture, who can interrupt the course of the session with their behavior. On the other hand, there might be discussions, which are not constructive, which can slow down and disrupt the work of the Council.

It is possible that sometimes the citizens might insist on interventions, which have nothing to do with the agenda items, with the intention to solve some of their problems.

How to overcome difficulties?

Difficulties related to the possible resistance on the part of the councilors can be resolved with the assistance from the Mayor, President of the Council and the coordinators of the councilors' groups. They should talk to the councilors that they do not agree about the presence of citizens, and explain the benefits from this practice for the municipality.

The key for solving possible difficulties related to the behavior of the citizens, is the adoption of quality Rules for presence of citizens at the sessions of the municipal Council and consistently respect them. The president of the Council will have the most important role, and since their application is under the president's competence, he/she should study the rules thoroughly and apply them without any exceptions. After certain period of time of strict adherence to the rules, the citizens will get used to respect the rules, and such difficulties will disappear.

4.2. Public Opinion Poll In The Municipality

When and what it is used for?

Public opinion poll in the municipality is carried out when:

- Local self-government does not have sufficient information about the general public opinion of citizens regarding matters which are important for its work
- Local self-government has partial information about the attitudes of citizens about matters which are important for its work
- Local self-government has the need to get a clear picture about the citizen opinion before reaching decisions of strategic importance for the municipality.

Public opinion poll is one of the most efficient means for receiving citizen feedback and is used by all advanced local self-governments in the world. It provides information about citizen priorities, assists to determine the general guidelines for the work of the municipality and especially focusing on the problems, which are most important for the majority of the citizens.

How it is conducted

In order to conduct the public opinion poll for the citizens in the municipality, the following will be necessary:

- Determine exactly what should be obtained with the research, i.e. whether the opinion of citizens about the overall work of the municipality will be measured or only about certain areas of its competence (communal services, infrastructure, urbanism etc). Precise definition of the area and the expected results is very important for the design of the questionnaire and for determining the directions for further analyses of obtained results.

- Preparation of the questionnaire, which will be used for the research. Depending on the complexity of the researched area, it can contain from 5 (for simple) up to 20 – 30 questions (for more complex research). The design of the questionnaire is one of the most important phases in the research, because the quality of the questions directly influences the objectivity of obtained results. Questions must be simple, clear, unambiguous and, what is very important – they must not be suggestive, that is should not lead the citizen which answer should be given. For the first several researches, it is best to engage an expert – research manager, who will prepare the questions.

- Specify the number of citizens to be interviewed, i.e. specify the sample of citizens. Public opinion poll is done on so-called representative sample of citizens, which reflects the ethnic, social, educational and age composition, as well as the geographic distribution of the population in the municipality. The purpose and dimensions of this Manual do not allow detailed explanation about the representative sample determination, and therefore the research manager should do it.

- Once the questions and the sample are defined, the interviewers are trained how to carry out the research. Interviewers can be junior associates in the municipality, local students, NGO activists, unemployed citizens and similar categories. They should be educated (recommended that they either have graduated or study at some of the social sciences faculties), are well behaved, responsible and have understanding about the researched topic.

- The training is carried out by the research manager, who explains the questionnaire to the interviewers, i.e. gives guidelines how to ask questions, which are the modalities of the answers and how they need to be entered in the questionnaires. Special attention should be paid to the manner in which the interviewers represent themselves and the research to the citizens, as it will determine whether they will be willing to be interviewed. The absolute neutrality when asking questions and unbiasedness when providing possible assistance to the citizens during the interview, must be clearly emphasized to the interviewers.

- The interviewers make the interviews in direct contact with the citizens in their homes (i.e. face-to-face interview) or during a phone call. These two manners have advantages and disadvantages, and are crucial for selecting the manner of conducting the interview are the funds allocated for the research. Telephone interviews cost less as the travel expenses are avoided and the required time for the research is considerably reduced. Direct interviews give possibility for more quality communication and more reliable results from the research, but a more expensive manner for conducting the research.

- In the two manners of running an interview, the interviewer first introduces himself/herself to the citizens, explains why they are here, why the research is being conducted and what will be the obtained results used for. In order to make sure that the interviewers do this well, usually there is a text that they need to learn. In order to gain the trust from the citizens, it would be best if the interviewers have written authorization to carry out the research which is signed by the Mayor or the President of the municipal Council (possibly both signatures). During the direct interviews, the interviewers shall present the authorization to the citizens at the beginning of the conversation.

- During the interviews, the interviewers ask the questions and write down the answers in previously prepared forms, in the manner in which they have been trained. The answers are then submitted to the research manager, who makes statistical data processing. On the basis of the analyses of obtained results, the research report is prepared which contains the conclusions about citizens' opinion on the researched topic.

- The research manager submits the report with the findings and conclusions to the municipal leadership, and then they review it and take them into consideration when deciding about the future direction of the work in the municipality. If needed, the leadership might ask for additional explanation from the research manager regarding the findings and conclusions from the research.

Advantages

If professionally prepared and properly conducted, the research will fairly precisely measure the citizens' opinion and enables easy identification of their priorities and expectations from the municipality. Obtained conclusions from the research analyses are very useful asset to direct the strategic plans and activities of the local self-government.

If the municipality has sufficient financial means to engage a professional research agency, in that case none of its resources will need to be engaged.

Disadvantages

If the municipality does not have enough expertise to conduct the public opinion poll, it will have to engage a specialized agency, which implies considerable cost.

Each municipality cannot afford to make such expenses and that is why only bigger and financially more powerful municipalities can afford public opinion poll on representative sample.

Necessary resources

If a specialized agency is engaged to do the research, the only required resource will be financial means.

If the municipality decides to conduct the research with its own resources, it will be necessary to engage at least one external professional – research manager. This person will be responsible to prepare the questionnaire, train the interviewers, coordinate the research, make the statistical data processing and make the analyses of the obtained results.

Besides the research manager, there will be need for ten interviewers to carry out the interviews, who can be junior associates from the municipality, students volunteers who study social sciences, or if cooperation with citizen associations exists – their activists.

There is also need for a team from the local self-government, who will assist during the definition of the questions from the questionnaire as well as the details of the data that need to be obtained from the research. This team should later participate in conceptualizing the future activities of the municipalities based on the conducted research in order to enable easier interpretation of the obtained results.

Possible difficulties when conducting the research

Insufficient cooperation by the citizens, even rejecting the interviews because of lack of trust in the goodwill of the research.

Difficulties to coordinate the interviewers in the field, that is, the research is conducted slowly.

Interviewers are insufficiently serious and dedicated, who might answer the questionnaires themselves without doing the interviews.

How to overcome difficulties?

Cooperation with citizens can be improved if the public opinion poll is announced in a timely manner through the local media or some other adequate manner, if the reasons for the poll are stated, what the results will be used for, and how it will contribute to better work of the municipality and contribute to better life of the citizens.

In addition, the citizens will better accept the research if serious and responsible people are selected to be interviewers, the introductory presentation of the interviewer to the citizen is well prepared and if the interviewers are trained for serious and professional communication with the citizens.

Financial problems can be reduced if cooperation is established with high education institutions in the sphere of social sciences, who can carry out the public opinion poll in the framework of their practical work on voluntary basis or for a symbolic fee. After several conducted researches, and trainings for that purpose, the team from the municipality, which participated in the research, can acquire skills to do the research individually.

4.3. Survey For The Opinion Of Certain Categories Of Citizens

When and what it is used for?

Survey for the opinion of certain categories of citizens is done when the local self-government wants to learn the attitudes of specific more concrete categories of citizens on certain issues, i.e. when they want to determine the opinions of:

- Ethnic groups
- Youth
- Women
- Unemployed
- Business community.

How it is conducted

This research is very similar to the public opinion poll for the citizens in the municipality, with one considerable difference – it is not conducted on a representative sample of citizens, but rather on a precisely specified category. The selection of the sample is not done randomly, which gives fairly equal distribution regarding the gender, age, education, social and ethnic origin. The sample is determined on previously defined characteristics of the group of citizens, whose opinion is being measured.

Similarly like for the public opinion poll, in order to carry out the public opinion research for a concrete group of citizens, it would be necessary to:

- Determine exactly what should be obtained with the research, i.e. whether the opinion of the citizens about the overall work of the municipality will be measured or only about certain areas of its competence (communal services, infrastructure, urbanism etc). Precise definition of the area and the expected results is very important for the design of the questionnaire and for determining the directions for the later analyses of obtained results.

- Preparation of the questionnaire, which will be used for the research. Depending on the complexity of the researched area, it can contain from 5 (for simple) up to 20 – 30 questions (for more complex research). The design of the questionnaire is one of the most important phases in the research, because the quality of the questions directly influences the objectivity of the obtained results. Questions must be simple, clear, unambiguous and, what is very important – they must not be suggestive, that is should not lead the citizen which answer should be given. For the first several researches, it is best to engage an expert – research manager, who will prepare the questions.

- Specify the number of citizens to be interviewed, i.e. specify the sample of citizens. The sample for this research is determined according to previously defined characteristics of the group of citizens, whose opinion is being measured. The purpose and dimensions of this Manual do not allow detailed explanation about the representative sample determination, and therefore the research manager should do it.

- Once the questions and the sample are defined, the interviewers are trained how to carry out the research. Interviewers can be junior associates in the municipality, local students, NGO activists, unemployed citizens and similar categories. They should be educated (recommended that they either have graduated or study at some of the social sciences faculties), are well behaved, responsible and have understanding about the researched topic.

- The training is carried out by the research manager, who explains the questionnaire to the interviewers, i.e. gives guidelines how to ask questions, which are the modalities of the answers and how they need to be entered in the questionnaires. Special attention should be paid to the manner in which the interviewers represent themselves and the research to the citizens, as it will determine whether they will be willing to be interviewed. The absolute neutrality when asking questions and unbiasedness when providing possible assistance to the citizens during the interview must be clearly emphasized to the interviewers.

- The interviewers make the interviews in direct contact with the citizens in their homes (i.e. face-to-face interview) or during a phone call. These two manners have advantages and disadvantages, and crucial for selecting the manner of conducting the interview are the funds allocated for the research. Telephone interviews cost less as the travel expenses are avoided and the required time for the research is considerably reduced. Direct interviews give possibility for more quality communication and more reliable results from the research, but present more expensive manner for conducting the research.

- In the two manners of running an interview, the interviewer first introduces himself/herself to the citizens, explain why they are here, why the research is being conducted and what will be the obtained results used for. In order to make sure that the interviewers do this well, usually there is a text that they need to learn. In order to gain the trust from the citizens, it would be best if the interviewers have written authorization to carry out the research which is signed by the Mayor or the President of the municipal Council (possibly both signatures). During the direct interviews, the interviewers shall present the authorization to the citizens at the beginning of the conversation.

- During the interviews, the interviewers ask the questions and write down the answers in previously prepared forms, in the manner in which they have been trained. The answers are then submitted to the research manager, who makes statistical data processing. On the basis of the analyses of obtained results, the research report is prepared which contains the conclusions about citizens' opinion on the researched topic.

- The research manager submits the report with the findings and conclusions to the municipal leadership, and then they review it and take them into consideration when deciding about the future direction of the work in the municipality. If needed, the leadership might ask for additional explanation from the research manager regarding the findings and conclusions from the research.

Advantages

If professionally prepared and properly conducted, the research will fairly precisely measure the citizens' opinion and enables easy identification of their priorities and expectations from the municipality. Obtained conclusions from the research analyses are very useful asset to direct the strategic plans and activities of the local self-government.

If the municipality has sufficient financial means to engage a professional research agency, in that case none of its resources will need to be engaged.

Disadvantages

If the municipality does not have enough expertise to conduct the public opinion poll, it will have to engage a specialized agency, which implies considerable cost.

Each municipality cannot afford to make such expenses and that is why only bigger and financially more powerful municipalities can afford public opinion poll on representative sample.

Necessary resources

If a specialized agency is engaged to do the research, the only required resource will be financial means.

If the municipality decides to conduct the research with its own resources, it will be necessary to engage at least one external professional – research manager. This person will be responsible to prepare the questionnaire, train the interviewers, coordinate the research, make the statistical data processing and make the analyses of the obtained results.

Besides the research manager, there will be need for ten interviewers to carry out the interviews, who can be junior associates from the municipality, students volunteers who study social sciences, or if cooperation with citizen associations exists – their activists.

There is also need for a team from the local self-government, who will assist during the definition of the questions from the questionnaire as well as the details of the data that need to be obtained from the research. This team should later participate in conceptualizing the future activities of the municipalities based on the conducted research in order to enable easier interpretation of the obtained results.

Possible difficulties for implementation

Insufficient cooperation by the citizens, even rejecting the interviews because of lack of trust in the goodwill of the research.

Difficulties to coordinate the interviewers in the field, that is, the research is conducted slowly.

Interviewers are insufficiently serious and dedicated, who might answer the questionnaires themselves without doing the interviews

Cooperation with citizens can be improved if the public opinion poll is announced in a timely manner through the local media or some other adequate manner, if the reasons for the research are stated, what the results will be used for, and how it will contribute to better work of the municipality and contribute to better life of the citizens.

In addition, the citizens will better accept the research if serious and responsible people are selected to be interviewers, the introductory presentation of the interviewer to the citizen is well prepared, and if the interviewers are trained for serious and professional communication with the citizens.

Financial problems can be reduced if cooperation is established with high education institutions in the sphere of social sciences, which can carry out the research in the framework of their practical work on voluntary basis or for a symbolic fee. After several conducted researches, and trainings for that purpose, the team from the municipality, which participated in the research, can acquire skills to do the research individually.

4.4. Surveys For Evaluation Of Municipal Services

When and what it is being used for?

It is used when the local self-government wants to obtain the citizen opinion about:

- The work of the administration as a whole
- Work of certain parts of the administration.

The results obtained from this practice can be used to learn the weaknesses of the work of the municipal administration or parts of it. On basis of this, there might be measures to improve the work of the administration as a whole or parts of it.

How it is conducted?

In order to conduct the survey for evaluation of municipal services or functioning of certain organizational parts, the following will be necessary:

- Clearly and precisely determine which is the goal of the survey – which municipal services will be subject of evaluation and to which municipal organizational units the survey refers.

- Define the questions, which will be used for the survey. It is best if that is small number of questions – for simple survey up to 5, for more complex up to 10. Questions should be clear, simple and unambiguous, not to confuse the citizens or create possibility for ambiguousness of the interpretation. In addition, they should not be suggestive, i.e. the manner in which they are asked should not suggest the manner in which they should be answered. If there are no experts in the municipality to deal with this area, it would be best to engage an expert from outside to prepare the questions.

- The duration of the survey is precisely determined, the start day and end day, and implementation plan for taking certain obligations and respective responsible persons. One municipal employee is appointed to be the manager of the survey and will take care of the coordination. All municipal staff, and especially the staff in the municipal organizational units whose work will be subject of research, will be informed about the survey.

- Questions may be asked verbally by interviewers or asked in written as a questionnaire, which can be left at the counters in the municipality, in the citizen information center or other appropriate places in the municipality, and can be sent by mail or e-mail.

- If the survey is done verbally, the interviewers to conduct the survey will be trained. Interviewers can be junior associates in the municipality, students from the local community, NGOs activists, unemployed people and similar categories. They should be educated (desirable to have completed or study at some of the faculties for social sciences), well behaved, and responsible and have understanding about the researched topic.

- Training is done by an externally engaged expert and the research manager, who explain the questionnaire to the interviewers, i.e. give them directions how to ask questions, which are the modalities of the answers and how to enter them in the questionnaire. Special attention should be paid to the manner in which the interviewers introduce themselves and the survey to the citizens, because this determines whether citizens will agree to be interviewed. It must be clearly emphasized that the interviewers should be absolutely neutral when asking questions as well as when giving possible assistance to the citizens when they ask the questions.

- Interviewers can conduct the verbal survey at previously determined places –most adequate would be in the premises of the municipality, at the entrance or the places where the citizens can receive some service from the local self-government. If the municipality has introduced one-stop system, in that case most adequate place to conduct the survey would be the entrance of the Front offices in the municipality. As they have been trained, they approach the citizens, explain the purpose of the survey, ask the questions, write down the answers, and submit the forms to the research manager.

- If the survey is done in written, there should be a determined manner in which questionnaires will be given to the citizens and how the answered questionnaires will be collected. When the questionnaires are left at the counters or other adequate places in the municipality, there should be adequate boxes provided where the filled out questionnaires will be left. The collection of the answered questionnaires should be organized periodically, as well as the place where the questionnaires will be taken and stored.

- If the survey is done by e-mail, there should be a specific e-mail to send the answered questionnaires, as well as responsible person to check that e-mail from time to time.

- Once the survey is completed, all answered questionnaires are processed according to previously determined methodology; conclusions are drawn and presented in front of the competent officials in the municipality. The processing should be done by the research manager, with professional assistance from the externally engaged expert that prepared the questions.

Advantages

The survey gives focused data about concrete administrative services in the municipality, even for certain municipal staff. It is easy to be prepared, easy to be conducted and does not require engagement of big resources. With little engagement, considerable feedback is obtained from the citizens.

It is useful to establish the shortcomings in the work of the administration and areas of municipal operation that the citizens do not find satisfying.

Disadvantages

It is possible that some citizens are subjective or too rigorous when they evaluate the work of the municipality, which might lead to wrong conclusions. The possibility that personal relations among certain citizens and municipal staff have impact, is not excluded and these might be conveyed in the survey.

This can be manifested in positive evaluations based on „friendship" or severe criticism because of private disagreements. The so-called "regular malcontents" must always be taken into consideration – people who are critical towards everything or the possibility for ordered positive evaluation.

Necessary resources

It is recommended that the research manager, usually municipal employee is a civil servant and not elected or appointed official, which would contribute to the objectiveness of his/her work.

Several young associates from the municipality, volunteers or NGOs activists, should be in charge of doing the technical and administrative work (preparations, copying, distribution of the questionnaire and collection of filled out questionnaires). If the survey is verbal, they would be competent to carry out the survey in direct communication with the citizens.

If there is no municipal employee with adequate education for the survey (sociologist or similar), an external expert needs to be engaged in order to take care that the survey is methodologically accurate.

Computer, printer or copy machine to copy the questionnaires, boxes to put the answered questionnaires. Besides possible costs for the engagement of an external expert, other financial costs will be reduced to operating supplies for printing or copying, procurement of boxes where the answered questions will be placed and other minor operating supplies.

Possible difficulties to conduct the survey

Insufficient willingness by the citizens to participate in the survey, which is caused by distrust in the survey conducted by the municipality to evaluate its work.

Fear among the citizens that if they criticize the work of municipal services, they might have problems in future to obtain services from the municipality.

Insufficiently trained interviewers whose behavior can be repelling to the citizens to give answers to the questions. Unserious interviewers who might fill out the questionnaires themselves, without interviewing citizens.

One should not underestimate the willingness of the municipal leadership to show the local self-government in the best light in front of the citizens, and influence the survey team to „adjust" results in that direction.

How to overcome difficulties?

Difficulties related to the insufficient willingness of the citizens to participate in the survey and the scarce honesty in their answers can be considerably reduced if the survey is announced in the local media or other adequate manner. In the announcements, as well as during the interviews, the anonymity of the survey must be emphasized and the aim is to improve the municipal services for the citizens.

The citizens' acceptance of the survey will be increased if serious and responsible persons are selected to be interviewers, if there is well prepared introductory address by the interviewer to the citizen, and if the interviewers are trained for serious and professional communication with the citizens.

4.5. Participation In Radio And Television Programs

When and what it is used for?

It is used:

- It is necessary to explain certain aspect of the municipality's work and obtain citizen feedback
- Before the municipality reaches some important decision, and the correctness of the decision must be presented to the public
- To increase citizen interest about concrete area of work in the municipality

How it is conducted?

- There is list of media that broadcast programs on the territory of the municipality and their rating is being researched. Ratings done by specialized institutions can help, which contain information about the number of citizens that completely follow certain media and information about the numbers of viewers and listeners in concrete time periods and concrete programs.

- The media and time periods with good ratings are selected, which would enable to address bigger number of citizens. The selection should be balanced among time periods with higher ratings which usually require certain payment, and time periods with lower ratings but offer the possibility to be used free of charge. The selection will depend on the financial capabilities of the municipality and an assessment whether it is worthwhile to invest funds for that purpose, and the management decision will depend on the concrete concept at given period of time.

- Once the media and time periods are selected, it should be decided whether the participation will be done on regular or periodic basis. Hasty decisions should not be made about frequent appearance in the media, in order to avoid situations where the municipality does not have anything new or concrete to inform about. This would create the opposite effect than the desired one – the citizens would not follow those events and would not participate in the debates.

- Afterwards, the topics to be discussed and the representatives from the municipality who will participate in the programs, are determined. The topics should be selected according to the priorities of the citizens, usually from the sphere of communal services, infrastructure issues, and urbanism and similar. Special attention should be paid to the explanation of procedures related to certain requests from the citizens about municipal services. It would be most useful if the citizens have the possibility to be included in the program, whereby they would be able to state their comments and proposals to improve the work of the municipality.

- The representatives from the municipalities must be serious professionals, who are familiar with the topic that they discuss in media. Besides the mayor or the president of the municipal council, good choice will be the heads of certain departments in the municipality or public enterprises. When doing the selection, besides expertise and elocution, special attention should be paid whether that person has problems to appear in the media. It is not rare that professionals, who can

express themselves perfectly in everyday life, are nervous when it comes to appearance in front of cameras and microphones.

- Before each appearance, the representative from the municipality must be well prepared. It implies collecting information about the subject topic from the competent department and the actual problems that citizens face. In an ideal case, on the basis of the experiences from the previous period and complaints received in the municipality, one should foresee the possible questions from the viewers and prepare draft answers. The representative from the municipality must receive the material several hours before the appearance in the media, in order to be able to prepare himself/herself.

- In order to attract citizens' attention, it would be useful if the appearance in the media and the topic were announced. If it is foreseen to include the citizens in the program, it would be best to announce the possibility and the telephone number.

- The appearance will be better if the representative of the municipality and the journalist meet before the program and review the issues, which will be discussed on that day. This will especially help to overcome certain nervousness on the part of the municipal representative and explain certain possible unknown aspects from the work of the municipality for the journalist.

- The way the municipal representative is expressing himself/herself must be adjusted to the level of understanding by an ordinary citizen about the work of the municipality. Two extremes should be avoided – high intellectual level, which is not understandable for less educated people, or too ordinary style, which will dissuade more educated people.

- It should not be forgotten that the purpose of the appearance in the media, is that the municipal representative should inform the citizens, to attract interest about the discussed topic and provoke them to participate in the program with their own opinion, proposals and suggestions. Therefore, the overall appearance should be adjusted to this purpose – the municipal representative must behave in a serious, professional and prepared manner when answering the questions from the citizens.

- Questions and suggestions of citizens who participate in the program must be taken with maximum interest, in a serious and professional manner, regardless whether they are constructive and useful. Even if the citizen does not know exactly what should be asked or asks in an unclear way, the municipal representative will answer the question. The best response would be to give an answer with explanation of most related topic to which the question refers. One should not neglect the fact that sometimes citizens would make a call during the program only to be heard from their relatives and friends, even when there is no concrete question for the guest in the program.

- It is recommended that the municipal representative is joined by some junior associate from the municipality, who will write down the questions and suggestions from citizens, so that they can be taken into consideration in the course of the work. It is a useful practice if all the questions from the citizens are written down, and to compile a list of most frequently asked questions, and the list along with the answers can be posted on the municipal website.

- If a citizen is giving good and constructive thoughts and proposals, it would be useful if the municipal representative invites that citizen to come to the municipality for a discussion in order to explain his/her considerations more in details. This will considerably enhance the impression that the local self-government is interested in the proposals from the citizens, and that there is willingness to discuss them. This will attract the citizens to think about the ways of improving the work of the municipality in future and give their proposals to the local self-government.

Advantages

Appearance in the media is a very efficient way to receive citizen feedback, because it easy for realization and enables direct insight into the opinion of citizens for a concrete question.

Besides that, it practically does not incur any expenses if there is no need for payment to the media about the term, neither it requires any other special engagement of other resources.

Citizen can be very open when they participate in the programs, as they remain anonymous, which can give good quality to their proposals.

Disadvantages

"Live" appearances always carry certain risk from unserious individuals, who can be unpleasant with their comments. This especially refers to political opponents, whose aim is to represent the local self-government governed by their political opponents in the worst possible scenario. Often they do not intend to talk with arguments, they only want to criticize.

One should not underestimate the possibility when citizens call about serious problems in some other area, and who might insist that their problem is discussed and not the subject topic of the program.

Necessary resources

Engagement by some of the competent departments in order to prepare information about the subject topic of discussion.

Person in charge of public relations to make a list of expected questions and draft answers.

One young associate from the municipality to accompany the municipal representative during the program and write down questions and suggestions from citizens.

Possible difficulties for realization

Small, especially rural municipalities do not have local media, which considerably handicaps the implementation of this practice. Depending on the financial situation and market orientation of the media, there is possibility that the municipality will be asked to pay for the respective term, which can be a financial overburdening for the municipality.

In some municipality there might be problems regarding insufficient number of people who are capable and trained for public appearances, which especially refers to heads of departments and public enterprises.

It is possible that the citizens do not show interest about the discussed topic in the program or give non-constructive and unfeasible proposals.

Sometimes it is possible that the citizens who participate in the program insist on some discussion, which is not related to the topic, aiming to solve some of their problems.

How to overcome difficulties?

Absence of media in the municipality can be overcome by establishing cooperation with media from other municipalities, which broadcast program on the territory of the respective municipality.

Financial difficulties that arise out of the requests for payment may be overcome by selection of another media that will agree on free of charge program, even if that media has lower rating.

If there are not sufficient number of staff in the municipality who are trained for public appearance, it would be necessary to train the heads of departments who are expected to participate in such programs most often.

Difficulties related to the insufficient interest by the citizens to participate in the programs are resolved by selecting topics, which are interesting for the citizens, or topics which are expected to provoke the citizen interest. Equally important is whether the municipal representative and the journalist will present the topic in an interesting and understandable way.

Non-constructive behavior by the citizens can be overcome with good preparations for the appearance by the municipal representative, especially regarding the quality of the foreseen questions and draft answers, prepared by the public relations officer in the municipality.

4.6. Public Debates (Meetings With Citizens)

When and what it is used for?

It is used when reaching decisions of strategic importance for the municipality, such as budget adoption, plan for local economic development, changing the urban plan and in other occasions when it is necessary to know the opinion of the citizens.

Public debates are very useful because during the debates one can verify whether some important decision is worthwhile and get citizen feedback directly.

How it is realized?

- The topic, which will be discussed at the meeting with citizens, must be clearly defined, as well as the position of the municipality regarding that issue. The respective municipal departments should prepare information about the problem and submit the information to the organizer of the meeting. Representatives from the municipality must be well prepared for the topic, in order to avoid unpleasant situations or absence of answers on citizens' questions. Previously prepared list of assumed questions and draft answers would be very beneficial.

- The meeting should be announced on time – it would be best to start that process one week before the event. Most efficient way is to do that with announcements in the media, appearance of municipal representatives in the media, and sometimes with paid advertisements. Sometimes it is useful to place posters or distribute leaflets on busy public places– squares, markets, in the municipality, at the entrance of schools and kindergartens, in neighborhood units and urban communities, bars etc. Information should also be posted on the municipal website, as well on some local Internet portals which are popular in the local community.

- The information about the meeting with the citizens should contain data about the date, time, venue, and agenda for the meeting, brief explanation of the topic to be discussed as well as the purpose of the meeting. Depending on the financial capabilities of the municipality, it would be useful to prepare a leaflet, which will present the topic of discussion in a detailed but concise and clear manner.

- In order to share information about the meeting and the reached conclusions, the representatives from the local media should be invited so that they can be introduced with the topic and the purpose of the meeting.

- The number of citizens who will attend the meeting needs to be foreseen and accordingly to choose adequate room for the meeting. If bigger number of citizens is expected, the municipality should provide a sound system as well as moveable microphones for the questions from citizens. If there is need for power point presentation, the adequate equipment should be provided. At least one hour before the meeting the functioning of the equipment must be checked, in order to

enable time to do the necessary corrections if some parts are not functioning.

- There must be a facilitator for the meeting, to give the floor and to make sure that the meeting is conducted in the best possible way. The main role of the facilitator is to channel the discussion, to make sure that constructive proposals are heard and discussion is conducted accordingly. The facilitator must have authority in the local community and must be capable to recognize a useful discussion or to prevent some unconstructive behavior.

- Person to take minutes is appointed, in order to record the course of the meeting, with special attention to the proposals given by the citizens. The minutes from the meeting must be completed in the shortest possible period after the meeting and must be at disposal for the citizens in the municipality in the most appropriate way. The conclusions from the meeting can be drawn from the minutes, and they should also be available for the citizens. The best manner is to distribute the minutes and conclusions to the local media, especially to the journalists that attended the meeting. Besides that, they can be displayed on some prominent place in the premises of the municipality and also posted on the municipal website.

- At the beginning, the facilitator clearly states the purpose of the meeting, the topic that will be discussed, agenda, rules for the meeting and the expected duration of the meeting. Afterwards, the representatives from the municipality are introduced as well as their position in the municipality.

- In order to enable discussion which is properly conducted and without any problems, there must be an introduction of the topic, which will be discussed. This is done by a representative from the municipality, by avoiding extremely specialized presentation or extremely simplified presentation that does not provide a lot of information.

- Following the introduction, the discussion is opened and the facilitator gives the floor and clearly indicates the duration of each intervention (it is recommended that the time allocated for each intervention should be up to three minutes, and extended up to five minutes in exceptional cases). The number of discussions per participant should be two at the most, and in exceptional cases third intervention can be allowed. The extension of time and giving the floor three times should be allowed only to constructive participants who stick to the topic and give positive contribution to the meeting.

- Discussion should be held in the direction of identifying solutions to the problems or about the topic of discussion and any situation, which might lead to verbal arguments, should be avoided. The representatives from the municipality must have priority in the constructiveness and their behavior should serve as an example to the citizens.

- The meeting should end with conclusions, which must be clearly defined by the facilitator, communicated to the attendees and if possible to obtain consent from the attendees. It is recommended that the representatives from the municipality should give as many as possible answers and proposals to improve the situation. It is important that they know that they can make only promises, which can be realized, as the citizens will expect that the promises must be kept.

- At the end of the meeting, the representatives from the municipality express their gratitude to the citizens for their interest in the meeting, their useful proposals and inform them about the future steps that the municipality will take regarding that issue.

Advantages

If well prepared and conducted, meetings with citizens can be one of the most efficient ways to get their feedback. It enables to directly hear their opinion and proposals; such meetings represent contact with the everyday reality on the field and serve as an excellent opportunity to present the work plans of the municipality.

Meetings are not complicated to be organized; neither require engagement of many resources, nor time necessary to hold the meetings. They are exceptionally useful to enhance the publicity of the work in the municipality and citizens' trust in the local self-government.

Disadvantages

If they are not well prepared, it is realistic to expect that the meetings will not reach the goal and there will be no citizen feedback. It might happen that the opposite effect is achieved – they might increase the mistrust in local self-government and dissuade citizens from future cooperation.

Necessary resources

One municipal employee to coordinate the preparations for the meeting. It is recommended that it should be a civil servant and should not be some elected or appointed official, whereby the citizens will get the impression that it is not a matter of some gathering with political background.

Several junior associates from the municipality, who will make the technical and administrative preparations (preparation of the agenda, announcements for the public, information about the meeting, copying the materials and similar). During the meeting, they will also deal with the distribution of materials, checking the technical equipment, welcoming the participants and the seating arrangements in the hall.

One facilitator, who can be employee from the municipality or some externally engaged person (on voluntary basis or for a certain fee). One person to take minutes, who can be employee from the municipality or some other person (can be a citizen, and there is confidence that this person will perform the obligation in a quality manner).

Computer, printer, copy machine and operational office supplies (paper, cartridge etc). If necessary sound system equipment, laptop, LCD projector and screen.

Besides the costs for the office supplies and equipment, there might be a need to rent a hall where the meeting will be held (if there is no adequate hall for the meeting in the municipality).

Possible difficulties for the realization

In some communities, if the information about the meeting is not shared in a timely and sufficient manner, it is possible that there is no favorable response from the citizens. Sometimes it might happen that besides the sufficient number of citizens, they might not be enough active during the meeting, do not take the floor or there are no proposals on their side.

There is also possibility for attendance of citizens who have not developed their democratic awareness and culture, who can disrupt the course of the meeting with their behavior. Sometimes it is possible that the citizens insist on discussions, which have nothing to do with the items of the agenda, aiming to solve some personal problem.

Because of lack of information about the possibilities of the municipality, the citizens can have requests or proposals, which are not feasible.

How to overcome difficulties?

Possible insufficient response by the citizens can be overcome if there is well-prepared and well-distributed announcement for the meeting, as well as interesting notice about the topic of discussion. It is important to make good selection of the topic, which is in the interest of the citizens as well as their interest for finding solution, which will be crucial for good response and attendance by the citizens.

All difficulties related to the behavior of the citizens can be considerably reduced, even eliminated by good facilitation of the meeting and clearly regulated rules for the meeting. The facilitator of the meeting will have the key role, such as his/her authority in the local community and skills to run the meeting.

4.7. Meetings with Neighborhood Units and Urban Communities

When and what it is used for?

It is used when it is necessary to review questions or problems that refer to one neighborhood unit or urban community, which are common for several neighborhood units or urban communities or when certain neighborhood unit or urban community shows dissatisfaction from the publicity of the work in the municipality.

The meeting can be initiated by the local self-government or by the citizens in the neighborhood unit or the urban community.

Meetings with the citizens in the neighborhood units or urban communities can be complex because they are direct meetings with citizens who are dissatisfied with the situation in their community and are difficult to communicate with.

How it is conducted?

Meetings with the neighbor units and urban communities are similar to the Public debates i.e. meetings with citizens. The difference is that the invitation is not general (for the citizens of the whole community), but the invitation is for a concrete neighborhood unit or local community. Similarly like the meetings with the citizens, it is necessary to do the following:

- The topic, which will be discussed at the meeting with citizens, must be clearly defined, as well as the position of the municipality regarding that issue. The respective municipal departments should prepare information about the problem and submit the information to the organizer of the meeting. Representatives from the municipality must be well prepared for the topic, in order to avoid unpleasant situations or absence of answers on citizens' questions. Previously prepared list of assumed questions and draft answers would be very beneficial.

- The meeting should be announced on time – it would be best to start that process one week before the event. Most efficient way is to do that with announcements in the media, appearance of municipal representatives in the media, and sometimes with paid advertisements. Sometimes it is useful to place posters or distribute leaflets on busy public places– squares, markets, in the municipality, at the entrance of schools and kindergartens, in neighborhood units and urban communities, bars etc. Information should also be posted on the municipal website, as well on some local Internet portals which are popular in the local community.

- The information about the meeting with the citizens should contain data about the date, time, venue, and agenda for the meeting, brief explanation of the topic to be discussed as well as the purpose of the meeting. Depending on the financial capabilities of the municipality, it would be useful to prepare a leaflet, which will present the topic of discussion in a detailed but concise and clear manner.

- In order to share information about the meeting and the reached conclusions, the representatives from the local media should be invited so that they can be introduced with the topic and the purpose of the meeting.

- The number of citizens who will attend the meeting needs to be foreseen and accordingly to choose adequate room for the meeting. If bigger number of citizens is expected, the municipality should provide a sound system as well as moveable microphones for the questions from citizens. If there is need for power point presentation, the adequate equipment should be provided. At least one hour before the meeting the functioning of the equipment must be checked, in order to enable time to do the necessary corrections if some parts are not functioning.

- There must be a facilitator for the meeting, to give the floor and to make sure that the meeting is conducted in the best possible way. The main role of the facilitator is to channel the discussion, to make sure that constructive proposals are heard and discussion is conducted accordingly. The facilitator must have authority in the local community and must be capable to recognize a useful discussion or to prevent some unconstructive behavior.

- Person to take minutes is appointed, in order to record the course of the meeting, with special attention to the proposals given by the citizens. The minutes from the meeting must be completed in the shortest possible period after the meeting and must be at disposal for the citizens in the municipality in the most appropriate way. The conclusions from the meeting can be drawn from the minutes, and they should also be available for the citizens. The best manner is to distribute the minutes and conclusions to the local media, especially to the journalists that attended the meeting. Besides that, they can be displayed on some prominent place in the premises of the municipality and also posted on the municipal website.

- At the beginning, the facilitator clearly states the purpose of the meeting, the topic which will be discussed, agenda, rules for the meeting and the expected duration of the meeting. Afterwards, the representatives from the municipality are introduced as well as their position in the municipality.

- In order to enable discussion which is properly conducted and without any problems, there must be an introduction of the topic, which will be discussed. This is done by a representative from the municipality, by avoiding extremely specialized presentation or extremely simplified presentation that does not provide a lot of information.

- Following the introduction, the discussion is opened and the facilitator gives the floor and clearly indicates the duration of each intervention (it is recommended that the time allocated for each intervention should be up to three minutes, and extended up to five minutes in exceptional cases). The number of discussions per participant should be limited to two at the most, and in exceptional cases third intervention can be allowed. The extension of time and giving the floor three times should be allowed only to constructive participants who stick to the topic and give positive contribution to the meeting.

- Discussion should be held in the direction of identifying solutions to the problems or about the topic of discussion and any situation, which might lead to verbal arguments, should be avoided. The representatives from the municipality must have priority in the constructiveness and their behavior should serve as an example to the citizens.

- The meeting should end with conclusions, which must be clearly defined by the facilitator, communicated to the attendees and if possible to obtain consent from the attendees. It is recommended that the representatives from the municipality should give as many as possible answers and proposals to improve the situation. It is important that they know that they can make only promises, which can be realized, as the citizens will expect that the promises must be kept.

Advantages

If well prepared and conducted, meetings with the neighborhood units and local communities can be one of the most efficient ways to get their feedback. It enables to directly hear their opinion and proposals; such meetings represent contact with the everyday reality on the field and serve as an excellent opportunity to present the work plans of the municipality.

Meetings are not complicated to be organized; neither require engagement of many resources, nor time necessary to hold the meetings. They are exceptionally useful to enhance the publicity of the work in the municipality and citizens' trust in the local self-government.

Disadvantages

If they are not well prepared, it is realistic to expect that the meetings will not reach the goal and there will be no citizen feedback. It might happen that the opposite effect is achieved – they might increase the mistrust in local self-government and dissuade citizens from future cooperation.

Necessary resources

One municipal employee along with one official from the neighborhood unit and urban community to coordinate the preparations for the meeting. It is recommended that it should be a civil servant and should not be some elected or appointed official, whereby the citizens will get the impression that it is not a matter of some gathering with political background.

Several junior associates from the municipality, who will make the technical and administrative preparations (preparation of the agenda, announcements for the public, information about the meeting, copying the materials and similar). During the meeting, they will also deal with the distribution of materials, checking the technical equipment, welcoming the participants and the seating arrangements in the hall.

One facilitator, who can be employee from the municipality or some externally engaged person (on voluntary basis or for a certain fee). One person to take minutes, who can be employee from the municipality or some other person (can be a citizen, and there is confidence that this person will perform the obligation in a quality manner).

Computer, printer, copy machine and operational office supplies (paper, cartridge etc). If necessary sound system equipment, laptop, LCD projector and screen.

Besides the costs for the office supplies and equipment, there might be a need to rent a hall where the meeting will be held (if there is no adequate hall for the meeting in the municipality).

Possible difficulties for implementation

In some communities, if the information about the meeting is not shared in a timely and sufficient manner, it is possible that there is no favorable response from the citizens. Sometimes it might happen that besides the sufficient number of citizens, they might not be enough active during the meeting, do not take the floor or there are no proposals on their side.

There is also possibility for attendance of citizens who have not developed their democratic awareness and culture, who can disrupt the course of the meeting with their behavior. Sometimes it is possible that the citizens insist on discussions, which have nothing to do with the items of the agenda, aiming to solve some personal problem.

Because of lack of information about the possibilities of the municipality, the citizens can have requests or proposals, which are not feasible.

How to overcome difficulties?

Possible insufficient response by the citizens can be overcome if there is well-prepared and well-distributed announcement for the meeting, as well as interesting notice about the topic of discussion. It is important to make good selection of the topic, which is in the interest of the citizens as well as their interest for finding solution, which will be crucial for good response and attendance by the citizens.

All difficulties related to the behavior of the citizens can be considerably reduced, even eliminated by good facilitation of the meeting and clearly regulated rules for the meeting. The facilitator of the meeting will have the key role, such as his/her authority in the local community and skills to run the meeting.

4.8. Meetings with Citizen Associations and Business Community

When and what it is used for?

Meetings with the representatives from the citizen associations and the business community represent exchanging opinions among the municipal leadership and the forms of organized social and economic life in the local community. This is used when the municipal management wants to become familiar with:

- The problems that citizens face and the citizen associations work on those issues
- The problems of the companies that operate on the territory of the municipality
- More concrete proposals to resolve problems in the local community
- More concrete proposals to improve the work of the municipality.

This mechanism is similar to the meetings with the citizens, and only differs by the proposals given by the citizen associations and business community, because they deal professionally with these issues. It is realistic that they provide more sublimed opinions and well conceptualized proposals to improve the situation in the local community.

How it is realized?

- The topic, which will be discussed at the meeting with the citizen associations and business community, must be clearly defined, as well as the position of the municipality regarding that issue. The respective municipal departments should prepare information about the problem and submit the information to the organizer of the meeting. Representatives from the municipality must be well prepared for the topic, in order to avoid unpleasant situations or absence of answers on citizens' questions. Previously prepared list of assumed questions and draft answers would be very beneficial.

- The meeting should be announced on time for all persons and associations who are expected to attend – it would be best to start that process one week before the event. If it is expected that limited number of persons and associations will attend, then it is sufficient if they are invited with written invitations, by phone or send the invitation by e-mail. If the meeting is open for representatives of unlimited number of entities and associations, the most efficient way is to do that with announcements in the media, appearance of municipal representatives in the media, and sometimes with paid advertisements. Sometimes it is useful to place posters or distribute leaflets on busy public places– squares, markets, in the municipality, at the entrance of schools and kindergartens, in neighborhood units and urban communities, bars etc. Information should also be posted on the municipal website, as well on some local Internet portals which are popular in the local community.

- The information about the meeting with the citizens should contain data about the date, time, venue, and agenda for the meeting, brief explanation of the topic to be discussed as well as the purpose of the meeting. Depending on the financial capabilities of the municipality, it would be useful to prepare a leaflet, which will present the topic of discussion in a detailed but concise and clear manner.

- In order to share information about the meeting and the reached conclusions, the representatives from the local media should be invited so that they can be introduced with the topic and the purpose of the meeting.

- The number of citizenassociations and business community representatives, who will attend the meeting needs to be foreseen and accordingly to choose adequate room for the meeting. If bigger number of participants is expected, the municipality should provide a sound system as well as moveable microphones for the questions from participants. If there is need for power point presentation, the adequate equipment should be provided. At least one hour before the meeting the functioning of the equipment must be checked, in order to enable time to do the necessary corrections if some parts are not functioning.

- There must be a facilitator for the meeting, to give the floor and to make sure that the meeting is conducted in the best possible way – it can be the mayor, president of the municipal Council or some citizen who is familiar with the topic and has authority in the local community. The main role of the facilitator is to channel the discussion, to make sure that constructive proposals are heard and discussion is conducted accordingly. The facilitator must have authority in the local community and must be capable to recognize a useful discussion or to prevent some unconstructive behavior.

- Person to take minutes is appointed, in order to record the course of the meeting, with special attention to the proposals given by the citizens. The minutes from the meeting must be completed in the shortest possible period after the meeting and must be at disposal for the citizens in the municipality in the most appropriate way. The conclusions from the meeting can be drawn from the minutes, and they should also be available for the citizens. The best manner is to distribute the minutes and conclusions to the local media, especially to the journalists that attended the meeting. Besides that, they can be displayed on some prominent place in the premises of the municipality and also posted on the municipal website.

- At the beginning, the facilitator clearly states the purpose of the meeting, the topic which will be discussed, agenda, rules for the meeting and the expected duration of the meeting. Afterwards, the representatives from the municipality are introduced as well as their position in the municipality.

- In order to enable discussion which is properly conducted and without any problems, there must be an introduction of the topic, which will be discussed. This is done by a representative from the municipality, by avoiding extremely specialized presentation or extremely simplified presentation that does not provide a lot of information. If the meeting is held on initiative by the citizen associations or the business community, then, with previous agreement, the introduction to the presentation should be made by an appointed citizen.

- Following the introduction, the discussion is opened and the facilitator gives the floor and clearly indicates the duration of each intervention (it is recommended that the time allocated for each intervention should be up to three minutes, and extended up to five minutes in exceptional cases). The number of discussions per participant should be two at the most, and in exceptional cases third intervention can be allowed. The extension of time and giving the floor three times should be allowed only to constructive participants who stick to the topic and give positive contribution to the meeting.

- Discussion should be held in the direction of identifying solutions to the problems or about the topic of discussion and any situation, which might lead to verbal arguments, should be avoided. The representatives from the municipality must have priority in the constructiveness and the official representatives from the neighbor hood unit or urban community.

- The meeting should end with conclusions, which must be clearly defined by the facilitator, communicated to the attendees and if possible to obtain consent from the attendees. The conclusions should be constituent part of the minutes, which should be submitted to the media and each interested entity from the local community.

- It is recommended that the representatives from the municipality should give as many as possible answers and proposals to improve the situation. It is important that they know that they can make only promises, which can be realized, as the citizens will expect that the promises must be kept.

- At the end of the meeting, the representatives from the municipality express their gratitude to the citizens for their interest in the meeting, their useful proposals and inform them about the future steps that the municipality will take regarding that issue.

Advantages

Meetings with citizen associations and business community can provide the municipality with much concrete and previously well-conceptualized information on the problems in the local community and proposals to overcome the problems. These associations work continuously in certain area of social life and have the opportunity to learn the problems from the citizens as well as the possibilities for their resolution.

If the civic and business sectors are well organized, the information and proposals that they provide can save time and human and financial resources of the municipality.

Disadvantages

This mechanism is less useful and applicable in municipalities with insufficient number of citizen associations or business communities, i.e. it is more convenient for bigger and urban municipalities.

Necessary resources

One employee from the municipality, to coordinate the meetings and take minutes during the meetings – recommended that it is a civil servant, and nor some elected or appointed official.

Several municipal staff, for administrative and technical preparations of the meetings (preparation of agenda, announcements for the public, information about the meeting, copying materials etc).

Technical equipment- computer, printer, copy machine and operational office supplies (paper, cartridge etc). If necessary sound system equipment, laptop, LCD projector and screen.

Possible difficulties for implementation

In some communities, if the information about the meeting is not shared in a timely and sufficient manner, it is possible that there is no favorable response from the citizens. Sometimes it might happen that besides the sufficient number of citizens, they might not be enough active during the meeting, do not take the floor or there are no proposals on their side.

There is also possibility for attendance of citizens who have not developed their democratic awareness and culture, who can disrupt the course of the meeting with their behavior. Sometimes it is possible that the citizens insist on discussions, which have nothing to do with the items of the agenda, aiming to solve some personal problem.

How to overcome difficulties?

Possible insufficient response by the citizens can be overcome if there is well-prepared and well-distributed announcement for the meeting, as well as interesting notice about the topic of discussion. It is important to make good selection of the topic, which is in the interest of the citizen associations and business community as well as their interest for finding solution, which will be crucial for good response and attendance by the citizens.

All difficulties related to the behavior during the meeting can be considerably reduced, even eliminated by good facilitation of the meeting and clearly regulated rules for the meeting. The facilitator of the meeting will have the key role, such as his/her authority in the local community and skills to run the meeting.

4.9. Open Days With The Mayor

When and for what it is used?

Open days with the mayor are personal meetings between the leader of the local self-government and the citizens, representatives from the business community and citizen associations, as well as other local entities regarding issues, which are important for the local self-government. During the meetings, the mayor receives feedback about the problems they face, their proposals to overcome those issues as well as concrete information about the work of the municipal departments.

Open days to meet the Mayor should be a regular practice of each Mayor who wants to stay in contact with everyday problems of the citizens, their associations and the business community in the municipality. They assist the mayor in identifying the existing problems in the municipality, receive proposals how to resolve those problems, obtain their opinion about the work of municipal departments and to improve the work of the municipal administration.

How it is conducted?

- It starts to be applied once the terms when the Mayor has open days for the citizens are determined, which depends on obligations of the mayor and the interest of the citizens. It is recommended that those are terms, which are cyclically repeated, and once they are introduced, those terms are changed only in exceptional cases if that is really indispensable. Fixed time when the Mayor receives the citizens creates impression that the local self-government is dedicated to the citizens and their problems, and increases the trust in it. On the other hand, it enables easy planning of the mayor's time and the time of the administration.

- Afterwards, it is needed to think of a way how to select the citizens who will be received by the mayor, whereby they will not be discriminated, but the citizens who have real problem related to the local self-government will be enabled to see the mayor. Although it might look like unnecessary bureaucratic procedure, this procedure is very important for proper and successful application of these mechanisms. This will reduce the number of citizens who would come to meet the mayor because of problems, which are not related to the local self-government, and would not contribute to the improvement of its work.

- Selection system implies preparation of procedure to submit request to meet with the mayor, reviewing the procedure, determining the citizens that the mayor will meet and the specific time for each of this admissions. The Mayor's cabinet should carry out the procedure, by assigning clear obligations to each team member. Special attention should be paid to the selection criteria, which are applied to the requests to meet with the mayor, which will enable easier implementation of the procedure and fair selection.

- Criteria should give priority to requests that refer to serious citizen problems, requests that indicate some unprofessional work by the municipal administration and requests, which contain good proposals to improve the work of the local self-government. Selection should be assigned to the member of the mayor's cabinet who is most familiar with the situation in the municipality, in order to be able to easily understand the scope of the problem and the quality of expected results.

- Besides that, the person responsible to make the selection, must have good communication with all municipal departments, in order to able to request and receive information related to the reason for the requested meeting. Preparing the mayor for the meeting on the basis of such information will save time and will enable easier solution to the problem for which the meeting is requested. On the other hand, requesting information from the respective departments regarding citizens' problems shall enhance the professionalism, legality and efficiency in their work.

- Afterwards, they need to determine the average duration of the meetings with the mayor and to define how many meetings during the open days will be realized. This will considerably assist to avoid overlapping of scheduled meetings, more efficient implementation in practice and citizens' impression about the organization of the local self-government. Depending how complex is the problem and how capable are the citizens to concisely represent the problem as well as the proposal for its solution, it is recommended that the duration of one meeting should be from half an hour to one hour. The information that the mayor received from the respective departments regarding the discussed topic has the key role in enhancing the efficiency of the meetings.

- Once the system for admission, selection, and scheduling the meetings is defined, it is necessary to announce the information in the media about the possibilities to meet the mayor. It must be announced that the meetings are aimed for resolution of problems, which are under the competence of the local self-government, and improvement of its work, and that priority will be given to the requests, which refer to those questions. In order to emphasize the objectivity of the selection of requirements, it is desirable that the general procedure should be explained. It would be best if this is done personally by the Mayor, by participation in some of the local televisions and radios, which will contribute to increasing the interest about the meetings and the citizen trust. If there are no such media in the municipality, then it can be done through the media in the neighboring municipalities, which broadcast signal on the territory of the municipality.

- Following the announcement, it might happen that there are big numbers of requests submitted and that is why the mayor's cabinet must be prepared for such situation and make good selection of the requests and schedule the meetings. On the contrary, the citizens can lost their trust in meetings and local government's intention at the very beginning of introducing the practice. It is very useful to response to the citizens when the meeting with the mayor will be enabled and to inform them about the time when the meeting can be realized.

- Response in written should be also sent to the citizens whose request about meeting cannot be satisfied, by indicating that the municipality is familiar with the problem and that it will be forwarded to the respective municipal departments for further acting. For some citizens, meetings should be scheduled with the heads of certain departments that their problem or proposal refers to. This will considerably reduce the pressure from repeated citizen requests, who will not be able to meet the mayor, and will enhance the opinion that the municipality is interested in resolving problems.

- For the purpose of resolving the problems of the citizens, meetings should be enabled with the heads of departments and the mayor, if the mayor thinks it is worthwhile. Combination of meetings with the mayor and the competent head of department to which the problem refers, will considerably assist the resolution and increasing the citizen trust in the local self-government.

Advantages

Meetings between the mayor and the citizens are the most direct way of receiving feedback, serve as possibility to resolve many citizen problems and obtain much useful information about the manner of work of the municipal departments. Once it is introduced as a practice, it is relatively easy for use, does not require many resources and provides considerable assistance to improve the efficiency and professionalism of the administration work.

Besides that, such meetings are useful to verify the work of the local self-government in concrete areas of competencies, as well as to learn the attitudes of citizens, their priorities and expectations.

Disadvantages

The meetings with citizens, at least in the beginning, do not enable perception of the general attitudes of the majority citizens in the municipality, but only about concrete situations and problems. On the other hand, discussions about concrete problems many times contain many subjective citizen opinions, because they primarily come to solve their problem and not to improve the work of the municipality.

Overcoming those shortcomings depends on the ability of the Mayor and his/her associates to realize and recognize the possibilities for improving the municipal work by resolving the problems through the proposals given by the citizens.

Necessary resources

Once the practice is elaborated, and if it is previously well conceptualized and prepared, its implementation can become routine obligation of the Mayor's cabinet and constituent part of its agenda.

In the beginning while the practice is being introduced, because of possible big number of requests to meet the mayor, it will be necessary that two or three staff from the cabinet dedicate one day a week to review the requests and make their selection. During the implementation of the practice, when the number of requests is expected to be reduced and experience is acquired, it will be necessary that one employee from the cabinet is engaged to work on it several hours a week.

It is especially important that the organization of meetings with the mayor does not require financial or any other resources except engagement by some of the staff in the cabinet during office hours.

Possible difficulties for implementation

It is certain that many citizens will want to meet the mayor about personal problems, which are not related to the municipality, most often when the citizens want to resolve their social status. Practice shows that big numbers of requests refer to employment or issues, which are not under the competence of the local self-government. Frequently it happens that the citizens insist to discuss some personal problems rather than the issues for which the meeting with the mayor was scheduled in the first place.

One should not underestimate the importance of possible unpleasant situations, which can occur during the meeting, which are caused because of the difficult problems that the citizens face and lack of hope that those issues will be resolved by the municipality. Although rarely, but it might happen that a citizen might come for a meeting with a big problem which can influence the sanity and behavior during the meeting.

There might also be difficulties to adjust the scheduled time for meetings with the citizens and other obligations of the mayor.

How to overcome difficulties?

Problems related to non-adherence to the topic, for which the citizen arranged the meeting, can be resolved by good selection of the requests as well as canalizing the course of discussion by the mayor. Previous discussion between the citizen and the competent employee in the cabinet can be of great assistance for the preparation of the admission of citizens to discuss with the mayor. It is better to foresee the citizen's problem or proposal in a direct communication or telephone conversation, as well as to assess whether the meeting should be scheduled as well as to foresee possible problems during the discussion.

In order to enable more constructive course of the meeting, the mayor should be provided with concrete information about the problem and possible solutions, as well as about the citizen that comes for a meeting. Having previously informed the mayor about this information before the meeting, would enable more efficient course of the meeting and saving the mayor's available time.

4.10. Interactive Municipal Website

When and what it is used for?

Although it serves to inform the public about the competencies and activities of the municipality, small modification of the website can make it an efficient means to receive citizen feedback.

This mechanism is used when the municipality wants to be in continuous contact with the citizens and receive prompt concrete feedback, complaints and proposals about its work.

This is especially recommended for municipalities that already have their own website, because it requires minimal adjustments to make it interactive, and the implementation does not require additional engagement of financial and human resources.

How it is realized?

- It is checked whether the program (software) enables interactivity in cooperation with the competent person that maintains the website, i.e. whether the users have possibility to ask questions and give suggestions. If there is no such possibility, the website should be adjusted for this purpose, and it is recommended that this is done by the person or company that designed the website. The required work is minimal and can be completed in a relatively short period of time, and does not represent financial overburdening for the municipality.

- When enabling the interactivity, the manner in which the citizens can easy submit their opinion through the website, should be identified and applied. The option for giving feedback should be visibly featured on the website, so that at each opening of the website it can be easily noticed and available for every visitor. The manner of using this option should be extremely easy, so that it can be used without any difficulties and requires only basic computer literacy.

- It is recommended that the option offers two possibilities – one for conducting surveys and the second for complaints and proposals from the citizens. The first one will enable that the citizens are surveyed about concrete questions, which are initiated by the municipality. The second one provides possibility that the citizens initiate solution of certain problem and possibly to propose some way to overcome the problem.

- Prior to start using the interactive website, there should be a conceptualized manner to choose the survey questions as well as orientational duration of the survey for each question separately. It is recommended that the selection of the questions is made from the area and topics that the municipality is intending to reach decisions, so that the citizen opinion can be taken into consideration. The duration of the survey cannot be strictly determined in advance and it will depend on the complexity of the question and number of input/opinions received from citizens. It is recommended that it should last from one to three weeks, and exceptionally when it is a very important matter, which requires getting opinion from more citizens, it can last longer.

- The questions for the survey must be selected from topics, which mostly affect the citizens, in order to provide citizen active participation and initiating more quality feedback. The questions should be objective, without any ambiguities or in a certain way be suggestive about the answers from the citizens. The selection should include consultations with the municipal departments and asking for information about issues that citizens usually complain about. The analyses of media reporting on local issues as especially criticism about the work of the municipality can be of great assistance to identify topics and issues.

- Besides for conducting surveys, this mechanism can be used as an efficient means to receive citizen complaints related to the work of the municipality. Therefore, it should provide a simple manner in which the citizens can give their comments on the work of certain municipal departments, and possibility for suggestions how to overcome those situations. The municipality should develop a system for receiving, processing and resolving such problems and for examining the citizen suggestions. The response on each complaint or suggestion, and indicating the manner in which the issue will be resolved, is of great importance for gaining citizen trust. If municipal departments are well functioning, it would be great if the municipality also indicates the timeframe for resolving the respective issues. Providing such response and completing the work in the foreseen timeframe, will considerably improve the efficiency of the municipal departments and will have positive influence on the opinion of the citizens in the municipality.

- The successfulness of using an interactive website mostly depends on the citizens' response and that is why it should be announced on time – it would be most appropriate if this process is started one month in advance. Primarily it should be announced on the municipal website, as well as on popular local Internet portals in the community, and setting banners and links to the municipal website. Announcements in the media, appearance of local self-government representatives in the media, sometimes paid advertisements, posters or disseminating flyers on busy public places can be of great assistance.

Advantages

An interactive website is an efficient, fast and inexpensive means for continuously receiving citizen feedback. Once it is introduced and starts functioning, it is easy for maintenance, does not require financial means or any additional engagement of human resources.

An interactive website which is well conceptualized, organized, implemented in regular and planned manner is one of the most recommended means for receiving citizen feedback.

Another reason, which adds to its efficiency, is that it saves time and human resources, because it replaces the direct contacts with citizens with a concrete written opinion or proposal. The savings on resources can be increased if the answers to the questions are posted on the website, whereby the citizens can find answers about certain things without having to address the municipality.

Disadvantages

This mechanism is not applicable in municipalities that do not have their own website or financial and human resources to introduce or maintain a website. Municipalities that do not have websites and have resources, once they introduce the website can promptly start using this mechanism.

The quantity of received feedback and the efficiency of the mechanism depend on the number of Internet users and the level of computer literacy in the municipality. The application of these mechanisms is easier and more productive in bigger urban municipalities, rather than smaller or rural communities.

Necessary resources

One major advantage of this mechanism is the minimal requirement for human and financial resources for its regular and efficient implementation. If the municipality has its own website, and if the program (software) supports possibility for interactive communication, that would not present any financial burden for the municipality. In that case, the employee responsible for the maintenance can dedicate only several office hours to extract the citizen feedback and submit it to the competent staff in the municipality.

Minimal financial means would be required if there is need to redesign the program (software), which is simple and can be done within a short period of time.

Possible difficulties for implementation

At the very beginning of the implementation, the municipality can encounter less opinion from the citizens than expected. This can happen as result from insufficient information about the possibility for the citizens to send their opinion to the municipality or when citizens are not sufficiently assured that their opinion will be given serious consideration.

It is likely that there will be some unrealistic requests, even unserious comments and proposals from citizens, who neither have problems with the municipality nor have interest in the work of the municipality.

Negative comments and criticism without any specific or real reason should not be excluded, and usually they are due to some personal or political disagreement with the municipal management.

How to overcome difficulties?

Citizen response can be enhanced through organized, timely and well-prepared announcing of the mechanism in the local media, on the municipal website or some other appropriate manner. This will enable to familiarize as many as possible citizens about the possibility to send their opinion, problem or proposal to the municipality in this way. In addition, it should be represented in a manner, which will convince the citizens that the municipality aims to seriously consider their opinion.

Unrealistic, unserious and malicious comments, proposals and opinions should not create problems and put under question the implementation of the mechanism, but they should be ignored.

4.11. Open Telephone Line for Proposals and Complaints

When and what it is used for?

Similar to the interactive website, open telephone line is used when the municipality wants continuously to be in contact with the citizens in order to receive fast and concrete feedback, complaints and proposals related to its work.

In general, this mechanism is appropriate to be used in any municipality, because all municipalities have the basic preconditions for application – telephone line and one employee to answer calls from citizens. It is especially recommended for municipalities that do not have website, where the number of Internet users is small or the computer literacy is on very low level.

How it is realized?

- One telephone number is determined only for this purpose, as well as the days and time of the day when the citizens can call. Whether one or several whole days in a week or several hours in the course of the day are determined is a matter of choice by the municipality, but certainly that the employees entrusted to do this should be enabled to be dedicated to their regular assignments. It is recommended that whole working day is not dedicated for this purpose, because it is hardly expected that there will be calls during all office hours in one day. It is most rational to start with several hours a day and in case of big number of calls, the period for receiving calls should be gradually increased.

- Depending on the expected number of calls, one or several employees will be assigned to answer the calls. The selected employees should be serious, good-tempered people, who are familiar with the competencies and work of the municipality, as well as the local mentality. Another reason to elect such people is that they represent the municipality in front of the citizens and their behavior can either contribute or harm the opinion about the municipality.

- Once they are selected, the employees should be trained about verbal communication with citizens, competencies of the municipality and especially how to extract the citizen feedback during the conversation. This will be a preparation for adequate reaction in cases when dissatisfied citizens call or when the citizens cannot clearly set the problem or propose solution. These calls are constituent part of this mechanism, and should not be discouraging neither for the municipality nor for the employees, because in course of time they will acquire experience whereby such situations will be easily overcome.

- It is recommended that at least one or two employees are selected and trained more than the foreseen number of calls, in order to enable their replacement if they are busy with regular assignments, use sick leave, are overburdened with work or use annual leave. If there is possibility, the municipality can include as many as possible employees in the training on communication with citizens. In this way, without any financial burdening, the municipality will improve the service provision and will improve citizen opinion about its work.

- Besides paying attention on professional communication, the course of the training should be also dedicated to acquiring skills for extracting and recognizing citizen feedback. Without having it included in the training, the open telephone line will deal more with citizen personal problems rather that receiving feedback how to overcome problems. It is certain that those aspects will be part of this mechanism, but priority importance should be given to extracting the proposals how to improve the work of the municipality and presentation of those proposals in front of the municipal leadership.

- The implementation of the mechanism should be announced on time, at least several weeks in advance through announcements in the media, appearance of local self-government representatives in the media, and sometimes by paid advertisements. Sometimes it is useful to use posters or distribute leaflets on busy public places – squares, markets, in the municipality, at the entrance of schools and kindergartens, in neighborhood units and urban communities, bars etc. Information should be posted on the municipal website, as well as on local Internet portals which are popular in the local community.

- When citizens call for some personal problem, and do not give proposals how to improve the work of the municipality, those should be treated most professionally and the heads of certain departments in the municipality should be informed accordingly. Received opinions and attitudes should be further submitted to the competent persons in the municipality to act accordingly.

Advantages

Open telephone line is the most rational mechanism to receive citizen feedback, because without any expenses and minimal engagement of human resources, very good results can be achieved. It is adequate for communication with citizens in municipalities, which have populated territories and which are remote from the seat of the municipality.

The activities to introduce the system are simple and can be easily organized, and any further maintenance does not require additional engagement.

Disadvantages

The mechanism does not have any specific disadvantages if it is well conceptualized and prepared, and can be applied in municipalities with small financial and administrative potential.

Municipalities, which have small or insufficient number of employees and numerous activities, might have problems to assign people who can dedicate part of the working hours to receive calls from citizens.

Necessary resources

The biggest advantage of this mechanism is the minimal requirement for human and financial resources for regular and efficient implementation, as there is no municipality that does not have the basic preconditions at disposal. It requires only one telephone line and part of the working hours of one or two employees in the municipality to receive the calls, to write down the citizen feedback and submit it to the competent staff in the municipality.

Possible difficulties for implementation

At the very beginning of the implementation, the municipality can encounter small number of calls from the citizens than expected. This can happen as result from insufficient information about the possibility for the citizens to give their opinion to the municipality in this way or when citizens are not sufficiently convinced that their opinion will be given serious consideration.

It is likely that there will be calls about some unrealistic requests, even unserious comments and proposals from citizens, who neither have problems with the municipality nor have interest in the work of the municipality.

Calls about negative comments and criticism without any specific or real reason should not be excluded, and usually they are due to some personal or political disagreement with the municipal management.

How to overcome difficulties?

The citizen response can be increased with an organized, timely and well prepared announcement of the mechanisms which will enable bigger number of citizens to be familiarized with the possibility to give their opinion, problem or proposal to the municipality. In addition, the representation should be done in a manner, which will convince the citizens that the municipality will seriously consider citizen opinion.

Unrealistic, unserious and malicious comments, proposals and opinions should not cause problems and put into question the implementation of the mechanism. Those can be easily overcome if the employee who answers the calls is well trained how to deal with such situations.

Problems related to human potential, can be easily overcome with minimal financial means to stimulate the employees who will receive the calls or to engage other people outside of the municipality. If the municipality is in position to attract, train and keep volunteers for this purpose, there will be no need for financial means for this purpose.

4.12. Meetings With Citizens at Public Places

When and what it is used for?

Meetings with citizens at public places are form of direct communication of the municipality with the citizens outside of its premises, in a time and place with big frequency of people. This mechanism is used when the municipal management wants to initiate communication and cooperation with the citizens, when the consultations with the citizens are not on satisfactory level. It is recommended in local communities where such communication exists, but the municipal management wants more intensive consultations with the citizens.

This mechanism is important because it is proactive, i.e. instead of waiting for the citizens to come and contact the municipality – the municipality approaches them to ask for their opinion.

How it is realized?

- The places where at certain period of time there is bigger frequency of people are determined, i.e. places that provide possibility to contact big number of citizens. In bigger towns those are primarily city squares during concerts or other manifestations, during weekends in shopping molls, supermarkets, parks, sports matches and similar. In smaller towns and rural municipalities those can be market days, people's gatherings and other events on occasions of religious and other holidays. Each municipality makes the choice depending on the conditions and circumstances when big number of citizens can be contacted.

- The people who will communicate with the citizens are selected – those can be volunteers, employees or heads of some municipal departments, members of the municipal council. Once it is assessed as worthwhile, it is recommended that the mayor is involved in the implementation of this mechanism. Depending on the expected number of such events, the municipality determines the number of employees or volunteers who are responsible to communicate with the citizens. They should be serious, good tampered and familiar with the competencies and work of the municipality, as well as familiar with the local mentality. Another reason is that they represent the municipality in front of the citizens and their behavior can contribute or harm the citizen opinion about the municipality.

- Once they are selected, the employees should be trained about direct verbal communication with citizens, competencies of the municipality and especially how to extract the citizen feedback during the conversation. This will be a preparation for adequate reaction in cases when they discuss with dissatisfied citizens or when the citizens cannot clearly set the problem or propose solution. Such problems will certainly appear at the beginning of the implementation of this mechanism but should not be discouraging neither for the municipality nor for the employees, because in course of time they will acquire practical experience whereby such situations will be easily overcome.

- It is recommended that at least one or two employees are selected and trained more than the foreseen number for communication with the citizens, in order to enable their replacement if they are busy with regular assignments, use sick leave, are overburdened with work or use annual leave. If there is possibility, the municipality can include as many as possible employees in the training on communication with citizens. In this way, without any financial burdening, the municipality will improve the service provision and will improve citizen opinion about its work.

- Besides paying attention on professional communication, the course of the training should be also dedicated to acquiring skills for excluding and recognizing citizen feedback. Without having it included in the training, the meetings with citizens at public places will deal more with citizen personal problems rather that receiving feedback how to overcome problems. It is certain that those aspects will be part of this mechanism, but priority importance should be given to extracting the proposals how to improve the work of the municipality and presentation of those proposals in front of the municipal leadership.

- Parallel to the training, there must be a concept about the manner in which this communication will be carried out – it is most appropriate to provide prefabricated movable stall, which enables two people to stand or sit behind it. It should be moderately attractive – sufficient to attract citizen attention, but should not resemble stalls for presentation of commercial products. The logo of the municipality and a sentence explaining the reason for placing the stall must be placed on a visible place. The best solution is to select a motto which will reflect the essence of the mechanism, such as for example „Municipality among citizens“ or „Municipality discusses“ or similar.

- Before starting the communication at public places, the organization and the course of the activity should be clearly defined, in order to avoid some unforeseen and sometimes unpleasant situations. The average duration of one conversation must be orientationally determined, in order to avoid complaints from citizens who are willing to discuss but have to wait. Frequently the citizens will approach regarding information about receiving some municipal service, and therefore it will be useful to disseminate materials, which describe the procedures for such services in clear and detailed manner.

- In order to attract the citizens to communicate with the municipal representatives, the use of this mechanism should be announced on time – most appropriate is if the process is announced one week in advance before the event. Most efficient are the announcements in the media, appearance of local self-government representatives in the media, and sometimes by paid advertisements. Sometimes it is useful to use posters or distribute leaflets on busy public places – squares, markets, in the municipality, at the entrance of schools and kindergartens, in neighborhood units and urban communities, bars etc. Information should be posted on the municipal website, as well as on local Internet portals which are popular in the local community.

- Besides for communication with the citizens, the stall should be used for dissemination of printed materials about the municipality, about municipal competencies, ways in which citizens can exercise their rights etc. In addition, it represents a practical possibility to carry out surveys and to evaluate the work of the municipal departments, as well as to announce future activities of the municipality.

- Yet, the primary reason for such type of communication with the citizens is to receive feedback aimed for better functioning of the municipality. Therefore discussions with citizens about some personal problem, and when they do not give proposals how to improve the work of the municipality, should be treated most professionally and the heads of certain departments in the municipality should be informed accordingly. Received opinions and attitudes should be further submitted to the competent persons in the municipality to act accordingly.

Advantages

Meetings with citizens at public places are an excellent opportunity to consult the citizens, who most probably would not come to the municipality on their initiative to explain the problem they face or to give their opinion. They enable direct contact with the citizens, and most likely that without previous preparation for discussion with municipal representatives, they can give more sincere comments and proposals.

Another advantage is that this mechanism can combine application of other means for receiving citizen feedback.

If well prepared and implemented with a good concept, these meetings are very important asset to enhance the citizen trust in the municipality and the municipality's determination to work in the interest of the good for the local community.

Disadvantages

In municipalities with small number of citizens or with insufficient number of citizens, but numerous activities, there might be a problem to assign people who will dedicate part of their time to meet citizens at public places.

This mechanism is more applicable in more liberal environment, in towns rather than in more traditionally oriented smaller towns or rural areas.

Necessary resources

The biggest part of the necessary resources refers to the engagement of the municipal staff for the preparation and implementation of this mechanism, whereas the financial needs refer to the preparation of the stall.

Other expenses are possible if the municipality decides to prepare, print and distribute leaflets and other materials during the meetings with citizens at public places.

Possible difficulties during implementation

Similar like with the other mechanisms for direct contact with the citizens, one cannot exclude the possibility that the discussions will refer more to personal problems rather than improvement of the work in the municipality. Considering that these meetings are outside the municipal premises, considerable challenge can be the unserious and sometimes uncivilized behavior by some citizens.

At the beginning of this mechanism implementation, especially in traditional areas, the placement of the municipal stall at public places might be received with surprise and sometimes with disapproval. In such areas, at the very beginning, there might also be distrust among the citizens and lack of citizen response to communicate with the municipal representatives.

It is not excluded that the initiative for application of this mechanism might get resistance among traditionally oriented structures in the municipal management, who consider that this manner of communication is unworthy for the municipality.

During the communication there might be comments and criticism by citizens who are negative and without any real reason, and usually this is due to some personal or political disagreement with the municipal management.

How to overcome difficulties?

The biggest number of difficulties can be surpassed with organized, timely and well-prepared implementation of the meetings with the citizens. Good presentation of the mechanism to the citizens has important role as well as whether they will be convinced that the municipality intends to seriously consider citizen opinion.

Possible unserious or malicious comments, proposals and opinions should not be a problem and put into question the implementation of the mechanism. They can be easily surpassed if the representative from the municipality, who will communicate with the citizens, is trained to deal with such situations.

Possible resistance by the municipal management can be surpassed if the mechanism is presented in front of the whole management, with special emphasis of the effects which will be achieved.

Problems related to human potential, can be easily overcome with minimal financial means to stimulate the employees who will communicate with the citizens or to engage other people outside of the municipality. If the municipality is in position to attract, train and keep volunteers for this purpose, there will be minimal need for financial means for this purpose.

5 Analyses and Use of Received Feedback

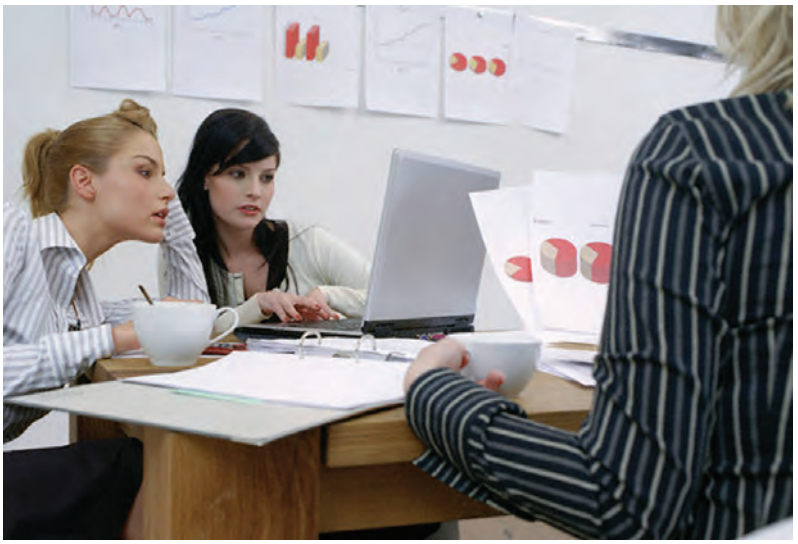
Receiving feedback from citizens neither can nor it should be means for itself, but makes sense if that information is used for planning and decision-making, as well as in the regular work of the municipality.

If the information is not used in an organized manner, the received feedback will be for single use and the invested funds and efforts would not be worthwhile. Feedback has great value if properly stored, processed and analyzed and compared in regard to different time periods, which can enable drawing conclusions about:

- Changes in the public opinion in the municipality in the course of the past years,
- Changes in the prioritized needs of the citizens,
- Changes in attitudes of concrete groups of citizens,
- Improvement or deterioration of the quality of municipal services,
- Changes in the satisfaction of citizens regarding the efficiency of administration.

The composition of the system for collection and processing of received feedback can not be identical in each municipality, but it varies on the basis of the size, as well as how frequently will the mechanisms be used and how detailed will be the analyses of the received feedback. However, the minimal conditions for introduction and maintenance of the system for receiving and processing the feedback are:

- Appointment of coordinator to receive citizen feedback – in smaller municipalities that can be only one employee, and in bigger municipalities this person can have assistants
- The coordinator and the team should have concrete plan and work program approved by the mayor, with concrete obligations and deadlines



- The obligation for work according to this plan, should be entered into the job descriptions for the staff appointed to receive citizen feedback
- All employees in the municipality should be informed about the work of the coordinator, and that they have obligation to provide assistance during the process
- Prescribe the manner in receiving citizen feedback in order to prevent violations or malpractice
- Determine the manner of storing and analyzing the citizen feedback
- In order to provide for continuity, the storage and responsibility for this information should be entrusted to a civil servant, and not to an elected or appointed person
- In order to secure information, besides materials that are used for regular work, it is compulsory to have one copy of the data on CDs.

The coordinator shall have the key role in the system and in cooperation with the municipal management will conceptualize the work plan and program, and will organize and oversee the implementation of mechanisms. In addition, the coordinator will manage the storage of received feedback, the analyses and presentation of obtained conclusions in front of the municipal management.

6 Positive Effects from Receiving Feedback

Municipal management would not start dealing with the organization and implementation of feedback mechanisms, unless they bring positive effects to them, the municipality and the overall local community. There are many benefits from this practice, and the most important ones are:

- The interest about the opinion of the citizens and their inclusion in the decision making process in the local self-government, contributes to **enhancing the legitimacy of the municipal management and administration**
- When included in decision-making, citizens are more willing to cooperate with the local self-government and to be involved in its activities, which considerably **alleviates the functioning and work of the municipality**
- Active cooperation with the citizens is a characteristic of well organized and stable administration, which considerably **increases the chances for receiving foreign funds and attracting domestic and foreign investments**
- Respect for the opinion of the citizens, citizen associations and business community, **enhances the trust in domestic and foreign capital for participation in public-private partnership projects**
- Consultations with the citizens make the municipality more distinguishable in the country and abroad, whereby it **increases the possibilities for closer cooperation with institutions from local self-government in the country and abroad**
- Throughout the process of cooperation with the local self-government, citizens and their associations can help for more efficient work, whereby **the capacities will be increased and financial and human resources can be saved**
- By paying attention to the opinion and needs of the citizens, the local self-government will enjoy bigger trust, and **the municipal management will have far bigger chances to be reelected.**