

## **DRPR Guideline Citizen Participation and Communication**

### ***Preamble***

Participation is a social expectation that has long since ceased to be articulated solely to the political system, but is also increasingly being demanded of organisations - especially companies. More or less organised players often represent their interests publicly. In a pluralistic, democratic society, this is a legitimate, necessary and welcome enrichment of public discourse. In some cases, organisations and companies respond to this expectation by voluntarily initiating participation measures, which are described in the professional field discussion as one of the instruments of 'acceptance communication'. These voluntary, informal participation measures are the scope of this guideline. They are characterised by the fact that the interests of the initiator can also be represented in them. In such a constellation of actors, conflicts of interest between participants and those commissioning a participation procedure are often unavoidable. High ethical standards must therefore apply to such measures.

It is essential that these communication processes are characterised by a spirit of mutual appreciation and fair interaction. This includes, in particular, the acceptance of other convictions, ideas and perspectives as well as respect for all participants and their professional and personal backgrounds. Where possible, substantial room for manoeuvre in decision-making must be opened up in order to meet civil society's legitimate interest in participation.

The organisation of participation processes is a demanding communication task that requires specialist communication qualifications as an important basis. In order to ensure good practice in this specific field of activity, further provisions not yet specified in the codes of the profession must be observed in addition to these principles.

The aim of this guideline is to offer those involved in voluntary participation processes a concrete opportunity to lodge a complaint, which the DRPR can penalise accordingly after consultation.

### **I. Transparency and commitment**

1. Participation processes must be initiated at an early stage so that - if this is stated as the aim of the process - influence can actually be exerted before decisions are made on matters to be negotiated. Participation processes that are implemented pro forma constitute deception and should be avoided.

2. It must be made transparent to what extent those specifically affected by the procedure can influence the subject matter under discussion. Procedures that are purely informational in nature must be labelled as such.
3. In addition to sender transparency, which must be ensured in any case, participation processes must also disclose who is financing the process.
4. Commitments made in the participation process by the commissioning party of a participation process (in particular regarding the assured influence) must be honoured insofar as they lie within its own sphere of influence. If commitments made have to be revised for compelling reasons, the participants must be informed transparently.
5. The results of participation processes must be appropriately taken into account in the initiators' decisions.
6. The content and processes of participation must be made transparent and documented. People involved in participation processes have a right to know to what extent the results of participation have been incorporated into decisions and to what extent decisions from participation processes are also implemented.
7. Confidentially communicated information must be treated confidentially by all participants.
8. The professional and transparent implementation of participation processes also includes an evaluation of the process that must be published, in particular with a focus on whether legitimate interests have been adequately taken into account.

## **II. Accessibility and representativeness**

1. The circle of people involved in participation processes must be organised in such a way that those materially and ideally affected are adequately represented.
2. It must be made transparent how those specifically involved in the process were selected and to what extent they are representative of all those affected/stakeholder groups.
3. Comprehensive information must be provided to enable those affected to participate.
4. Participation processes must be organised in such a way that barriers to access are avoided. This applies in particular to the formulation and language of the necessary information and documents and the choice of a suitable location or a suitable (digital) technological platform that enables equal access for all people.