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Foreword

Local public authorities are in a dynamic process of change influenced by the decentralization process. Thus, allowing for decision-making powers and responsibilities to be delegated at the local level. It is a natural process, taking into account the acknowledgement of the fact that the local needs can be more efficiently satisfied if the services can be provided as close to their consumers as possible.

This approach, however, requires the development of public relations through the assessment of local needs and their integration into the decision-making process, as well as determining the best ways to include, in the process of identifying optimal solutions, those influenced by the decisions.

In order to achieve the objectives set in the interest of the entire community, local authorities must prove to have professionalism and efficient management of local resources in identifying the optimal ways to solve various problems in the community, taking into account the existing constraints. The process of improving the quality of life of the members of community is not possible without a harmonious cooperation with all actors of the community, including civil society, private sector and ordinary citizens. The deliverance of quality public services requires joint effort that meets the needs of community members and aligns to the recognized standards.

Citizens' involvement does not mean only participation in the electoral process, but, first of all, involvement in establishing development priorities, elaboration of public service objectives and participation in the decision-making process related to these services. All members of the community need to be informed and involved in preparing community development strategies in order to understand the objectives pursued and to support and celebrate the achievements. When citizens are involved in the entire implementation process, beginning with the stage of preparing and setting objectives, accomplishing and evaluating them, they, citizens, will be able to actively

contribute and understand the importance of their direct participation in reaching the desired quality of life level.

Local authorities need a qualified staff who understands the importance of delivering quality public services, has a high level of training and understands the financial possibilities, as well as the local authority constraints, opportunities to establish local partnerships and attract new funds for the community. The local authority staff is expected to have an understanding of the policy development process and its implementation. It is expected to know how to keep promises and how to not make promises that will not be accomplished, and thus, build unnecessary frustration, distrust and deception in the entire community. In this regard, it is required to know how to collaborate with other stakeholders and learn from them, how to get citizens and local organisations involved in the local governance process.

This guide introduces one of the many possible tools for involving the society in decision-making process and describes the necessary steps to facilitate public consultations. It is a practical guide to assist the entities in charge, including public authorities, in the organization of Public Hearings on educational institutions' budgets of the communities they represent.

Introduction

Citizens desire to be able to participate in the decision-making process and to be involved in the governance process, because the decisions influence directly their daily life. However, in order to contribute to the governance process, policy development, implementation and evaluation processes, community members must get involved and must be empowered. The elected officials can play a key role in facilitating civic responsibility through helping citizens analyze various issues of common interest and develop solutions with the means of an open dialogue. The purpose of this practical guide is to help officials take the necessary steps to efficiently organize Public Hearings on the proposed development objectives of educational institutions and on their budgets as part of the communities they represent.



Public Hearing at 'Dumiru Matcovschi' gymnasium, Vadul-Rascov, Soldanesti in 2017

Public participation in decision-making has often proved to be useful and have positive effects in democratic countries.

However, public consultations have taught the authorities that citizens are not 'a public', but stakeholders: men and women, young people, elderly people, marginalized people, etc., who have the same amount of knowledge, experience, skills, realities, priorities and needs. When vulnerable people are not engaged in the decision-making process, it is a loss of intellectual resources and of great ingenuity behalf of numerous members of the community. In this respect, it is very important to ensure their access to the decision-making process and the use of ICT tools which is useful in the given token.

The real involvement of citizens in the decision-making process allows the authorities to make well-informed decisions which reflect the realities and specific needs of the citizens. These decisions contribute to reducing inequalities and discrimination based on factors that marginalize many citizens. As a result, the entire community benefits and the level of trust behalf of the population increases, as well as the participation of citizens in solving various issues of common interest. Another key-tool in ensuring

inclusive decision-making processes is the development of partnerships between the authorities and community actors.

Citizens' involvement in decision-making process can create many advantages for the local authorities, such as improving public services, revitalizing various community sectors, increasing security and increasing the quality of life for all community members.

The given guide presents a series of necessary steps for planning and implementing each necessary stage for organizing Public Hearings on development objectives of educational institutions and on their budgets. The citizens' engagement in an open dialogue regarding the education reform, quality of services, and development priorities of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools will enable an environment where social accountability initiatives can thrive and develop and the benefits are seen by the entire community.

What is a Public Hearing?

Public Hearing is a formal and structured event, usually organized by local public, regional or national authority. Public Hearings are efficient ways for local public authority to obtain the opinions and ideas of its citizens on a certain subject or program which is presented at the given event, including the potential proposed solutions or means of implementation. During the event, the public's reactions are heard and recorded. The presentation of public's reactions takes place in a guided and planned in advance manner, ensuring the recording of both verbal and written recommendations submitted by the participants.

Public Hearings are a democratic tool for consulting the citizens on issues of common interest, such as: planning the community's educational institution budget or drafting a community strategic plan; making adjustments to the tariffs and schedules of public utility services; establishing tax rates, local

tariffs, etc., in order to identify the immediate social problems and their solutions.

The Constitution of the Republic of Moldova and other normative acts provide various means for the consolidation of democracy. Public Hearings are one of them. The principle of citizens' consultation on local problems of special interest declared in the Article 109 from the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova forms the constitutional basis for Public Hearings' practice.

The organization of this type of events also contributes to the exercise of the freedom of thought, opinion and public expression (Article 32) and of human right to unhindered access to any kind of information of public interest. Public authorities are obliged to ensure that citizens are adequately informed on public affairs (Article 34 of the Constitution). At the same time, Article 58 of the Constitution provides the citizens' obligation to contribute to public expenditures through taxes, but it also stipulates ***their right to be consulted on the use of local public money.***

Local public administrations can use Public Hearings to obtain citizens' feedback on important budgets, strategic plans, development projects, land use issues, recommendations of privatization of some municipal services, or recommendations to increase taxes and tariffs, etc. Officials must ensure, prior to the Public Hearing, that all aspects of the issue in question have been openly discussed and are known to all community citizens. In this respect, 'The Stakeholders' Engagement Forms' (questionnaires) represent a useful tool for the perception and involvement of all pupils and their parents when a school Public Hearing is organized. Examples of such Forms can be accessed on the official website of the 'My School' initiative, funded by the World Bank and implemented by the Expert-Grup Think Tank and the regional partners network in an informational partnership with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research of the Republic of Moldova. Web Address: <http://scoalamea.md/cum-se-implementeaza-fisele-de-raportare-in-scoala/>

In addition to a number of important topics, this tool allows you to elucidate the perception of all education service users regarding the institution's priority

development directions. So that, during the Public Hearing, one can already have exact and quantifiable data to take into account during decision-making process, and introduce it to the participants at the event.

Public Hearings provide valuable information on whether the concerned issues and the suggested remedies enjoy citizens' support, as well as recommendations regarding the necessary changes that would make them more acceptable to the public.



Public Hearing at Costuleni gymnasium, Ungheni in 2017

Public Hearings are a special type of public meetings, appropriate for major public policy issues, such as planning a community budget or a strategic plan, adjustments to tariffs or schedules for public utility services, setting tax rates, duties or other local tariffs. These issues of great importance require profound deliberation behalf of the civil servants in order to make a decision. Moreover, such issues are likely to cause citizens to have strong, divergent or even emotional reactions. On these grounds, the Q & A sessions, or direct or immediate answers to citizens' questions during Public Hearings are not appropriate. A successful formulation of a reasonable public policy, in such cases, will be if the civil servants take the necessary time to reflect on what has been said during Public Hearings and make a decision at a future open meeting with the citizens.

The Goal of the Public Hearing

- To inform
- To educate
- To obtain additional information, ideas, critical reactions (before the decisions are made)
- To consult
- To listen to the citizens

Public Hearing is not a forum for debates with citizens. The Q & A session may slow down the process, may put civil servants in a defensive position, may turn into a debate and may cause emotional reactions behalf of those citizens (or even servants) who have strong divergent views. Potential intense emotional exchanges are to be avoided in order to ensure a robust and wise democratic deliberation process.

If the local public administration together with the administration of the educational institution prepares well for the Public Hearing, many of the citizens' questions will be addressed in advance in the prepared informative materials and made available by the organizers of the Public Hearing before the event (with the copies of the given materials made available for the participants, including during the Public Hearing) .

Citizens' contributions are for information only. The act of asking for citizens' opinions does not diminish the responsibility of the local administration or Council, and neither does it mean that the administration or the local Council shall adopt nor accept the suggestions without discussing them first. In this respect, it is very important to bring this to the citizens' attention, mentioning that their opinion matters and it will be taken into account in decision-making process.

If citizens know that the administration of the educational institution together with the local public administration devotes their time to listen to them, they

will support much easier the decisions taken by the authorities and will be more open to get involved in implementing those decisions.

Since Public Hearings are formal procedures, they are appropriate for most public policy areas.

Therefore, public institutions will not make decisions during Public Hearing, but will set a deadline for reflecting and evaluating the recommendations they receive as a result of the Public Hearing. The final decisions will be made public afterwards, on a date which is established in advance and is known by all participants at the event.

Advantages and Limitations of Public Hearing

The formal Public Hearing includes a large number of citizens and gives the public an opportunity to comment on an issue. All aspects of the issue can be discussed.

Public Hearing is a forum where citizens can express their views on the issues in question and an opportunity to openly share their views and recommendations on solutions, as well as opportunities to overcome the encountered obstacles.

Public Hearing is an inexpensive way to get citizens' comments on a specific issue, to understand the constraints, as well as to actively engage citizens in reducing those constraints.

In this regard, in case of school Public Hearings, the active involvement of community stakeholders gives you the opportunity to improve the educational services provided by the institution and thus, increase its quotation. If you are open, accountable and responsive towards students and parents' needs and desires regarding development priorities of the institution, they will gain more confidence in the institution's decision-making process. They will also be more willing to get involved in reducing various constraints that the institution faces while carrying out its activity.

'Stakeholders' Engagement Forms' (questionnaire mentioned above) are a useful tool in finding out the opinions of the users of educational services provided by the educational institution in question. These Forms are milestones in the decision-making process regarding the development priorities of the institution, as well as in attracting investments. At the same time, its annual usage represents a guide in evaluating the obtained results, as well as in identifying new development priorities.

This tool also gives you an exhaustive picture because it allows you to engage everyone in the process and to find out students and parents' opinions regarding the issues that the Forms tackle. If a large number of participants get involved, you will have a bigger picture of the situation and thus, will take informed decisions.

Limitations

Public Hearing is not an actual forum for exposing complex ideas and detailed information.

Public Hearings are not adequate for in-depth discussions or appreciation of different points of view because those can be dominated by noisy individuals with limited interests. On these grounds, the 'Stakeholders' Engagement Forms' come in handy as a complementary tool.

It is vital for the Public Hearing to be well tackled – as it can deviate from its agenda and the consequences might be hard to handle. Therefore, the Organizational Council must set clear rules and apply them strictly during the Public Hearing. The Council must also clearly articulate the purpose of the Public Hearing along with the citizens expectations.

Why it is Important to Ensure Citizens' Participation?

- In order to create confidence in local public administration and in educational institution;
- In order to obtain citizens' contributions and opinions; while involving citizens in the process we offer them the opportunity to better understand the problems and limitations faced by the local public administration and by the educational institution in an attempt to meet their requirements. Divergent views and opinions can also draw attention to the things you were not aware of and can help the administration.
- In order to inform citizens; information gives them the opportunity to see all the programs and services of the local public administration, of the educational institution and the needs they meet; through informing them you prove what has been achieved and thus, the level of support behalf of citizens, grows;
- In order to get support for basic policies;
- In order to maintain citizens' participation in the community; it is the responsibility of local administration to do their best in order to engage citizens in the public dialogue, both directly and through social institutions;
- In order to facilitate the local public administration;
- In order to support more initiatives suggested by the citizens;
- In order to engage citizens as leaders in the decision-making process;
- In order to empower citizens to take the lead in solving problems;
- In order to invite citizens to become partners of the local public administration and of the educational institution's administration.

When the decision-making process is carried out in a transparent manner with the active involvement of citizens and when the reasons behind decisions, constraints and the inherent advantages for the benefit of the entire community are explained, informing the citizens accurately and in real time, these actions are among the best tools for reaching consensus, confidence and community support.

It is a well-known fact, that the lack of transparency and access to information leads to suspicions and often misleading interpretations of the taken decisions or of the intentions that are being followed. This erodes a lot the



level of confidence behalf of members of community and therefore, erodes their support.

Empowered citizens will have a better understanding of the complexity of the issues you face and will appreciate the patience and the perseverance it takes to solve public issues.

The complex problems you encounter daily, require a broader range of contributions. The collective intelligence of a group is better than the intelligence of one person or that of a small group. Creativity will be enhanced through the ideas of more people with different experiences.

When citizens are involved in solving joint problems and in decision-making processes, they become co-owners of solutions to community problems and thus, feel responsible for these solutions. It is unlikely that these citizens will sabotage your efforts or oppose a solution at the end of the process. Perhaps, the solutions you reach will be even more efficient and sustainable than you thought.

The dialogue with citizens is not a given. This is based on mutual trust and respect. If the mutual trust or respect has been lost or impaired, the local public administration, or the administration of the educational institution will have a problem. Trust and respect is earned through concrete actions.

How to Organize a Public Hearing?

Necessary Steps for Planning a Public Hearing

1. Identifying the Target Audience

Take into account the goal and the topic of the Public Hearing. This event may serve as a foundation for drawing the interest and the participation of all members of the community, but it will, in particular, draw the attention of

those who will be directly influenced by the decisions taken as a result of the Public Hearing.

It is important to get everyone from the community involved, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, financial status, etc. A larger participation in the event, including that of the people with special needs will allow for a relevant collection of information for all categories of population and thus, will influence some decision-making processes / identify appropriate solutions, based on concrete data; it will also ensure their active involvement in implementing the decisions that are made. In this respect, it is very important to ensure the access to the event of the people with disabilities, single mothers, etc.

At the same time, as mentioned above, an additional tool that will help narrow down some of the limitations of the organization of school Public Hearings is the application of 'Stakeholders' Engagement Forms' and the presentation, during the event, of the results of these Forms.

Exchange of experience behalf of educational institutions that have already organized such public events is welcomed. The lessons learned from the gained experience are valuable and can provide you with a good basis for organizing a successful event that will bring you the desired results. Many such experiences can be accessed on the official page of the 'My School' initiative: <http://scoalamea.md/category/istorii-de-succes/>, either by reaching directly these institutions or the beneficiaries of the project in question.

Depending on the subject of the Public Hearing, it could be organized in partnership with community initiative groups, civil society organizations (e.g. parents and teachers associations, community centers, day centers, etc.).

2. Setting the Date, Hour and Location

The Public Hearing should be held in a day and time which would be convenient for everyone invited (may also be on an off day or after the normal

work hours). It should be also taken into account that on average the event lasts about 2 to 2.5 hours and the widest possible participation is important.

It should be noted that the organization of the Public Hearing on the draft school budget should be correlated with the set budgetary calendar officially adopted in the given year. Thus, as a rule, school Public Hearings are scheduled to take place in the first half of October.

As a rule, the Public Hearing is organized in a place that can host about 100 people and has the necessary space and arrangement for hosting the event, including in terms of physical access (especially for people with locomotor disabilities).

3. Selection and Training of the Organizational Council

The Organizational Council of the Public Hearing usually involves the members of the Local Council, representatives of the school administration who are in charge of developing and implementing the budget of the institution and the representatives of the Mayor's Office.

For planning and organizing the Public Hearing it is important to create the Organizational Council and actively involve all its members at all stages of the event preparation. A critical role is played by the efficient and operative communication between Council members, as well as the clear delimitation of each member's tasks and their deadlines. In this regard, it is important to develop a detailed action plan that oversees this details (see Annex 1). The election and nomination of the Organizational Council's coordinator is also very important.

The Organizational Council is directly responsible for planning and organizing Public Hearings. It decides upon the hearing's format, rules of conduct which are to be announced at the beginning of the event and sets the time frame for each presentation, guaranteeing thus, a chance for every citizen to take the floor. Those who want to take the floor must register in advance. This allows the person who makes the minutes to write exactly 'who said what'. It will also



to maintain the order during the hearing, because there will be a list according to which citizens can be called to speak.

After the Public Hearing took place and the recommendations were received in due time, the Organizational Council will set a meeting in order to analyze the recommendations and will decide upon the changes or corrections to be made next time. Final decisions will be brought to the attention of the general public with the help of the media (or press conference).

Note: It is better if the Mayor is not the Chairperson of the Public Hearing, moderator or speaker.

4. Drafting the Public Hearing's Agenda and Establishing Rules of Conduct

The Organizational Council prepares the agenda of the Public Hearing which will provide information on the topics discussed, moderator of the event, the persons designated to make presentations and the time allocated to them (about 5 to 10 minutes per speech); sufficient amount of time will be planned for presenting the results of the 'Stakeholders' Engagement Forms' and the key-results; sufficient time will be planned for questions, suggestions and comments from the guests. At the end there will be time for summarizing the results of the Public Hearing and informing the participants about the activities that are to follow as a result of the recommendations issued during the Hearing. At the same time, the deadline for submitting additional recommendations will be announced, as well as the to whom and where they can be addressed.

In order to get the stakeholders actively involved, it is important to invite the District President and/or the District Vice-President to the Public Hearing as well as the Chief of the District Division for Education. In this regard, sufficient



time will be set (at least 10-15 minutes) for the District President's presentation and Chief's presentation on the general situation of the district educational institutions, the educational institution's situation from the given location as compared to other, what are the development opportunities of the institution in question and how can it access financial support from the administrative-territorial unit.

It is considered to be a good practice to invite the representatives of the institutions who have already organized a school Public Hearing and to give them about 5 minutes to talk about the experience they gained. It is also good to have among participants the representatives of the educational institutions who want to organize a Public Hearing in their community.

At the same time, rules of proper conduct of the Public Hearing shall be established. These shall also delimit the time set for each of the guests' speeches present at the event, and shall guarantee each citizen the right to be heard.

Citizens who want to speak at the Public Hearing shall be asked to register before the event begins in order to be given the opportunity to take the floor during the Hearing. In order to maintain order during the Public Hearing, the citizens who want to take the floor shall be called according to the list of speakers and according to the order they registered (first to register shall speak first, and whoever wants to speak shall do so before someone speaks twice).

The Organizational Council shall establish clear and reasonable rules of procedure long before the Public Hearing. It would be a good idea to distribute copies of these rules in advance (together with the brochures and handouts for the Hearing). The process of registering for taking the floor needs to be open during the entire Public Hearing, so that, if someone feels 'the need' to speak at a certain moment, he/she will approach the secretary in charge of registering and then, take the floor when it shall be given to that person.



The Organizational Council will designate those in charge of preparing the Public Hearing's minutes, with the exact rendering of what was said by each speaker. Recording techniques can be used in this respect, for example an audio recorder, but the citizens should be asked for the permission to do so and the reasons behind it should be explained.

At the end, there should be planned time for drafting the summary of the Hearing's results and for informing the participants on the follow-up actions. At the same, the additional period of time for any comments or suggestions should be mentioned, especially behalf of those members of the community who were not able to attend the event on the set date, as well as where these should be submitted.

The Organizational Council should establish, well in advance, clear rules for the conduct of the Public Hearing. These rules (together with the prepared leaflets and handouts) should be distributed in advance (at least one week before the event) as well as be available during the event. During the entire event, the participants should be given the possibility to register for taking the floor in order to comment upon something.

5. Announcing the Public

Usually the Organizational Council announces the organization of the Public Hearing at least a week in advance by making a public note that should be placed somewhere at sight (on the information panel of the Mayor's Office, the school, etc.), on the web-sites (Mayor's Office website, school's website, the local press agency website, etc.), published and broadcast in the local press (newspapers, TV channels, radio, etc.). In this regard, the participation of local NGOs, initiative groups and youth from the community would be welcomed.

Also, it is important to inform the parents of the children that study in the given educational institution.

The note should contain information on the date, hour, place, the goal of the Public Hearing and the contact persons as well as their contact details. The

note/press release should contain information on the goal of the event in a way that attracts the public. It should also contain information on the guests invited by the authorities that would be present at the event. An efficient idea is to include a quote from an official (who will be present at the event) on the importance of organizing school Public Hearings while also mentioning the key achievements achieved to that date, with a brief description of real cases. The Organizational Council will prepare informational sets easy to understand by any community member (leaflets containing the brief draft school budget, other distributive materials). These informational sets should be distributed well in advance (at least one week ahead) as well as made available at the beginning of the event. The public note should also contain information on how and where the informational sets may be obtained.

Officials can ensure, prior to the Public Hearing, that all aspects of the issue in question have been openly discussed. At the same time, it is advisable to organize a prior meeting before the event for the Organizational Council and educational institution's administration in order to discuss and analyze the preliminary results of the 'Stakeholders' Engagement Forms' and to identify the key-results that shall be presented at the Public Hearing, as well as to designate the persons in charge of drafting the given presentation and preparing the visual materials. Public Hearings provide valuable information on whether the concerned issues enjoy citizens' support, as well as the necessary changes to make them more acceptable to the public.

Importance of the District Public Authorities' Involvement

According to Law No 435 on the administrative decentralization, one of the fields of activity of the local public authorities is the maintenance of the primary school kindergartens, gymnasiums and lyceums, secondary vocational education, boarding schools and boarding gymnasiums with special care program, as well as other educational institutions which are at the district's disposal, as well as the maintenance of the methodical activity and other related activities. At the same time, in accordance with Law No 397 on local public finances, the responsibility for the execution of the district budget lies

with the district President. In this respect, it is recommended to invite the district President to the Public Hearing organized by the institution in question.

In this context, according to the Regulation on distribution and use of financial resources from the administrative-territorial unit (Annex 2 to the Government Decision No 868 from 8 October 2014), the recommendations for distribution of the administrative-territorial unit are prepared by the District Division for Education in collaboration with finance division. Taking into account the above-mentioned aspects, **it is important to invite the representatives of the District Divisions of Education at the Public Hearings** on the draft budget of the educational institution in question. It should be mentioned that the distribution of the financial means from the territorial-administrative unit is performed within the limits stipulated by the mentioned Regulation, Article II. According to the provisions of the Article III. Method of calculating the allocated means from the administrative-territorial unit.

In this regard, in order to get all the stakeholders involved, sufficient time will be set on the agenda of the event (at least 10-15 minutes) for the district President's presentation and presentation of the Chief of the District Division for Education on the situation of the district primary educational institutions, the educational institution's situation from the given location as compared to other, what are the development opportunities of the institution in question and how can it access financial support from the administrative-territorial unit, as well as present real examples in this respect.

The invitations to the parties mentioned above shall be sent at least one month before the organization of the Public Hearing, so that, they will be able to plan in advance their participation. They should also be told about the importance of their participation and presentations. Subsequently, a repeated notification shall be sent, in order to confirm the participation, at least 3 days before the event date.

Mass Media Role

Local media (radio, television and the press) provide an effective way of communicating the message to the public and drawing its attention in order to participate in the process. There are a number of media coverage ways that you can use in order to increase significantly the impact of the Public Hearings in your community.

A press release sent with the means of mass media represents a way of communicating the information. **The press release** is a tool by which you inform the press about the planned activities, and through the press you inform the general public. In order to be published, the press release must contain fresh information which is of interest to a significant audience. Journalists are the ones who decide upon releasing the received information.

In order to increase the likelihood of publishing the information presented in the press release, the information should be made relevant to the public, should be fresh, clear, easy to read and understand, include as much information as possible in shortest words and be adapted to the local and general context.

Press Release Format:

- The title should be short, impacting, clear, to stir the interest of journalists, to draw the attention to certain actions, decisions, achievements, new ideas. The title should be simple, straightforward and must provide a clear perspective on the subject that is being covered by the press release.
- The first paragraph represents the essence of the information and must answer the following questions: **who, what, where, when, how** and **why**. This paragraph should not exceed 5 or 6 rows.
- The second paragraph elaborates on the ideas outlined in the first paragraph. If the first one presents new and important facts, the second one will defend them: provides the circumstances, reasons, explanations, consequences.
- The third paragraph may contain one of the Director's statements, or one of the official's, if the subject allows for it. A statement is like a piece of decoration which brings authenticity to the press release because it is a verbal expression.
- In the end, contact details for further information are attached (contact person, function, phone number, fax and E-mail address).

Last but not least, it is very important to follow the institution's visual identity rules (logo, header, etc.).

Preparing the Necessary Information for the Public

Simple information packages for the public shall contain brief and easy-to-understand for anyone information. This information can be presented in the form of simple brochures or flyers. It is important to be aware of the fact that the draft budget of the educational institution is a technical document that may be difficult for the non-specialists to understand.

Therefore, in briefly informing the public, it is good to address simple issues that are comprehensive for everyone. In addition, the information which is provided must allow comparisons with previous periods (e.g., for the past 3 years) and comparative information by district, region, country (depending on data availability).

An important aspect is to present the information in which the general public is interested, such as, for example, the distribution of expenses and their description, with the necessary amount of expenses per categories and with the concrete actions as compared to the distributed amount being estimated. The information presented during the Public Hearing, usually, emphasizes the main goal and specific objectives

The Content of the Budget Summary Usually Includes:

- Highlights of the budget's priorities;
- Key issues and options / proposals for the budget period;
- Major changes in tax rates;
- Planned amount of provided services, priorities and reasons for changes;
- Major financial issues, including changes in the economy and long-term economic forecasting;
- Significant increases or decreases in the central government revenue, or that from the local funding sources.

which are respected in preparing the draft project of the educational institution, main constraints and the solutions for reducing them, as well as the expected role of the community members in this regard.

The use of visual materials in presenting the information during the Public Hearing is welcomed. It will better draw the public's attention and will ensure a better understanding of the presented information. In this sense, it is advisable to prepare a presentation using ICT tools and the necessary visualization equipment. An alternative option is to prepare a paper presentation (flip-chart).

A good preparation is an important step towards a good conduct of the Public Hearing.

The Necessity of Adjusting the Process of Organizing Public Hearings to the Established Budgetary Process by the Legislation in Force:

According to Article 61 of the Law on Education (No 547 from 21.07.1995), the main source of funding the state education system are the budgetary funds. However, in addition to public sources, institutions from the state education system can also benefit from other sources of funding, such as donations from individuals and legal entities, income from rent / lease of public property.

It should be mentioned that the technical and material basis of the education system consists of buildings, engineering installations, libraries, laboratories, workshops, clinics, lands, means of transport, equipment and other technical and material means provided by the normative acts. According to the current regulatory and legislative framework, the alienation and the transfer of the edifices, constructions and related land belonging to the educational institutions is forbidden, for purposes other than education and cultural enlightenment. Educational institutions can not offer for rent the buildings that they possess, unless the education management bodies allow for it.

The budget of an educational institution is the transposition in financial terms of the goal and objectives of an institution. With the help of the budget, a school unit can decide upon the distribution of resources in order to reach its objectives. Thus, the budget must represent a plan for orienting all of the resources institutions' resources: time, human resources, physical resources. The financial resources represent just one aspect of the budget. The budget document, expressed in financial terms, is part of the integrated annual plan of the school unit, which is a managerial plan.

The budget plan is essentially a table with two columns: the revenue the school expects to obtain from the legally constituted sources and, the expenses towards various categories.

Each year, educational institutions plan and prepare the institution's draft budget for the upcoming year on the basis of a predetermined procedure and calendar. **Planning (budgeting) represents** a special function of the management process which encompasses the entire activity of public educational institutions and determines the actions which are to be implemented.

There are Two Basic Directions in Planning (Budgeting):

- Preparing strategic (forward looking) plans that represent a decision-making process regarding the strategic programs and includes long-term plan drafting. Each public educational institution has a certain strategic objective (providing quality services, holding a leader position, etc.). In order to accomplish this objective, strategic planning is carried out, the results of which are long-term future plans, usually developed for a period of 3-5 years.
- Preparation of budgets (identifying short-term tasks within the general strategy) is accomplished by the breakdown of long-term plans in current short-term budgets up to one year.

Budgeting is a process of preparing to unveil the anticipated revenues and the proposed expenses. It is a preparation process of a summary on planned revenues and expenses. This estimate is the budget of the school, which allows for the accomplishment of various school activities.

Law No 847 on budget system and budgetary process of 24.05.1996, regulates the entire process of preparation and approval of the national public budget, and the Article 19 provides the procedure for submission of budget proposals to the Ministry of Finance, which is the authority in charge of public budget development. Thus, according to the same Article, public authorities must submit the budget proposals to the Ministry of Finance on the date set by the Ministry of Finance. However, the deadline for submitting the proposals is set taking into account the fact that the Government is obliged to submit to the Parliament by 1 October of each year, the draft of annual budget law.

At the same time, the process of drafting and execution of administrative-territorial units budgets is regulated by **Law No 397 on local public finances of 16.10.2003**. Article 19 of the given law regulates the process of drafting the budgets of administrative-territorial units and states that within 20 days after receiving the methodological notes prepared by the Ministry of Finance, the executive authorities of the first level administrative-territorial units have to ensure the preparation of the prognosis of all types of taxes and duties that are to be collected in the next year(s) in the administrative-territorial unit in question, as well as the draft budget of the first level administrative-territorial authority, which comes to the Finance Division for the analysis of the project's correctness and the preparation of the consolidated synthesis of the draft budgets of the first and second level administrative-territorial units. Subsequently, within the deadlines set by the Ministry of Finance, the Finance Division submits to the Ministry of Finance, for consultation and inclusion in the national public budget, the consolidated synthesis of the budgets of the first and second level administrative-territorial units. However, the deadline takes into account the fact that the executive authority must submit, to the relevant representative and deliberative authority, the draft budget of the administrative-territorial unit for the next year for examination and approval, no later than **1 November**. It should be noted that according to the law, the

representative and deliberative authority approves the budget of the administrative-territorial unit for the next budget year, no later than **10 December**. Until **1 January**, the Finance Division submits to the Ministry of Finance the distributions of the revenues and expenditures of the budgets of the administrative-territorial units, according to the budget classification.

According to the Decision of the Government No 728 of 2 October 2012 on 'On funding based on standard cost per pupil by using the adjustment coefficients as established by the Government for the mainstream primary and per capita funding secondary educational institutions funded from the budgets of administrative-territorial units', the volume of allowances is based on standard cost per pupil per primary and secondary educational institutions: primary schools, gymnasiums, mainstream general schools, lyceums. The formula extends on the main budget component and includes current expenditures, except those for food, inclusive education services the activity of groups that provide the mandatory preparation of children for school and special conditions for remuneration of institutions' workers from Causeni, Anenii-Noi, Dubasari, as well as capital expenditure, except capital investments.

According to Their Priority the Expenses are Distributed in the Following Way:

- Payroll accruals with all components
- Contribution to state social insurance budget
- Contribution to health insurance budget
- Expenses for electricity
- Expenses for heat
- Expenses for gas cost
- Expenses for water and sewerage
- Staff training
- Expenses for teaching materials
- Office supplies, materials and household products
- Expenses for equipment and inventory
- Current repair works
- Others, specified in the economic classification of budget spending.

The main financing sources of the education system are the budgetary means and other revenues such as, cost for rent, lease of goods, donations, grants, sponsorships, etc. (special means). Estimates of revenue or allowances from the budgetary sources for each school unit are estimated based on the standard cost per pupil **by the General Finance Division jointly with the General Education Division**. Estimates of revenues and expenses from special means are made taking into account the taxes, tariffs, physical volumes of rendered services, the norms and established standards in laws and regulations, contracts, agreements in question.

The special means of the institutions are classified according to the following categories:

- Services against payment
- Payment for the rent / lease of public property
- Grants
- Other special means

The estimate of the revenue and expenditure is the document of the public institution funded from the budget of the territorial-administrative unit, through which the annual volume of revenues and expenditures is established and their destination according to the budget classification. The estimate of the revenue and expenditure is established per each public institution funded from the budget in accordance with the financial means distributed for the current year according to a form approved by the Ministry of Finance. The following shall be attached to the estimate: the justification calculations of the expenses for each Article and Point of spending of the economic classification according to some forms (1-18) which are an integral part of the estimate of expenses.

Planning and execution of an adequate budget for the established by the school necessities, allows for:

- Accomplishment of school objectives;
- Drafting adequate decisions regarding the provision of quality services;
- Identification of some factors that would lay at the basis of drawing up a better budget in the next year.

It should be noted that a good practice at the European level is the stipulation in the Law of the guarantee of the citizens' permanent access to the local financial information. At the same time, the local public authorities are obliged to:

- (i) to disseminate information on the budget,
- (ii) to organize open sessions and Public Hearings, on quarterly basis, before taking the final decisions,
- (iii) to publish an estimate of the revenue and expenditure, as well as the accounting balance sheet,
- (iv) to have a proactive approach regarding the transparency of the information submitted in reports and websites,
- (v) to allocate sufficient human resources to process requests of information,
- (vi) to be trained to manifest an approach of courtesy towards the public.

Note: Better to have realistic expectations:

- Do not expect everyone to agree with the presented options
- There is no guarantee that small groups represent the interests the entire population
- The goal of the Public Hearing is to hear different perspectives
- Do not expect a large number of citizens present at the Public Hearing
- Unexpected moments can always occur.

Therefore, taking into account the above mentioned and especially the provisions of the legislation in force regarding the budgetary process and the deadlines set in this respect, we should mention the importance of aligning the process of organizing the school Public Hearings on the draft budget of the educational institution to the budget norms set by the law.

Necessary Steps in Conduction a Public Hearing

1. Preparing the Room

The registration table shall be placed at the entrance, with the registration lists prepared in advance. Available materials should be distributed (brief information on the draft budget, including relevant materials on the results of the institution's activity and local public administration's activity).

It is good for the brief information on the educational institution's draft budget to contain very clearly the word DRAFT, in order to avoid unwanted confusion.

One of the elements that brings success to the Public Hearing is the presentation and distribution of a great amount of simple and accessible information which the Organizational Council considers to be important.

The room and the equipment for visualizing presentations should be prepared, as well as the audio equipment.



Public Hearing at the Theoretical Lyceum 'Mesterul Manole', Salcuta, Causeni region in 2017

2. Role of the Officials and of the Members of Organizational Council

- As a rule, officials and members of the Organizational Council are seated in the front of the room, so that participants can address their comments and suggestions to those in front of them.
- All those who wish to speak shall be registered at the entrance in the registration list. This shall include the name of the person, if he/she belongs to a certain group, and what is that group.
- The Public Hearing will start with the opening speech of the Mayor (5 to 10 minutes maximum) and with the presentation of the Organizational Council. The Chairperson of the Organizational Council will present the agenda of the event and will go through the organization rules of the Public Hearing.
- The Moderator will facilitate the whole session, briefly presenting each speaker according to the agenda.
- The order of the speakers is based on the 'first come first serve' principle. The principle will be announced when the rules of the Hearing are presented.
- The time reserved for each person who wants to take the floor is maximum 3-5 minutes.
- Individuals who want to make written statements will leave copies of declarations or comments to the person in charge of organizational team.
- All comments should be addressed to the Council. Debate is not the purpose of the Public Hearing. The attempts at initiating a debate shall be considered violations of the order.

Note: Try to anticipate the types of problems and concerns that the public may have regarding the issues discussed during the Public Hearing. If the suggestions include drastic cuts in education spending, make sure to set out clearly the constraints you are facing and the potential solutions to overcome them.



- A person in charge of drawing up the minutes of the Public Hearing shall be appointed. This person will include all the comments and suggestions made during the event. In this regard, it is advisable to use an audio recorded.
- No smoking or eating will be allowed in the place where the Public Hearing will be held.
- Hearings shall not last more than **three hours**. The moderator may announce regular breaks as he sees fit.
- The moderator shall ensure a calm and friendly atmosphere during the entire Public Hearing while evaluating the public's mood.
- The moderator shall declare the Public Hearing closed at the right moment, after all participants have had the opportunity to speak or after the time for Hearing has expired or because of any other reason, as the Organizational Council sees fit.
- In the end, the moderator shall announce the deadline for submitting comments or additional suggestions made after the Public Hearing, while also mentioning the contact person, and where the suggestions can be submitted in case they are on paper.
- The moderator shall also announce when will the meeting (for discussing all suggestions and making the final decisions) take place.
- It shall also be mentioned that the final decisions will be communicated with the help of mass media (possibly, through organizing a press-conference).

It is important to mention that the current opportunities offered by the IT developments should not be neglected and therefore, the event may be broadcasted online, and the comments and suggestions may be received remotely, through social media, etc.

Necessary Steps After Conducting the Public Hearing

The minutes which contains the summary of the recommendations and suggestions made during the Public Hearing shall be submitted to the members of the Organizational Council and people in charge of drafting the educational institution's budget.

Recommendations received after the Public Hearing, within the established deadline, will be summarized and submitted to the members of the Organizational Council and people in charge of drafting the budget.

The Organizational Council will have a meeting for discussing all the suggestions and recommendations that were made, in order to take final decisions regarding the drawing up of the final draft of the educational institution budget.

The results and the final decisions should be publicly communicated through media channels (e.g., through a press-conference at which NGOs from the community shall be invited) and through websites.

Planning the Total Necessary Time

The whole process usually takes about 4⁺ weeks.

The first week can be dedicated to the initial preparations, such as: deciding the date, time and location; choosing the topics to be brought to the attention of the public; selecting the members of the Organizational Council; preparing the announcement and brief information on the draft budget of the educational institution.

The second and the third week may be dedicated to actively informing the public about the organization of the Public Hearing and to distribute brief information on the draft budget of the educational institution. The distribution of these materials should take place at least 10 days before the event is organized. At the same time, this period could be used for training the

members of the Organizational Council on the process of organizing the Public Hearing and preparing the presentations for the event.

A day shall be dedicated to the organization and actual conduct of the Public Hearing.

About three to five days will be needed in order to collect any additional recommendations that are given after the Public Hearing.

About three days will be needed in order to summarize all the recommendations received, to organize the meeting for taking the final decisions and to communicate the results to the public. The process of sharing the results with the community shows that the administration is responsible and that it appreciates the community's contribution.

An Event is Considered Successful If:

- It has clear goals and a clearly defined target audience;
- It is organized in a way that maximizes participation and impact;
- It engages the audience;
- It does not neglect post-event activities (handouts, post-analysis);
- It is evaluated (the results generated by the event are monitored and useful conclusions for organizing subsequent events are drawn).

Note: The advantages of using ICT tools in the communication and information process of the public should not be neglected, as it is possible to communicate in real time, all stages of preparation, conduct and completion of the Public Hearing, including the communication of the final decisions.

According to the results of international studies, if compared to 'offline' participation programs, those based on 'online' participation, allow for a higher level of communication and interactive participation between citizens and authorities, as well as among the citizens themselves.

Checklist

At the Planning Stage of the Public Hearing

#	To Do List	In Progress	Completed
1.	To book a location		
2.	To verify the location and to prepare it		
3.	To verify the lighting and check if the audio-visual presentations will be made possible for projection		
4.	To ensure a audio-visual equipment, including microphones inside the building where the hearing will take place		
5.	To prepare the necessary handouts: Public Hearing agenda, informative materials / brochures and rules of conduct / procedure		
6.	To distribute and make available the necessary materials in various public places, including on Internet		
7.	To prepare a recording system, as well as markers, pens and papers for notes		
8.	To set a table for registration (open during the entire event)		
9.	To prepare badges for moderators and civil servants		
10.	To put signs to guide participants to the right building / room		
11.	To designate moderators		
12.	To explain the rules / to train Organizational Council members, as well as civil servants who will participate in the event		
13.	To prepare the announcement / press release on the organization of the Public Hearing		
14.	To distribute the announcement and the handouts		
	To publish / to display the announcement on		

	billboards and in press, or other means of local media and on the Internet		
15.	To make a list of public organizations, civic groups, NGOs, etc., which will be notified / involved and directly informed		
16.	To prepare the participants' registration lists, as well as the information on rules of conduct and registration for taking the floor		

During the Public Hearing

#	To Do List	Completed
1.	To ensure a sufficient amount of chairs and to have participants seat in an even way	
2.	To mark the toilets and the smoking areas	
3.	To inform the public on the Hearing's rules of procedure	
4.	To ensure that the participants understand the goal of the Public Hearing	
5.	To start and finish within the established time frame. To tell the participants at the beginning of the event how long the hearing will last and when it will be over	
6.	To ensure a sufficient number of handouts copies	
7.	To ensure that participants can see the handouts and other audio-visual materials	
8.	To ensure that the agenda and the time allocated to each presentation is respected	
9.	To ensure at the end of the event that the participants know what are the next steps to be taken	

Annex 1

TEMPLATE OF THE DETAILED ACTION PLAN TO PREPARE FOR THE EVENT

	To Do List	Completed / In progress	Deadline for Completing the Activity	Name, Surname, Function, Contact Details of the Person in Charge of Completing the Activities
1.	To designate the members of the Organizational Council and distribute the responsibilities among them			
2.	To elect the Chairperson of the Organizational Council, who will be also responsible for monitoring the execution of the planned activities			
3.	To decide on the Council's working hours			
4.	To organize a meeting for evaluating the results of implementing 'The Stakeholders' Engagement Forms'			
5.	To prepare the agenda of the Public Hearing and of the potential guests / moderators of the event			
6.	To prepare invitations and to send the agenda and the time of each presentation to the speakers			
7.	To prepare presentations and visual materials, as well as to coordinate everything with the moderator of the Public Hearing			
8.	To prepare handouts: the agenda of the Public Hearing, informative materials / brochures and rules of conduct / of procedure			
9.	To book a location for the Public Hearing			
10.	To verify the location and to prepare it			
11.	To verify the lighting and check if the audio-visual presentations will be made possible for projection			
12.	To ensure the presence of the audio-visual equipment, including microphones inside the building where the hearing will take place			

13.	To check the technical conditions and the connection of the equipment to the Internet – in case of online transmission of the event			
14.	To prepare the process of visualization of participants' suggestions on a specially arranged panel – in case it is possible to get a real time feedback from the public through various ICT tools, including social networks			
15.	To distribute and make available the necessary handouts in various public places, including on Internet			
16.	To prepare a recording system, as well as markers, pens and papers for notes			
17.	To set a table for registration (open during the entire event)			
18.	To prepare badges for moderators and civil servants			
19.	To put signs to guide participants to the right building / room			
20.	To prepare visual materials			
21.	To explain the rules / to train Organizational Council members, as well as civil servants who will participate in the event			
22.	To prepare the announcement / press release on the organization of the Public Hearing			
23.	To prepare the invitations for participants and to prepare the rules of conduct			
24.	To distribute of the announcement / press release to local media agencies			
25.	To distribute the invitations for the participants, the rules for participation and the handouts			
26.	To publish / to display the announcement on billboards and in press, or other means of local media and on the Internet			
27.	To make a list of public organizations, civic groups, NGOs, etc., which will be notified / involved and directly informed			
28.	To prepare the participants' registration lists, as well as the information on rules of conduct and registration for taking the floor			

29.	To set a deadline for submitting the recommendations / suggestions after the event took place			
30.	To organize a meeting for evaluating the recommendations and suggestions given as a result of Public Hearing and to finalize the educational institution development plan and the proposed budget			
31.	To identify the means to inform the public about the results on the decisions which were made as a result of organizing Public Hearing			
32.	To inform the public about the final decisions			

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