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Authority



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Electronic Participation Policy Kingdom of Bahrain

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Abbreviations List

ICT	Information & Communication Technology
ICTGC	Information & Communication Technology Governance Council
iGA	Information & eGovernment Authority
NEA	National Enterprise Architecture
SCICT	Supreme Committee for Information & Communication Technology
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development

Basic explanation on common terminologies used in this document.

Constituents Constituents includes citizens, residents, and visitors of the Kingdom of Bahrain as well as Non-Government Organizations, Civil Society Groups and public / private organizations operating in the Kingdom.

Entity Any government entity within the Kingdom of Bahrain including ministries, authorities, departments, and programs

E-Participation or Electronic Participation is about fostering civic engagement and open, participatory governance through Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs).

E-Participation The objective of e-Participation is to improve access to information and public services as well as to promote participation in policymaking, both for the empowerment of individual citizens and the benefit of society.

Government Government consists of legislature, executive and judiciary and is responsible for creating and enforcing the rules of a society, defense, foreign affairs, the economy, and public services

ICT Diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share, or exchange information. These technological tools and resources include computers, the Internet (websites, blogs and emails), live broadcasting technologies (radio, television and webcasting), recorded broadcasting technologies (podcasting, audio and video players and storage devices) and telephony (fixed or mobile, satellite, video-conferencing, etc.).

Inclusiveness inclusion is the process of improving the terms of participation in the society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice, and respect for rights.

NEA

The National Enterprise Architecture website is the main source of IT-related standards, guidelines, and best practices for Bahrain government entities across multiple areas, including eservices, mobile applications, websites, and technologies. For more information, please visit <https://www.nea.gov.bh/>

SCICT

The Supreme Committee for Information and Communication Technology (SCICT) chaired by His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa - Deputy Prime Minister, provides strategic direction and decisions related to the advancement of ICT and electronic Government in the Kingdom.

About this Policy Document

The e-Participation policy document has been prepared taking into consideration of current applicable laws in the Kingdom of Bahrain. If a conflict arises between this document and the laws of Kingdom of Bahrain, the latter shall take precedence.

This policy document highlights the commitment of the Government of Bahrain to focus not only on the e-Enablement of traditional participation methods and strengthening of social media channels but also leapfrogging towards new electronic methods of engagement such as crowdsourcing and open data. This document also emphasizes the importance of a Whole of Government Approach to develop, institutionalize, monitor, review and update an e-Participation framework leading to the Kingdom's vision for the continued development of the economy and building a better life for every Bahraini.

Introduction

The Government of Bahrain, in accordance with the National Economic Vision 2030 and Government Program, is in pursuit of constantly improving various public services and economic transformational initiatives through creative utilization and engagement of its constituents. The Government considers Information & Communication Technology (ICT) as an effective tool in strengthening its robust constituent engagement model to ensure an open, transparent, responsive, participatory, and inclusive governance in the Kingdom. As a result, the Government continues to promote and enforce digital government, digital economy, digital channels and continues to strengthen the empowerment of government entities as well as constituents to make the fullest possible use of existing, new and emerging technologies.

Various strategic initiatives were undertaken to strengthen the digital ecosystem in the country with the objective of harnessing ICT to improve Government performance, optimize the cost of Government operations as well as to improve the satisfaction of constituents regarding public services. One of the prominent initiatives is related to the constituent engagement in governance and service delivery.

The growing pervasiveness of social media in the daily life of the constituents has reinforced the Government's commitment to develop innovative application of ICT tools and policies for deepening the constituent engagements. Accordingly, the Social Media Policy was officially adopted and promoted that comprised of Digital Communications Engagement and Response, Personal Digital Communication for Government Employees and Public Officials Digital Communication guidelines that enhanced the interaction with the constituents.

The social and economic challenges arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic has further provided the impetus for the Government's shift in focus from conventional means of constituent participation to engaging constituents through ICT for enhancing the quality of participation in proactive crisis management, recovery and in ensuring sustainable development.

Current Status of e-Participation

The electronic participation (*engaging constituents with the support of ICT*) activities of the Government is based on a framework which constitutes:

- Stakeholders (Citizens, Residents, Businesses, Non-Governmental Organizations, Media Outlets, Government entities, Public officials)
- Methods (Election, Referendum, Petitions, Surveys, Consultation / Deliberations, appeals, Feedback, Suggestions, Polls, Blogs, Information provision)
- Channels (electronic mails, call centre, live broadcasting such as radio, television and webcasting, Digital platforms such as Social media, eGovernment channels like Tawasul, National eGovernment Portal, Government Entity websites and applications Electronic Service Centre, eGovernment Kiosk)
- Enablers (Community management, Content creation, Content capturing and processing).

The Government of Bahrain currently employs several participation methods with electronic enablement, which includes but are not limited to provisioning information, enabling feedback/suggestions, facilitating consultation, deliberations as well as enabling decision making with different stakeholders in Bahrain. The websites and portals, along with social media and mobile applications, are extensively used to engage with the constituents to identify and enhance services that add to their quality of life.

Purpose of Electronic Participation Policy

The purpose of this policy is to

- a) Ensure greater transparency, openness, and inclusiveness in government operations.
- b) Encourage constituent participation and facilitate public service innovation.
- c) Support the development of necessary rules and regulations that will regulate and monitor the usage and performance of e-Participation processes and tools.
- d) Be a reference and facilitate the clarification on the procedures and responsibilities involved in e-Participation process in the Kingdom.
- e) Raise the awareness and knowledge about e-Participation process in the Kingdom.

Scope of Electronic Participation Policy

The Electronic Participation Policy will apply to government entities and their online communication and constituent engagement activities which include but are not limited to information sharing, public consultation as well as collaboration with the constituents. This Policy also applies to all topics, opinions, discussions, reports, documents, surveys, feedback, appeals, complaints, suggestions, petitions, and opinion polls that are offered, published, broadcasted or exchanged through electronic Participation tools provided by the Government of Bahrain through any of the Government's digital channels such as website/ portal , surveys , radio, television, or applications or through any social networking sites, whether they are submitted or shared using computers, smart mobile devices or tablets.

Policy Statement

Government of Bahrain considers e-Participation as a tool for engagement to strengthen the collaboration between government entities and its constituents.

Government of Bahrain will continue to strengthen the electronic enablement of participation from entities as well as constituents perspective by providing the right capabilities (*such as community management, content creation, content capturing and processing*) and underlying enablers (*such as regulations and policies, people/organization, technology, performance*

management) leading to more effective implementation of public services, policies and programmes as envisioned in the Kingdom's Economic Vision 2030.

Provisions of Electronic Participation Policy

Government of Bahrain adopts the United Nations electronic participation model that includes:

i) E-Information:

- Government will actively promote the use of ICT to enable participation by providing constituents with public information and access to information without or upon demand. Towards this, the Government will:
 - Enable access to information through multiple channels such as website, mobile devices, social media platforms etc.
 - Promote technology to enable access for people with disabilities.
 - Make information available in at least two languages (Arabic and English).
 - Ensure that the information provided is simple, clear and in straightforward language avoiding jargons.
 - Strengthen entities capability to share and consult in real time on a wide range of activities such as public services, policies and decisions that impact the constituents' life.

ii) E-Consultation:

- Government will actively promote the use of ICT to engage constituents in contributions to and deliberation on public policies and services. Towards this, the Government will
 - Explore the possibility to create new public participation platform that may be leveraged by all entities.
 - Leverage national portal, Tawasul and other relevant websites by strengthening it with e-Participation tools to obtain public opinion (polls,

surveys, bulletin boards, chat room, blogs, web casting, and discussion forums, etc.) as well as feedback mechanisms for queries, comments, appeals, complaints etc.,

- Leverage existing social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter etc. for seeking feedback and improving service.
- Solicit constituents' opinion, feedback and input through consultations and deliberations to identify and enhance public services and policies.

iii) E-Decision making:

- Government will explore the use of ICT to empower constituents through co-design of policy option and co-production of service components and delivery modalities. Towards this, Government plans to:
 - Explore the possibility of constituent engagement early in the service or policy development cycle and provide enough time for public information and consultation.
 - Enhance the entities capability to engage and interact with community & moderate conversations.
 - Enhance constituents' capability to produce coherent responses to government participation initiatives.
 - Motivate, engage, and empower the constituents to be involved in the process of public services, policies, and deliberations through various online communications tools.

Operationalization of the Electronic Participation Policy

This policy is approved by the Prime Minister's Office, and shall be operationalized under the supervision and monitoring of Supreme Committee for Information & Communication Technology (SCICT) by way of policy requirements/rule, guidelines & procedures, as well as detailed plans of action.

Change to this policy.

Government may change this Policy statement from time-to-time. Such changes shall be notified through the NEA portal (www.nea.gov.bh).

Feedback & Suggestions

Feedback and suggestions on the Electronic Participation Policy are welcome. Any suggestion/feedback will help in enhancing/refining the policy further thus making this document more comprehensive and relevant. Feedback, suggestions, clarifications and queries on this document may be sent to standards@iga.gov.bh.

Sources of information

Following documents/links may be relevant to this policy.

- Constitution of Kingdom of Bahrain, published by Legislation & Legal Opinion Commission
<https://www.legalaffairs.gov.bh/Media/Publications/Download/048.pdf>
- eGovernment Development Index-2020, UNDESA
<https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Reports/UN-E-Government-Survey-2020>
- Citizens as Partners, OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy Making
- Focus on Citizens, Public Engagement for Better Policies & Services, OECD Studies on Public Engagement
- Protection of Information and State Documents", Law No. 16, 2014, Kingdom of Bahrain
- Law of Protection of Personal Data, No. 30, 2018, Kingdom of Bahrain
- Public Officials Digital Communication Guidelines, Government of Bahrain
- Personal Digital Communication Policy for Government Employees, Government of Bahrain
- United Nations E-Participation Index. <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/E-Participation-Index>
- Identifying social inclusion and exclusion – the United Nations – [chapter1.pdf \(un.org\)](#)
- <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/information-and-communication-technologies-ict>