# The MSP steering committee election process – typical phases and key questions

In multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs), stakeholders from the public and private sectors, civil society and academia plan, coordinate and implement activities to achieve common goals and sustainable change. One typical feature of institutionalised MSPs is a long-term governance structure.[1] This always includes a central decision-making body that is responsible for the partnership's strategic orientation. The name of this body differs from one MSP to another, with common titles including *steering committee*, *management board*, *steering group*, and *steering body*. For the sake of simplicity, we use the term 'steering committee' here.

To ensure the legitimacy of this central decision-making body, a regular and transparent election process is required. This process is usually supported by the MSP secretariat in its neutral role as facilitator of administrative and logistical processes. This document is therefore primarily aimed at MSP secretariats and supports the preparation, implementation and finalisation of steering committee election processes. It is important to note that there is no blueprint for an ideal election process that is universally valid for every MSP.

This document presents the phases of an election process from preparation to finalisation, listing steps and questions that have proven important in practice, and sharing experiences from various MSP election processes that may provide inspiration. When preparing an election process, it is important from the outset not only to consider the preparation phase, but also the steps and questions relating to implementation and finalisation. Ultimately, the appropriate MSP election process for the respective context must be developed in negotiation with the stakeholders involved.
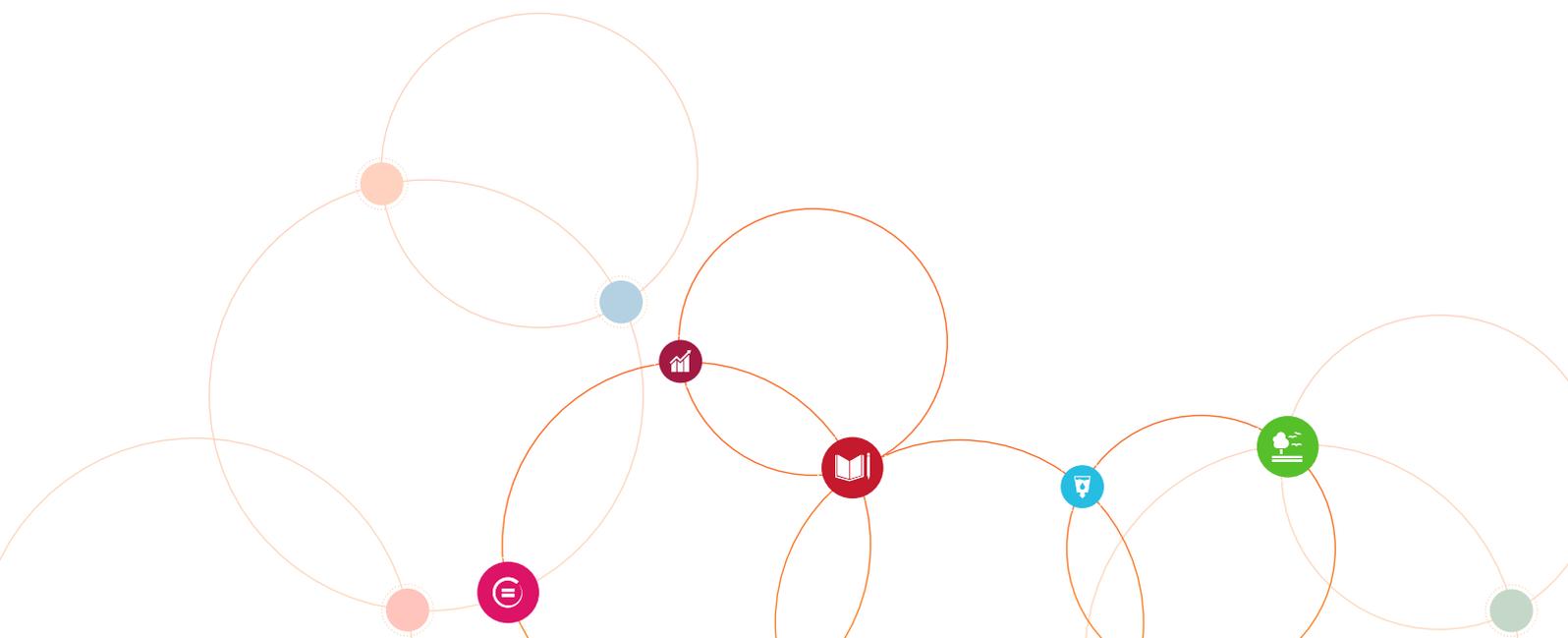
[1] See also: Partnerships2030: Governance structures of multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP)

Phase 1: Preparing and planning the election process

As the first phase of an election process, preparation and planning entails above all the 'internal' clarification of key issues, including the initial situation, the roles of the parties involved, the time frame and the criteria for active and passive voting rights. This phase is therefore probably the most complex part of the overall process, so it is important to think about the specific design of the process at an early stage.

The most important steps and milestones in this phase include:

○ **Context analysis:** What (German) legal norms is the MSP[2] subject to and what legal norms may have to be observed in the election process? Are there specific rules/regulations regarding standards for inclusion, transparency and data protection that need to be considered for the election process? Do the MSP statutes already contain corresponding requirements?

○ **Clarifying the initial situation:** Do existing framework documents such as MSP statutes provide sufficient guidance for the election process? Is it the first election of the steering committee? If so, can experience from the election processes of comparable MSPs provide guidance?

○ **Determining the election procedure:** Who is responsible for organising the election process? How is the process being financed? What resources are required? How should the vote be organised (e.g. verbal or written, open or secret ballot)? Will the election take place in person or virtually? If the latter, experience shows that voter turnout in virtual elections is low, meaning that campaign activities are crucial for electoral success. Should software be procured for the election and is it GDPR[3]-compliant?

○ **Settlement of disputes:** What potential conflicts of interest may arise during the election process? Is there a need to set up a body to ensure the proper conduct of the elections and, if necessary, assume a dispute settlement or conflict resolution role (e.g. for situations that are not regulated by statutes or other framework documents)? What is the mandate of this body? Which people should be represented on it?

○ **Drawing up and approving the road map:** How much time should be planned for the entire election process, including preparation and follow-up? Are there any comparative figures available from the practice of existing MSPs? Is there a deadline for establishing the new steering committee and from when should it be 'ready to work'? How can the transition/handover from the old steering committee to the new steering committee be organised appropriately (e.g. through onboarding measures)? Who has the mandate to approve the road map?

In the case of **MSPs with global operations**: How do those organising the election process coordinate matters with the regional/national branches of the MSP? Are the latter actively involved?

○ **Defining criteria:**

• Defining criteria for the **composition of the steering committee**: What criteria should be observed for filling positions on the steering committee (e.g. equal numbers of people based on previously defined criteria: stakeholder group, gender, regional representation)? What role will the client or the funding organisation/institution play in the future steering committee (e.g. a permanent seat)?

• Defining criteria for **eligible voters**: Has a list of all possible eligible voters been drawn up – if so, based on what criteria (e.g. regional breakdown)? And who verifies the list?

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2 See also: Partnerships2030: Practical tips: Legal forms of multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) [in German]
3 The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has been in force since 2018. Further information can be found here.

- Defining criteria for **candidates**: Based on what criteria can individuals put themselves forward as candidates? Are these criteria clearly defined (e.g. clear definition of stakeholder groups representing certain individuals)? What happens to candidates who do not fulfil the criteria (for example, is it possible to correct information or submit additional information)? Is there a sufficiently large number of potential candidates standing for election – in total, and also in line with the criteria? Are potential conflicts of interest to be expected if certain people stand for election? Do candidates stand for election individually (as natural persons) or on behalf of organisations? Are job descriptions and other details provided to inform people while at the same time motivating them to stand for election? Do people interested have to submit application documents according to the criteria – and are these documents made available? What happens if candidates do not accept the results or contest them?

Phase 2: Implementing the election process

Once the road map for the entire election process has been drawn up and agreed in the first phase, the second phase entails informing eligible voters and potential candidates of the full details and procedure of the election process. It is particularly important to share relevant information with the members of the MSP early on, so there is sufficient time to organise the elections.

The most important steps and milestones in this phase include:

○ **Announcement of the upcoming election process:** Inform MSP members that new elections are due in the next few months and tell them that more information will follow.

○ **Launch of election campaign:**

- **Appeal to eligible voters:** How are potential eligible voters informed about the election in advance and how are they contacted (e.g. via campaign work)? How do they find out about the candidates standing for election? What information about the candidates is needed to make an informed voting decision?

- **Call for candidates:** How do potential candidates learn about the possibility to stand for election? Share general conditions, job descriptions and application documents..

○ **Check the applications received:** Make sure the application documents are complete and give potential candidates the chance to amend them; reassess the submitted documents where necessary, and finalise the list of candidates

○ **Inform candidates if they are eligible or not**

○ **Start and carry through the elections:** How will the list of candidates be shared with the eligible voters? Is sufficient time allowed for the actual election phase so that all the eligible voters can cast their votes (e.g. approximately two weeks in the case of virtual elections)?
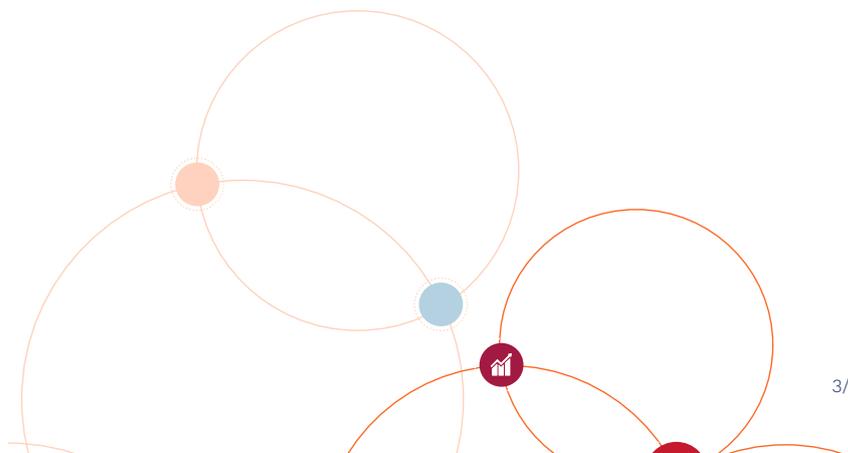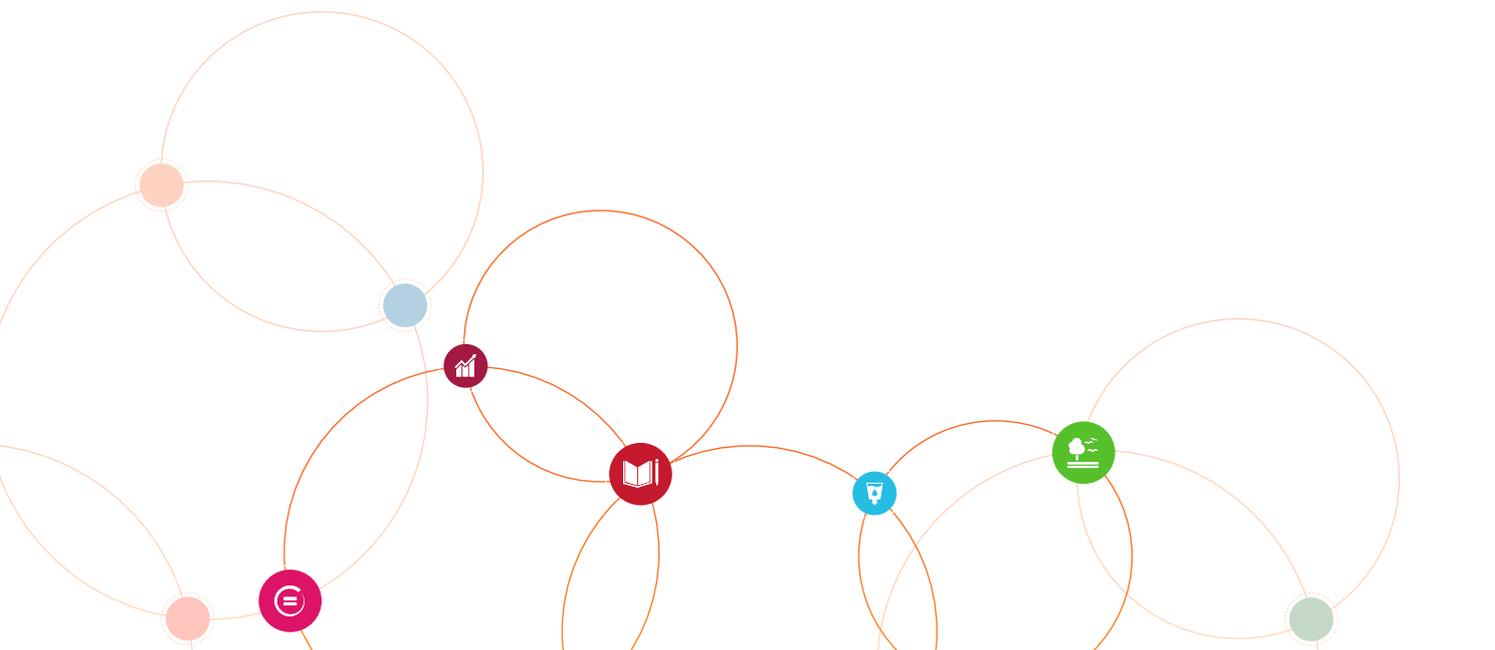
Phase 3: Finalising and following up the election process

As soon as the elections are closed, the election results should be analysed and the MSP members informed of the outcome of the elections.

The most important steps and milestones in this phase include:

○ **Assessment of the election results:** Are the results ranked? What happens if the vote is tied? What happens if seats remain vacant – also with regard to the balance of power in the new steering committee? How are deputies for steering committee members determined – are they (1) elected or (2) the next-highest-ranked candidates? When and how do they act as deputy? How high was the voter turnout? What lessons can be learned from the voter turnout for future election processes? Is the turnout high enough to legitimise the elected steering committee members?

○ **Inform elected candidates of the election results** and, if they have been elected, ask them to take up their mandate.

○ **Presentation of the results:** Do the election results need to be approved before they are published (e.g. by a separate body)? How are elected candidates informed? How are voters informed of the results?