

Guidelines for Gathering Testimony from Stakeholder Groups

A major tenet of shared governance at The College of New Jersey is the ability for all community members to participate in the development of new policies by offering testimony on any preliminary recommendation developed by standing committees.

As part of shared governance, stakeholder groups have the opportunity to provide input and testimony at multiple points in the process. Testimony, either broadly invited from the campus community, or more directly solicited from specialized groups of people, including relevant administrators, will be sought as committees or councils develop preliminary recommendations. Testimony from stakeholder groups is required after a preliminary recommendation has been made. Testimony should be gathered in accordance with the testimony tier assigned to the issue by Steering, or in accordance with guidelines provided by CSPP for planning issues. For Tier I issues, committees or councils should consult with relevant stakeholders, as identified by Steering. For Tier II issues, the completed preliminary recommendation should be made available to the relevant stakeholder group, and testimony should be solicited in the form of written feedback (through a survey or email).

Tier 3 issues require a high degree of testimony from the campus community. The assigned council or committee should consult with relevant individuals and groups in developing a preliminary recommendation. The completed preliminary recommendation should then be made available to the relevant stakeholder groups. Testimony should be solicited in the form of both written and oral feedback, as well as endorsement by the appropriate representative bodies.

Issues which are designated Testimony Tier III by the Steering Committee or which CSPP determines require a high degree of testimony from the campus community will require public testimony at a meeting of the appropriate representative body or bodies of each stakeholder group (as identified by Steering or CSPP). The chair of the standing committee or council should contact the president of the appropriate representative body or bodies to schedule the next available time slot at a meeting of that body. These meetings should be open to the general public, and publicized so that individuals not represented by that group but interested in the issue may attend. Members of the standing committee or council that wrote the preliminary recommendation should be present to hear and record the testimony.

Committees and councils should be aware that following that meeting, the representative body may, at its discretion, issue a formal response to the preliminary recommendation, which should be sent to the relevant council or committee as well as Steering. This response should accompany the final recommendation to Steering, and it should be considered as part of Steering's final review.

The Steering Committee offers the following guidelines for consideration.

1. As a general rule, solicited testimony should not be used as a referendum. While it is important that all stakeholder groups have an opportunity to provide feedback and that a range of campus viewpoints be taken into consideration when developing a recommendation, the Steering Committee recognizes that there may never be consensus on an issue. In addition, most policies are complex and do not conform easily to an up-or-down vote. Each standing Committee or Council needs to weigh the community input they receive and to consider this testimony in their recommendations, but the final recommendations may not be endorsed by all, or even by a majority of the members of each stakeholder group.
2. Solicitation of testimony by surveys may sometimes be appropriate, although when developing such surveys care should be taken to include open-ended questions.
3. Testimony should be solicited from all stakeholder groups that are affected by the recommendation, even if a group does not have a formal representative (for example, graduate students).

Committees should clearly report in a cover memo to their final recommendation which groups were targeted as stakeholders, how input was invited, and the substantive content of the feedback. Before forwarding any committee recommendation to the Office of the Provost, the Steering Committee will review the procedures followed by the committee to solicit stakeholder testimony.

Approved by Steering Committee 10-18-17