



**NATIONAL
DEMOCRATIC
INSTITUTE**
FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

**MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD:
A CIVIC PARTICIPATION GUIDE
FOR LATVIA**



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The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.



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PREFACE

Civic participation, that is, the active involvement of people in the decisions that affect them and their communities, is essential to the long-term health of any democracy. It gives substance to political institutions and ensures that governments remain responsive to the interests of those they have been elected to serve.

The potential for civic participation is present in every society. The history of Latvia's recent struggle for independence is a powerful example of how people, working together, can bring about social and political change. Today, the changes taking place in Latvia are perhaps no longer as dramatic as they were a few years ago, but the need for people to be active in the affairs of their communities remains.

The unique quality of democratic societies is found in the constitutional opportunities they provide for people to work with government through its national and local institutions. But the success of democracy can only be measured by the people's awareness of these opportunities, and by their willingness and ability to take advantage of them on a day-to-day basis. Sustained and frequent participation in government by the people it serves is the defining element of any democracy.

The purpose of this handbook is to introduce the tools, techniques and skills of civic participation that have worked in other democracies around the world, while focusing on the opportunities and openings for civic participation in the Latvia. NDI hopes that the information provided in this handbook will help individuals and organizations take advantage of existing opportunities to make themselves heard, bring about change and win real victories in cooperation with government.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) has been working to assist the development of democracy in Latvia since 1991. For the past two years, NDI has provided assistance on a range of issues to numerous nongovernmental organizations throughout Latvia. Based in Washington, NDI is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening democratic institutions and promoting democratic participation around the world.

Former NDI field representatives for Latvia, Michael Brogioli and Polly Duke, were the principal writers of this handbook. NDI Senior Program Officer Gabriel Hütter was mainly responsible for editing the text.

If you have comments or suggestions regarding this handbook, please contact NDI.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY

Civic participation in a democracy finds its basic expression in the vote. Through elections, people choose the leaders who will make decisions on their behalf. But even the most responsible elected official will not always know the exact concerns of his constituents, unless the constituents remind him or her what they are. Moreover, officials, once they are elected, represent not only the people who voted for them, but everybody in the community. Because elected officials represent the entire community, it is important that all members of the community share their concerns and opinions so that the broadest range of thought is considered as decisions are made.

The people who make decisions in a democracy, whether they are elected or appointed, have a responsibility to reach out to members of the community to find out their needs and concerns and to solicit their advice. They must provide opportunities to people to participate in the decision-making process. But participation is a two-way street. Average people, too, have a responsibility to bring problems to the attention of local and national decision-makers, to offer solutions to these problems and to help implement these solutions. Civic participation, therefore, is about the direct and active involvement of people in the work of their government and the life of their community. It requires that members of the community work in partnership with government to shape the decisions that affect them. Such decisions may include whether or not a town opens a new playground, or how a community handles its sewage disposal; they may also include social, economic, cultural and political issues that affect the entire nation.

Participation in the community requires an environment in which people are able to express themselves freely and join organizations that support and promote their interests, ideas, beliefs and values. It also requires that people understand their rights and the opportunities available to them to participate and that they make a constant effort to remain informed of political events and decisions that affect their interests. Finally, effective civic participation demands that people gain the necessary skills to promote their interests and ideas to decision-makers and to the public.

THE ROLE OF NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN A DEMOCRACY

There is much that individuals can do to influence the way in which public decisions are made. The democratic system of government rests on the rights and freedoms of the individual, and, therefore, in principle, every person counts and should count equally. However, people usually have a better chance of making themselves heard if they are able to demonstrate that they represent not only themselves but the views and interests of a larger portion of the community. To be effective participants in the community's decision-making, to effect change, or solve a problem, it is usually necessary that people find and work with other people who share their interests. This process is called *organizing*.

People organize for many reasons, for example, because they:

- are not listened to
- need a bridge to local and national levels of government
- see problems in the community
- want to fight against corruption in the system
- feel discriminated against
- want their fair share of available resources
- want to promote particular ideas

One way in which people organize is through political parties. Parties are an important part of the democratic process. They are perhaps the most effective means by which people can influence political decisions. However, political parties tend to focus their activities on the electoral process. Moreover, they usually try to appeal to broad interests within the community. To participate between elections, and to promote their own specific interests, people have had to organize in other ways as well, through associations, neighborhood organizations, public interest groups, unions, and other *nongovernmental organizations*.

NGOs are a vital part of a democracy. In a sense, they are the heart of civil society. Together, NGOs represent and communicate the wide diversity of views and interests in a community. According to the *Latvia Human Development Report 1996*, there are more than 1,200 NGOs, or 20 per cent of the population participating in NGOs in Latvia. Their activities touch on a wide range of issues including social welfare, culture, education, human rights, the environment, consumer protection, trade unions and others. NGOs study issues and gather information that local and national governments need to make informed and intelligent decisions. Because they have this information and because they represent people, NGOs are able to put pressure on decision-makers to encourage them to respond to the needs and wishes of their constituents.

Another important role NGOs play is in the provision of direct services, such as adult education, emergency shelter, and alcohol and drug counseling. NGOs often provide these services more cheaply than governments. Moreover, NGOs provide resources through grants, contributions, and volunteers that are usually unavailable to governments. It makes sense for governments to work in partnership with NGOs for sound financial, as well as political reasons. To take advantage of the resources NGOs can offer, national government must provide a legal and regulatory environment that responds to the needs of the NGO sector and encourages their activity.

An active and thriving third sector, working in partnership with government, is absolutely essential to the growth and development of a democracy. NGOs should not be seen as competitors of government, nor perceived only as charities looking to government for financial support. NGOs are important and essential partners in moving a society forward.

HOW NGOS CAN INFLUENCE PUBLIC DECISIONS

There are many ways in which individuals and organizations can influence public decisions. They do so by educating and informing government and elected officials of the problems, concerns and issues in the community. The more aware government and elected officials are of problems in the community, the more likely they are to propose changes that will solve or mitigate the problems. However, if officials do not have a good understanding of the problems and issues or know how deeply felt they are, change will not and cannot happen.

Another important audience is the public. Educating the public about problems or a particular cause helps increase the number of individuals who care about the problem and may be willing to speak up about it. NGOs reach out to the public by disseminating information, holding meetings, and using the media.

One of the most direct ways to influence decision-making is through the legislative process. NGOs often work to ensure that laws that are adopted reflect the interests of the community. Understanding the procedures by which laws are made and keeping informed of legislative proceedings is an important requirement for influencing the process. In the remainder of this handbook, we will discuss many of the methods organizations can use to influence public decisions.

How a Bill Becomes a Law in Latvia

According to the Latvia's constitution, legislation is primarily the right and responsibility of the Saeima. Bills may be presented to the Saeima by the President, the cabinet of ministers, Saeima committees, at least five deputies, or 10 per cent of the electorate. Bills introduced by the electorate must be adopted by the Saeima in the first reading or otherwise may trigger a referendum.

Most bills are drafted in the committees of the cabinet of ministers. A number of NGOs participate in the work of committees, specifically on social and economic issues. Pension reform and other social welfare legislation, for example, is subject to regular negotiation within the so-called tripartite council consisting of representatives of the government, labor unions and employers.

After a bill reaches the Saeima, it usually goes through three readings before becoming law. Before each reading, deputies are given time, in most cases at least five days, to submit proposals to the main committee receiving the bill. Perhaps not surprisingly, this process, and the work of the Saeima in general, are a lot more susceptible to public scrutiny and influence than that of the cabinet of ministers. Committee meetings generally are open to the press and the public, and scheduling information is available through the Saeima News Service Department and through the newspaper "Latvijas Vestnesis." Transcripts of meetings and the submitted draft laws and remarks on them are also published. Furthermore, committee consultants are asked to maintain contacts with a network of technical specialists and interest group representatives who are invited to provide input into legislation. (For further details, see the Appendix.)

CHOOSING A PROBLEM OR ISSUE AND DEVELOPING A CAMPAIGN

To be truly effective, civic participation must be systematic. Like an election campaign, the goal of which is to win political office, a successful civic participation effort usually requires a concrete goal and a plan to achieve that goal. Choosing the problem or issue and developing a campaign around it is the first step of an effective civic participation effort. Doing so involves a number of tasks. They are: choosing a problem or issue; developing a campaign strategy; setting goals; identifying resources; taking stock of your constituents; allies and opponents; developing a campaign message; recruiting volunteers; and developing tactics.

● **Choosing an Issue for a Campaign**

In order to be effective in solving problems in your community, you must first identify a problem or issue that can be solved. Avoid problems that are too ambitious, complex or difficult. Instead take on a problem or a part of a problem that you have a reasonable chance of fixing. For example, instead of trying to eliminate unemployment, you could focus on training people who are out of work so they are more likely to find jobs.

When you think about problems or issues ask yourself the following questions.

Is the problem/issue...	easy to understand? worthwhile? consistent with the values of the organization? widely and deeply felt by others? ACHIEVABLE?
-------------------------	---

Does it...	result in real improvement in people's lives? give people a sense of their ability to make change?
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Are there...	clear targets? clear timetables?
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● **Developing a Strategy**

A strategy is a detailed plan for reaching a desired goal. To improve its chances for success, each campaign must have a carefully considered strategy. There are a number of elements to consider as you develop your strategy. The strategy should address specific goals; take into account the facts surrounding the issues, your existing and potential resources, and your existing and potential constituents, allies and opponents; and incorporate a brief campaign message and a plan for the tactics you will employ to advance the campaign. A campaign strategy will help you map out where you are going and how you will get there.

- **Setting Specific Goals**

In a campaign, long-, intermediate- and short-term goals should all be considered. Set a series of goals that represent what can be won in a specific time frame. Setting specific goals can help you get results quickly. Continual small victories, if well used, will bring media attention and increase public support as you work toward the more complicated, long term objectives.

- **Getting the Facts**

Before embarking on a campaign, find out as much as you can about the history and status of an issue or problem. Researching an issue will help identify the source of the problem, develop workable solutions and plan tactics for implementing them. Keep track of all of your information sources. The better informed you are, the more persuasive you will be in convincing others that the problem is important and deserves attention.

- **Identifying Your Resources**

It is critical to understand how and where you will get the resources — such as people, money, and equipment — to accomplish your goals and implement the campaign. Generally, the more resources you have on hand, the more attention you can draw to your campaign. If your organization lacks resources, consider whether there are other individuals or organizations who would be willing to contribute to your campaign.

- **Identifying Your Constituents, Allies, and Opponents**

In planning a campaign, it is not only important to identify your constituents and potential allies, it is equally important to recognize your opponents. Knowing which individuals and organizations care about the problem or issue, what they stand to win or lose if you are successful, and what power they have to advance or hinder the campaign will improve your overall strategy. Understanding the determination of your opponents will help you understand the difficulty of the challenge you face. You will need to determine how to compensate for any shortcomings you encounter, such as opponents who have greater access to decision-makers or greater financial resources.

- **Identifying Your Targets**

After you have identified the issue, set goals and objectives, collected your facts and assessed your resources, you must identify the specific targets of your campaign. Simply put, who has the power to make the decisions on your issue? Often, the primary targets will be elected officials or other important authorities. To influence these people, you may need to identify secondary targets — people who can in turn influence the primary targets. These may include staff members of the primary target and/or their spouses, friends, colleagues and other associates.

- **Developing a Message**

Having a message will help frame the campaign and persuade potential supporters to join the campaign. The message should be simple, concise, truthful and persuasive. The message is not the same as a slogan. Rather, it is a statement that captures what your campaign is trying to do and what it is all about. You should try to deliver the message at every possible opportunity, at meetings, in newsletters, in newspaper articles and feature stories, and on radio and television. (See the section below on working with the media for specific techniques.)

- **Recruiting Volunteers**

Volunteers are one of the most important elements in solving community problems. Volunteers provide the guidance, labor and influence that is critical to a campaign's success. Without them, unless you have a lot of money, your ability to accomplish anything is severely limited. There are many benefits in using volunteers in a campaign: they expand the membership of your organization, provide a greater pool of expertise to draw from, and increase the number of people to attend events and activities.

To be successful in your volunteer recruitment, it is helpful to understand the reasons why people volunteer. Some of these reasons include a personal interest in making improvements in the community, a specific interest in the issue or problem you are trying to solve, belief in the organization, professional interest in learning new skills, and the possibility of making new friends or meeting new people

To recruit volunteers, ask friends, family, neighbors and community leaders to join in an activity or attend a meeting. Post sign-in sheets at every event or activity and contact and recruit all newcomers following an event.

Clearly explain the importance of all assigned tasks to volunteers and how they fit into solving an issue. Never make people feel that they have wasted their time. Recognize each volunteer's effort and thank volunteers regularly.

- **Developing Tactics**

Tactics are the actions designed to advance your campaign, such as working with the media, contacting decision-makers, and staging public events. Some of these tactics will be described in the sections that follow.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Successful use of the mass media will educate the public and focus attention on community problems and issues. It can also enlighten and influence decision-makers and help establish the organization's reputation and attract supporters. Building sound media relations is the key to getting media coverage and should be a critical element of any campaign strategy.

Techniques for Building Strong Media Relations

Effective media work is much more than sending out news releases. Your organization will enjoy consistently good coverage only if it has good relationships and a plan for regular media activity.

Tips for developing good media relations:

1. Develop a list of the 30 media people you need to know. Develop a plan to introduce yourself, the organization and the issues to them.
2. Create a system for keeping track of contacts with individual members of the media.
3. Make the reporters' job as easy as possible. Provide them with the information at times and in formats that are easy for them to use.
4. Acquaint yourself with the reporters and journalists who cover your area of interest. Knowing them will help you to understand how they work and will allow you to modify your approach with each individual.
5. Personal contact is important. Media outlets receive thousands of requests for media coverage weekly. If you or your organization is known, it is more likely you will get coverage.
6. Thank the appropriate person when you receive coverage and follow up when you do not to find out why.
7. Ask for advice and feedback from reporters: how can the presentation of material be improved to attract the desired attention?
8. Provide journalists ideas for good features stories.
9. Never lie.

News releases, news conferences, letters to the editor, feature stories for print media and television, radio call-in programs, and public service announcements represent the most frequently used

techniques for getting your message out in the public forum where it can be read, heard and seen by community members and decision-makers. Use as many of these techniques as possible.

- ***News or Press Release***

The object of a news or press release is to get the media to cover an event or issue or to write a story about it. A news release should be one or two pages (preferably one) of information explaining the who, what, when, where and why of the event or story and should provide enough information to entice the media to cover the event or story.

A news release helps the media to frame your message accurately, and provides the media with background information and quotations that can be used in a news article. A news release helps make a reporter's job easier, which in turn increases the likelihood that your issue will receive press coverage. News releases should be received two to four days before an event. If possible, schedule your event so that it does not compete with other events for coverage.

Checklist for Writing a Press Release:

- Prepare the release on organizational letterhead.
- Include the date the release is being issued.
- Write *for immediate release* at the top.
- Place the contact person's name and phone number on the top of the release.
- Create a short headline that will attract attention.
- Double space the copy.
- Answer questions who, what, where, why, and when in the first paragraph.
- Use the organization's name several times
- Quote key leaders in the second or third paragraph. (Make sure they have agreed to be quoted.)
- Make sure all names are correctly spelled.
- Try to limit the text to one page.
- Include a photograph if possible.
- End the press release with # # # #. This symbol indicates the end of the text.
- Determine who is responsible for sending the press release.
- Assign someone to make follow-up phone calls; make sure this person is well informed

- ***News or Press Conference***

The purpose of a news conference is to convene the media to release new information about a problem or issue or provide a new perspective. Press conferences can be used to announce your position on an issue, to introduce a new project, or to launch a campaign. Press conferences can be pro-active or reactive. A pro-active news conference is undertaken at your initiative to announce or create a story. A reactive news conference responds to breaking news. News conferences require

much planning. Speakers need to be invited and briefed, press packages prepared, news releases written, and a site selected that will, if possible, be photographically appealing.

Many NGOs find it difficult to attract the media to a press conference unless their issue is highly visible. When considering a press conference, try to link your story or event to current news such as a parliamentary debate on the budget or the impact of cuts on social welfare programs.

- ***Letters to the Editor***

Letters to the Editor are an extremely effective technique of civic participation because they always attract attention. Letters to the Editor provide an opportunity to educate the public and decision makers on an issue or problem. They also offer an opportunity for free press.

Tips for writing a Letter to the Editor:

1. State who you are. If applicable, state whom you represent, your clients, constituents and/or the number of members in your organization.
2. Demonstrate your understanding of the issues.
3. Demonstrate your credibility and ability to speak authoritatively on the problem or issue.
4. Explain the impact of the problem or issue about which you are writing.
5. Keep it short to avoid writing a letter that will require substantial editing.
6. Include other compelling information so that readers will have an understanding of the importance and the significance of individuals and organizations speaking out on such issues.

- ***Feature Stories***

Offering ideas for feature stories is another way to encourage positive media attention. This does not mean creating stories, but, rather, finding a story that already exists and passing it along to the media. All forms of media regularly run feature stories on specific people and issues. Feature stories are best suited to a description of an interesting personality or a special activity that will attract the attention of readers and viewers while promoting your issue. If you have a good subject for a feature story, inform the appropriate news person.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH DECISION-MAKERS

One of the most effective strategies NGOs use to advance their issues and share their ideas is to establish relationships with decision-makers and their staff. An established relationship, coupled with your persistence, will be your most powerful tool as a lobbyist. NGOs and members of the community can build these relationships through a combination of grassroots work and lobbying techniques. The techniques include letter writing, personal visits, telephone calls and arranging site visits.

● ***Letter Writing***

One of the essential civic participation tools is the letter. Most decision-makers respond to such letters and pay attention to the opinions expressed in them. Letters from constituents help decision-makers decide how important an issue is and what actions they should take on those issues. As a result, organizations often organize special letter-writing campaigns. Having individuals write on behalf of an organization or its cause gives decision-makers an indication of the strength of the organization's public support.

Tips for letter writing:

1. Write clearly and concisely. The letter must focus on the issue. It should be as brief as possible to convey your message.
2. Do your homework before writing the letter. Do not simply write a letter complaining about a problem, suggest a solution. Offer the decision-maker your opinion about what he or she could do to address the issue or problem.
3. Be firm and polite. State your opinion and explain why you feel the way you do. Personal experiences and anecdotes are helpful, as are statistical facts.
4. Write the letter on the organization's letterhead and provide contact information so a response can be easily made.
5. Ask for a response from the decision-maker; ask him/her to state his/her position on the issue and what he/she intends to do about it in the future. Let the decision-maker know that you expect action on the issue.
6. Follow up. Be sure to thank the decision-maker if he or she has helped to solve the problem or issue presented. If nothing has been done, state your concerns again.

- ***Personal Visits***

Even more effective than a letter is a personal visit to a decision-maker. It is very difficult for officials, especially elected officials, to avoid responding to a concerned constituent who has come specifically to express his or her concerns. Personal visits allow an organization's members to ask key questions about an issue and convey the organization's message.

Most elected officials have office hours for constituent visits. It is best to call ahead and schedule an appointment with the official or a member of his or her staff. Often, visits with staff members are productive substitutes to visits with the officials themselves, because the staff members typically have more time to concentrate on the issue at hand and may have more concrete information for you. However, when possible, meet with the decision-maker, as he or she has the power to affect issues that concern you.

Tips for personal visits:

1. Call ahead and make an appointment. If the decision-maker is unavailable ask to meet with a staff person who handles the issues you are concerned about.
2. If you represent an organization, be sure to make clear your organizational affiliation. Especially if you are representing a coalition, let the decision-maker know how many members you represent.
3. State your view in a clear and calm manner. Demonstrate your understanding of the issue or problem. Let the decision-maker know what you would like him or her to do.
4. Be polite. Arguing with a decision-maker is not helpful to your cause. Even if you strongly disagree with his or her views, listen politely and attentively. Ask him or her to have an open mind and offer additional information to support your position.
5. Follow up. Ask the decision-maker for his or her support and ask to be kept informed regarding his or her actions on the issue. Let him or her know you will continue to be in touch in the future.

- ***Telephone Calls***

Telephone calls are another effective lobbying technique, especially if many constituents call about the same problem. Telephone calls can present a sense of urgency because they need to be addressed immediately. They are similar to letters in that the number of calls on a particular issue is noted. The more calls a decision maker-receives on a single issue, the greater the likelihood that the issue will be addressed in a meaningful way.

Tips for calling a decision-maker:

1. Demonstrate your understanding of the issue and be prepared to explain briefly the subject you wish to discuss. The more complicated the conversation the less effective it will be.
2. Be specific about the issue and be clear about what you would like the decision-maker to do. Ask the decision-maker to do something to help solve or mitigate the problem.
3. Be polite and thank the decision-maker for his or her time.

- *Site Visits/Tours*

Inviting an elected or government official to visit the site of a problem can be an effective way of conveying your message. Site visits allow officials to meet and speak with those who experience the problem you are trying to solve and thereby gain a greater understanding of the problem. Site visits are an opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of an organization's activities and can provide important opportunities for media attention. Finally, they are an effective tool for building relationships with officials.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Educating members of the community about important issues is essential to increasing public awareness and ultimately mobilizing public support for the issue. The methods to educate the public are limited only by the imagination. Some of the more traditional public education methods include flyers, newsletters, open meetings and reports.

Distributing **flyers** is a easy, cost effective and efficient way to publicize an event and express your opinions and concerns about an issue or problem.

Newsletters can provide important information to members and constituents about problems and solutions that are not widely reported in the newspaper.

Organizing **public meetings** allows you to share your views, but more importantly, provides an opportunity for members of the community to share their concerns and thereby help you determine how widely felt an issue is in the community. Organizations also often organize meetings to allow public officials to make a presentation to the membership of the organization or the general public on an issue that concerns the community. Such meetings have many benefits: they provide a public service, strengthen your organization's relationship with decision-makers, and demonstrate your organization's influence and effectiveness to the public. They are also effective media events.

Reports are useful to document the existence of a problem. Reports can alert government officials, the media and the public about the problem and potential solutions to the problem. Organizations often draw on outside consultants to assist them in preparing reports, if the subject matter (*i.e.*, environmental hazards) is very technical.

BUILDING COALITIONS

Creating a coalition is one of the most important and powerful tools used by NGOs to bring about change and impact public policy. A coalition is two or more organizations working collaboratively to achieve a common goal. Coalitions are about building power. They are built to amass the power necessary to accomplish something that one organization cannot do alone. Coalitions come in a variety of shapes and sizes. They can be permanent or temporary, work on one or many issues, or be limited to specific geographical location. They can also evolve into sophisticated networks of organizations with separate governing structures. By finding the right partners in a coalition your organization can increase its opportunity for success.

Whatever shape a coalition takes, the following should be considered before forming or joining a coalition.

● **Elements of Successful Coalitions**

1. The coalition's purpose must be clearly stated and widely understood.
2. Each member of the coalition must participate in a meaningful way.
3. Successful coalitions do not just meet and talk, they do something.

● **Three Steps to Finding and Working with Partner Groups**

1. Identify potential partners.

To identify potential partners for your coalition, you just need to look around the community. Make a list of organizations that you think might want to join the coalition, consider their strengths and weaknesses, and find out about their activities and positions on issues. Once you have identified your potential allies, you will be able to decide who your best partners will be. Secure their endorsement and/or involvement and get permission to use their name(s) in official correspondence.

2. Educate coalition partners about the issues.

After you have determined the groups with which you will work, you must educate them about the issue and your organization. The more you know, the better you will be able to work together.

3. Activate the coalition by assigning tasks.

Coalitions are only as good as the results they produce. You must be sure to activate all coalition members by asking them to perform tasks such as writing letters, organizing meetings and other events, and visiting officials, ministers, or funders.

- **Key Ingredients for Successful Coalitions**

Good staff

Unifying issues

Realistic budget to implement the campaign

Respect for each coalition member's organizational self-interest

Recognition of each member's contribution to the campaign

Carefully structured decision-making process

Achievement and recognition of significant victories

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS IN THE SAEIMA

Prepared for the National Democratic Institute by Dzintra Pededze
Saeima Legal Affairs Commission

⇒
Draft laws and amendments may be submitted by:
- the President of Latvia
- (Cabinet of Ministers)
- a Saeima commission
- no less than five deputies
- one tenth of the electorate

⇒
 The copies of the draft law are submitted to deputies, and also are sent to the President and the Prime Minister

⇒
 The Saeima Presidium:
prepares an assessment of the draft law and includes a report about it in the agenda of Saeima plenary meeting;
The Presidium has the right to return the following draft laws to the submitter:
- draft laws, not signed by the submitting party;
- draft laws that require approval of international conventions, not officially translated into Latvian

⇒
 In Saeima plenary meeting:
- the Presidium reports on the bill;
- debate may take place.
Saeima decides:
- to submit the draft bill to commissions, designating the responsible commission;
- to reject the draft law.

⇒
 Commissions consider the draft and submit their comments to the committee responsible, and, if necessary, prepare an alternative bill.

⇒
 The commission responsible considers the bill and assessments, and submits its evaluative report to the Presidium.
Responsible commissions may:
● support the bill;
● reject the bill;
● reject the bill and prepare an alternative draft or support another commission's alternative bill

⇒
 The copies of the conclusion and the alternative draft are submitted to deputies, and sent to the President and Prime Minister.

⇒
 The Presidium:
includes the draft bill in the agenda of Saeima plenary meeting;
- if rejected by the responsible commission, the bill is not included on the plenary agenda, except when:
● the bill is submitted according to Constitutional Article 78,
● the bill is submitted by the Cabinet of Ministers,
● the submitting party requests that the bill be considered at Saeima plenary session

⇒
 The first reading in Saeima:
- referent from the responsible commission reports on the bill;
- Saeima decides on the urgency of the bill, if requested by Saeima commission or at least 10 deputies;
- debates are opened on the general principles of the bill;
- Saeima decides on the approval of the bill in first reading.
● If bill is approved in first reading, Saeima sets deadlines for submission of recommendations, if bill is not deemed urgent;
- Saeima decides when bill will be considered in second reading, if bill is deemed urgent.
- If bill does not pass in first reading, it is considered rejected.

⇒

✓ ⊕ ■

Second reading in Saeima

Saeima considers the bill article by article (debate on each article or section thereof, all submitted proposals)

After considering all articles, Saeima votes on entire bill, with approved recommendations.

If bill passing second reading is not urgent, Saeima sets deadlines for submission of proposals.

!! If Saeima approves an urgent bill (or budget) in second reading, the law is considered passed.

If Saeima does not approve the bill, it is returned to the responsible commission.

✓ ⊕ ■

Third reading in Saeima

Saeima considers only the articles for which proposals were submitted (debate on separate articles or sections thereof).

After considering all proposals, Saeima votes on the complete bill.

!!! If Saeima approves bill, it becomes a law.

If Saeima does not approve bill, it is returned to the responsible commission.

⇒

✓ ■

the Presidium: includes the draft bill in the agenda of Saeima plenary meeting

does not include the bill in the agenda, if the following are not attached:

- all submitted proposals and recommendations;
- the Finance Minister's assessment, if bill requires budgetary amendments

⇒

✓ ■

the Presidium: includes the draft bill in the agenda of Saeima plenary meeting

does not include the bill in the agenda, if all submitted proposals and recommendations are not attached.

⇒

□

Copies of the bill prepared for second reading are distributed to deputies, the President and Prime Minister

⇒

□

Copies of the bill prepared for third reading are distributed to deputies, the President and Prime Minister

⇒

✓ ■

Responsible commission prepares bill for second reading, assessments of submitted proposals and, if necessary, its own proposals

⇒

✓ ■

Responsible commission prepares bill for third reading, assessments of submitted proposals and, if necessary, its own proposals

⇒

Proposals for amendments and additions to the bill may be submitted by:

- the President;
- Saeima commission;
- a fraction or political bloc;
- a deputy;
- the Prime Minister, Minister or authorized public official;
- the Legal Bureau of Saeima (for technical codification)

⊕ Saeima meeting transcripts, information about the meetings of Saeima and Saeima Presidium meetings, the agendas of Saeima and Saeima committee meetings, the submitted draft laws and remarks on them are published in the newspaper "Latvijas Vestnesis".

⊕ Saeima open meetings are broadcast on state radio channels.

✓ Saeima, Saeima Presidium and committee meetings, except cases excluded by law, are open.

□ Copies of the documents discussed in Saeima meetings are available for mass media.