

Public Comment Process 101



The Colorado
Health Foundation™

What is public comment, and why does it matter?

When the federal government proposes a new regulation or considers changes to an existing one, it must give the public an opportunity to weigh in. This is known as the **public comment process**, and it is one of the most direct ways individuals, communities, and organizations can help shape federal policy.

Public comments are not just a formality; they are a core part of how rules are developed and finalized. They help ensure that policies reflect real-world conditions and lived experiences, not just internal analysis.

Through public comments, people can:

- Elevate personal or community-level stories that illustrate real-world impact
- Introduce data or research that strengthens or challenges a proposal
- Demonstrate how specific communities may be affected
- Highlight unintended consequences or downstream effects of the proposed rules

Why does the government ask for comments?

Federal agencies are required under the Administrative Procedures Act (APA) to seek public input before finalizing most regulations.

As part of this process, agencies must:

- Share proposed rules with the public
- Provide a defined period for feedback
- Review and consider the comments they receive

This structure is designed to make policymaking more informed, transparent, and accountable. It ensures that decisions are shaped not only by internal agency analysis, but also by lived experiences, community perspectives, and expert insight. Most importantly, it gives those directly affected by a policy a meaningful opportunity to influence it before it is finalized.

Do public comments actually make a difference?

Yes, both in the short term and over time. Agencies are legally required to review all submitted comments and respond to significant issues raised. While not every comment results in a change, public input can influence both the direction of a rule and how it is implemented.

Public comments can:

- Lead to revisions or clarifications in the final rule
- Signal widespread support or concern, shaping future agency actions
- Become part of the official record used to justify policy decisions

Even when a rule is not immediately changed, comments still matter. They help build a record that can shape future policymaking and inform legal challenges. If a rule is challenged in court, judges often review the administrative record, including public comments, to assess whether the agency fully considered the policy's impact.

What makes a strong comment?

You do not need to be a policy expert to submit a meaningful comment. Some of the most impactful comments are grounded in direct experiences and perspectives.

Strong comments can include:

- **Personal experience:** How would the policy affect you, your family, or your community?
- **Clear position:** What do you support or oppose, and why?
- **Specific feedback:** Are there parts of the proposal that could be improved?
- **Supporting information:** Data, research, or examples can strengthen your perspective, but are not required

Comments can be as brief as a few sentences or as detailed as a longer response. For major rules, organizations often provide templates or guidance to make participation easier, but even a short, original comment can be meaningful.

Where do I go to submit a public comment?

All current regulations are published on [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov). You can also find them in the [Federal Register](https://www.federalregister.gov) ([federalregister.gov](https://www.federalregister.gov)). You can sign up for email alerts on the Federal Register website to get notified when a regulation is scheduled to be published. On both sites, you can search by agency, docket number, or posting date to find the regulation you want to comment on; however, the official site to submit electronic comments is [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov).

Once you have selected a regulation you want to comment on, you can submit comments any time during the comment period, which is usually 30 to 90 days from the date that the regulation is published. **Be sure to check the comment period timeline.** Regulations are regularly posted with the shortest possible comment period (30 days), which can increase the difficulty of drafting and submitting a comment by the deadline.

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The [Colorado Health Foundation](#) is a statewide, nonprofit and nonpartisan philanthropic organization with a mission to improve the health and well-being of Coloradans. Through community engagement, research, grantmaking, and private sector investments, the Foundation aims to ensure that everyone in Colorado has what they need to be healthy. For more information, please contact Alexis Weightman, senior government affairs manager, aweightman@coloradohealth.org.

