Panel Discussion

A Panel Discussion is a participatory format in which different people publicly discuss a specific topic. It brings together diverse perspectives, interests, and opinions. Panelists often include experts, representatives from politics or public administration, interest groups, and people directly affected by the issue.

Participation Depth	Participate, Have a say
Project Phase	Onboarding
Goals	Understanding & Gathering Perspectives
Format	Analogue
Duration	1 - 3 Hours
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public, Hard-to-Reach Groups, Organised Actors
Group Size	Medium Group up to 30, Large Group from 30
Characteristics	Structured, Activating

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of a panel discussion is to make different perspectives on a topic publicly visible and to facilitate a structured exchange between various stakeholders. The format helps communicate information in an accessible way, openly discuss conflicts and differing opinions, and generate new ideas for future participation or planning processes.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Define the Topic
Choose a topic that:

- is relevant to the public,
- allows different perspectives,
- encourages discussion.

The guiding question should be open-ended.

Examples:

- *How should the city centre develop in the future?*
- *What kind of mobility does our neighbourhood need?*
- *How can public spaces become more equitable?*

2. Select the Panelists
Invite participants representing a range of perspectives.

Possible panelists include:

- subject experts
- politicians
- public administration representatives
- local initiatives
- interest groups
- people directly affected

Aim for a diverse panel.

Make sure to:

- represent different viewpoints,
- consider power imbalances,
- prevent any single perspective from dominating.

3. Prepare the Moderator
The moderator should:

- structure the discussion,
- ask guiding questions,
- ensure balanced participation,
- manage the time,
- involve the audience.

Prepare:

- guiding questions,
- potential conflict topics,
- transitions,

- a clear schedule.

4. Organise the Venue and Technical Setup
Plan for:

- good visibility of the panel,
- appropriate acoustics and microphones,
- seating for the audience,
- digital participation tools if required.

The audience should feel actively included and have opportunities to participate.

Execution

1. Welcome and Introduction
The moderator opens the event by explaining:

- the topic and objectives,
- the programme,
- discussion guidelines,
- opportunities for audience participation.

The panelists are then introduced.

2. Opening Statements
Each panelist is given time for a brief opening statement.

They may:

- explain their perspective,
- present their main position,
- share experiences or insights.

Opening statements should remain concise to leave sufficient time for discussion.

3. Moderated Discussion
The moderator guides the discussion using targeted questions.

Examples include:

- *Where do you see the greatest challenges?*
- *Which solutions do you consider most promising?*
- *Where do conflicts or differing interests arise?*

The moderator ensures that:

- everyone has the opportunity to contribute,
- the discussion remains understandable,
- contributions stay concise.

4. Audience Participation
The audience is then invited to contribute.

Possible formats include:

- open Q&A sessions,
- written questions,
- digital participation tools,
- live polls.

Allow sufficient time for questions and discussion.

5. Closing Round
To conclude, the moderator summarises:

- key insights,
- differing viewpoints,
- open questions,
- possible next steps.

Each panelist may also give a brief closing statement.

Evaluation

1. Document the Results

Record:

- key statements,
- points of conflict,
- audience questions,
- possible solutions.

2. Documentation formats may include:

- meeting minutes,
- summary reports,
- photo documentation,
- video recordings.

3. Share the Results

Make the results available to:

- participants,
- the public,
- public administration,
- political decision-makers.

Clearly communicate how the results will be used in future processes.

Source: https://mobilitaetsplanung-hessen.de/methodenkoffer-partizipative-planung/

WHEN USEFUL?

- discussing controversial or publicly relevant topics.
- different perspectives should be made visible.
- informing and raising awareness.
- introducing a broader participation process.
- bringing together public perspectives and expert knowledge.

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

-

concrete solutions need to be developed collaboratively.

- working with very small groups.
- only a few perspectives are represented.
- there is no room for open discussion.
- the topic has little public relevance or debate.

TIPS

- Aim for a diverse panel representing multiple perspectives.
- Encourage concise contributions to maintain an engaging discussion.
- The moderator should actively guide the discussion and prevent dominant individuals from taking over.
- Allow sufficient time for audience questions.
- Digital participation tools can help include quieter participants.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- making concrete decisions.
- intensive group work.
- very small groups.
- processes without room for open discussion or diverse perspectives.

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/podiumsdiskussion