Citizens' Assembly

A Citizens' Assembly brings together a randomly selected group of citizens who work intensively over an extended period on an issue of public importance. The aim is to combine diverse perspectives and develop well-informed recommendations for policymakers and public authorities. The method is particularly suitable for complex or controversial issues where broad societal perspectives should be considered.

Participation Depth	Participate, Have a say
Project Phase	Onboarding
Goals	Exchange & Discourse
Format	Analogue, Digital
Duration	1 Day - 1 Week, Several Weeks
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public, Hard-to-Reach Groups, Organised Actors
Group Size	Large Group from 30, As Many as Possible
Characteristics	Structured, Activating

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of a Citizens' Assembly is to deliberate on complex public issues from the perspective of citizens and jointly develop recommendations. By selecting participants through a random process, the assembly aims to reflect a broad range of experiences and viewpoints, contributing to balanced and well-considered outcomes.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Define the guiding question

Begin by developing a clear and understandable guiding question.

Examples include:

- *"How can our city become more climate-friendly?"*
- *"How should the city centre be developed in the future?"*
- *"Which measures can strengthen social cohesion?"*

The question should:

- provide a clear mandate
- remain open-ended
- allow sufficient scope for developing recommendations

2. Clarify how the recommendations will be used

Before the process begins, determine:

- Who will receive the recommendations?
- Who is responsible for responding or making decisions?
- What will happen after the assembly concludes?

Participants should understand how their work may influence future decisions.

3. Select participants
Participants are chosen through a random selection process.

To ensure broad representation, the final group is usually balanced according to characteristics such as:

- age
- gender
- educational background
- income
- place of residence
- migration background

The aim is to create a group that reflects the diversity of the wider population.

4. Create accessible conditions
Participation barriers should be reduced wherever possible.

Possible measures include:

- reimbursing travel expenses
- providing childcare
- offering participant compensation
- ensuring accessible venues
- providing technical support for online participation

Execution

1. Getting to know each other and introduction

At the beginning, participants become acquainted and receive an introduction to the process.

Topics include:

- the role of participants
- the overall process and schedule
- expectations
- rules for respectful collaboration

Creating an open and respectful discussion culture is essential.

2. Build a shared knowledge base
Participants receive balanced background information on the topic.

Contributors may include:

- researchers
- public administration experts
- practitioners
- affected stakeholders
- interest groups

The objective is to establish a common understanding before deliberation begins.

3. Exchange perspectives
Participants discuss the issue in professionally facilitated small-group and plenary sessions.

Helpful questions include:

- *"Which perspectives have not yet been considered?"*
- *"How might this proposal affect different groups?"*
- *"What opportunities and risks do we see?"*
- *"Whose interests should be taken into account?"*

Avoid:

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blaming individuals or groups

- leading questions
- partisan political debates
- rushing to conclusions before sufficient discussion

4. Develop recommendations
Based on the discussions, participants formulate concrete recommendations.

Helpful questions include:

- What is realistically achievable?
- Which conditions are necessary?
- What impact is expected?
- Who would be affected?

The recommendations are discussed collectively and formally agreed upon by the assembly.

5. Present the results
The recommendations are compiled into a final report and presented to the previously identified political decision-makers.

The report should be written in a clear, transparent, and accessible manner.

Evaluation

1. Document the recommendations
The final documentation should clearly include:

- recommendations with explanations
- voting results where applicable
- remaining open questions

Transparent documentation strengthens the credibility of the process.

2. Reflect on the process
Helpful evaluation questions include:

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Were different perspectives adequately represented?

- Did participants feel sufficiently informed?
- What worked well during the process?
- What could be improved in future Citizens' Assemblies?

3. Provide feedback on implementation
Participants should be informed about:

- which recommendations have been adopted
- which recommendations have not been implemented
- why particular decisions were made

Regular updates on implementation help maintain transparency, strengthen trust, and encourage future participation.

Quelle: https://partizipation.at/partizipation-anwenden/methoden/

WHEN USEFUL?

- addressing complex societal challenges
- discussing issues of broad public interest
- different perspectives should be considered
- developing recommendations for policymakers and public authorities
- dealing with controversial topics that require careful deliberation

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- rapid decisions are required
- there is no room for influencing outcomes
- decisions have already been made
- there is no political commitment to consider the recommendations
- time, staff, or financial resources are insufficient

TIPS

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Formulate a clear and understandable guiding question.

- Allow sufficient time for learning and deliberation.
- Use professional, independent facilitation.
- Provide balanced and accessible information.
- Ensure a diverse group of participants.
- Reduce participation barriers wherever possible.
- Communicate transparently about how the recommendations will be handled.
- Include an independent evaluation of the process.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- situations requiring rapid decisions
- processes without genuine openness to the outcome
- projects lacking sufficient resources for preparation and facilitation
- situations where recommendations will not be seriously considered
- questions that are too narrowly defined or already decided

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/buerger-innenrat-citizens-assembly