Citizens' Public Meeting

A Citizens' Public Meeting is an open participation format in which people are informed about a project or proposal and then invited to share their questions, opinions, suggestions, and concerns. It is particularly suitable for reaching a large number of people at the same time, increasing transparency, and gathering initial public feedback.
The format usually combines an information session with an open discussion. Depending on the topic and the number of participants, discussions may take place in plenary, at themed discussion tables, or in smaller groups.

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

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of a Citizens' Assembly is to inform people about a project at an early stage and provide opportunities to ask questions, give feedback, express concerns, and share suggestions. At the same time, public authorities, policymakers, and project teams gain valuable insights from the community and make the public discussion visible and transparent.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Materials

- projector and screen
- microphones
- presentation equipment
- seating
- facilitation materials
- pinboards or display boards
- documentation materials
-

name badges

- refreshments

2. Clarify the purpose and scope for participation
Begin by considering:

- Why is the assembly being organised?
- Which aspects are open for discussion?
- Which decisions have already been made?
- Which questions remain open?

Clearly communicate what participants can influence and what is already fixed to avoid unrealistic expectations.

3. Identify the target groups
Consider:

- Who is directly affected?
- Which groups should be specifically invited?
- Who may have an interest in the topic?

Identify groups that are often underrepresented in participation processes and use targeted communication channels and existing networks to encourage their participation.

4. Select the venue and date
Choose a venue that offers:

- good accessibility
- barrier-free access
- sufficient seating
- good acoustics

Schedule the event at a time that is convenient for the intended audience.

5. Promote the event
Announce the event early and provide information about:

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the topic and purpose

- date, time, and location
- opportunities for participation

Use various communication channels, for example:

- municipal websites
- social media
- local newspapers
- flyers
- community organisations and associations

6. Prepare the programme
Determine:

- who will give the presentation
- which information will be presented
- how much time is reserved for questions
- how feedback will be documented

Allow sufficient time for discussion, as presentations that are too long often reduce active participation.

Execution

1. Welcome and introduction
The facilitator welcomes participants and explains:

- the purpose of the meeting
- the programme
- discussion guidelines

For example: *"Today we would like to present the project and gather your questions, feedback, and suggestions."*

2. Information session
The project team presents the proposal.

Participants should receive clear answers to questions such as:

- What is the project about?
- Why is it being implemented?
- What impacts are expected?
- Which decisions are still open?

Use maps, plans, images, and other visual materials wherever possible.

Complex information should be explained in clear and accessible language.

3. Question session
After the presentation, participants are invited to ask factual questions.

Clarifying information before moving into discussion helps establish a common understanding.

4. Discussion and exchange
Participants are then invited to:

- express opinions
- share concerns
- make suggestions
- contribute ideas

Depending on the group size, different formats may be appropriate.

Option A: Plenary discussion

All contributions are collected in one large discussion.

Suitable for:

- smaller meetings
- relatively straightforward topics

Option B: Marketplace format

Several themed discussion tables are arranged around the room.

Participants can:

- ask questions
- speak with experts
- provide comments

This format works particularly well for:

- larger audiences
- complex projects
- controversial topics

Option C: World Café-style discussions

Small groups discuss individual questions and develop ideas together.

This format usually allows more people to contribute than a large plenary discussion.

5. Summary
Participants or discussion groups present their main findings, questions, ideas, and suggestions.

The facilitator concludes by summarising:

- recurring concerns
- key discussion points
- remaining open questions
- next steps

It is important to explain clearly how participants' feedback will be used.

Evaluation

1. Document the results
Record:

- questions and comments
- concerns and criticism
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discussion themes

- ideas and suggestions

Possible documentation methods include:

- written minutes
- photographs of flipcharts and pinboards
- digital documentation

2. Provide feedback
Inform participants about:

- the feedback that was collected
- how it will be considered
- the next steps in the process

Transparency helps build trust.

3. Publish the results
Make the documentation publicly available whenever possible, for example through:

- the project website
- newsletters
- social media

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

WHEN USEFUL?

- informing many people at the same time
- gathering initial opinions and reactions
- introducing a new project or initiative
- increasing transparency
- presenting a public project
- giving citizens the opportunity to ask questions

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- decisions are intended to be made collectively
- serious conflicts already exist and no professional conflict facilitation is available
- highly individual or complex issues need in-depth discussion
- there is no genuine opportunity to influence the outcome

TIPS

- Keep presentations concise.
- Use clear language instead of technical terminology.
- Use visual materials to explain complex topics.
- Allow plenty of time for questions and discussion.
- For controversial topics, smaller discussion groups are often more productive than long plenary debates.
- Always explain what will happen next.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- collective decision-making
- detailed concept development
- intensive conflict resolution
- confidential topics
- projects with no genuine scope for public influence

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/buerger-innenversammlung