Shetland Partnership
Methods and Techniques

Citizens' Juries, Citizens' Panels and Citizens' Assemblies

Distinctions between Citizens' Juries, Panels, and Assemblies

Citizen's Juries, Panels and Assemblies are all methods of public participation designed to involve everyday people in decision-making, but they differ in structure, purpose and scale. Here is a breakdown of their key differences, followed by information on each method.

Feature	Citizens' Jury	Citizens' Panel	Citizens' Assembly
Size	Small (12-25)	Medium (20-100)	Large (50-200)
Purpose	In-depth decision on a specific issue	Ongoing feedback on various topics	Addressing major, complex issues
Duration	Short-term (days or weeks)	Long-term (regular input)	Medium to long-term (weeks/months)
Formality	High formal deliberation	Less format, flexible input	Formal and structured deliberation
Impact	Focused recommendations	General advice	Significant policy recommendations

Citizens' Jury

A Citizens' Jury is a form of participatory research where a small, diverse group (usually 12-25 people) evaluates evidence and provides recommendations on specific issues.

The group is chosen to represent a community. They hear from experts, discuss different perspectives, and deliberate. After careful consideration they provide recommendations or a decision. It is a way to involve everyday people in making informed contributions to policies or solutions.

Suitable for:

Citizens' Juries are useful when an issue is complicated, where knowledge is contested and there may be important ethical and social repercussions. A Citizens' Jury can be used on different policy issues and involves people in developing their knowledge of a policy area, asking questions of expert witnesses, collective group discussions and deliberations to reach a final decision. They are often designed to deliver on things such as:

- Providing a specific verdict or decision
- Recommendations for delivery
- Clarity on priorities for improvement
- Clarity of preferences towards proposals.

Type of engagement:

Delegate | Involve

How to do it:

- A Citizens' Jury typically lasts between 2 to 4 days, depending on the topic. It is important to choose suitable venues and make sure there is enough time for everyone.

- Identify who is affected by your topic and select a representative group of about 12 to 25 people. Let them know what will be expected.

- Prepare a key question related to the issue or present a series of options for the Jury to think about.

- Prepare information packs for the participants and consider what they need to attend, like covering their expenses and providing support.

- Plan surveys for before and after the event to see how opinions change.

- Recruit and prepare expert witnesses.

- Hire independent moderators to help with the discussions.

- On the first day, explain the rules and start the discussion.

- Throughout the event, bring in experts to give detailed information. The Jury can ask them questions and discuss the issues.

- At the end of the discussions, reach a consensus on recommendations.

- Finally, compile a report and, if appropriate, arrange a presentation for the commissioning body.

⭐ Advantages	⚠️ Challenges
• It helps get people involved who do not usually have a say in decisions • It includes different types of people from the community • It helps manage different opinions and makes the decision-making process transparent • Being seen as fair and unbiased makes people trust the process more • It gives people a chance to really understand the issues • Regular community members get to take part, ensuring decisions reflect everyone's needs.	• Jury members need to reflect the community • A Citizens' Jury requires choosing jurors and experts and planning the schedule • Independent moderators are required, which may be costly • Everyone must understand the process and how the results will be used; this takes time to plan and organise • The Jury may need up to 4 days to come to a decision / recommendations • The commissioning body must follow the recommendations or explain why not • The process can be expensive.

Further information: 🔍

What is a Citizens' Jury? | Inclusive research | Scottish Learning Disabilities Observatory

Case study: 📖

Citizen's Jury on Shared Decision Making (external, Health Improvement Scotland)

(see online at: https://www.hisengage.scot/informing-policy/citizens-jury/)

Citizens' Panel

A Citizens' Panel is a large group of people that represent the community's diversity.

They are regularly engaged to share their opinions and preferences. Statutory agencies typically use these panels to understand what the community cares about and to get feedback on specific topics. Citizens' Panels can range in size from a few hundred to several thousand people.

Suitable for:

Citizens' Panels are particularly useful for ongoing consultation processes, allowing authorities to track public opinion over time. They are typically used to gather a wide range of public opinions and preferences on various issues.

Type of engagement:

Consult | Involve

How to do it: 💡

- Citizens' Panels usually involve a rolling programme of research and consultation. It is therefore important to be clear, when recruiting members, what involvement will include and how frequently panel members will be asked to participate.

- Clearly outline the goals of the panel, such as to gather public opinions on specific issues or consulting on local priorities.

- To recruit participants: use random sampling from the electoral roll or postcode address file to recruit a diverse and representative group of citizens. Ensure that socially excluded and hard-to-reach groups are included. Use various communication channels like digital adverts, direct emails, and local media to reach out.

- Inform participants about their role and what to expect.

- A Citizens' Panel is not a standalone engagement method, it will typically involve engagement through surveys and other methods. Regularly engage the Panel through surveys, focus groups, and workshops to gather detailed feedback on policy options and other issues.

- Analyse the collected data and provide feedback to participants and the wider community. This can be done through newsletters, local media, or online platforms.

- Keep the Panel database up-to-date and periodically renew the Panel to ensure it remains representative of the population.

⭐ Advantages	⚠️ Challenges
• Citizens' Panels helps gather a wide range of public opinions and preferences on various issues • They provide detailed feedback on policy options, helping to shape decisions that reflect community needs • They engage a diverse group of citizens, ensuring that different voices are heard • They can be used for regular surveys and in-depth research, such as focus groups and workshops • They can help to track local opinions over time.	• Citizens' Panels require a lot of staff time to set up, and to maintain • It can be difficult to be truly representative of the community • Keeping participants consistently engaged over time can be challenging • Some issues may be too complex for Citizen Panel members to fully understand processes, without more background information and support.

Further information: 🔍

Citizens' Panel | Involve

Case study: 📖

Citizens' Panel to bring together people across Scotland to inform and influence key decisions about health and social care policy and services (Healthcare Improvement Scotland - external).

(see online at: https://www.hisengage.scot/informing-policy/citizens-panel/)

Citizens' Assembly

A Citizens' Assembly is a group of people randomly selected to represent the demographics of the local community.

They come together to discuss important public issues and make recommendations. Assembly members learn about the topic from experts, deliberate on different viewpoints, and work towards a consensus. This process ensures that decisions reflect the diverse perspectives and needs of the community. Typically, there are 50 to 200 participants. Citizens' Assemblies are a democratic method used worldwide to empower citizens and solve problems through deliberation and recommendations.

Suitable for:

Citizens' Assemblies are used to address complex public issues. They discuss topics like constitutional reform, climate change, social policies, and community planning. They help ensure decisions reflect the community's needs and values through informed deliberation and consensus-building.

Type of engagement:

Consult | Involve | Collaborate

How to do it: 💡

- Citizens' Assemblies usually takes place over several days, either consecutively or over weeks/months. It is important to be clear what the time commitment will be for participants.

- Beforehand, decide whether you want to run a Citizens' Assembly. A successful Citizens' Assembly depends on the time and resources you have, the political context, and the problem you are trying to solve.

- Consider the assembly's size, length, and scope, as these affect cost and resource needs. The amount of time it takes to design and deliver an Assembly should last at least 5 months. If resources are limited, consider smaller processes like Citizens' Juries.

- Political support, ideally from Councillors, is important.

- Ensure the problem lacks easy answers and choose a clear, focused question. Test it with residents and politicians.

- Select evidence and witnesses, often with help from an independent advisory group. Include lived experiences and expert insights, providing balanced information.

- Recruit a diverse group reflecting the wider public in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, etc. Randomly select individuals, send invitations, confirm participation, and provide support for full engagement.

- Success on the day depends on good design and preparation leading up to the assembly. Helpful guides with standards, tools, and methods are available under 'further information'. An Assembly includes:

  - A learning stage - participants should think critically about the information they hear and have opportunities to ask questions.

  - A deliberation stage – good facilitation is important

  - A final process of decision-making – this could involve voting, ballots, or reaching a consensus without voting.

After a Citizens' Assembly concludes, the recommendations are presented to policymakers or the commissioning body. These recommendations are compiled into a report that outlines the Assembly's findings and suggested actions. Policymakers review the recommendations and provide a formal response, indicating which suggestions will be implemented and why. The recommendations and the response are shared with the public to ensure transparency. If accepted, the recommendations are integrated into policy decisions and actions, ensuring the Assembly's work has a tangible impact on public policy.

⭐ Advantages	⚠️ Challenges
• Diverse representation - they include people from all parts of the community, making sure different viewpoints are considered in decisions • Participants learn from experts and deliberate on issues, leading to well-informed recommendations • By involving ordinary citizens, these assemblies can increase public trust in the decision-making process • The diverse viewpoints and collaborative nature often lead to creative and effective solutions to complex problems • Recommendations, from a representative group of citizens, can carry significant weight with policymakers and the public.	• Ensuring the assembly is truly representative of the community can be difficult; often only a small percentage of those invited agree to participate, and they might not represent everyone equally • Keeping people interested and involved over time can be challenging; you might need to communicate regularly and offer incentives • Setting up and running an Assembly takes a lot of time, effort, and money • Some topics are very complicated, and participants might need a lot of background information to understand them fully • Turning the Assembly's suggestions into real actions can be difficult, especially if there are different opinions • There's a risk that certain groups might dominate the discussion or that outside factors could influence the process.

Further information: 🔍

How to run a citizens' assembly – a handbook for local authorities is available to download here: The Innovation in Democracy Programme (IiDP) - GOV.UK

Case study: 📖

Bristol's Citizens' Assembly – How do we recover from COVID-19 and create a better future for all in Bristol? (Involve UK, Sortition Foundation and Bristol City Council - external)

(see online at: https://www.bristol.gov.uk/ask/find-consultation-engagement/consultation-engagement?id=16)