

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES

What is a Citizens' Assembly?

- A **Citizens' Assembly** is a representative group of people who come together to discuss an issue, or a selection of issues, and reach a conclusion about **what they think should happen**.
- The people who form an assembly are **chosen, at random like a jury, to reflect the wider population** – in terms of demographics (age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, social class) and sometimes relevant attitudes (political left or right).
- **Citizens' Assemblies** give members of the public the time and opportunity to **learn** about and **discuss** topics and deliberate amongst themselves before reaching **conclusions**. Assembly participants are asked to make trade-offs and arrive at **workable recommendations**.

How does it work?

Citizens' Assemblies often adopt a **three-step process** of **learning, deliberation** and **decision making**. This is supported by a team of impartial facilitators who guide participants through the process, ensuring that **everyone is heard**.

(1) Learning

In the first phase, participants **learn** about a topic through a combination of presentations from **experts** to cover the breadth of opinion on the issue being addressed. Participants can also be provided with **additional learning materials** before the Assembly starts.

There is also time given for **experts/advisors/professionals** to **answer all questions from participants**.

(2) Deliberation

In the second phase, participants are encouraged to **explore their own opinions** on what they have heard and **develop a wider understanding of the opinions of others**.

Experts will usually participate in this phase to provide **additional information** and **clarification** (but **not opinions**).

(3) Decision making

In the final phase, participants come to some **conclusions** on what they have learned throughout the assembly process. It is very important that citizens' assemblies do not create a false sense of **consensus**.

To ensure that **everyone's voice is heard**, individual voting can be used to include the **views of all participants**. This ensures that **minority voices are heard** and counted, **not just the majority**.

How is the process overseen?

Citizens' Assemblies are often overseen by some form of **independent** Advisory Group.

This advisory group supports the preparations for the Citizens' Assembly, including **topic selection**, **process design**, and the **materials** that will be used during the citizens' assembly meetings.

A key responsibility of the advisory group is to ensure that assembly participants are presented with **factual, accurate, comprehensive, balanced** and **unbiased information** to **inform their decisions**.

Have we seen examples of citizen assemblies working?

Citizens' Assemblies have been used in the UK, Australia, Canada and the United States to tackle a range of **complex, difficult and emotive issues**.

For example: A citizens' assembly in the Republic of Ireland addressed a number of important **legal and policy issues** facing Irish society. These included **equal marriage**, **abortion** and the **opportunities** and **challenges** of an **ageing population**.

They are also the go-to for making decisions related to the **climate**, for the reason that they've been seen as the most **sustainable** and **forward-thinking** models that create decisions **based upon fact**.

What are some advantages of **Citizens Assemblies**?

- Fairer
- Issues focused
- Includes all voices
- Real people making decisions
- More transparent
- Much harder to corrupt
- Focused on people not profit

Find out more from the **experts on Citizens' Assemblies**:

[Sortition Foundation](#)

[Involve](#)

[Get involved](#) in our campaign to give **Power to the People**.

[Meet Valerie](#) and find out more about **Burning Pink**.

[Contribute](#) to our campaign for **London run by Londoners**.