Ensuring Impact

A Guide to Effective Set-up and Follow-up of Citizen Participation

FIDE FEDERATION FOR INNOVATION IN DEMOCRACY EUROPE

BertelsmannStiftung

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Acknowledgement

These guidelines were developed through active discussion and participation within the Network for Citizen Participation and Deliberation in Europe.

The Network for Citizen Participation & Deliberation in Europe (initiated by Bertelsmann Stiftung and FIDE) brings together experts from diverse institutions working across different levels of governance. Its overarching goal is to strengthen and institutionalise participatory and deliberative democracy within Europe's representative system.

The initiative seeks to enhance both the reach and the quality of citizen participation and deliberation, embedding these practices more deeply into representative structures and processes at the local, regional, national, and EU levels. Ultimately, it strives to foster a European democracy in which citizens' voices are genuinely heard and political decisions are improved through inclusive dialogue.

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1 Executive Summary

Over recent decades, citizen participation, particularly public deliberation, has become increasingly important in democratic decision-making. A considerable amount of experience has already been captured in guidelines on how to organise and conduct such processes. However, clear guidance on how to initiate these processes effectively and maximise the value of the results they produce is still lacking.

Participatory processes are usually divided into different phases, each with its own challenges — from the initial idea and initiation of the process (set-up) to citizen interaction and recommendation development (engagement), and finally the dissemination and implementation of results (follow-up).

This document emphasises the critical importance of the set-up and follow-up phases in these processes, highlighting their role in ensuring reliable and impactful citizen engagement that influences policymaking. While most guidelines focus on the engagement phase, where participation and deliberation occur and different methods are implemented, this document fills the gap by providing detailed guidance on the earlier and later stages of the process.

The set-up phase involves preparing for participation, defining the purpose and mandate, selecting citizens, and ensuring alignment with policy cycles. A well-organised set-up phase is crucial for clarifying goals, ensuring inclusivity and determining how outcomes will inform decision-making. In this phase, sufficient resources, clear governance structures, and comprehensive planning are paramount for success.

The follow-up phase involves integrating the results of public participation into policymaking, ensuring that citizens' input is acknowledged, and ultimately acted upon. A lack of attention to follow-up activities can undermine the trust and effectiveness of the entire process, making it crucial to establish mechanisms for tracking results and maintaining accountability.

Genuine participatory processes begin when public input has the potential to influence decisions, for example through consultation. This aligns with the widely used five-step participation model of informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering. Activities that do not reach this level are generally classified as information sharing.

Topics considered by citizen participation or deliberation are mostly defined by policymakers. These processes are often planned or commissioned by public administrations.

While this guide is primarily intended to support regional-level authorities or higher, smaller authorities may adapt the guidelines according to their capabilities. Achieving positive outcomes requires reliable, high-quality processes — a standard these guidelines are designed to support.

Regardless of scale, public administrators responsible for the process should receive adequate training or seek expert advice to ensure effective engagement.

The document also addresses foundational norms and values, such as clarity, transparency, inclusiveness and accountability, which should underpin the quality of any participatory or deliberative process. These principles help to ensure consistency and build trust in the process.

These guidelines aim to improve the quality of citizen engagement by offering practical support for the set-up and follow-up phases and referencing the best existing practices for the engagement phase. When designed and executed well, participatory and deliberative processes have the potential to strengthen democratic governance by making it more inclusive, responsive and accountable. There are numerous examples of the effectiveness of such approaches, some of which are provided in the appendix to this document.

These Guidelines are a product of the "Network for Citizen Participation & Deliberation in Europe", founded by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and FIDE. It comprises experts and institutions focused on improving citizen participation in Europe. The aims: To strengthen as well as institutionalise citizen participation and deliberation in Europe. It works to improve the quality of citizen participation and deliberation. The focus is on embedding participation and deliberation in representative structures and processes on the local, regional, national, and EU level.

For more information see:

2 Introduction

Citizen participation (The word citizen is used throughout this document in a civic sense, including both those legally recognised as members of a state with associated rights and obligations as well as residents and inhabitants.) is an important part of creating a more inclusive and responsive democratic society. It enables citizens to influence public policy and fulfil the fundamental principles of democracy by providing them with a genuine role in political affairs (Hierlemann, Roch, Butcher, Emmanouilidis, Stratulat and de Groot 2022). Participatory budgeting and citizens' assemblies are two examples of forms of participation that empower citizens beyond electoral representation, enabling them to contribute directly to decision-making on various issues.

In this document, we refer to participatory processes in a broad sense, as well as to deliberative processes, which are usually understood to be structured formats, such as citizens' assemblies. Careful preparation is important for any participatory process, and its significance increases with the level of influence that the process is expected to have on public decision-making, which tends to be higher in deliberative formats.

Such processes have been implemented at local, national and European levels to enhance the quality, transparency and legitimacy of political decision-making. In many cases, citizens have been given a say in matters such as urban planning, public budgeting and far-reaching constitutional issues. One example is citizens' participation in the Irish Citizens' Assembly to inform abortion law reform. Deliberative formats have also been used in the European Commission's citizens' dialogues, the German Parliament's Nutrition in Transition Citizens' Assembly, and the French Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (Citizens' Convention for the Climate).

> Citizen participation is the process by which individuals or groups are actively involved in decision-making, policy development, or community activities that affect their lives. It broadly covers everything from surveys to town hall meetings, and voting.
>
> Public deliberation, in the context of citizen participation, refers to a structured process in which citizens engage in thoughtful and respectful discussions and reflection on issues. This involves taking different perspectives and evidence into consideration to make informed decisions or provide recommendations. Examples of this include citizens' assemblies.

Citizen participation processes are communicative processes that give ordinary people, who do not have the right to participate in democratic decisions by virtue of an office or mandate, the opportunity to influence the decision-making process by sharing their knowledge, preferences, assessments and recommendations, either directly or indirectly.

Ideally, the public can engage in accessible, open-ended discussions about important societal issues. As experts in their own living environments, citizens exchange their different points of view in an atmosphere of mutual respect, expressing their concerns

and discussing facts and opinions. The aim is to form well-informed opinions and identify areas of potential consensus, or at least a basis for compromise.

The Role of Participation and Deliberation in Political Decision-Making

Ideas about the extent of citizens' direct political influence — beyond elections and participation in representative democracy — are evolving.

Countless examples demonstrate that deliberative democracy and direct citizen participation in decision-making create added value for democracy. Deliberation can produce sensible and useful results, leading to better, more trusted political decisions. It can also overcome polarisation and bridge social divides. Extreme views have been shown to diminish in deliberative forms of discourse (Grönlund, Herne and Setälä 2015). By giving equal consideration to all views and seeking consensual solutions to contentious issues, deliberative methods can reduce social division (Jain and Roch 2025). The various forms of political participation reinforce one another. Given the current widespread disenchantment with politics and the rise of populism, innovative forms of citizen participation can help build trust and strengthen democracy (OECD 2024). Additionally, politicians can gain ideas and suggestions and broaden their understanding to improve their decision-making. This lively exchange can lead to greater acceptance of political decisions and democratic processes among citizens.

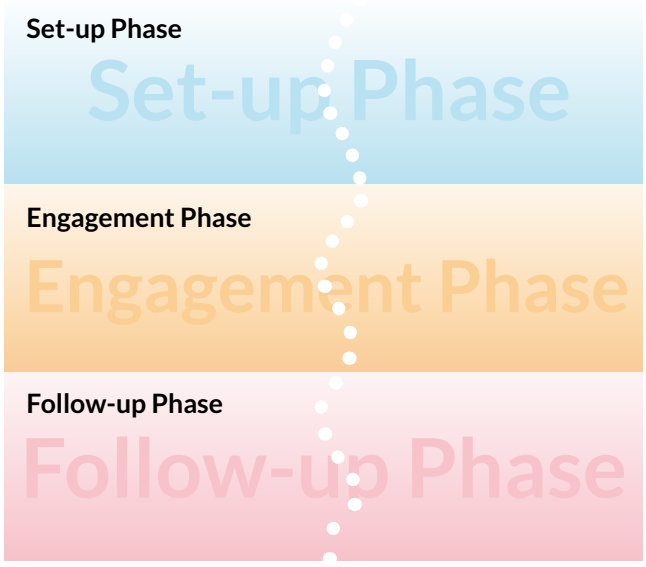
Why Guidelines for Participation and Deliberation?

As political decision-makers and public authorities increasingly turn to participatory and deliberative processes to address complex policy challenges, the need for high-quality processes has become more urgent. Well-designed processes ensure clarity, transparency and integrity, whereas poor design can lead to frustration, disillusionment and disengagement (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2014). This is detrimental to citizen participation as a whole. Citizens will no longer participate in new programmes if they are invited to contribute their views and ideas, but ultimately not listened to. However, meaningful citizen participation does come with expectations. Such processes are often costly, but the organisers justify the expense by claiming that the outcomes will be more trusted, representative and informed than typical community engagement methods, such as surveys and public hearings. Meeting these expectations, requires citizen participation to adhere to quality standards such as the OECD's Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making and the Council of Europe's Recommendation on Deliberative Democracy by the Committee of Ministers.

Why focus on the Set-up and Follow-up Phase?

While much attention has been given to the engagement phase of participation, more focus is needed on the set-up and follow-up phases as they are critical

Figure 1 | Overview Participation/Deliberation Process



Source: Own illustration

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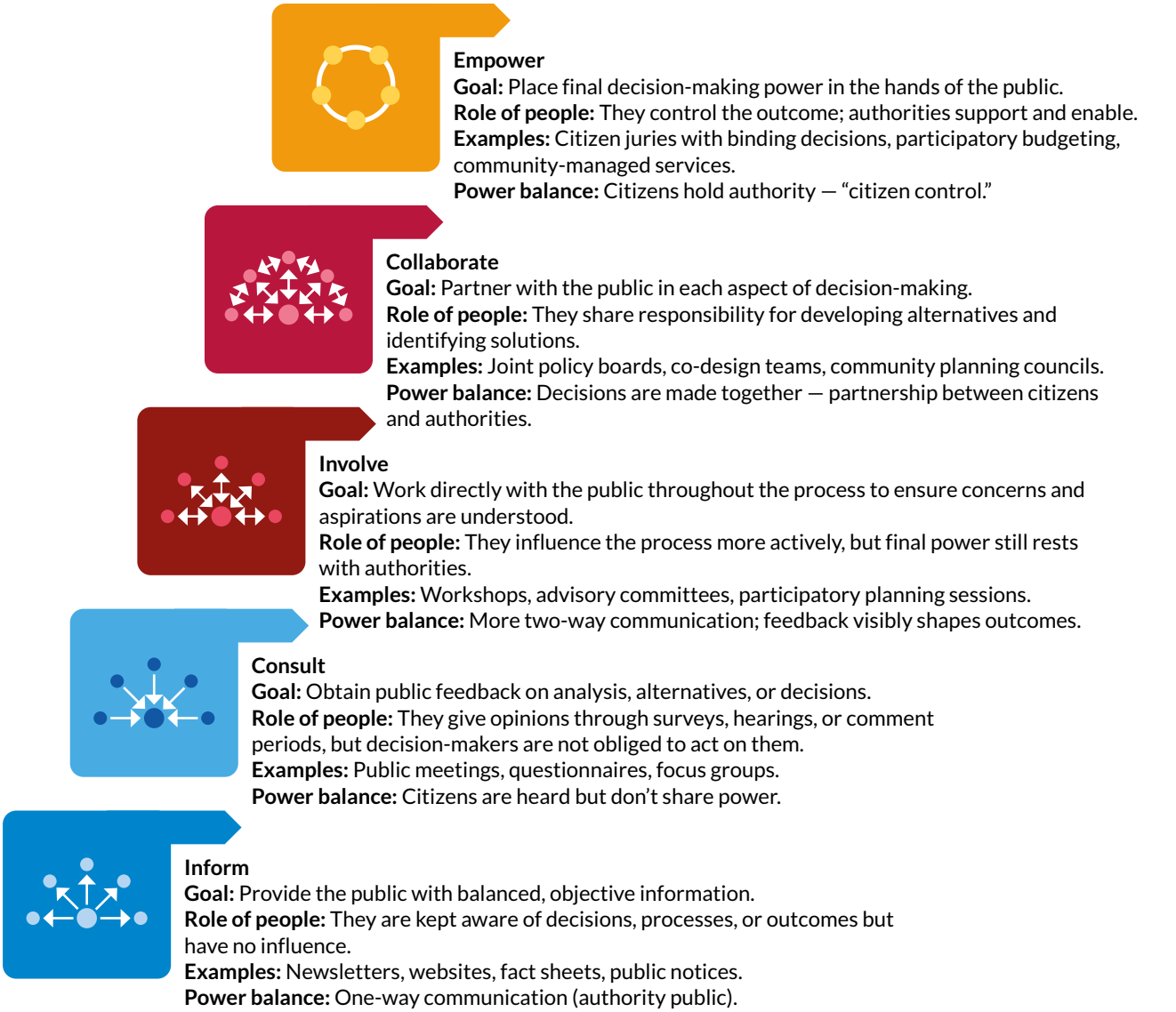
to the quality and, therefore, the success of participatory and deliberative processes.

The set-up phase involves defining the scope, method, and level of participant involvement, while the follow-up phase ensures that the outcomes are integrated into policy decisions. Both phases are critical for the success of participatory processes.

Who are the Guidelines for?

These guidelines focus on public administrators responsible for citizen participation processes at regional, national or higher levels of governance, but they can be effectively adapted for participatory and deliberative processes at various levels. While these guidelines encourage all those involved in organising participatory processes to strive for the highest possible quality and outcomes, certain recommen-

Figure 2 | The Ladder of Participation



Source: Own illustration

dations, such as those in the evaluation or governance sections, may be too demanding for smaller local authorities if applied without adaptation. Those working at the local level could design a checklist when preparing a process to assess what is feasible with the available resources. For instance, a large city might have the resources of a smaller region, whereas a small town would need to determine what is essential and what is not within its means. Such decisions should be made by assessing which components would most effectively contribute to the integrity of the process and public trust, recognising that this will vary by context. While these guidelines offer flexibility, it is highly recommended that a participation expert be consulted to ensure an informed and effective approach, regardless of the scale.

What kind of processes are the Guidelines intended to advise?

The guidelines aim to improve the quality of processes where citizens' input is intended to meaningfully influence public policy. In terms of the spectrum of public of participation, these are processes that are consultative or higher. As processes advance along this spectrum, it is increasingly important that they are robust and well-managed.

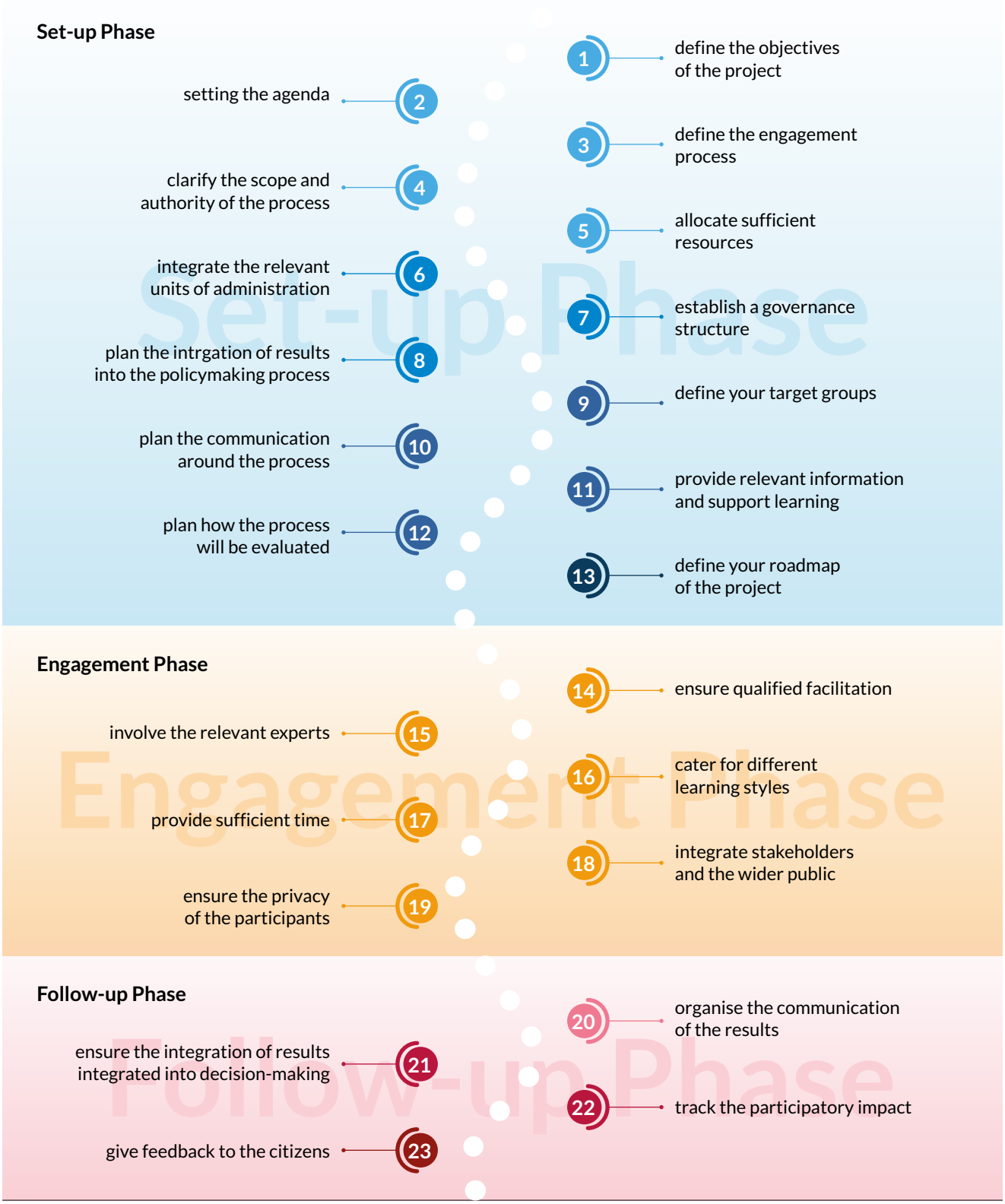
The Key Principles of the Guidelines

Generally, participatory and deliberative processes often differ in terms of participant numbers, selection methods, and processes, but both aim to empower citizens in public decision-making. Successful processes rely on clear norms and values that shape the organisers mindset and guide the process. The key values that should be incorporated for quality and accountability standards to be met include

- **Clarity:** Clearly define the purpose and connect it to decision-making.
- **Transparency:** Ensure participants understand their role and how their input is used.
- **Representativeness, Inclusiveness, and Accessibility:** Ensure the process is inclusive and accessible to diverse groups.
- **Openness:** Encourage dialogue and provide true potential for change.
- **Integrity and Fairness:** Protect the process from bias or political capture.
- **Commitment and Accountability:** Public authorities must commit to acting on citizens' input.

By adhering to these principles, participatory processes can enhance democracy by ensuring citizens' voices lead to meaningful policy changes. These can also be found in available participation guidelines and are addressed and developed some more in these guidelines.

Figure 3 | The Guidelines at a Glance



Legend: The numbered guidelines offer a step-by-step approach to participation projects. Since every project is different, the order of steps may vary. Colour highlights show which guidelines belong together and form a shared perspective.

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3 The Guidelines at a Glance

In this section, we briefly present our key guidelines for the set-up and follow-up phases. For the engagement phase, we mostly refer to existing guidelines, so this section is brief. Please note that the guidelines are not necessarily step-by-step instructions. They overlap in terms of timing and content to varying degrees depending on the circumstances of the participation project in question.

Set-up Phase

1 **What are the specific objectives of the citizen participation process?**
The first step is to define the purpose of the participation process. These processes exist within a broader policy context, and clear connections should be made between the purpose and role of the citizen participation process and the related goals of the authority. What is the public policy problem that is being addressed? What specific decisions are being made? What will the role of the citizen participation process in the wider decision-making process be? What impacts are intended to be achieved through the process? What types of output are required? Who intends on initiating the process and why? Why is the citizen role important?

2 **Who will set the agenda for the participation process and how?**
Selecting the appropriate topic or policy issue is crucial, and so the method to make that choice should be well thought through. Citizens should be given an issue where real choices can still be made that have relevance to them and stakeholders. Increasingly, the idea is that a balance needs to be struck between citizen and policy logic in deciding on a topic. If a topic raised by citizens is not within the relevant competencies or aligned with existing policy cycles, it may have limited impact. Note: this does not refer to determining the question itself, but rather the broader issue or problem.

3 **What type of engagement process is best suited to the needs?**
Different types of participation can have different goals and serve different purposes. Some tools are, for example, better at finding common ground between a representative sample of the population, while others are better at involving a very large number of citizens in setting the agenda. The requirements outlined above should be linked to the capabilities of different participation formats. To support making an informed decision on the most appropriate method, it is advisable to consult a participation expert.

4 **What is the scope and authority of the participation process?**
The mandate of the process should be clearly defined from the outset. What power will the process have over the authority, and what influence will its decisions have? Participatory and deliberative processes encompass a wide spectrum of decision-making, ranging from advisory to empowered or binding. Determine how much decision-making power to give citizens. It is also necessary to clarify what falls within or outside the scope of the process, considering jurisdictional, technical, legal, political, and financial

constraints — all of which should be clearly justified.

5 Are there sufficient resources to deliver the process effectively?
Sufficient resources, time, and budget must be invested, especially if a diverse and inclusive recruitment of the population is to be ensured, as well as an impactful follow-up and an independent evaluation.

6 How will the relevant units of administration be integrated into the participation process?
Public participation processes need to be effectively integrated into general political and administrative structures. This integration requires administrative investment, potentially involving training in participatory or deliberative skills, collaboratively designing processes, and under the consideration of necessary resources and communication channels among different departments.

7 What governance structure will be put in place to oversee the participation process?
In the set-up phase of the process, a governance structure should be established that clearly defines the distribution of tasks, rules, and responsibilities — including responsibility for providing background information and content, responding to participant questions, and obtaining expert input. Who is responsible for managing the overall process? While the commissioning authority can perform a good number of tasks during the process, there should also be some independent oversight at arm's length from that authority.

8 How do you intend on integrating the outcomes of the participation process into the policymaking process, and who is responsible for organising and overseeing the follow-up process?
From the outset, determine the expected objectives and desired outcomes of the process, and how these will be integrated into the policymaking process. The timing of the process should be aligned with the relevant policy cycle, and responsibilities and timelines for follow-up should be established and communicated before the process begins.

9 What target groups do you want to include, and how will you reach them?
Different processes aim to include different amounts and types of people. You should think about the needs of your context, process and what ultimately will build wider public trust in the process. Anticipate all the steps needed to reach the widest and most diverse audience for participatory processes, prioritising broad and diverse recruitment, and outreach strategies. For deliberative processes, the recruitment process is organised by a civic lottery. Furthermore, participation should be encouraged through remuneration, reimbursement of costs, and the provision or funding of childcare, eldercare, and other support services, as well as at least basic food and beverages. You should also think about ways of including people not directly involved in the process, such as stakeholders and the wider public.

10 How will you organise communication around the process to increase its perceived legitimacy?
All citizens should be able to understand and, in some way, observe the process, whether through public communications or by directly attending proceedings. The dedicated website of the public participation process can be used to publish updates on the process.

11 How will you provide information and support learning for participants reaching a considered judgement?
Some public participation processes provide citizens with transparent, diverse, and balanced information about the issue under discussion. For deliberative processes, it has proven useful to provide an information kit before the start of the process, give access to speakers throughout, and offer the opportunity to request specific speakers and information.

12 How will the process be evaluated to learn from the experience?
Conducting independent (external), accompanying evaluations is the most credible approach to evaluating a process. For smaller and shorter processes, the OECD recommends self-reports by members and organisers that can also enhance the learning experience.

13 What is your roadmap and how will the process be structured and organised?
After deciding on the key features above, you will need to complete its design — including a clear timetable, roles and responsibilities, resources needed, recruitment methods — and ensure that the design aligns with the issue's complexity and the goals of the process. It is good practice to publish the process document.

Engagement Phase

14 How can the process ensure skilled facilitation that supports constructive small-group work?
Skilled facilitation keeps small group work focused, inclusive, and productive. Clear objectives, basic rules, and participatory methods ensure that all voices are heard.

15 How can members be given the opportunity to hear from and question experts?
Experts enrich discussions by providing reliable knowledge and making complex issues accessible. They can give presentations, join panels, or answer questions, ideally selected with stakeholder involvement to build trust.

16 What strategies can be used to incorporate different learning styles and visualisation methods?
Different learning styles require varied methods like visuals, discussions, and hands-on activities. Offering materials in multiple formats ensures inclusivity and better understanding.

17 How can sufficient time be provided for participants to consider information and develop an informed judgement?
Providing sufficient time allows participants to reflect and form well-informed judgements. Organisers can stagger processes, share resources early, and include pauses or follow-up activities.

18 How will stakeholders and the wider public be involved during the process?
Involving stakeholders and the wider public brings diverse perspectives, builds trust, and increases legitimacy. This can be done through consultations, surveys, workshops, or transparent updates.

19 What measures will be implemented to protect participants' privacy?
Protecting privacy encourages participation and trust. Measures include clear policies, anonymisation, secure platforms, informed consent, and compliance with data laws.

Follow-up Phase

20 How will the communication of the process results to participants and the public be organised?
All citizens should be able to access the report on the process. The public participation process website can be used to report and track the results of participation, showing the processing stage and outlining the follow-up steps to be taken.

21 How will the results be integrated into decision-making to enable effective follow-up?
The authority should ensure that the citizens' report with the recommendations creates resonance and is discussed within the political sphere. Clear feedback and justification in writing should be given for each recommendation. A meeting should be held with interested citizens 6 to 12 months after the end of the process so that they can monitor the authority's actions. It

is possible to formally involve citizens in the follow-up phase through a follow-up committee.

22 How can participatory impact be tracked in the medium and long term?
Keeping track of the participatory footprint in the medium and long term is important to ensure that the follow-up of the process truly leads to an impact, as this is what most citizens define as a success factor for participatory processes.

23 What mechanisms will be used to provide feedback to participants?
Citizens expect feedback from the initiators on the use of their contributions.

Especially in terms of established, and sometimes long-term, political coordination processes within a multilevel governance system — for example, in departmental coordination — citizens expect consistent feedback. The planning of feedback to citizens for the phase of political negotiations is important so that positive results from the process do not fade.

4 The Good Practice Guidelines in Detail

These practical guidelines are intended to support the implementation of participatory and deliberative processes, and to improve their quality. Some of the guidelines contain text boxes that demonstrate how they can be implemented using specific examples.

The overall focus is on providing guidance for planning and organising the set-up and follow-up phases. For the engagement phase, we list existing guidelines.

Set-up Phase

The set-up phase refers to the initial stage where decisions are made regarding the parameters of the process, how it will interface with the administration, and what kind of supporting infrastructure is needed. This phase is crucial for ensuring that the process is well-designed, clear, and aligned with the goals of both the public authorities and the motivations and requirements of the citizens involved. Proper planning and structuring in the set-up phase lay the groundwork for a successful and impactful engagement process and follow-up.

1 What are the specific objectives of the citizen participation process?

Determine the required outcomes of the process to ensure it meets the needs of the citizens and policymakers.

Why: Clarifying the objectives ensures that the participation process is purposeful, aligns with the needs of both citizens and decision-makers, and effectively addresses the issue at hand. Without defining your goals and the purpose of the citizens' involvement, the results will not serve the goals, and the process will lead to disappointment on all sides.

How: This can be achieved by clearly defining the problem you want to solve with the help of citizens, the sort of advice or output sought, identifying stakeholders, and exploring the interests of citizens.

Firstly, you need to decide why the participation process is being initiated and what exactly is being sought. This could involve solving a specific problem by generating options and ideas, providing feedback on multiple viable solutions, or getting feedback on a draft policy. This also involves analysing the situation, topic and interests of the stakeholders and target audience, as well as considering which goals can be achieved through public participation. Why carry out a participatory process in the first place? Is the question directed to citizens framed in a genuinely open-ended way? If you already know the answer you are looking for, it is better to organise a well-thought-out information campaign. Why do you think citizens would be interested in participating in the process?

2 Who will set the agenda for the participation process and how?

Decide how the agenda will be set, considering citizen interest, policy logic, and political opportunity.

Why: Selecting the right topic ensures the process is relevant, engages citizens and fosters meaningful discussions that contribute to the effective design of policies and decision-making processes.

How: This can be done by choosing a complex, open-ended issue of public concern, collaborating with citizens in the initial stages of the policy cycle, and ensuring the scope is manageable.

One of the most important decisions in a participatory or deliberative process is the selection of the topic or policy issue to be addressed. It is advisable to choose a complex and challenging issue formulated as an open-ended yet focused question that matters to citizens, and which is hard to resolve for policymakers. This choice must be within the competences of the responsible authority and be appropriate in scope and complexity for the time available. The topic should resonate with the community, engage citizens, stakeholders, and experts alike, and offer lessons for policymaking. The discussion should focus on open-ended choices rather than simple yes or no answers.

When formulating the topic, it is important to find the right scope! It should be broad enough to encourage creative thinking, but not so much so that it overwhelms the participants or leads to impractical recommendations. Conversely, overly narrow or technical topics can limit discussion and systemic solutions. Remember that citizens are invited as experts in everyday life, not technical experts, and they have ideas and needs. Clear parameters, such as geographical, jurisdictional and financial boundaries, should be outlined from the outset.

Bottom-up agenda setting I

The public debate organised by the French National Commission for Public Debate (CNDP) on an infrastructure project called NEO in Saint-Denis on the island of Réunion (France) in 2020 has set up – for the first time in the history of the CNDP– a citizens' assembly prior to the actual public debate in order to define how the topic should be posed, which main themes and controversies should be addressed in priority and who are the most concerned audiences. The overall 60 citizens also decided on the channels of mobilisation and communication to be used for the debate. Letting the citizens co-construct the modalities of the debate was a way to enhance its legitimacy and acceptance, as the last public debate in 2018 in Réunion Island was highly politicised and risked being cancelled before the end. In addition, "debate ambassadors", i. e. former volunteer members of the citizens' assembly, promoted the debate in their immediate environment and informed their fellow citizens about the different ways in which they could participate in it. In this way, the co-construction process has also led to the debate being promoted by citizens and ultimately increasing its outreach.

Initial stages of defining the topic may involve collaborative efforts, such as convening mini-publics or engaging in co-design approaches. This ensures that the question to be addressed is formulated jointly and enhances trust in the process. Some processes empower citizens to set agendas, promoting inclusivity, legitimacy, and responsiveness to public concerns. Striking a balance between citizen interest and policy logic in setting topics is increasingly

Bottom-up agenda setting II

The Finnish "Kansalaisaloite" (Citizen's Initiative) is a legal mechanism that enables Finnish citizens to propose new laws or amendments. For an initiative to be debated in parliament, it must be signed by at least 50,000 citizens eligible to vote. It is then submitted to the Finnish Parliament. The Finnish Citizens' Initiative (CI) is a so-called "agenda" initiative, as it does not lead to a referendum. Agenda initiatives give citizens the opportunity to influence the parliamentary decision-making agenda by proposing new topics to legislation. The results also in terms of inclusion seem to be encouraging, as they suggest that the CI mobilises even some otherwise marginalised groups. This was most evident among younger citizens, who were significantly more likely to sign a CI than other forms of participation.

Bottom-up agenda setting III

The permanent citizens' council composed of 24 citizens selected by civic lottery in East Belgium (known as the "Ostbelgien Model"), has a strong agenda setting role. The citizens' council can initiate up to five ad hoc citizens' panels during the legislative term and decide which issues the panels should address. The citizens' council also decides on the number of participants and the duration of the citizens' panel. Proposals from citizens supported by at least 100 citizens, as well as proposals from parliamentary groups or the government, may also be submitted for consideration by the citizens' council.

recognised as essential for effective participation and deliberation. Transparency and harmonisation are crucial throughout this process to ensure fairness and credibility.

When writing the question or remit for the process, it is recommended that you focus specifically on addressing the problem at hand, using questions such as: How should we do this? and, how can we do that? Modifications to this approach include centring on specific value trade-offs or providing additional context in an introductory sentence. Remember that you will have additional time during the process to provide more context, and that participants will gain a thorough understanding of the issue. However, a confusing or overly wordy remit can be detrimental, so avoid going overboard (newDemocracy Foundation 2018a).

3 What type of engagement process is best suited to your needs?

Determine the appropriate type of process given your objectives and target groups.

Why: Diverse types of participation have different goals and serve different purposes. Some methods or tools are, for example, better at finding common ground between a representative sample of the population, while others are better at involving an exceptionally large number of citizens in setting the agenda.

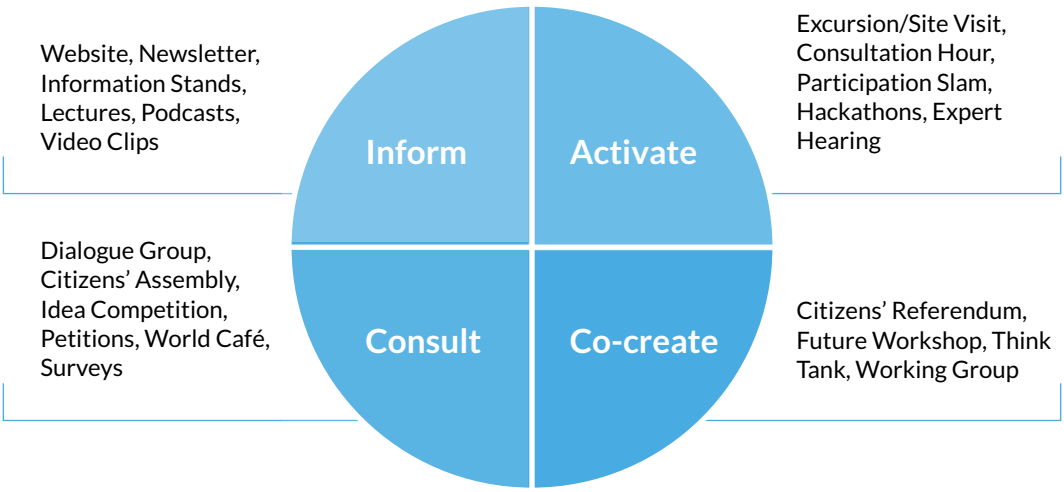
How: You should link the requirements outlined above to the capabilities of different processes. Make sure to be advised by an internal or external participation experts to make an informed decision about the most appropriate method.

You do not need to make every single decision in a citizens' assembly, and many decisions, on the other hand, are not suited to binary referenda. You should consider the requirements of your process holistically, including the type of decision, the shape of the output, the time you have to make the decision, the level of trust or polarisation around the issue or decision-maker, the complexity of the topic, and the scale of the decision.

Projects may combine a range of methods — for example, agenda-setting through public surveys, followed by online engagement to identify key concerns and perspectives on the chosen topic, and culminating in a citizens' assembly to address the difficult trade-offs involved.

Figure 4 | Designing Effective Participation Procedures

Selection of formats and methods for different procedural purposes and participation goals



Sources: Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research ISI; Institute for Future Energy and Material Flow Systems (IZES); Status: 12/2024

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4 What is the scope and authority of the participation process?

Define the mandate of the process to guarantee the effectiveness and accountability of participation processes and to ensure good expectation management.

Why: Defining the scope and authority ensures accountability, sets clear expectations, and enhances the effectiveness of the participation process. Without having defined the scope, you might get citizens' recommendations beyond your area of responsibility. Without having a clear mandate (the official authorisation and resources to execute specific tasks or actions) to perform the participation process, you will not be able to get the resources needed, involve other parts of the administration, and get political commitment for processing the results.

How: Ensure political commitment (democratic legitimacy of the process) in writing. This can be achieved by clearly outlining the mandate — specifying roles, responsibilities, and the decision-making power of the process to all involved — while avoiding overpromising and maintaining transparency throughout.

Ensuring the effectiveness and accountability of a participation process requires establishing a well-defined mandate during the initial design phase. Clearly outlining the political ownership of the process and how its result will be processed is crucial for accountability and successful execution. A clear mandate also avoids confusion on what the participation process can and cannot do and will therefore avoid confusion or even disillusionment afterwards. Overpromising on the mandate compared to what can or will be done with the output in practice is a common mistake that can be avoided.

The strength of the mandate can range from advisory to empowered (Arnstein's Ladder) or binding. While many citizen participation processes result only in consultative outcomes, providing recommendations to decision-makers, they can also lead to empowered decisions. In such cases, citizens can hold real decision-making power, for example through participatory budgeting. How much power is delegated depends on existing decision-makers, the design and purpose of each initiative, and the legal framework.

Authority of the process:

The Irish Constitutional Convention (2012–14) addressed, among other issues, same-sex marriage to break a political deadlock. The Convention recommended that the Irish Constitution be amended to allow same-sex marriage. The recommendation of the Convention was subsequently put to a referendum in May 2015 which gave the process the greatest possible legitimacy. The referendum was strongly supported by the Irish electorate, with a clear majority voting in favour of the constitutional amendment.

Later, the Irish Citizens' Assembly (2016–18), which addressed abortion rights among other issues, played a crucial role in holding a referendum on the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution. In response to the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly, the government decided to hold a national referendum in May 2018 to ask Irish voters whether they wanted to repeal the Eighth Amendment and allow the Irish Parliament to legislate on abortion. The referendum resulted in a historic vote to repeal the Eighth Amendment and marked a significant shift in Irish law and public policy on access and legalisation of abortion rights.

5 Are there sufficient resources to deliver the process effectively?

Ensure and allocate sufficient resources, time, and budget for the entire process.

Why: Sufficient resource allocation ensures the success, inclusivity, and sustainability of the participation process, addressing both immediate needs and long-term follow-up.

How: This can be achieved by budgeting for all necessary elements, including staff, external expertise, stipends for participants, digital tools, and future follow-up, while ensuring the resources align with the scope and objectives of the process.

Successful citizen participation requires sufficient resources to be invested. This relates to time, budget and the level of participation (and therefore capacity) of official staff. Sufficient resources must be allocated to ensure the population is recruited in a diverse and inclusive manner. Other elements that are often overlooked in the initial resource assessment include the costs of communication, effective follow-up, independent evaluation and public relations activities that convey the process and its outcomes effectively. The scope and design of the process must inform the allocation of resources.

Note: Resources must already be allocated and ready to spend by the unit that has the mandate to execute the process, even if the framework conditions have not yet been finalised. Depending on the budgetary terms, this step might be required a year or more ahead of the detailed planning of the process, depending on whether the project is part of the commissioning authority's existing project list or already considered in the budget.

In practice, estimating the necessary resources for a process before implementation can be challenging. Several variables can increase the cost of a process in terms of resources, such as its size, length and geographical scope (i.e., travel costs). In some cases, citizens receive a stipend or reimbursement for their participation, which can become an important budget item. Similarly, there may be a need to draw on external expertise (e.g. facilitation), which must be factored in. It is important to remember that, even after the final report has been issued, citizens may interact with the commissioning authority, which could incur costs.

When designing participatory and deliberative processes, it is important to allocate sufficient resources to digital activities and those that promote digital engagement. These resources may include the tools, platforms, staffing and budget required to facilitate meaningful participation in virtual or online settings. These processes are not necessarily cheaper.

How will the relevant units of administration be integrated into the participation process?

Involve and prepare relevant administration units to make sure citizen recommendations are implemented.

Why: Integrating the administration ensures that citizen recommendations are effectively implemented, preventing disconnects between participatory processes and administrative actions.

How: This can be achieved by involving relevant departments early, exploring their interest in the topic, in the results and their capacity to provide expertise and ultimately supporting the implementation of the results. Even if the link to their own work is not immediately apparent, it can be useful to include them in the governance structure and make them co-owners of the process, thereby ensuring their active involvement and commitment to follow-up.

One of the most important lessons learned by practitioners and scholars in recent years is the need for public participation processes to be effectively integrated into broader administrative structures. In the end, it will be one or more units of administration that will need to make sure citizen recommendations are considered and integrated into policy design and implementation. Without this integration, there is a risk that the outcomes of these processes remain a tedious task and the implementation of results a burden, leading to tensions between administrative and participatory logics that can undermine well-conceived projects. Ideally, the responsible department heads are invited as members of the oversight or governance committee so that they are part of the public participation process. Anchoring the deliberative and participatory processes firmly and early on within the administration is of fundamental importance for ensuring the implementation of citizens' suggestions. The administration's role in the follow-up process should therefore be determined at an early stage. Such support requires the administration to invest time and potentially acquire specific competencies through training, for instance, in deliberative skills. There are two common scenarios: First, an internal public engagement unit owns the engagement process, and the subject matter staff own the follow-up and engagement roles. Second, the subject matter staff are responsible for both the process and the follow-up and implementation. Before the process begins, officials should be involved in shaping it, helping to foster a sense of ownership. Designing is most often a collaborative effort, and the result of the relationships officials have with elected officials and consultants.

This preparation phase often includes bringing together several units or departments in a project group for the process. Citizens are not aware of functional divisions or organisational silos in the administration when they provide policy-input. In translating citizen recommendations into concrete policy actions, this project group can allocate and distribute tasks within the administration.

By anchoring processes within administrative structures and involving relevant units from the outset, administrations play a crucial role in ensuring the success and meaningful impact of participatory and deliberative initiatives.

7 What governance structure will be put in place to oversee the participation process?

Set up a governance structure to ensure independent oversight of the process.

Why: Establishing a clear governance structure ensures independent oversight, accountability, and legitimacy, particularly in controversial or highly impactful processes.

How: This can be done by creating a framework with defined roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority, including non-government actors and an independent oversight body to manage citizens' concerns and ensure transparency.

Local, regional or national government bodies often initiate and oversee participatory and deliberative processes. While the commissioning authority or the unit in charge can carry out a significant number of tasks during the process, independent oversight from that authority is also necessary. A governance structure is a framework comprising clear roles, responsibilities, rules, decision-making procedures and task allocation relating to organisational and content-related matters, which ensures effective and accountable governance throughout the process. Those responsible for making decisions about the process should be perceived as impartial and trustworthy by policymakers and the public alike. Depending on the context, including non-governmental actors alongside the commissioning authority may support this perception, though this is not guaranteed.

The more controversial a topic (e.g., when the population is polarised on the issue) or the more impactful it is (e.g., public works with effects lasting decades), the more important it becomes to have a clear governance structure to demonstrate the impartiality of the process and ensure the legitimacy of the outcome.

In deliberative and participatory processes, governance structures can vary significantly and must be adapted to the specific context. Generally, diverse groups are formed and tasked with commissioning, designing processes, communicating, making expert choices, coordinating, facilitating, monitoring and (sometimes) providing independent advice. It is crucial to form a multidisciplinary team with diverse expertise, including project management, facilitation and knowledge of the topic, to support the public authority effectively and enhance legitimacy.

Transparent governance of the process:

The Citizens' Assembly of Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina) has adopted a detailed rulebook in which all the rules and principles on which the assembly is based are publicly available. Because city politics in Mostar has been very polarised historically, a very transparent governance of the assembly was seen as indispensable to make sure citizens trusted the decisions about the assembly to be fair and not political.

Regardless of the specific organisational set-up, it is of utmost importance that all actors involved know who has the authority to make what decision in the process. There should be an actor independent of the commissioning authority to whom citizens can turn with procedural questions, requests for further information, or complaints.

Choosing experts in citizen participation processes is important and sensitive because the expertise provided can greatly influence the quality, credibility, and fairness of the process. Experts must be selected carefully to ensure they are impartial, knowledgeable, and able to present balanced, evidence-based information, without dominating the discussion or influencing participants' views unduly. Additionally, the selection of experts can affect public trust — if perceived as biased or lacking diversity, it can undermine the legitimacy of the entire process, and the decisions made. Therefore, transparency and inclusivity in the expert selection process are crucial for fostering trust and ensuring that all perspectives are fairly represented. Leading questions for selecting experts include:

1. Does the expert possess in-depth knowledge in the relevant field, and is she/he recognised and politically independent?
2. Does the group of experts cover all relevant subtopics?
3. Is there a balanced mix of different schools of thought and positions?
4. Is the group diverse in terms of personal attributes such as gender, age, and societal backgrounds?
5. Does the group include a balanced mix of academic experts as well as practical actors?
6. Are all experts capable of presenting complex topics to citizens in a clear and comprehensible way?
7. Can they explain evidence-based content and analyses in a way that is understandable and logical, even for those without an academic background?

These guidelines apply primarily to (inter)national and regional processes. In smaller local settings, forming separate groups for different tasks may not be feasible; however, a small, committed project team can still achieve a great deal. Even in such cases, clear guidelines and rules should be established for how the team collaborates and draws on internal and external expertise.

How do you intend to integrate the outcome of the participation process into the policymaking process, and who is responsible for organising and overseeing the follow-up process?

Define where the results will fit into the policymaking process.

Why: Clearly defining how results will be integrated into the policymaking process ensures transparency, sets realistic expectations, and strengthens the impact of citizen contributions on policy development.

How: This can be done by aligning the participation process with the policy cycle, planning integration from the outset, and ensuring clear communication about how outcomes will be considered by decision-makers and implemented by public authorities.

Defining how the outcome of a process will be integrated into the policymaking process is crucial for transparency and effectiveness. Careful consideration of expected objectives and desired outcomes is essential from the outset. This includes planning how the results will be incorporated into the policymaking process by authorities and establishing the scope and expectations for citizen participation. Aligning the timing of the process with the relevant policy cycle is imperative. If an issue has just been through a policy cycle (e.g., an important reform bill on the topic has just been voted and implementation is ongoing), there might not be a lot of openness to change that again. Be mindful of electoral cycles; will delivering recommendations to a different government be met with the same kind of commitment to act? Similarly, many participation processes are launched after most of the important decisions have already been made, leaving little room for anything beyond providing feedback on a project that is final and already being implemented. In these instances, it is important to manage expectations.

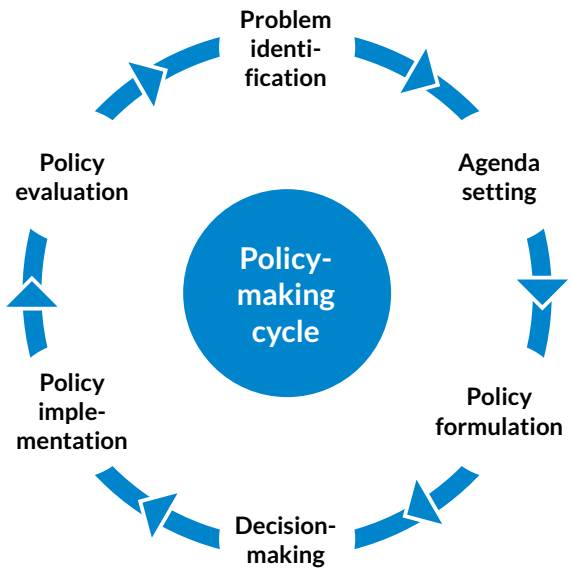
The outcome of the participatory and deliberative processes can be a part of any stage of the policymaking cycle; however, these processes primarily target the policy formulation stage (input dimension). If a policy has been decided with broad goals (e.g., climate targets) but leaves considerable scope for diverse ways of achieving them, a participation process can focus on that specific question.

Integration in decision-making:

Demoscan in Switzerland is a citizen project inspired by the Citizen's Initiative Review (CIR) procedure used in Oregon (USA). In the process a group of around 20 citizens chosen by lot spend four days analysing the topic of an upcoming referendum. They gather information, listen to arguments from both sides and deliberate among themselves. The group draws up a brief report containing important, verified information on the topic of the referendum. This report also contains the main arguments "for" and "against" the referendum question but does not give a voting recommendation. This report is then distributed to everyone entitled to vote, in addition to the official voting documents, to help other citizens decide on how they will vote in the referendum.

For participatory processes addressing open-ended policy areas, a broad and general mandate can set policy priorities or develop a long-term strategic vision, often resulting in agency reports or policy documents. Clear communication is paramount to managing expectations, ensuring citizens understand the nature of their contribution, and the presentation of the outcomes.

Figure 5 | Policymaking Cycle



Source: Own illustration | BertelsmannStiftung

Deliberative processes require meticulous planning for outcome integration. Designing the follow-up process before the Citizens' Assembly commences is a proactive measure. Responsibilities, structures, and timelines for follow-up should be defined by the commissioning authority. Establishing a dedicated team, comprising policy and process specialists within the administration, before the assembly starts, helps ensure effective coordination and support for the commissioning authority's response throughout the process. It is essential that the administration relevant to the topic supports participation and welcomes the results. They have to be involved early on in order to be able to integrate the recommendations into their work.

The outcomes that the participatory and deliberative process produce should be given careful and thoughtful consideration. The commissioning authorities should give clear justifications and arguments on how some results will be implemented or why others will not be considered. For that, authorities need to establish whether the process is purely consultative or how far they commit to integrating the results from the process. They should also commit to regularly communicating about the process and preliminary results in the political sphere.

Integration in decision-making: Approaches to handle outcomes should be considered from the beginning. Here two examples:

1. Written response by commissioning authority: The commissioning authority carefully reviews recommendations and issues a written response within a reasonable timeframe. The response indicates whether each recommendation is accepted, rejected, or modified. This approach ensures transparency and accountability in the decision-making process.

2. Predefined status for threshold recommendations: The commissioning authority may decide to pre-emptively declare that recommendations exceeding a specific threshold among assembly members will automatically receive a special handling. For instance, if a recommendation garners support from a significant majority of assembly members, it could be fast-tracked for implementation without further deliberation.

Accompanying the follow-up:

The permanent citizens' assembly on climate in Brussels has established a secretariat which follows up on the recommendations and meets with the relevant civil servants and cabinets to ensure progress and government support. The government provides an initial response within three months and a second response within twelve months.

A monitoring committee of 10 randomly selected members of the assembly (made up of 65 – 100 citizens) oversees government action for one year and meets with ministers (at least) twice. Besides the two moments, the citizens define their work and its intensity themselves. The permanence of the process allows members from one cycle to transmit knowledge to members of the next cycle. This may also allow for a longer-term follow-up on both policy development and scrutiny of government action.

9 Who do you want to include and how will you reach them?

Ensure inclusive and fair representation.

Why: Different processes aim to include different numbers and types of people. Consider the needs of your context and process, and what will ultimately build wider public trust in the process. Anticipate all the steps needed to reach the widest and most diverse audience for participatory processes, prioritising broad and diverse recruitment and outreach strategies. The choice of topic can influence the groups involved in the process, and these groups can, in turn, influence the choice of methods. Broad and diverse recruitment ensures fair representation, inclusivity and equitable participation, leading to a more legitimate and effective process.

How: Recruitment begins by addressing the following question: Who is affected, and whose input is needed? Where and how can I reach the people, I want to involve? This can be achieved by using a variety of communication methods, ensuring outreach through multiple channels, and utilising external expertise to ensure a representative and inclusive participant pool. Specific measures for hard-to-reach groups may help to increase diversity.

For a participation process to be considered fair and accessible, citizens first need to be informed about the participation opportunity. Prioritise broad and diverse recruitment by using a variety of communication methods and reaching out through numerous channels, including websites, emails, post, social media, phone calls, news outlets, municipal partnerships, and multilingual posters and brochures.

For deliberative processes based on random selection, public authorities should call on external expertise or an independent organisation that are experienced in democratic lotteries (Huesmann and Roch 2020).

Actively reaching out to specific target groups I:

The German organisation "Es geht LOS" uses a combination of targeted outreach and follow-up to encourage participation in their deliberative processes. To have 100 people participating, they first randomly select and invite around 120 people. Those who do not respond are personally invited at their doorstep and asked what they need to participate. By taking this step, they convince more people to join the assembly and gain insight into the reasons why people do not initially respond.

Most deliberative processes are recruited to reflect the wider public in terms of gender, age, socio-economic status and place of residence. Depending on the context, ethnicity or religion may also be considered. The size of the assembly and the topic to be deliberated on may also influence the selection criteria. For example, an assembly discussing a controversial issue such as abortion or climate change may need to emphasise that all perspectives are represented. In such cases, it could be worthwhile to consider participants' attitudes during the selection process, while bearing in mind the methodological challenges involved. If deemed necessary, oversampling or targeting groups affected by the topic under discussion may be an option. These decisions are typically motivated by the desire to improve public trust in the process.

Different outreach and engagement methods can be combined. Person-to-person outreach, while potentially time-consuming and costly, can increase participation, especially among those who are less likely to take part in this type of process.

Create an enabling environment:
For public participation to be successful, numerous social, linguistic, and physical barriers may need to be overcome to ensure that specific community groups are not only informed but also able to participate actively. Translation into different languages, British Sign Language interpretation, and introductory sessions can help reduce barriers to participation and facilitate entry into the process. To enable broad and inclusive participatory and deliberative processes, participation should also be encouraged through remuneration, reimbursement of costs, technical and logistical assistance, and the provision or funding of childcare, eldercare, and other support services. Any such measures should be communicated to participants before the process begins.

10 How will you organise communication around the process to increase its perceived legitimacy?

Prepare a communication plan for the process.

Why: Clear, transparent, appealing and easy-to understand communication builds trust and enhances the perceived legitimacy of the process.

How: Explain the project's objectives, provide regular updates, and involve diverse stakeholders to ensure transparency and responsiveness.

Actively reaching out to specific target groups II:

The Climate Assembly UK in 2020 broadly represented the population in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, education level, place of residence (considering both the rural/urban area and the region), level of concern regarding climate change.

This topic-related criterion was included to avoid critics claiming that the panel was biased towards citizens who were already very active on climate issues.

Increasing the perceived legitimacy of a citizen participation process requires clear, transparent, and consistent communication. When participants and the wider public understand the purpose, goals, and methods of the process, they are more likely to trust it and feel their involvement is meaningful.

Communication might include:

1. Process information and a follow-up phone call to encourage active participation from citizens during the pre-process and recruitment phase.
2. Information for experts, stakeholders, and the media regarding their contributions to the process, especially during the process itself.
3. Transparency, results, and follow-up actions, communicated before, during, and after the process.

In the case of a deliberative process, this kind of communication informs other citizens that a project is taking place in their community and shows them how they can contribute to the assembly. Additionally, attention should be given to building relationships with the media to encourage their engagement in reporting on the process. Increased participation has several benefits, one of which is that citizens know that people like themselves have been heard and are involved. This is only possible if they are aware of it. A key feature of any participatory or deliberative initiative is an accessible website that functions as a pivotal platform for disseminating information and encouraging engagement. It is crucial for transparency and legitimacy that all citizens can readily access all information about the process.

First, organisers should clearly explain the objectives and the importance of the project. This can be done through public statements, informational materials, and usually a website. Introductory meetings where purpose and expected outcomes are outlined are also important. For example, organisers could host town hall meetings to explain the process, provide updates on how citizen input is being used, and address concerns. This transparency, along with visible outcome that reflects public input, boosts the legitimacy of the process, and enhances public confidence.

By providing a solid rationale for the process, participants are more likely to understand why their input is valuable and how it will be used.

Providing regular updates throughout the process also helps to build trust and ensure transparency. These updates could include progress reports, summaries of key decisions and examples of how participants' feedback has influenced the project. For example, following a public consultation or survey, organisers could release a summary of the findings and explain how these will inform the next steps.

Additionally, involving a diverse range of stakeholders, including community leaders, experts, and organisations, can lend credibility to the process. When participants see that a broad spectrum of voices is being considered, they are more likely to trust that the process is fair and representative.

Furthermore, providing accessible channels for feedback and ensuring a responsive approach helps participants feel that their voices are being heard. Addressing concerns, answering questions and being open to dialogue reinforces the legitimacy of the process.

Communication about the process:

Different communication channels were used to prepare the citizens' dialogue on sustainable mobility in Filderstadt (Germany) in 2016: accessible, preparatory district walks in all neighbourhoods, postcard campaigns to all households with a good response rate, a household survey on mobility behaviour and a kick-off event with presentations and discussions with mobility experts. For the two strongly underrepresented groups in Filderstadt – young people and immigrants – the city also offered separate events with adapted formats.

11 How will you provide information and support learning for participants reaching a considered judgement?

Enable an informed and considered judgement on a public issue.

Why: Building basic knowledge of the topic at hand is a prerequisite for an informed discussion. Providing comprehensive and diverse information ensures participants can make informed, balanced judgements, enhancing the legitimacy and quality of the decision-making process. The preparation of materials before the process begins can ensure that participants are provided with the necessary materials for reference throughout the process, though careful consideration should be made to ensure that the group learns together. It is equally as important to document expert input throughout the process, so participants can revisit and reflect the evidence as discussion evolve.

How: This can be done by curating a variety of informational formats, including expert presentations, reports, testimonials, and field visits, and allowing participants to request additional information throughout the process. The information provided should be balanced — reflecting diverse perspectives rather than claiming objectivity — and easy to understand.

Effective information plays a crucial role in ensuring transparency and fostering informed decision-making among participants. In many cases, extensive knowledge about the topic cannot be assumed prior to a process involving citizens and must therefore be provided. Beyond merely handing out materials, it involves curating a diverse range of information sources and formats to cater to the varied needs and preferences of participants. This comprehensive approach includes reports, articles, expert presentations, but also testimonials, public feedback, skill-building sessions, and field visits.

Supporting participants:

The Deliberative committees of Brussels have focused on addressing the needs of four marginalised groups: young people, people experiencing poverty, persons with disabilities and people with children. Efforts are also being made to include people who do not speak the region's two main languages, French and Dutch, by formulating invitations in five additional languages. The "buddy system" allows participants to bring a designated person who can support them throughout the entire process by translating or providing assistance.

Moreover, it is essential to recognise the diverse types of information that various stakeholders, experts, and the public can bring to the table. While experts may provide specialised knowledge and technical insights, stakeholders offer valuable perspectives based on their experiences and interests. Meanwhile, members of the public contribute diverse viewpoints, pro and contra arguments, and their subjective experiences that enrich the process.

In the context of deliberative processes, where considered judgement is required, it has proven useful to provide an information kit at the start of the process to help members prepare for the range of topics. It is essential to ensure that all aspects of the debate are presented fairly and that a variety of sources are made available. In most cases, this kit is prepared by the administration responsible for the policy area of the assembly topic. It is also advisable to set up a reading committee and consider different ways of presenting information to specific audiences, such as video, audio, graphics and text. However, providing

too much information about the topic ahead of the process can be a hurdle for many people. It is therefore important to ensure that all the necessary information to understand the problem is provided at the meetings, as you cannot guarantee that all citizens will read the given information.

Citizens should also be able to request latest information, either in person from experts or through documents, during the process. This builds confidence in the process and ensures that they do not have the impression of being led to a particular conclusion through limited or biased information. In some participatory initiatives, there are examples of platforms created to allow the public to propose experts or submit evidence, further broadening the scope of perspectives considered.

The difficulty with including public submissions or an online consultation in a participatory or deliberative process is the potential for bias. Such submissions may be from individuals who are highly engaged with the topic or influenced by advocacy campaigns. Effectively managing these submissions requires robust procedures to uphold the integrity and inclusivity of participatory and deliberative processes. This can be achieved through a knowledge management committee with a clear set of rules.

Easy to understand information:

In Hamburg (Germany), some urban and landscape planning departments that come into contact with citizens have started to teach their employees the fundamentals of successful expert - lay citizens' communication in a seminar. They learn how to express themselves clearly, avoid abbreviations and explain difficult issues.

12 How will the process be evaluated to learn from the experience?

Evaluate the process and learn from experience.

Why: Evaluation ensures legitimacy, accountability, and continuous improvement. Evaluation is important for transparency and making the first dimension of impact (happiness with the process) public.

How: Conduct process and outcome evaluations using surveys, interviews, and independent assessments during and after the process.

Conducting evaluations has two functions. First, it increases the legitimacy of the public and stakeholders in the outcomes of participatory or deliberative process. An external evaluation that shows that the process was well conducted and balanced can be a strong antidote to criticism on the outcomes. A second important function is that it allows for process-learning. Especially when new methods are used (such as deliberation), the first processes might still include a lot of learning opportunities to refine its further use, and an evaluation will highlight the most important lessons learned.

Evaluation and learning:

An independent High Level Advisory Group (HLAG) observed the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) in 2021 and presented an evaluation report. It is composed by an international consortium comprising the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the European Policy Centre, the King Baudouin Foundation and Stiftung Mercator. The group critically analysed deliberations at the conference and the way in which citizens' recommendations are followed up by the EU. The findings were made public in online-seminars open to everyone.

Follow-up surveys and interviews with participants provide valuable insights into how they perceive the long-term impact of their involvement. These tools can help determine if citizens feel their input has influenced decisions, if outcomes align with their expectations, and if they remain engaged in the process. Additionally, it is important to gather feedback on whether the decisions made through the process have resulted in real changes in the community or in the policy.

Following the OECD's Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes (2021) which can be applied to both participatory and deliberative processes, these evaluations should encompass both process and outcome assessments, providing evidence of process quality and ensuring accountability and transparency. Process evaluation involves assessing the integrity of participatory or deliberative processes, considering aspects such as transparency, inclusivity and procedural fairness. It involves examining how well the process was designed and implemented, whether diverse perspectives were adequately represented, and whether participants felt empowered to contribute meaningfully. Outcome evaluation, on the other hand, assesses impact and effectiveness of the process, including the extent to which participants' input influenced decision-making, the quality of the resulting decisions, and the overall societal impact the process has. Evaluation methods should be considered throughout the process. These methods should be diverse, utilising a combination of surveys, interviews, observations, document analysis and other data collection methods, to gather reliable and valid information. Furthermore, evaluations should be conducted by independent parties wherever possible to ensure credibility and impartiality. The results should be made publicly available and communicated to stakeholders to foster transparency and accountability.

What is your roadmap? How will the process be structured and organised?

Define the design of the process to determine the boundaries of the process.

Why: Structuring and clearly designing the process by choosing the methods, defining aims, tasks and output for each step ensures clarity, transparency, and effective citizen engagement. It is essential for realistic time planning.

How: This can be done by carefully defining the scope of the process, the objectives, roles, and resources. Each of these steps often requires more time than anticipated.

The design is the intentional and thoughtful planning and structuring of a participatory and deliberative process. This phase involves making key decisions about fundamental aspects of the process, including the scope, objectives, methods, and overall structure. Process design means that you describe the aims and tasks for each step, the output, the time/resources needed (and the people responsible). Once all these questions have been answered, you are ready to commission the process or begin its design.

The scope determines the boundaries of the process, specifying which aspects of the issue at hand will be considered and what will be excluded. This will, for example, include refining the exact way the topic is proposed to the citizens after the agenda setting. The scope must be realistically achievable based on the available resources, including time, human and financial resources, and the practical workload for participating citizens.

Simultaneously, task definition becomes integral in this design phase, providing clarity for both participants and the executing and/ or commissioning authority. It should be clear who will have what role. In an extensive process, such as a citizens' assembly, this will involve setting up a whole governance structure.

The design, encompassing purpose, scope, and tasks, should be in proportion with the complexity and significance of the addressed issue and the overarching purpose of the process. If a minimal design is used for a principal issue, then this can lead to frustration or even questions about the honesty of the commissioning government. Transparency and openness in both the design and mandate are crucial, making the goals and procedures clear and accessible to all stakeholders. Integrating both the design and task definition ensures a comprehensive framework for participatory and deliberative processes, promoting effectiveness, clarity, and meaningful citizen engagement.

Engagement Phase

As to the engagement phase, the following briefly lists the guidelines for the in-between phase. This phase involves the actual conduct of the citizen participation process, including informed discussions among citizens, seeking compromise or consensus, and formulating the results. In most cases, recommendations for political decision-makers are formulated here.

These engagement guidelines are mainly derived from the guidelines of the OECD (2020), the recommendations of the Council of Europe (2023), the newDemocracy Foundation's UNDEF Handbook Enabling National Initiatives to Take Democracy Beyond Elections (2018b), MosaicLab's Facilitating Deliberation: A Practical Guide (2023) and the handbook on citizens' assemblies published by the Innovation in Democracy Programme (2020). A detailed description of the guidelines can be found in the sources mentioned and shall not be restated here.

14 How can skilled facilitation be ensured for constructive small group work?

Enable constructive and effective discussions in small group work.

Why: Skilled facilitation ensures focused, inclusive, and productive discussions.

How: Use clear objectives, basic rules, and methods, like round-robin, to ensure equal participation.

Skilled facilitation is essential for keeping small group discussions focused, productive, and constructive. A skilled facilitator creates a safe and inclusive environment in which all participants feel comfortable sharing their ideas. They encourage active listening and ensure that all voices are heard. They must set clear objectives, establish basic rules for respectful communication and guide the group through structured activities or discussions. This involves keeping the conversation on track while being flexible enough to respond to issues that arise.

For example, a facilitator may divide participants into smaller groups to discuss potential solutions to a local issue, such as improving public transport. Methods such as round-robin or brainstorming can be used to ensure that everyone contributes. Monitoring group dynamics helps prevent one person from dominating the conversation, allowing the facilitator to intervene and clarify points, summarise discussions and guide the group towards consensus. Skilled facilitation ensures that the group stays focused on the task at hand, while also considering diverse perspectives in a way that fosters collaboration and creativity.

How can members be given the opportunity to hear from and question experts?

Involve experts to enrich the discussions of the citizens.

Why: Experts ensure informed and trustworthy discussions.

How: Experts can give presentations, join panels, or answer questions.

Involving experts in citizen participation projects is crucial for ensuring that decisions are informed and evidence-based. Experts provide specialised knowledge that helps to clarify complex issues and make them accessible to citizens from a range of backgrounds. Their involvement ensures discussions are based on accurate, up-to-date information, helping to prevent misunderstandings and misconceptions. They can also bridge knowledge gaps, facilitate meaningful dialogue and ensure that proposed solutions are feasible and practical. Their involvement also fosters accountability and builds trust in the process, as citizens can be confident that decisions are based on reliable evidence. Overall, experts enhance the quality of deliberations, guiding citizens towards more effective and sustainable outcomes, while ensuring that the process remains transparent and inclusive.

There are various methods of involving experts in citizen participation, such as inviting them to give presentations or briefings to clarify complex issues. They can also sit on advisory panels to inform decision-making processes, deliver training in the form of workshops and facilitate discussions to ensure informed conversations. They can participate directly in small group sessions or provide citizens with ongoing access to ask questions. These approaches ensure that expert knowledge enhances deliberations while keeping citizens actively engaged in the process.

However, the question remains: Who selects the experts, and how? Best practice involves stakeholders and participants in the nomination process because their involvement helps to broaden the range of views and build trust in the fairness of the information included.

16 What strategies can be used to incorporate different learning styles and visualisation methods?

Provide the right methods for the discussion.

Why: It ensures all participants can engage and understand the material well.

How: Use diverse methods like visuals, discussions, and hands-on activities.

It is important to incorporate different learning styles and visualisation methods because this ensures that all participants can engage with and understand the material in a way that matches their strengths. People learn in different ways: some are visual learners, some are auditory, and others prefer hands-on, experiential learning. Catering to these differences increases the chances of effective learning and retention for everyone.

Using diverse methods also makes learning more inclusive, ensuring that no one is left behind regardless of their preferred learning style. It encourages greater participation, fosters a deeper understanding of the content and helps to accommodate a wide range of learners in both formal and informal settings. This approach leads to more effective communication and knowledge sharing.

Several strategies and visualisation methods can be employed to incorporate different learning styles. Firstly, incorporate a variety of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning activities. For example, visual learners can benefit from infographics, videos, or diagrams, while auditory learners can engage with discussions or podcasts. Hands-on activities or interactive tasks can benefit kinaesthetic learners.

Additionally, offer multiple forms of visualisation, such as mind maps, charts, and interactive simulations, to appeal to different preferences. Encourage collaborative learning through group activities where diverse learning styles complement one another. Providing materials in various formats (written, visual and audio) ensures that all participants can engage in the way that suits them best, thereby enhancing their understanding and retention.

17 How can sufficient time be provided for participants to consider information and develop an informed judgement?

Provide the citizens with sufficient time to discuss the topic and come to conclusions.

Why: Sufficient time allows participants to reflect, engage deeply with information, and make well-informed, considered decisions.

How: Organisers can stagger the process, provide clear and accessible resources, offer reflection periods, and support participants with expert access and follow-up activities.

Providing sufficient time for participants to consider information and make an informed decision is crucial. When participants have sufficient time, they can reflect on complex issues, engage with the information more deeply, and ask questions that lead to more informed contributions and decisions.

To achieve this, organisers can break the project down into stages and stagger the process. Rather than rushing through discussions, they can first provide basic information and then allow participants time to reflect individually or conduct research before coming together for discussions. This approach gives participants the chance to digest the information thoroughly before forming opinions.

Providing accessible resources is also important. Information should be distributed early and in clear, comprehensive formats such as written materials, videos and infographics, to allow participants to absorb the material at their own pace. Additionally, organisers can facilitate reflection time by incorporating pauses in meetings or workshops where participants can consider what they have learnt before moving on to the next topic or phase. For instance, after a presentation on a policy issue, time should be allocated for participants to ask questions or engage in small-group discussions.

Offering support is another key strategy. Providing opportunities for participants to engage with experts or facilitators for clarification or further information ensures they can deepen their understanding. This can be achieved through office hours, Q&A sessions or online resources, which allow participants to delve deeper into the subject matter. Lastly, follow-up activities such as sessions or feedback loops allow participants to refine their thoughts and judgements based on ongoing discussions or the latest information.

Providing time for community members to review budget proposals and ask experts questions, followed by a period for deliberation and feedback, for example, ensures that participants make well-informed decisions. This approach helps to build trust in the process, leading to decisions that reflect a more comprehensive understanding of the issues.

18 How can stakeholders and the wider public be involved during the process?

Integrate stakeholders and the wider public in the process to ensure diverse input for the citizens.

Why: Involving stakeholders and the wider public ensures diverse perspectives, builds trust, and increases the legitimacy of decisions.

How: Engage stakeholders through public consultations, workshops, surveys, advisory groups, and maintain transparent communication with regular updates throughout the process.

Involving stakeholders and the wider public in the citizen participation process is essential for achieving inclusive, transparent and effective outcomes. Engaging these groups ensures that diverse perspectives are heard, builds trust, and increases the legitimacy of decisions.

To achieve this, organisers can invite stakeholders to participate at various stages, such as providing input during the planning phase or offering feedback on proposals as they develop. This could involve holding public consultations, town hall meetings or workshops, where stakeholders and the public can share their concerns, ideas and expectations. Additionally, surveys, online platforms, and social media can be used to provide broader access and allow the wider public to participate, even if they cannot attend in-person events.

Involving stakeholders directly in decision-making processes, such as advisory groups or steering committees, ensures their concerns are integrated into the planning and engagement phases. This helps make the process more representative and grounded in the community's actual needs. Organisers can also encourage collaboration between diverse groups, creating spaces for dialogue that foster partnerships and collective problem-solving.

Furthermore, regular updates and transparent communication are essential for keeping stakeholders and the public informed and engaged throughout the process. Sharing progress reports and hosting feedback sessions, for example, ensures that people understand how their input is being used and how the project is evolving. This ongoing engagement helps to maintain public trust and encourage continued participation.

Stakeholders such as local businesses, residents and experts might, for instance, participate in workshops to co-design solutions, while the wider public could provide feedback via an online survey. This level of inclusion helps to ensure that decisions reflect the needs and interests of both key stakeholders and the wider public.

19 What measures will be taken to ensure that the privacy of participants is protected?

Ensure the privacy of the involved citizens.

Why: Protecting privacy builds trust and encourages open and honest participation, while ensuring compliance with legal and ethical standards.

How: Implement clear privacy policies, anonymise data, use secure platforms, obtain informed consent and comply with data protection regulations.

Protecting the privacy of participants is critical in citizen participation projects as it builds trust and encourages open and honest engagement. Protecting participants' privacy ensures that they feel safe expressing their opinions without fear of personal consequences and that legal and ethical standards are met.

To protect privacy, organisers can implement several measures. First, they should clearly communicate the privacy policy to participants, explaining how their data will be used, stored and protected. This transparency helps participants understand the extent of their privacy rights and the precautions in place.

Next, organisers can anonymise or pseudonymise data where possible. For instance, survey responses or contributions to public forums can be collected without personal identifiers to ensure anonymity. If personal information is necessary, it should be kept to a minimum, stored securely, and accessible only to authorised personnel.

Additionally, it is important to use secure platforms for digital participation. Whether it is an online survey, forum or virtual meeting, using a platform with robust encryption and security protocols prevents unauthorised access to participant data.

Another effective measure is to obtain informed consent from participants, ensuring they understand what data will be collected and how it will be used. This can be achieved by providing a consent form at the start of the participation process.

Finally, if sensitive data is being collected, or if there are specific legal requirements (as in health or legal contexts), organisers must ensure compliance with data protection regulations such as the EU's GDPR, or similar legislation in other regions.

For instance, participant's names and personal details could be anonymised before being included in reports, ensuring their views are represented while maintaining confidentiality. If online tools are used, the platform should be encrypted and access to participant data restricted to authorised staff only. Taking these steps helps to protect participant privacy while ensuring a secure and trusted environment for citizen engagement.

Follow-up Phase

The follow-up of participatory and deliberative processes is crucial for ensuring that the outcomes of citizen engagement are well recognised and translated into tangible actions and meaningful change. It involves a systematic review of the recommendations and decisions generated during the process, as well as the integration into the democratic decision-making process, implementation, and evaluation. To ensure genuine follow-up, it is crucial to give the administration an explicit role and mandate. Follow-up mechanisms serve to uphold accountability, transparency, and trust in democratic processes by demonstrating responsiveness to citizen input and commitments made during deliberations. This may include regular reporting on the progress of discussions in the political space, ways of implementation, engaging stakeholders, participating citizens, and experts in ongoing dialogue, and revisiting the process to address emerging issues or concerns.

The follow-up deals with the effects and impact of the process. The first impact dimension relates to the participants and stakeholders and their satisfaction with the fairness and transparency of the process and with the results. The second relates to the resonance that the results generate in society, the public debate, and in the political arena. The third refers to the actual influence on political decision-making and solutions. The aim is to improve these through the contribution of citizens. Participatory processes can lead to tangible impact such as policy changes, improved services, and better resource allocation. They also build trust in institutions, empower citizens, and foster social cohesion.

The follow-up phase is often initiated by a special event at which the citizens' recommendations are handed over to the commissioning authority in the presence of relevant stakeholders, the media, and interested members of the public. It is important that the commissioning authority is present to accept the citizens' report, listen to it and discuss it with the participants, and provide initial feedback. This event marks a milestone for the citizens, as it is the point at which they present their agreed recommendations. While the participation process ends here, the discussion process on the recommendations in the political arena begins.

How will the communication of the process results to participants and the public be organised?

Communicate about the results to provide the wider public with clear information regarding the process.

Why: Clear communication of the results (e.g., the citizens' recommendations) ensures transparency, builds trust, and demonstrates the openness to listen, and the willingness to consider and discuss the results, fostering greater public engagement.

How: The final recommendation report is prepared, reviewed by the participants, and then made public. The results are then made readily available through various formats, such as summaries and mobile-friendly websites, actively encouraging public dialogue and media involvement.

While communication has already been addressed in general terms under project design, it becomes even more important at the end of the active participation phase — when citizen input or recommendations are handed over to the authorities. The results should be made publicly available in accessible formats, such as short summaries, mobile-friendly web pages, and social media posts. It is also important to raise awareness among policymakers and the public about the outcomes of the process and to clearly communicate the planned follow-up steps.

Encouraging active communication from citizens about the process and the results further enriches its scope and ensures diverse perspectives are considered. By fostering open dialogue and engagement, participatory initiatives can extend their reach and effectively harness the collective wisdom of the community, ultimately enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of decision-making processes.

21 How will an impactful follow-up be ensured after the participation process? How will the results be integrated into decision-making to enable effective follow-up?

Engage with decision-makers early to enable an impactful follow-up.

Why: With the publication and presentation of the citizens' recommendations, the internal process intensifies. Ensuring impactful follow-up is essential for turning citizen input into meaningful actions, maintaining accountability, and reinforcing trust in the democratic process.

How: This can be done by engaging decision-makers early, establishing clear follow-up mechanisms, providing regular updates, and ensuring continued dialogue to keep citizen recommendations central to policy implementation. The most important success factor is to define a person or unit responsible for the process and for communicating the interim status to the participants.

Depending on the kind of participation method being used, the follow-up phase varies in its form, depth, and scope. Alternatively, in online engagement platforms or surveys, follow-up could entail sending out periodic updates to participants on how their input has influenced decision-making or policy development. In participatory budgeting for instance, the decision on which projects or budget measures to adopt completes the process. Regardless of the method used, the effectiveness of the follow-up phase ultimately hinges on its ability to sustain momentum and ensure that the voices and concerns expressed during the participatory process remain central to decision-making and implementation processes. It is recommended to invite participants to public parliamentary debates or committee meetings to present the results and explain them in their own words. However, this needs to be considered earlier in the process, as you need to know what participants are willing to be nominated.

Ensuring impactful follow-up

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) in 2021, a joint undertaken by the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council, has enabled to bridge a gap between citizens and institutions at European level.

A common secretariat composed by high level civil servants and Members of the European Parliament, representing the three institutions equally, assisted the work of the executive board. The Common Secretariat supported the organisation and proceedings of the plenary session of the Conference and the European Citizens' Panels. It contributed to the coordination of the three administrative branches and made it possible to build a bridge between citizens, political institutions, and elected representatives as well as their respective administrations at the European level.

For deliberative processes, the follow-up phase happens after citizens' recommendations have been formulated and handed over and, ideally, discussed with the commissioning authority. This phase requires careful planning and design, as political and/or administrative structures must be used or established (ideally from the very beginning of the process) to ensure effective consideration of citizens' input in decision-making processes. Unfortunately, in many processes the mandate ends here. This is because no one anticipates the importance of careful follow-up. However, it is possible to take a different approach. This creates a disconnect between those responsible for organising the assembly and the policymakers who are supposed to respond to the recommendations. The ad-

ministration, as part of the organising team, needs the mandate to manage the follow-up. The organisation commissioned to run the process should also be tasked in its contract with supporting communication and feedback activities after the handover, even if resources are limited or the work spans election cycles.

During the process, it may emerge that the policy priorities and recommendations formulated by citizens concern not only the commissioning authority, but also other policy areas or levels (e.g., European, national, regional or local). In this case, it will be important to re-evaluate the stakeholders and the most important political actors and interlocutors and adjust the follow-up process accordingly.

Figure 6 | Increasing impact on the decision | Climate Assembly Impacts

		Type of impact		
Area of impact		**Instrumental Impacts** **New ways of acting on climate change**	**Capacity Impacts** **New expertise and/ or reprioritisation of resources for acting on climate change**	**Capacity Impacts** **New ways of understanding climate change and climate action.**
	State actors **Impacts on national and regional government decision-making.** Key actors: policymakers, politicians, parliamentarians, civil servants.	Changes to climate policy, strategy, legislation, laws, regulation and official guidance.	Changes in expertise and resources for climate action, including connecting climate deliberation and public engagement to policymaking.	Changes to understanding of climate action by state actors, including role of public engagement and perspectives.
	Non-state actors and civil society **Impacts on wider society and public discourse.** Key actors: members of the public, media, businesses, third sector, advisory bodies, assembly members.	Changes to behaviour or climate action by wider publics; changes to media policy, practices or coverage; changes to business or organisational policies and practices; changes in behaviour of assembly members.	Changes in expertise and resources for engaging in climate action by non-state actors, such as civil society initiatives to establish greater public contribution to climate action.	Changes to understanding of climate action by civil society, media and business organisations, including enhanced recognition of the importance of climate in their practices, and the role of public engagement and perspectives. This category also includes changes in understanding of climate action among assembly members, organisers and the wider public.
	System and structure **Impacts on underlying features of practices (including decision-making) that alter the goals or mandates that guide climate action.**	Changes to the underlying mechanisms with which society addresses climate change, accounting for the systemic nature of the climate crisis (e.g., new tax systems, economic goals, shifts in responsibilities).	Changes in organising principles or in expertise and resources available to tackle the systemic nature of the climate crisis.	Changes to understanding of the climate crisis and climate action as a systemic issue (e.g., interconnected with other societal challenges). Fundamental shifts in shared understandings and norms governing climate action.

Source: https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/65b77644e6021e9021de8916/675ff37b91b3f53c964415ad_Updated_IEF_Dec_2024.pdf

22 How can the participatory impact be monitored in the medium and long term?

Keep track of the participatory footprint in the medium and long term.

Why: Tracking the participatory footprint and impact over time ensures that citizen engagement leads to tangible, lasting changes, fostering trust and ongoing involvement in future processes.

How: This can be done by establishing specific impact indicators, conducting follow-up surveys, maintaining ongoing communication with participants, and documenting the integration of citizen input into policy outcomes.

Tracking the participatory footprint in the medium and long term is essential in ensuring that the outcome of the process leads to meaningful impact, which is often defined by citizens as a key measure of success. The impact of a participatory process can be assessed across three key dimensions: trust and satisfaction, the participatory footprint, and actual policy influence.

The first dimension, trust, and satisfaction, reflects the degree to which citizens feel their engagement has been valued and is meaningful. This is often achieved through transparent communication and responsive feedback mechanisms. Ensuring participants feel heard and seeing the process deliver on its promises is a significant factor in building trust and satisfaction with the process, and with democracy in general.

The second dimension, the participatory footprint, refers to the visibility and dissemination of the results within relevant decision-making bodies, stakeholders, the media, and the public. While it can be difficult to track the overall influence of the process, it is useful to define realistic activities that can be monitored. For example, tracking where and how outcomes are discussed among key decision-makers, reported in the media, or incorporated into public discourse can provide tangible evidence of the reach and relevance the participatory process has had.

The third dimension, influence on policymaking, is the most challenging to track, as it involves the direct incorporation of citizen input into actual policy decisions. To monitor this, organisers can use tools like KNOCA's Impact Framework to track the implementation of citizens' proposals and ensure that input is reflected in the final policies. Periodic updates on the integration of participatory suggestions into policy can demonstrate the long-term influence of the process.

In summary, tracking impact — trust and satisfaction, the participatory footprint, and policy influence — ensures that the process is not only successful in the short term but also continues to build momentum and achieve real and lasting change. These wins should be actively communicated to participants and documented publicly.

23 How can feedback be provided to the citizens?

Ensure feedback to the citizens involved is given.

Why: Feedback builds trust, validates contributions, and encourages future participation. Feedback should address two dimensions: Where and with whom are the citizens' recommendations discussed with and what is the resonance, and how do they feed into actual policy making?

How: Use clear feedback channels such as email lists, newsletters, public meetings, and, where appropriate, meetings with citizens who participated in the citizens' assembly. Provide regular updates and maintain transparency about how input is being used. Consider inviting participants to a follow-up meeting, for example after one year, where the authority reports back on progress.

Citizens expect specific feedback from the initiators on how their contributions have been used. This is particularly important in established, and sometimes long-term, political coordination processes within a multilevel governance system — for example, in departmental coordination — where citizens expect consistent feedback. The planning of feedback to citizens for the phase of political negotiations is important so that positive results from the process do not become faded. It is important to manage citizens' expectations, as some measures may take time to be implemented in one form or another. Participants never expect their recommendations to be implemented entirely, but they expect their work and feedback on its progress to be treated with respect.

Ensuring feedback to citizens involved in participatory processes is essential for maintaining trust and engagement. Citizens expect to hear how their contributions have been used and whether their input has influenced decision-making, especially in complex political systems like multilevel governance. Without consistent feedback, there is a risk that the enthusiasm generated during the participatory phase may fade, and citizens may feel their efforts were in vain.

To provide effective feedback, organisers should establish clear communication channels from the start. Regular updates, such as newsletters, public meetings, or online platforms, should be used to inform citizens about the status of their contributions and how these are being integrated into the political process. This feedback should be timely and specific, detailing the steps taken because of citizen input.

Written feedback to the citizens' recommendations:

In the context of the Scottish citizens' assembly on climate the government was required by law to respond to the assembly's report within six months. A support team responsible for organising the government's response to the assembly's report was established before the assembly began its work. The sponsorship team worked with about 30 directorates responsible for the policy areas covered by the assembly's recommendations.

The secretariat and steering group, which are normally disbanded at the end of the assembly, remained in place to promote the report and enable members to engage with public officials and politicians. Members not only met with political leaders, such as the First Minister, to present their recommendations, but also came together as an assembly for another weekend to reply to the government report.

It is also important to communicate during key phases of political negotiations. For instance, when decisions are being made at the departmental level or in cross-governmental coordination processes, citizens should be informed about how their suggestions are being considered or modified to fit broader policy frameworks. This ensures that the positive results from the participatory process are not lost in lengthy political discussions.

In addition to updates, organisers can offer opportunities for citizens to ask questions, provide further feedback, or clarify their views as decisions progress. This could involve follow-up meetings or online Q&A sessions where citizens can engage directly with policymakers or project leaders.

For example, in a community development project, after citizens submit their ideas for local improvements, regular updates about the feasibility, approval, and eventual implementation of these suggestions will help keep participants informed and motivated. This ongoing feedback loop is crucial for reinforcing the legitimacy of the participatory process and ensuring that citizens see their contributions have led to a real, tangible outcomes.

To address these challenges, guidelines for follow-up, inspired by KNOCA (2023) recommendations, include responding to recommendations promptly, providing clear justifications for any inaction, and planning additional contact moments between the commissioning authority and participants. These contact moments serve to engage stakeholders in the policy field and increase the legitimacy of subsequent policymaking steps. In some cases, citizens are formally involved in the follow-up phase through mechanisms such as follow-up committees, while others may form independent associations to monitor the authority's actions and advocate for their recommendations.

Conclusion Guidelines

The Good Practice Guidelines demonstrate that meaningful citizen participation does not end when citizens' recommendations are written. Ensuring impact depends on careful preparation and requires embedding participation within established policymaking processes, specifically by assigning clear responsibilities for follow-up and maintaining transparency and dialogue with citizens beyond the event itself.

When citizen participation is planned strategically, communicated clearly, and followed up systematically, it strengthens trust, legitimacy, and the capacity of institutions to respond to complex societal challenges. Ultimately, these Guidelines intend to encourage a cultural shift—from participation as a single project to participation as an integral, continuous element of democracy in Europe.

Good practices: Case studies on the application of the guidelines

Permanent Citizens‘ Dialogue in East Belgium

Case Overview

Title	Bürgerdialog in Ostbelgien (translated meaning Citizens‘ Dialogue in East Belgium)
Duration	Permanent process • **Citizens' council:** Meets monthly for 36 months • **Citizens' assembly:** Five sessions over three months, followed by two follow-up sessions
Level of governance	Regional
Number of participants	24–30 citizens
Commissioning Authority	Parliament of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (federal state parliament)
Organising Body	Permanent Secretary of the Parliament

Context and Objectives

On 25 February 2019, the Parliament of East Belgium unanimously passed a decree establishing and institutionalising a permanent citizen' dialogue. This deliberative process is a world first, as it is the first region in the world to set up a permanent citizen council, mandated by law, and annual citizen assemblies.

Like other deliberative initiatives, East Belgium's permanent citizen dialogue seeks to actively involve citizens in shaping public policy. It was introduced following a successful pilot project in 2017, which focused on childcare.

The politicians behind this initiative intended to address the limitations and challenges of the electoral model of representative democracy, including declining political trust, misinformation and the growth of populist movements. They also hoped that permanent citizen dialogue would enhance the legitimacy of political decisions by demonstrating responsiveness to citizens' needs and desires. They also expected this process to foster attachment to the institutions of the small federal state among the population, as well as strengthening the identity of the German-speaking community.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

- **Eligibility Criteria:** All residents living in the territory of the German-speaking community were eligible to be drawn by lot. Recruitment broadly reflected the region's population in terms of gender, age, level of education, and place of residence.
- **Recruitment Methods:** Participants are recruited through random selection carried out by the permanent secretary of parliament.
- **Incentives/Compensation:** Financial compensation for each session is provided as well as the reimbursement of travel expenses.

Participation Format

Citizens can be chosen by lot to sit on the citizens' council or to take part in a citizens' assembly on a given topic.

Citizens' council: The citizens' council consists of 24 members, drawn by lot from former participants in citizens' assemblies, who meet monthly over a period of 36 months.

To ensure both continuity and the introduction of new perspectives, the citizens' assembly operates on a staggered rotation system. In practice, one-third of the members are replaced annually, allowing each member to serve for a maximum of three years.

Its mandate has two main functions. Firstly, it sets the agenda and has the power to convene up to five citizens' assemblies per legislative period. It also determines the topics to be addressed by each assembly. It can also receive suggestions for assembly topics from the public or two of its own members. The council also decides on the number of participants and the duration of each assembly. Following the amendment to the decree in April 2024, parliament can now also propose topics for citizens' assemblies, in addition to citizens and the citizens' council. The parliament's presidium can propose up to three topics, at least one of which the citizens' council must consider within a period of five years. This amendment seeks to leverage policymakers' insights into areas where legislation is needed and where public input is valuable.

Second, the council ensures follow-up by receiving responses from the relevant parliamentary committee and minister one year after the recommendations are presented and initially responded to in parliament. The entire process, from setting the agenda to following up, can take up to two years. One-third of the council's members are replaced after every citizens' assembly, ensuring regular renewal.

Citizens' assembly: Every citizens' assembly consists of approximately 30 citizens selected by lot. As is usual in citizens' assemblies, this group of citizens first informs themselves about the topic at hand, then discusses it, and finally formulates recommendations on the topic for politicians. The discussions are facilitated by an external moderator. As a rule, the decisions of the citizens' assembly are made by consensus. If no agreement can be reached after repeated voting attempts, a decision can be made by a four-fifths majority if at least four-fifths of the citizens participating in the citizens' assembly are present. Citizens who disagree and have voted against the decision can explain why in a statement attached to the decision.

A secretariat, staffed by a full-time civil servant employed by parliament, is responsible for organising the civic lottery for both the citizens' council and citizens' assemblies. It also manages the operations of the citizens' council and organises the citizens' assemblies, including preparing materials and making propositions for experts, with the final selection of experts made by the citizens themselves. Additionally, the secretariat supports the citizens' council during the follow-up phase of its recommendations.

Decision-making

After citizens vote on their recommendations, the regional parliament discusses them in a public hearing. The follow-up, overseen by the citizens' council, involves three public, streamed meetings of the relevant parliamentary committee. In the first meeting, the citizens' assembly presents its recommendations, in the second, politicians offer their initial reactions, and in the third — held a year later — politicians report on which recommendations have been accepted, and which have not, and why, as well as how they are being implemented. This regulated, well-integrated process ensures consistency and avoids improvisation, a unique strength of the system. Additionally, informal intersessions can be held for citizens and politicians to exchange views off-camera. Parliament has also allowed members of the citizens' council to participate in committee meetings when broader discussions on the subject

arise, for example, through new legislation, an adaptation, or a hearing, ensuring strong citizen involvement.

Outcome and Lessons Learned

Since 2019, seven citizens' councils and assemblies have addressed topics such as care, inclusive education, housing, digital skills, immigrant integration, and lately, pupils' skills. Over the last five years, a series of citizens' recommendations have been adopted and implemented by parliament as a whole or in part or have been considered in its decisions.

Two main challenges remain: First, it remains challenging to engage the entire population, especially the marginalised, in the council or citizens' assemblies, despite offering attendance allowances and travel reimbursements. This is due to the considerable time and commitment required, particularly for the citizens' council, which can last up to three years. Second, while the Ostbelgien Modell is internationally well-known among participation experts, it still faces challenges in gaining visibility within the German-speaking region itself. Additionally, citizens often struggle with defining relevant themes, finding it difficult to propose topics that benefit the broader community. Too frequently, their suggestions focus on personal issues or fall outside the region's areas of authority. Despite the challenges outlined below, the permanent citizens' dialogue is certainly one of the most interesting and well-designed institutionalised public participation processes currently in place.

References and Supporting Documents

Website "Bürgerrat Ostbelgien"

Citizens' Assembly on End of Life in France

Case Overview

Title	Convention citoyenne sur la fin de vie
Duration	December 2022 – April 2023
Level of governance	national
Number of participants	184 citizens
Number of sessions	9 sessions each of which 3 days (27 days)
Commissioning Authority	Prime Minister of France
Organising Body	French Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE)
Type of Process	Deliberative citizens' assembly, including online platform

Context and Objectives

Organised by the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE), the Citizens' Convention on the End of Life brought together 184 randomly selected citizens to represent the diversity of French society. This was the second national citizens' assembly to be held in France. Their task was to answer the question posed by the Prime Minister: "Is the framework for providing support at the end of life adapted to the different situations encountered, or should changes be introduced?"

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

- **Eligibility Criteria:** All residents were eligible to be drawn by lot. Recruitment broadly reflected France's population in terms of gender, age, level of education, socio-professional category, geographical distribution (rural, suburban, urban), and region.
- **Recruitment Methods:** Participants were recruited through random selection.
- **Incentives/Compensation:** Citizens are compensated for their participation, reimbursed for travel, accommodation and meal expenses, and a childcare allowance was introduced.

Participation Format

Over the course of 27 days, the citizens worked both collaboratively and individually, participating in hearings, exchanges, and debates on end of life issues, while dedicating sessions to listening to and auditioning around 60 experts from diverse fields — legal, medical, religious, and philosophical — and deliberating and voting on proposals, all with careful attention to preserving the nuances of opinions on this complex, intimate, and collective subject. Additionally, participants carried out research, met health care professionals, visited palliative care services, and exchanged views with patients to enrich their reflections.

An innovative measure was the inclusion of two citizen members from the previous national citizens' assembly on climate in the governance committee, ensuring that the citizens' perspective was actively represented in the governance process. These citizens rotated with each session, preventing them from assuming leadership roles and maintaining their equal status with other citizen members.

During the convention, the wider public was invited to contribute via an online platform, primarily by sharing testimonials about their subjective experiences of caring for loved ones at the end of life. While this input was available for convention members to consider alongside expert contributions, the platform was not designed as a fully participatory tool. For instance, it did not include features for proposal development.

Decision-making

During the debates, participants put forward a wide range of proposals and voted on the issues raised.

The citizens' assembly concluded that the healthcare system is in a critical state, suffering from shortages in both human and financial resources. They highlighted issues such as medical deserts, overcrowded emergency departments, and unequal access to palliative care.

Additionally, the members emphasised the need to improve support at the end of life, by developing support at home, increasing guaranteed access to palliative care for all and supporting better training for healthcare professionals in palliative care, and improved public awareness. Most of the citizens decided that it would be necessary to introduce both assisted suicide and euthanasia. 23% of participants were opposed to this, citing ignorance of existing laws and the risks to vulnerable people. However, as the citizens' assembly recognised the complexity of the issues surrounding the end of life, it did not seek to establish a single path for developing the current support framework. A colour chart was drawn up, structured around three main groups and eight opinion clusters, ranging from refusal of all active assistance in dying to universal access to assisted suicide and euthanasia.

In the end, members adopted 65 collective proposals aimed at strengthening the legal framework for support at the end of life. The final report reflects the diversity of the citizens' opinions, illustrating both their points of convergence and divergence.

Outcome and Lessons Learned

One year after the citizens' assembly delivered its report, the final session was held on 26 and 27 April 2023. This follow-up session allowed citizens to discuss the assembly's outcomes with President Emmanuel Macron and other high-level policymakers. The meeting at the Elysée garnered significant media attention, raising the profile of the process. An AI tool called Panorama, developed by Make.org, allowed the public to easily follow the sessions, hearings, and various positions of the citizens' assembly, while also generating relevant video excerpts on specific topics.

However, as Macron dissolved the national parliament after the European elections, the work of this commission was suspended and only resumed at the end of April 2025. On 27 May 2025, the National Assembly held a first reading of two bills: one on palliative care, and the other on introducing assisted dying. These will now be sent to the Senate for review in autumn 2025.

References and Supporting Documents

Website "Citizen Assembly on End of Life"

Chatbot and FAQ on the "Citizen Assembly on End of Life"

Recommendations of the "Citizen Assembly on End of Life"

Bürgerforum G8/G9 in Baden-Württemberg (Germany)

Case Overview

Title	Bürgerforum G8/G9
Duration	June–December 2023
Level of governance	Regional State
Number of participants	64 citizens
Number of sessions	6 sessions over a period of 3 months
Commissioning Authority	Federal state government of Baden-Württemberg
Organising Body	Servicestelle Dialogische BürgerbeteiligungType of Process
Type of Process	Deliberative citizens' forum, including preceding participation scoping with stakeholders and online engagement

Context and Objectives

Purpose: Gathering citizens' input on a legislative proposal regarding the duration of high school.
The state government launched a broad-based participatory and deliberative process with a citizens' forum on the duration of high school. In Baden-Württemberg, the Gymnasium (German for high school) currently takes eight years (referred to as G8). Until the 2004/05 school year, however, high school lasted nine years (G9), and its reintroduction has been under discussion for years.

The participation process included intensive debates on the future duration of the general education Gymnasium (high school) in Baden-Württemberg. In the coalition agreement between the Conservatives (CDU) and the Greens, the government had initially committed not to address questions of education policy during its five-year term, as the two parties hold hugely different views on the school system. However, when it became clear that a citizens' initiative advocating for nine years of high school education (G9 jetzt! BW) was gaining traction, the state government decided it was important to listen to a wide range of perspectives rather than framing the issue as a simple pro-or-con question. The citizens' forum was tasked with making recommendations to the state government.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

- **Eligibility Criteria:** All residents registered in Baden-Württemberg were eligible to be drawn by lot. Recruitment broadly reflected the region's population in terms of age, gender, migrant background, and (all) levels of education.
- **Recruitment Methods:** Participants were recruited through random selection.
- **Incentives/Compensation:** Citizens were compensated for their online and on-site participation, reimbursed for travel, accommodation, and meal expenses.

Participation Format

Agenda setting via participation scoping
As the process involves randomly selected citizens, it is crucial that stakeholders play a significant role in shaping and co-constructing the process. This is achieved through participatory scoping with stakeholders (such as regional student, professional or teacher associations, and trade union federations, etc.), including the G9 jetzt! BW citizens' initiative, who helped design the process to ensure legitimacy and acceptance not only of the outcomes but also of the process itself. Therefore, 190 associations were invited to the scoping phase, and stakeholders were asked to prioritise their involvement by indicating if they wanted to participate directly or if they would leave it to another association with similar positions. Around 80 associations responded. The aim was twofold: to identify the stakeholders' positions and,

more importantly, to consider their thematic priorities, which they felt should be addressed in the citizens' forum. For example, the agenda and specific terms of reference were developed with experts, stakeholders, and sections of civil society. Stakeholders also had the task of drawing up a list of experts, from which the citizens' forum itself chose those it wished to hear as this selection was not made by the organising body (Servicestelle).

As part of the scoping process, a thematic map was created and put online for the public to suggest further issues (900 comments were received).

Citizens' forum

Over the course of six meetings, citizens combined learning, deliberation, and the drafting of recommendations in plenary sessions and small-group discussions, as in a typical citizens' assembly. After jointly selecting experts on diverse topics and stakeholders to be heard at later meetings, citizens heard from experts from government — such as the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of Baden-Württemberg — as well as from academia and civil society. These experts and witnesses presented different perspectives, outlined current challenges, and shared inspiring examples of action. Citizens could request additional contributions as needed.

Decision-making

Thirty-five citizens met for a writing workshop on 2 December 2023, to formulate and vote on recommendations. Those citizens who could not attend in person were able to submit their evaluation by telephone or digitally. This meant that a total of 55 participants were able to work on the recommendations. All aspects of the topic map were discussed and worked on by the citizens' forum. A summary of the final report was submitted to State Councillor Barbara Bosch on 11 December 2023, and the extended version was published in January 2024. The citizens' forum concluded that the question of whether to return to nine years of high school was too narrowly framed and did not sufficiently address the issues at hand. Rather, the entire school system needed to be reformed. Accordingly, their recommendations are aimed at the entire system, not only the duration of grammar school, but every kind of school. They recommend reintroducing the 9-year system, but not simply reinstating the old system, but reforming it bottom up.

Outcome and Lessons Learned

Although the duration of high school education is a controversial topic in Baden-Württemberg and there was pressure from civil society for the government to address it, the process was conducted under good conditions and resulted in a balanced outcome. According to State Councillor Bosch, the process was also a success because the citizens' council introduced new perspectives and raised new questions, and politicians were faced with problems they knew nothing about that needed to be addressed. This insight enabled them to make better policies. It is now up to the state government to develop a school reform program that addresses all the issues raised.

References and Supporting Documents

Website "Bürgerforum G8/G9"

YouTube Video on the "Bürgerforum G8/G9"

European Citizens' Panel on Tackling Hatred in Society

Case Overview

Title	European Citizens' Panel
Duration	5 April 2024 – 19 May 2024
Level of governance	Supranational (European)
Number of participants	150 citizens from 27 member states
Number of sessions	3 sessions each 3 days (9 days total)
Commissioning Authority	European Commission
Organising Body	DG COMM & DG JUST
Type of Process	Deliberative citizens' assembly, including online participation & consultation

Context and Objectives

The European Citizens' Panels were created in the aftermath of the Conference on the Future of Europe (2021 – 2022), in which 800 randomly selected citizens gathered to share their perspectives and ideas on key EU issues. One of the citizens' recommendations from the Conference on the Future of Europe was that citizens wanted to have more opportunities to participate in European politics in the future.

For each European Citizens' Panel, the Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM) partners with the Directorate-General (DG) overseeing the relevant policy area to spearhead the panel's design and coordination. This effort is conducted alongside a consortium of experts specialising in deliberative processes and public engagement. Additionally, each panel receives guidance from a knowledge committee, comprising a representative from the relevant DG and a group of selected independent specialists. This committee collaborates with the consortium to advise on knowledge management during the panel's operation. Since December 2022, six citizens' panels have been held, focusing on the topics of food waste, virtual worlds, learning mobility, energy efficiency, tackling hatred in society, and the new long term EU budget.

The European Citizens' Panel on Tackling Hatred in Society discussed the question: What can we do about hate and how can we enhance mutual respect in our societies? This panel contributed to the Commission's #NoPlaceForHate initiative, which aims to step up efforts to counter all forms of hate by supporting action across a range of policy sectors, such as security, digital affairs, education, culture, and sport. It was co-directed by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers and Directorate-General for Communication. The panel's recommendations will help to strengthen this initiative.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

- **Eligibility Criteria:** All EU citizens were eligible. Recruitment broadly reflects the EU's population in terms of gender, age, level of education, geographic location (nationality and urban/rural), and occupation. Participants from each member state are selected proportionally to its population, applying the principle of degressive proportionality (no member state has less than 2 citizens).
- **Specific features:** One-third of participants were people aged 16 – 29.
- **Recruitment Methods:** Participants were recruited through random selection.
- **Incentives/Compensation:** Financial compensation for each session was provided as well as reimbursement of travel expenses, while meals were provided on site.

Participation Format

Every panel meets from Friday to Sunday three times. While the first and third sessions are held at the Commission's buildings in Brussels, the second session is conducted online. Like the Conference on the Future of Europe in 2022, the deliberative approach centres on consensus-building through sharing experiences and reaching common ground after hearing from a diverse set of experts or people affected by the issue.

The panel brings citizens together in both small working groups (around 12 participants each) and plenary sessions involving all 150 members. In these smaller groups, citizens have the chance to explore the various aspects on the tackling hatred in society topic. The plenary sessions allow all participants to gather and share insights and listen and respond to the contributions from the other groups. A facilitation team, made up of experts in group dynamics, supports participants by improving group interaction to make the most of both individual and group contributions. This team also provides citizens with various tools for collaborative work and joint decision-making.

The citizens explored the root causes and factors contributing to hatred while formulating recommendations. They were supported by insights from experts, including sociologists, linguists, psychologists, journalists, advocates from various anti-hatred organisations, and Commission members involved in these policy areas.

An online platform was set up to enable the wider public to submit online contributions to involve as many European citizens as possible in the discussion.

Decision-making & Follow-up

The citizens collaborated in 12 small groups before reconvening in a plenary session to present and evaluate the final set of 21 recommendations. Each recommendation was rated on a scale from 1 to 6, allowing citizens to express their level of support. For transparency, votes were counted with citizen observers present. The 21 recommendations were divided into five categories: the response system to hate crimes and hate speech, the role of the media and politicians, digital issues and the role of technology, education, citizen participation and social inclusion. After the presentations and voting, the recommendations were formally presented to Ana Gallego Torres, Director-General of the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST), by the panel's oldest member, Gemma from Italy, and the youngest, Camille from France.

Outcome and Lessons Learned

Follow-up: In general, representatives from the relevant policy Directorate-General (DG) participated in the citizens' panel, enabling them to hear recommendations directly from citizens. This firsthand exposure is the initial way the panel influences the decision-making process. Subsequently, a citizens' report is drafted as a staff working document, which is adopted by the College of Commissioners together with the policy initiative and sent as one of the annexed documents to the European Parliament and the Council as co-legislators. This report outlines the citizens' recommendations along with an initial analysis by the Commission, detailing how the recommendations have been addressed and incorporated into the proposal.

This approach ensures that the commissioner presenting the initiative can highlight the panel's contributions and demonstrate the steps taken to integrate citizen input. This systematic process has already been applied to initiatives on food waste, the virtual world, and learning mobility.

Shortly after the panel discussion, a high-level event offered citizens the chance to discuss this important topic directly with Member States. As part of the meeting with Member States, DG JUST organised a half-day session focusing on the citizens' panel on tackling hatred. Seven citizens attended to present their recommendations, after which there were

breakout sessions with Member State representatives to discuss these recommendations in depth. An event was organised to provide feedback on the Anti-Hatred Citizens' Panel and explain how the recommendations have been considered. A regular newsletter is also sent to panel alumni to update them on new developments.

In June 2025, panel participants were invited to a feedback event where the European Commission presented how it has been acting on their recommendations, integrating them into ongoing and upcoming policy initiatives

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Tackling Hatred in Society European Citizens' Panel

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