

# OECD DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY TOOLBOX

## WHAT IS DELIBERATION?

Weighing evidence and considering a wide range of perspectives in pursuit of finding common ground.

It is distinct from:

- **Debate**, where the aim is to persuade others and to 'win'
- **Bargaining**, where people make concessions in exchange for something
- **Dialogue**, which seeks mutual understanding rather than a decision
- **"Opinion giving"**, where individuals state their opinions in a context that does not first involve learning, or the need to listen to others

## WHAT IS A REPRESENTATIVE DELIBERATIVE PROCESS?

*A process in which a broadly representative body of people weighs evidence, deliberates to find common ground, and develops detailed recommendations on a policy issue for a public authority.*

Prominent examples include:

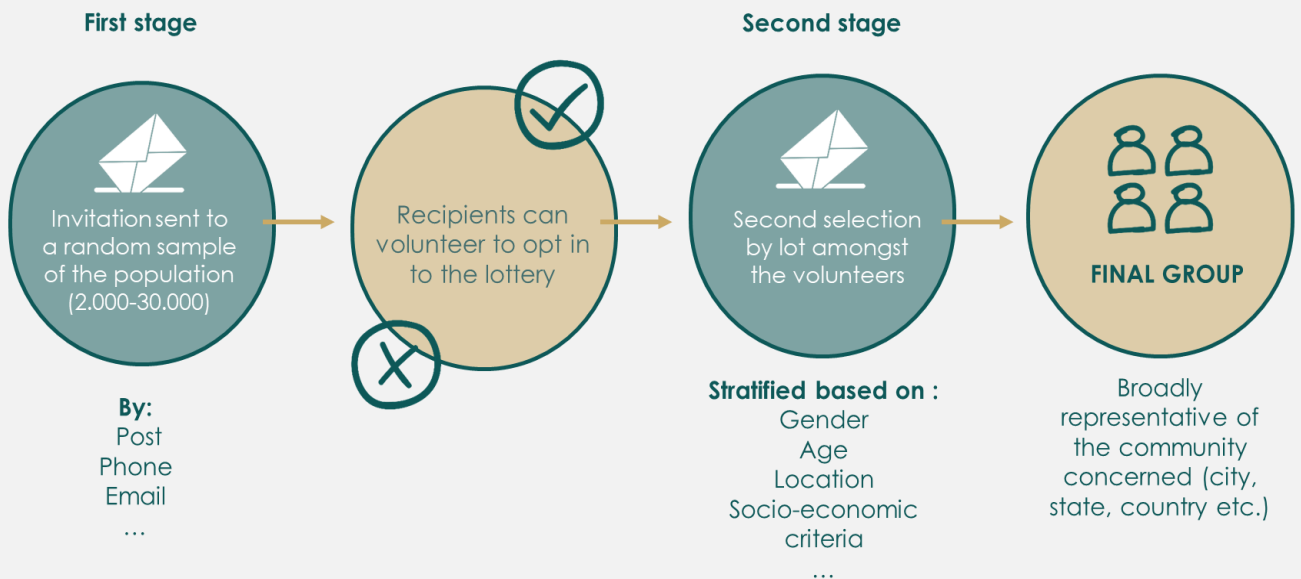
- **Irish Citizens' Assemblies (2016-2018)** on abortion, same-sex marriage, divorce, blasphemy, and climate change – that have all led to either referendums, constitutional changes and/or new legislation
- **French Citizens' Climate Convention (2019-2020)** on how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030 in a spirit of social justice that influenced France's Climate Act
- **Canada's Citizens' Assemblies on Democratic Expression (2020-2022)** examining the impact of digital technologies on Canadian society, reporting to the Canadian Commission on Democratic Expression, to the federal government, and to the public

Access the full [OECD Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions \(2021\)](#) with almost 600 examples featured in the OECD's flagship report [Catching the Deliberative Wave](#).

## WHAT IS A CIVIC LOTTERY?

*A process used by public authorities to convene a broadly representative group of people to tackle a policy challenge. The principle behind a civic lottery is that everybody has an equal chance of being selected by lot.*

A civic lottery has two stages. First, a very large number of people receive an invitation to be part of the process from the convening public authority. These randomly selected recipients can volunteer by opting in to the lottery. Then, amongst the volunteers, members are chosen by lot to be broadly representative of the public.



## BENEFITS

- Civic lotteries aim to **overcome the shortcomings and distortions of both “open” and “closed” calls for participants**, which result in non-representative groups of people who do not mirror the wider population.
- **Greater legitimacy** as the group is broadly representative of society and everyone has an equal chance of being chosen
- **More diverse group** of people who do not typically participate in consultations or politics than any other recruitment process
- Research **shows greater cognitive diversity leads to better decisions** than those made by more homogeneous groups
- People are more likely to **trust a process where they see ordinary people reflecting all parts of society**

## THE PHASES OF A REPRESENTATIVE DELIBERATIVE PROCESS

### 1.

The starting point is a public authority has a **public problem** that needs to be solved

### 2.

The public authority carries out a **civic lottery** to convene a small, broadly representative group of people, typically called a **Citizens' Assembly, Jury or Panel**

### 6.

#### Phase 4. Response

The public authority considers the Citizens' Assemblies recommendations and responds to each of them, with a rationale

### 3.

#### Phase 1. Orientation & Learning

The Citizens' Assembly members define the values to guide its deliberations, and hear from a wide range of experts and stakeholders

### 5.

#### Phase 3. Recommendations

The Citizens' Assembly members draft recommendations for addressing the public problem in their own words

### 4.

#### Phase 2. Deliberation

The Citizens' Assembly members, with the help of skilled facilitators, weigh the evidence, listen to one another, and aim to find common ground

## WHY DO REPRESENTATIVE DELIBERATIVE PROCESSES WORK?

Usually, it is difficult for large groups of people to find rough consensus on complex decisions – but deliberative processes work due to:

1. **Independence:** Due to the civic lottery, the members of a deliberative body can avoid being 'captured' by interest groups or influenced by powerful or wealthy people and organisations. There are no elections, no campaigns, and no fundraising.
2. **Cognitive diversity:** The civic lottery process ensures diversity. Research has shown that, for developing successful ideas, diversity is more important than the average ability of a group.
3. **Favourable conditions for quality deliberation – information, time, and skilled facilitation:** This leads to informed, detailed, and rigorous recommendations that consider trade-offs.
4. **A focus on the common good:** The members are not there to represent any particular interest group, company, political party, etc.
5. **High levels of trust:** People have lost trust in politicians and experts, but they do trust everyday 'people like them'.

## OECD GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR DELIBERATIVE PROCESSES

Deliberative processes only work if they are designed well.

The **OECD Good Practice Principles** were developed to help guide policy makers in designing and delivering high-quality, successful processes that result in useful recommendations for policy makers and are trusted by the public.



## OECD EVALUATION GUIDELINES FOR DELIBERATIVE PROCESSES

The **Evaluation Guidelines** establish minimum standards and criteria for evaluating these processes to support public authorities, organisers, and evaluators in conducting more comprehensive, objective, and comparable evaluations. The guidelines outline evaluation criteria for these three essential steps, and additional criteria for evaluating institutionalised processes.

### Three-Step Evaluation Cycle

*of a representative  
deliberative process*

1.

#### Process design integrity

Evaluating the design process that set up the deliberation

2.

#### Deliberative experience

Evaluating how a deliberative process unfolds

3.

#### Pathways to impact

Evaluating influential conclusions and/or actions of a deliberative process



## INSTITUTIONALISING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Increasingly, public authorities are reinforcing democracy by making use of deliberative processes in a structural way. The **OECD guide on institutionalising deliberative democracy** provides examples of how to create structures that allow representative public deliberation to become an integral and ongoing part of how certain types of public decisions are taken.

Examples include the Bogotá Itinerant Citizens' Assembly, Paris Citizens' Assembly, Ostbelgien Citizens' Council, Brussels Mixed Deliberative Committees, and more.

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