

# A Review of Public Participation and Consultation Methods





Abelson J, Forest P-G, Eyles J, Smith P, Martin E and Gauvin F-P. *Deliberations about Deliberation: Issues in the Design and Evaluation of Public Consultation Processes*, McMaster University Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis Research Working Paper 01-04, June 2001.

\* NOTE: Shaded boxes represent deliberative methods, whereas the other boxes are non-deliberative.  
Symbols within each cell provide links to references at the end

Method	Description of Method	Strengths	Weaknesses	Recommendations for Use
<b>Citizens Juries</b> §	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· group of 12-20 randomly selected citizens, gathered in such a way as to represent a microcosm of their community, who meet over several days to deliberate on a policy question</li> <li>· they are informed about the issue, hear evidence from witnesses and cross-examine them</li> <li>· they then discuss the matter amongst themselves and reach a decision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· creates informed, active, engaged citizenry</li> <li>· promotes "common good" as a societal objective</li> <li>· promotes self-transformation and development</li> <li>· provides opportunities to introduce new perspectives and challenge existing ones</li> <li>· more careful examination of the issue</li> <li>· promotes consensus building</li> <li>· promotes communication between government and governed</li> <li>· brings legitimacy and democratic control to non-elected public bodies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· no formal powers; lack of binding decision accountability to act upon decision /recommendation</li> <li>· exclusive - only a few individuals participate</li> <li>· resource intensive time commitment for participants and organizers</li> <li>· potential problems lie in initial stages of preparation (i.e., jury selection, agenda setting, witness selection) - these have to do with representation (who participates?) responsiveness (what jury is asked to do); and information transfer (how jury is informed?)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· sponsoring organization should be clear about what issues it wants to address, how much it can spend on process, and whether it can follow through on the advice</li> <li>· should be designed for the public and not for special interest groups</li> <li>· better with value questions than technical questions</li> <li>· better for focussed questions about concrete issues, than on large scale issues and should be part of a wider public involvement strategy</li> <li>· the development of the agenda should be overseen by an advisory board made up of key stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Citizens Panels</b> ⚙	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· randomly selected group of 12 citizens meet routinely (eg. four times per year) to consider and discuss issues and make decisions</li> <li>· used to guide health resource allocation decision</li> <li>· panels act as "sounding boards" for governing authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· proportion of panel members are replaced at each meeting (i.e. 4 members) to increase overall number of participants</li> <li>· multiple panels can be held and run to increase participant numbers (i.e. reduce exclusivity)</li> <li>· people benefit from discussion within groups, but also from discussing issues with family and friends outside of the panel</li> </ul>		
<b>Planning Cells</b> ⌚	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· similar to a citizens' jury in form and function</li> <li>· sponsored by local or national governing authorities to help with the decision making process</li> <li>· discussions/deliberation take place in Cells of about 25 participants in size</li> <li>· results are articulated in a report that is presented to the sponsor, the media, and any other interested group</li> <li>· local/national sponsor has to agree to take decisions into consideration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· small size of individual cells and its non-intimidating nature allows for innovative ideas and active participation</li> <li>· participants represent all citizens and not special interest groups</li> <li>· anyone in the population has a chance of being selected to be a part of this process</li> <li>· makes decision makers more accountable because they have to defend their position</li> <li>· resulting decisions are frequently implemented</li> <li>· can renew public trust in democracy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· problems defined by local authority</li> <li>· only useful for problems in need of unique decisions</li> <li>· accountability and long-term planning - decisions not always feasible</li> <li>· hard to keep bias out of information dissemination process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· can be used when other methods fail to resolve a conflict</li> <li>· best in situations that require an quick response to an urgent issue where there are a number of possible decisions that can be made</li> <li>· not suited for issues with a "yes" or "no" answer</li> </ul>
<b>Consensus Conference</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· a group of citizens with varied backgrounds meets to discuss issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· process of communicating information about the conference topic provides a strong</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· recruitment method for stage 1 may not ensure representative participation</li> </ul>	

Method	Description of Method	Strengths	Weaknesses	Recommendations for Use
❖	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>of a scientific and or technical nature</li> <li>consists of 2 stages: 1)meetings with experts, discussions and work toward consensus (involves small group of people)</li> <li>2)conference during which main observations and conclusions are presented to the media and general public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>educational component</li> <li>useful method for obtaining informed opinions from lay persons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>exclusive process for stage 1</li> <li>elaborate process requiring significant resources</li> <li>multiple conferences may be required to ensure that broad, representative opinions are sought</li> </ul>	
<b>Deliberative Polling</b> —	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>builds on the opinion poll by incorporating element of deliberation</li> <li>involves larger numbers than citizens juries and may involve less time</li> <li>measures what public would think if it was informed and engaged around an issue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides insights into public opinions and how people come to decisions</li> <li>seeks informed opinions, does not force people to reach consensus</li> <li>large, random sample</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incentives (eg. honorarium, transportation) are important</li> <li>requires a lot of preparation time</li> <li>although sample size is large and random, ensuring representativeness is difficult</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>can provide useful insight into public opinion and useful input into public decision processes</li> <li>complement to representative democracy</li> <li>not good for crisis decisions</li> <li>best suited to issues with options and about which the public is not knowledgeable</li> </ul>
<b>Citizens Panels</b> ♻️	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consists of statistically representative sample of residents in a given area</li> <li>most comprise several thousand citizens who represent the general population of an area</li> <li>panel views are regularly sought using a survey instrument (e.g. postal, telephone surveys)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>inexpensive and effective way to learn about citizens' needs and preferences</li> <li>panel data can be analyzed for multiple purposes and disaggregated for sub-level analysis (i.e. ethnicity, gender, socio-economic, geographic area)</li> <li>opportunity to collect trend data through multiple surveys to monitor impact of policies over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>exclusivity of participant selection process</li> <li>consultation agenda determined by decision-making body (i.e. top down)</li> <li>under-representation of hard-to-reach groups who refuse to participate</li> <li>panel members vulnerable to Hawthorne effect (i.e. over time they may be prone to sympathize with decision-makers...)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Due to the expense as well as the design, the panel is best suited for the development of major community wide policy documents.</li> <li>limit to new policy areas, where community opinion and policy direction have yet to be determined and mobilization has not yet occurred</li> </ul>
<b>Focus Groups</b> —	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>one time discussion of a particular topic</li> <li>involves 6-12 individuals selected to meet specific criteria in order to broadly represent a particular segment of society</li> <li>one-time face-to-face meeting structured to be informal to encourage open discussion among participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>successful focus group may lead to consensus and feelings of enrichment among participants</li> <li>good venue for learning about needs of a particular group</li> <li>remain largely informal, so participants can discuss issues in relaxed atmosphere</li> <li>a good way to gauge the opinions of the public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>private sector marketing roots limit ability to cover complex issues</li> <li>lack of informed participants produces superficial discussion</li> <li>potential for revealing and reinforcing social cleavages</li> <li>selection criteria can create bias in eliciting opinions</li> <li>limited number of participants limits representativeness of opinions</li> <li>potential for ideas expressed to be influenced/shaped by interaction/exchange with others (especially those who are dominant)</li> <li>resource intensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>can be a tool for encouraging discussion and deliberation, but needs to be used with much caution because of the problems associated with it</li> </ul>
<b>Consensus building exercises</b> —	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a process designed to help people reach a consensus by focussing on the issues themselves</li> <li>mediators are used to help people reach a consensus</li> <li>non-adversarial approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>helps people to reach solutions they can all support</li> <li>provides time for people to get to know each other and their differing views</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>typically used to bring stakeholders together to reach consensus over an issue</li> <li>round tables are one approach where traditionally adversarial groups are brought together to</li> </ul>

Method	Description of Method	Strengths	Weaknesses	Recommendations for Use
<p><b>Surveys</b></p> <p>—</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· solicit information from representative sample of citizens</li> <li>· same questions are asked of ever individual surveyed</li> <li>· there are a variety of survey types: postal, interviewer, telephone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· can reach large numbers of people</li> <li>· if same questions are retained, can be used for longitudinal studies (e.g., monitoring change over time)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· the lists may not be representative or comprehensive</li> <li>· questions need to be somewhat simple and straightforward, the information gathered then can be simplistic and superficial</li> <li>· survey results are often not comparable</li> <li>· the effectiveness of surveys are affected by the rates of response</li> <li>· fundamental decisions have to be made before the survey begins and cannot be changed once survey has been implemented</li> </ul>	<p>discuss an issue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· because this is a time consuming process, it is not a good method if quick results are required</li> <li>· can be used during the beginning phases of a study (useful in detecting issues that need to be addressed)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Public Hearings</b></p> <p>N</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· form of public meeting limited in size</li> <li>· tends to involve only interested citizens</li> <li>· usually experts and interested citizens</li> <li>· presentations are made</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· potential to inform citizens</li> <li>· potential for improved decision making</li> <li>· potential to minimize conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· may be dominated by special interest groups</li> <li>· feed-back obtained from this format needs to be treated carefully because it may not be representative of the community</li> <li>· does not generate a sense of ownership</li> <li>· excludes the inarticulate and perhaps disadvantaged groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· have a "pre-submission" phase which allows the public time to become familiar with the issues</li> </ul>
<p><b>Open Houses</b></p> <p>t</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· the public is invited to drop by at any time at a set location on a set day(s) and times</li> <li>· they can speak with staff, view the displays set up in the room and break into small discussion groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· relaxed atmosphere</li> <li>· enables staff to tailor responses according to the needs/questions of the public</li> <li>· allows for sensitive topics to be discussed</li> <li>· develops links for the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· potential for lack of clarity in purpose</li> <li>· staff resource intensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· suitable for confrontational issues</li> </ul>
<p><b>Citizen Advisory Committee</b></p> <p>◇</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· can be made up of a variety of different organizations (e.g. from governmental to public)</li> <li>· intended to represent the broader public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· if committee is balanced, deliberations can be fruitful</li> <li>· their advise should influence decision making process</li> <li>· should also produce informed citizens, boost trust in institutions and reduce conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· not a representative group of people</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Community Planning</b></p> <p>⊗</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· participation on a broader level to set policy agenda and to discuss citizens' vision for community and services provided in it</li> <li>· more about the outcome of participation (i.e. consensus about the vision or plan) than the process of engagement (who participated and how)</li> <li>· draws upon a range of participation techniques (e.g., pre-circulated consultation documents, written responses, structured public meetings)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· allows for underlying assumptions to be dealt with in a deliberative manner</li> <li>· emphasizes consensus building, collaboration and cooperation</li> <li>· formal outcome is a community plan but emphasis is on reaching a common understanding of issues and finding a shared vision for dealing with them</li> <li>· fosters connections/partnerships between different organizations</li> <li>· educative role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· may set/raise expectations that public bodies are unable to meet</li> </ul>	

Method	Description of Method	Strengths	Weaknesses	Recommendations for Use
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· outcome is a gradual refining of preferences and priorities which gives participants a deeper understanding of problems</li> </ul>			
<b>Visioning</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· similar to community planning but input sought is about broader “vision” for community services and less about specifics on how to achieve the vision</li> <li>· deliberative process where ideas are gradually refined through iterative process until a clear statement emerges</li> <li>· outcome is typically an overview of possibilities rather than a definitive plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· emphasizes consensus building, collaboration and cooperation</li> <li>· formal outcome is a community plan but emphasis is on reaching a common understanding of issues and finding a shared vision for dealing with them</li> <li>· fosters connections/partnerships between different organizations</li> <li>· educative role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· may set/raise expectations that public bodies are unable to meet</li> </ul>	
<b>Notification, Distribution &amp; Solicitation of Comments</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· simplest form of consultation</li> <li>· can involve the sending out of reports</li> <li>· may also involve other methods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· broad and representative in theory</li> <li>· transparency guaranteed through notification process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· questionable effectiveness in reaching some populations</li> <li>· risk that consultation will be dominated by the best organized groups with easy access to publication</li> <li>· despite the potential for broad participation, the interaction between concerned public and the authorities is often very limited, with no real possibility for dialogue or negotiation</li> <li>· transparency is threatened when solicitation of comments is targeted to specific groups</li> <li>· not enough time given to soliciting feedback (i.e sham consultation)</li> </ul>	
<b>Referenda</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· the process wherein an issue is put to popular vote</li> <li>· can be initiated by governmental or other organizations, or sometimes the citizenry</li> <li>· results may or may not be considered binding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· incites discussion and interest</li> <li>· way to learn public views</li> <li>· way to get citizens directly involved with the legislative process</li> <li>· all voters have equal influence</li> <li>· can potentially involve all members of a local or national population</li> <li>· difficult for the government to ignore the results of a referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· results may not be representative if there is low voter turnout</li> <li>· wording can present problems</li> <li>· limited number of times you can use it (i.e. voter fatigue)</li> <li>· potential for undue influence if one organization has greater resources than another when campaigning for or against a proposed referendum</li> <li>· very costly process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· should not replace representative democracy</li> <li>· issue should be answerable by “yes” or “no”</li> <li>· issue should stand on its own (i.e. not so intertwined with another that it becomes impossible to answer)</li> <li>· need to inform citizenry on issue beforehand</li> </ul>
<b>Structured Value Referenda</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· voting based method for eliciting public preferences</li> <li>· uses “decision analysis” principles where preferences are elicited by voters who select among specified alternatives</li> <li>· Key components: 1)select the policy decision; 2)structure objectives; 3)develop alternatives - technical process; 4)determine impacts of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· participants have a wider range of response options</li> <li>· easy to use and understand and useful for guiding policy</li> <li>· information disseminated and question wording may be more neutral than with traditional referenda.</li> <li>· voters have an easier time choosing among preferences because their alternatives are well defined and they are educated about</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· complex task and can require substantial resources</li> <li>· potential for undue influence over the wording by those who control the referendum</li> <li>· only those truly interested in seeking out preferences would employ this method</li> <li>· Decisions regarding what cost information and the number of alternatives to select from have the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· best for contexts with a specific issue and with a number of alternative answers</li> <li>· for this to be successful, political leaders will need to be willing to share control and listen to the advice given</li> <li>· can reduce cost of this process by combining it with an established electoral process</li> </ul>

Method	Description of Method	Strengths	Weaknesses	Recommendations for Use
	alternatives; 5)frame the questions; 6)select the voting task; 7)develop a communication program	these alternatives and consequences	potential to bias the outcome of the vote.	· can be administered as a survey, but has the drawback of not attracting the same attention

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