

Executive summary

The deliberative wave has been building as innovative ways of involving citizens in the policy-making cycle have gained traction with governments and citizens across the globe. This report is the first empirical, comparative study to consider the workings of representative deliberative processes for public decision making and discuss the case for their institutionalisation.

Deliberative processes take many forms and have been executed at all government levels: local (52%); regional (30%); national (15%), and international/supranational (3%). They have addressed many policy questions, from urban planning (43 processes), health (32 processes), environment (29 processes), infrastructure (28 processes), strategic planning (26 processes), and others. Generally, they are well suited to addressing: values-based dilemmas, complex problems that involve trade-offs, and long-term issues.

The OECD has identified 12 models of deliberative processes, clustered under four types of purpose: (1) informed citizen recommendations on policy questions; (2) citizen opinion on policy questions; (3) informed citizen evaluation of ballot measures, and (4) permanent deliberative models.

Good practice principles for deliberative processes

When conducted effectively, deliberative processes can lead to better policy outcomes, enable policy makers to make hard choices and enhance trust between citizens and government. Based on evidence collected and in collaboration with international practitioners from government, civil society, and academics, the OECD has identified common principles that can guide policy makers in implementing such processes as well as provisions 8 and 9 of the 2017 OECD Recommendation on Open Government. These principles should help achieve high-quality processes that, in turn, result in useful recommendations and meaningful opportunities for citizens to shape public decisions.

The principles are summarised as follows:

- The task should be clearly defined as a question that is linked to a public problem.
- The commissioning authority should publicly commit to responding to or acting on recommendations in a timely manner and should monitor and regularly report on the progress of their implementation.
- Anyone should be able to easily find the following information about the process: its purpose, design, methodology, recruitment details, experts, recommendations, the authority's response, and implementation follow-up. Better public communication should increase opportunities for public learning and encourage greater participation.
- Participants should be a microcosm of the general public; this can be achieved through random sampling from which a representative selection is made to ensure the group matches the community's demographic profile.
- Efforts should be made to ensure inclusiveness, such as through remuneration, covering expenses, and/or providing/paying for childcare or eldercare.

- Participants should have access to a wide range of accurate, relevant, and accessible evidence and expertise, and have the ability to request additional information.
- Group deliberation entails finding common ground; this requires careful and active listening, weighing and considering multiple perspectives, every participant having an opportunity to speak, a mix of formats, and skilled facilitation.
- For high-quality processes that result in informed recommendations, participants should meet for at least four full days in person, as deliberation requires adequate time for participants to learn, weigh evidence, and develop collective recommendations.
- To help ensure the integrity of the process, it should be run by an arm's length co-ordinating team.
- There should be respect for participants' privacy to protect them from unwanted attention and preserve their independence.
- Deliberative processes should be evaluated against these principles to ensure learning, help improve future practice, and understand impact.

Deliberative processes as part of wider participation strategies

Deliberative processes involve a component of broader stakeholder participation, the most common being online calls for submissions (used in 33 cases) and surveys (29 cases). Other methods are public consultations (19 cases) and roundtable discussions (16 cases). The combination needs to be sequenced so it is clear how the outputs of participatory processes feed into citizen deliberations.

Institutionalising deliberative processes into policy-making cycles and public decision making

Institutionalising deliberative processes enables governments to take more hard decisions and at lower cost. It improves practice by ensuring collective learning and experimentation, and can potentially increase trust in government, strengthen democracy, and enrich society's democratic fitness by creating more opportunities for more people to significantly shape public decisions. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach; it depends on the context, purpose, and process. Three existing routes to institutionalisation are explored:

1. Permanent or ongoing structure for citizen deliberation;
2. Requirements for public authorities to organise deliberative processes under certain conditions, and
3. Rules allowing citizens to demand a deliberative process on a specific issue.

Governments should consider drafting legislation or regulation that introduces requirements for deliberative processes under certain conditions and allows citizens to initiate a deliberative process with enough signatures.

Additional legal support issues, such as enabling database access for random selection, are needed to make organising processes easier, cheaper, and more effective. A next step would be for employers to provide paid leave to participate, as with criminal juries, recognising the value of citizens' time and input into policy making.

Institutionalisation also requires sufficient capacity in the civil service and civil society, and sufficient funding. To this end, governments could assign new responsibilities to an existing office (like the Open Government office) or establish an office with responsibilities for:

- setting good practice standards

- advising decision makers considering using deliberation in their work
- building government knowledge by training civil servants
- providing independent monitoring and evaluation of ongoing processes and their impact
- managing dedicated budgets for deliberative processes
- investing in civil society organisations
- regularly reporting findings from deliberative processes to government and parliaments.

Reflections for future study

This report has provided a foundation for future study of deliberative processes for public decision making. However, it has only scratched the surface. Chapter 7 identifies examples that did not meet the inclusion criteria but that present promising avenues for investigation.

Future research could provide a better understanding of impact, a framework for evaluating deliberative processes, and explore how digital tools can enrich deliberation. Finally, further experiments with institutionalised forms of citizen deliberation should be carried out, monitored, evaluated, and adapted.



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