

newDEMOCRACY

CITY OF CANADA BAY PROCESS DESIGN OVERVIEW: EMPOWERED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DECISION MAKING

Objective

The City of Canada Bay has a wide portfolio of recurrent services coupled with a need for ongoing infrastructure renewal - and funding is finite.

Traditional models of decision making and community engagement tend to reward those with a specific interest: a dozen very active users of a costly service have more cause to respond and engage in advocacy than the 35,000 citizens contributing to its funding.

The objective of this process is to:

- a. Make an insightful and innovative set of prioritisation decisions as to the desired range and quality level of council provided services.
- b. Deliver widespread public confidence and acceptance of the priorities, tradeoffs and funding models used as being equitable and based on merit.

Methodology

It is proposed that a single Citizens' Panel of 36 participants should be convened for a 3 month process.

Random selection will be used to identify participants as a means of securing a descriptively representative sample of the community.

Selection of Participants

Invitations would be issued to a random sample of 1,500 citizens from the electoral roll. Invitations will explain the process and ask the citizen to decide to opt in to be eligible for selection in one of the panels. (10% response rate required, 20% expected)

From positive responses, a sample is drawn electronically based on pre-agreed stratification goals such as age, gender, education, ethnic background, rates status (residential, business, tenant) etc. The objective is to achieve a group descriptively representative of the community even if one subset of the community responds disproportionately to the initial invitation.

This sample (and a number of reserves) will be sent a comprehensive schedule and explanatory kit of pre-reading, with the output being for them to provide a final acceptance allowing NDF to finalise the panel.

It is recommended a modest per diem payment be announced after this final confirmation and provided at the conclusion of the process – this may be in the form of vouchers to local restaurants if Council prefers to avoid cash payments and instead support local businesses. However, some form of incentive commensurate with the time commitment is viewed as essential by NDF.

The group is convened solely for this process: future panels should recommence a fresh selection process.

Preparation and Information Process

Information and judgment are required to reach decisions. We operate these panels as the judgment of random samples has been shown to achieve very high levels of public trust. It is thus imperative that the method of provision of information to the groups does not erode that trust.

Prior to the panel's first assembly, a background document will be circulated to the panellists – this should be similar in content and detail to that which would be provided to Councillors. This is the baseline content for deliberation. This ideally provides a summary of each service, its number of users and its cost to the Council (larger expenditure areas being broken into major constituent costs). For context, this should include both discretionary and mandatory services.

Companies, interest groups, expert groups and citizens will also be able to contribute to the document: these submissions will be of an executive summary nature (2pg limit) but allow for links to more detailed supporting information.

Through the meeting process, the panel is able to request a submission or an appearance from experts of their choosing, within an agreed budget limit. The group will be allowed to hear directly from Council and third party service providers.

There is also a second process of open public submission, with ideas aggregated into a further reading document. Panellists decide if they wish to hear further from any contributor.

What Do the Citizens' Panels Decide

It is important that the limit of the group's decision making authority is pre-agreed and clearly conveyed.

It is proposed that the remit of the group is to:

Agree the priority services for Council to deliver.

Agree the level of those services which Council should deliver.

Agree the preferred funding sources for each of their preferences.

In terms of authority, it is proposed that:

The Panel will set the level of service to be provided for in the 2014-18 Delivery Plan, subject to the final approval of Council.

What Constitutes a Decision?

In order to shift the public mindset from adversarial, two party, either/or contests and convey a message of broad based support for the recommendations, the Foundation suggests a 75% supermajority be required for a final decision from the group. In practice, citizens' panels tend to reach consensus positions with minority voices included in any report; they rarely need to go to a vote.

Operations

A facilitator would be identified with the assistance of IAP2 Australia (the International Association of Public Participation) which is the accredited independent body of professional facilitators and offers training in public participation.

Meetings would take place within Council facilities as an appropriate low cost venue.

Costing Outline

Each meeting costs approximately \$5,000 to operate (venue, catering, staging, facilitators, participants per diem expenses). The process detailed overleaf suggests five in person meetings. Printing and distribution costs are the other major expense.

This figure is provided solely as a guide for further discussion.

Key Issues to be managed:

- Interface within council operational areas to ensure accessibility to staff.
- Interest group buy-in (explicit invitation for inclusion in the preparation of background information is suggested).
- Delivery costs.
- Communication task (this will end up being an education campaign for the broader community as well as a communications task).

TIMELINE FOR 2012 DELIBERATIVE PROCESS:

PRIORITIES FOR THE CITY OF CANADA BAY

Topic: ***What services should we deliver in the City of Canada Bay, and how should we pay for them?***

Start –3 months	<p>Research Committee preparatory planning session. Key topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Agree Academic Oversight Representatives ➤ Identify required background materials for inclusion. ➤ Revise/ amend/ review this program. ➤ Final budget approval.
Start –80 days	<p>Invitation sent to a random sample of 1,500 citizens drawn from the electoral roll. Estimated 20% positive response rate.</p> <p>Recruitment of independent, skilled lead facilitator.</p>
Start -60 days	<p>First round selection to secure representatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Seeking 35-45 panellists (36 + reserves is ideal). ➤ Explanation of commitment required: attendance at all elements of process, including potential online discussion presence. ➤ Stratified random sample to deliver descriptive match to community (NDF to provide technology/ expertise).
Start -30 days	<p>Finalisation of participants. Provision of welcome kit of materials. Potential to open up online discussion environment for participants.</p>
Start -14 days	<p>Call for public submissions relating to desired services and how they should be paid for - to be included in representatives briefing/learning papers as an additional document. (Consider requests for speaking opportunities.)</p>
<p>Day 1</p> <p><i>(Full day required, Saturday suggested)</i></p>	<p>Opening day: The First Assembly – The Learning Phase.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Introduction of the topic upon which they will deliberate: understanding remit and authority. Explanation of influence and context: what will be done with the results the group produce. ➤ Introduction of the process, and its precedents; understanding the inevitability of bias & importance of constructive, critical thinking/doing. ➤ Agreement on group guidelines for participation. ➤ Panel sessions with 2-3 expert speakers driven by each group’s online discussions prior to meeting. Includes open Q&A. ➤ Group to identify speakers sought for future assemblies. ➤ Training and familiarity with online tools, and initial posts. Critical thinking and “discussion norms” exercises.

Day 7	<p>Local newspaper wraparound/liftout feature, explaining process, profiling representatives, and inviting participation.</p> <p>Potential use of Electronic Town Hall: 2 week online deliberation for readers to discuss ideas online.</p>
Day 21 (3-4 hours)	<p>The Second Assembly – Understanding Deliberative focus is on public submissions and on the panel’s own online idea formulation and exploration of challenge at hand.</p>
Day 23	<p><i>Convenors’ Review: do the participants need more time or assistance to come to a full understanding of their choices? Potential to extend meeting schedule at this point.</i></p>
Day 35	<p>The Community Voice An open Town Hall Q&A session.</p> <p><i>(This is offered to meet public desire for “traditional style” public meeting. It will ideally demonstrate how the randomly selected representatives have understood the complexity of the issue and the tradeoffs. This should increase public confidence in overall process/ method.)</i></p>
Day 49	<p>The Third Assembly – Reflect. Discuss. Deliberate. There is no fixed output from the session: the goal is to provide a face to face forum for the representatives to reconvene to discuss their views in small groups. The facilitator should encourage groups to move toward commencing the prioritisation task.</p>
Day 63	<p>The Final Assembly – Reaching Consensus. Delivery of a prioritised list of service priorities, their frequency, and the preferred funding model (with a record kept of minority views).</p> <p>Recommendation(s) must be Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic and with a Time horizon.</p>
Day 70	<p>Presentation of recommendations to Mayor of City of Canada Bay.</p>
Day 77	<p>Post event debrief and agreement on Action Items.</p>