

3

CHOOSE ME: THE CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL RANDOM SELECTION

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A legitimate public-deliberation process must inclusively represent the population that it serves.¹ Logistically, a deliberative process cannot deliver the whole population to the discussion. Instead, a microcosm that mirrors the full diversity and features of the public at large,² commonly referred to now as a *mini-public*, accepts the responsibility to deliberate in the common interest. The mini-public should be small enough to be organized into small groups that can deliberate together effectively.³

In establishing a mini-public, a public-engagement convener asks not just how many people should be involved, but also how they should be invited. Some conveners prefer to open an event to all comers, in the hope that by sheer force of numbers, the hundreds or thousands of participants will encompass a sufficient diversity of perspectives.⁴ Other event conveners prefer using a stratified random-sample approach to create a jury-like body of two dozen participants so that deliberation can be more focused and facilitated.⁵ Many eschew the jury method, however, in the belief that inevitable self-selection and abjuration in the absence of conscription compromise the result and undo the hard work of organizing it.

In this chapter, we detail how the Australian Citizens' Parliament (ACP) approached this problem. As the persons directly responsible for inviting and selecting participants, we compare the ACP's experience with one of its strongest influences, the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly for Electoral Reform (BCCAER). We also look beyond logistics to consider how the recruitment method shaped the ACP's proceedings.

Finding the Participants

Stratified random sampling is a randomized selection procedure that ensures that statistical proportionality (also called *descriptive representation*) is achieved across demographic dimensions such as locality, age, education, and ethnicity. These dimensions are divided into categories for which quotas are established from census data and other official sources.

The British Columbia Model

The ACP was largely inspired by the 2004 British Columbia Citizens' Assembly for Electoral Reform, established by the provincial government to recommend the best electoral system for the province.⁶ As described by political scientists Mark Warren and Hillary Pearse, the BCCAER design was "intended to approximate a *descriptive representation* of the people of BC, to insulate the process from organized political interests, and to maximize the quality of deliberation and decision-making."⁷ Participants were promised that any change from existing electoral arrangements would be presented to the public for a provincial referendum vote.

After a short campaign to encourage voter registration, the government agency responsible for conducting provincial elections (Elections BC) provided the Assembly organizers with a list of 200 citizens from the electoral roll of each of the 79 provincial electoral districts, evenly divided by gender and stratified by age.⁸ These 15,800 candidate participants were sent simple letters introducing the BCCAER process and inviting each to register to attend a regional selection meeting. Most electorates yielded insufficient responses in the short time available, causing the organizers to request more randomized names from Elections BC. Of the 23,034 invitations sent, 7 percent (1,715) responded, in varying numbers per electorate.

Elections BC invited 1,441 of these respondents, including a maximum of 10 males and 10 females per electorate based on their random pool sequence number, to attend one of 27 regional selection meetings. The 964 candidates who attended these meetings were provided with further information about their task and asked to confirm their eligibility (i.e., a Canadian citizen, not an elected official) and commitment to participate, leading 50 more candidates to decline at that stage. From the rest, the names of one man and one woman were drawn literally out of hats in each electorate to constitute the assembly of 158 participants.