



Systemic impacts of deliberative events

The Institute for Sustainable Futures is researching the systemic impact of deliberative events. The research project is funded by the newDemocracy Foundation.

Why is the research needed?

Deliberative democracy is a type of decision-making that values dialogue between informed citizens as a way to reach decisions on issues of public importance. Around the world, practitioners have built up a great deal of experience with running deliberative events, such as citizens' juries and community panels.

These events are usually very successful in creating a space where citizens can deliberate together and reach decisions. Participants feel empowered and often produce quite different recommendations to those that dominate political debates. However, deliberative events can be less successful at influencing what is actually done.

This research project uses a systems perspective to explore how deliberative events relate to broader political systems and how they might achieve more influence.

What are the objectives of the research?

The research project has three aims:

- To understand how deliberative events fit into governance systems
- To assess whether deliberative events have a positive impact on deliberation in these governance systems
- To identify practical measures that organisers and facilitators of deliberative events can take to have a more positive impact.

Consistent with these aims, the research is guided by the following questions:

- What evidence is there that discrete deliberative events achieve influence and impact on the topics they address, beyond their boundaries? What are the mechanisms by which influence and impact is achieved?
- How do participants and other stakeholders experience discrete deliberative events? How do their experiences influence their likelihood to share the event through their networks?
- How are discrete deliberative events portrayed in traditional and new media?
- In what ways do the responses to the above questions vary with the scale of the event?
- What can the organisers and facilitators of discrete deliberative events do to facilitate deliberation and impact beyond the boundaries of the event?

What will we be doing?

To answer these questions, we will develop three case studies of deliberative events initiated by the newDemocracy Foundation. These cases will be diverse; they will be at different scales (e.g. local, state and national), on different topics, and potentially using different processes to facilitate deliberation.

We will develop the cases by reviewing documents relating to the topic of deliberation, interviewing key stakeholders, observing events, and doing print and social media analysis of each event.

Who will we be talking to? What sort of questions will we be asking?

For each event, we plan to do up to 10 interviews:

- 1-2 interviews with organisers and convenors of the event to understand their aspirations for the event and intended pathways to influence and impact
- 3-4 interviews with selected participants about their experiences and any actions they take during the event to spread influence, such as posts on social media
- 5-6 interviews with selected stakeholders about their experiences of the event and any actions they take to spread influence. These stakeholders could include decision-makers that the event is seeking to influence, representatives of businesses, industry associations or non- government organisations that have a stake in the topic that is being discussed, and journalists or social media influencers that have an interest in the topic.

What is involved for participants?

Interviews will last for up to an hour and will be held at a location that is convenient for the participant. Preferably, interviews will be face-to-face but some may be done by telephone, Skype or email if face-to-face is not possible.

All interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Recordings will only be available to the research team and will be used to ensure accurate recall of the conversations.

Interview participants will be able to choose to remain anonymous in any publications emerging from the research project. If consent is provided by participants, anonymous interview transcripts will be posted in a data repository for access by other researchers. This is to support open science and further research in this important area.

There will be no payment for participation but we are very happy to shout a tea or coffee.

Participants are free to withdraw participation from this research project at any time without giving a reason.

Who is doing the research?

Dr Chris Riedy and Dr Jenny Kent are collaborating on this research project. Chris is an Associate Professor and Jenny is an Associate Researcher at the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney. If you have any queries about the research, you can contact Chris on 0402 043 386 or criedy@uts.edu.au.

Research ethics

Studies undertaken by the Institute for Sustainable Futures have been approved in principle by the University of Technology Sydney, Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research you may contact the ISF Ethics Coordinator, Dr Keren Winterford (02 9514 4972) or the ISF Deputy Director, Professor Cynthia Mitchell (02 9514 4953).

You may also contact the UTS Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (02 9514 9615). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.