

Public Participation Guide: Citizen Juries

Public Participation Guide

Citizen juries involve creating a “jury” a representative sample of citizens (usually selected in a random or stratified manner) who are briefed in detail on the background and current thinking relating to a particular issue or project. The issue they are asked to consider will be one that has an effect across the community and where a representative and democratic decision-making process is required. The “jury” is presented with a range of possible alternatives. Citizen jurors consider the alternatives and make a judgment as to the most attractive alternative for the community. They present their decision as they would in legal juries, often in the form of a report. The report may include recommendations for future actions or directions. In most cases, the responsible agency agrees in advance that it will implement whatever decision the citizen jury makes.

Citizen juries involve the wider community in the decision-making process in a representative fashion. Participants are engaged as citizens with no formal alignments or allegiances. The random selection is intended to prevent strong advocates for any particular outcome to lobby for inclusion. Citizen jurors are expected to bring with them an intrinsic worth in the good sense and wisdom born of their own knowledge and personal experience. Citizen juries provide the opportunity to add to that knowledge and to exchange ideas with their fellow citizens. The result is a collective one, in which each juror has a valuable contribution to make.

Advantages

- Can be used to broker a conflict, or to provide a transparent and non-aligned viewpoint
- Are intended to complement other forms of consultation rather than replace them; public input on values, concerns, and issues should be part of the “evidence” provided to juries
- Can be used to draw members of the community into participative processes where the community is distanced from the decision-making process or a process is not seen as being democratic
- Strives to improve representation in participative processes by engaging a cross section of the community in the jury
- Provides a transparent participatory process which can be seen to be independent and credible

- Provides a public democracy mechanism
- Provides citizens with an opportunity to develop a deep understanding of the issue
- Involves ordinary citizens
- Helps to gauge public reaction and opinion

Challenges to Consider

- A fair and transparent process for selecting jurors is particularly important; jury members must be representative of the community in consideration, and must be perceived as such by the broader community. Make sure to include parts of the community that may have been previously excluded.
- Everyone involved needs to be clear about the results and how they will be used.
- Ahead of the event, time needs to be allowed to empanel the jury, hire a facilitator, put together briefing or background papers, and contact “experts” to provide testimony regarding the different options
- Preparation also includes developing presentations on alternatives, engaging the experts and other witnesses, and timing everyone’s participation, as it can take several days to run the jury
- The sponsor must follow recommendations or explain why not. To go against the jury’s recommendations could have significant ramifications for the credibility of the sponsor and on future engagement efforts in the community

Principles for Successful Planning

- Select a broadly representative group of approximately 8-12 people
Determine a question important to the issue being considered or develop a series of options for the jury to consider
- Because of the random nature of selection and the time commitment, jurors are often paid a fee
- Brief jurors on the rules of the proceedings, and allow them two-to-four days to develop a recommendation
- Provide expert witnesses to brief the jury, be cross-examined by the jury, and spend time discussing the issue with the jury
- Engage independent moderator(s) to assist the process of deliberation
- At the agreed time, arrange a presentation from the panel and/or collect the jury’s report, which should outline its recommendations
- Hold the jury in a large enough venue to allow for an audience, consider videotaping and/or televising the proceeding.
- Publish the jury report and recommendations; it is essential to have widespread communication about the process and results.
- If the recommendations of the citizen jury are not accepted, a detailed rationale is essential

Resources Needed

Staffing

- Moderator/facilitator of overall process
- Staff to select, brief, and manage jurors
- Expert witnesses
- Staff to prepare information on alternatives
- Press and communications staff to widely advertise proceedings
- Videographer
- Interpreters, if necessary

Materials

- Venue reservation with appropriate space and furniture
- Refreshments appropriate to time, effort and audience (the jury needs to be fed)
- Data projectors, laptops, screens
- Flipcharts, tape, and markers
- Sound system with cordless microphones
- Presentations, posters, models
- Video equipment
- Information notebooks for jurors

Planning Time

- Effective citizen juries take months to plan

Implementation Time

- Juries can last multiple days to present evidence and then additional days for jury deliberation and report preparation.

Group Size

- The juries themselves are very small, but are designed to engage much broader interest from the whole community.

Cost

- Costs for juries can be quite high to prepare all of the information required, and engage experts and facilitators.

Most relevant participation levels:

- Juries are typically designed at the empower level as the jury decision is expected to be implemented by the sponsor agency.