

A Review of Public Participation and Consultation Methods

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* NOTE: Shaded boxes represent deliberative methods, whereas the other boxes are non-deliberative.





Symbols within each cell provide links to references at the end

<http://vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/compareparticipation.pdf>

| Method | Description of Method | Strengths | Weaknesses | Recommendations for Use |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Citizens Juries § | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> group of 12-20 randomly selected citizens, gathered in such a way as to represent a microcosm of their community, who meet over several days to deliberate on a policy question they are informed about the issue, hear evidence from witnesses and cross-examine them they then discuss the matter amongst themselves and reach a decision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> creates informed, active, engaged citizenry promotes "common good" as a societal objective promotes self-transformation and development provides opportunities to introduce new perspectives and challenge existing ones more careful examination of the issue promotes consensus building promotes communication between government and governed brings legitimacy and democratic control to non-elected public bodies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no formal powers; lack of binding decision accountability to act upon decision /recommendation exclusive - only a few individuals participate resource intensive time commitment for participants and organizers potential problems lie in initial stages of preparation (i.e., jury selection, agenda setting, witness selection) - these have to do with representation (who participates?) responsiveness (what jury is asked to do); and information transfer (how jury is informed?) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sponsoring organization should be clear about what issues it wants to address, how much it can spend on process, and whether it can follow through on the advice should be designed for the public and not for special interest groups better with value questions than technical questions better for focussed questions about concrete issues, than on large scale issues and should be part of a wider public involvement strategy the development of the agenda should be overseen by an advisory board made up of key stakeholders |
| Citizens Panels ⚙ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> randomly selected group of 12 citizens meet routinely (eg. four times per year) to consider and discuss issues and make decisions used to guide health resource allocation decision panels act as "sounding boards" for governing authority | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> proportion of panel members are replaced at each meeting (i.e. 4 members) to increase overall number of participants multiple panels can be held and run to increase participant numbers (i.e. reduce exclusivity) people benefit from discussion within groups, but also from discussing issues with family and friends outside of the panel | | |
| Planning Cells ⌚ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> similar to a citizens' jury in form and function sponsored by local or national governing authorities to help with the decision making process discussions/deliberation take place in Cells of about 25 participants in size results are articulated in a report that is presented to the sponsor, the media, and any other interested group local/national sponsor has to agree to take decisions into consideration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> small size of individual cells and its non-intimidating nature allows for innovative ideas and active participation participants represent all citizens and not special interest groups anyone in the population has a chance of being selected to be a part of this process makes decision makers more accountable because they have to defend their position resulting decisions are frequently implemented can renew public trust in democracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> problems defined by local authority only useful for problems in need of unique decisions accountability and long-term planning - decisions not always feasible hard to keep bias out of information dissemination process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> can be used when other methods fail to resolve a conflict best in situations that require an quick response to an urgent issue where there are a number of possible decisions that can be made not suited for issues with a "yes" or "no" answer |
| Consensus Conference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a group of citizens with varied backgrounds meets to discuss issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> process of communicating information about the conference topic provides a strong | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recruitment method for stage 1 may not ensure representative participation | |

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| ❖ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> of a scientific and or technical nature consists of 2 stages: 1)meetings with experts, discussions and work toward consensus (involves small group of people) 2)conference during which main observations and conclusions are presented to the media and general public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> educational component useful method for obtaining informed opinions from lay persons | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> exclusive process for stage 1 elaborate process requiring significant resources multiple conferences may be required to ensure that broad, representative opinions are sought | |
| Deliberative Polling — | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> builds on the opinion poll by incorporating element of deliberation involves larger numbers than citizens juries and may involve less time measures what public would think if it was informed and engaged around an issue | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides insights into public opinions and how people come to decisions seeks informed opinions, does not force people to reach consensus large, random sample | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> incentives (eg. honorarium, transportation) are important requires a lot of preparation time although sample size is large and random, ensuring representativeness is difficult | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> can provide useful insight into public opinion and useful input into public decision processes complement to representative democracy not good for crisis decisions best suited to issues with options and about which the public is not knowledgeable |
| Citizens Panels ♻️ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consists of statistically representative sample of residents in a given area most comprise several thousand citizens who represent the general population of an area panel views are regularly sought using a survey instrument (e.g. postal, telephone surveys) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> inexpensive and effective way to learn about citizens' needs and preferences panel data can be analyzed for multiple purposes and disaggregated for sub-level analysis (i.e. ethnicity, gender, socio-economic, geographic area) opportunity to collect trend data through multiple surveys to monitor impact of policies over time | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> exclusivity of participant selection process consultation agenda determined by decision-making body (i.e. top down) under-representation of hard-to-reach groups who refuse to participate panel members vulnerable to Hawthorne effect (i.e. over time they may be prone to sympathize with decision-makers...) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to the expense as well as the design, the panel is best suited for the development of major community wide policy documents. limit to new policy areas, where community opinion and policy direction have yet to be determined and mobilization has not yet occurred |
| Focus Groups — | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one time discussion of a particular topic involves 6-12 individuals selected to meet specific criteria in order to broadly represent a particular segment of society one-time face-to-face meeting structured to be informal to encourage open discussion among participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> successful focus group may lead to consensus and feelings of enrichment among participants good venue for learning about needs of a particular group remain largely informal, so participants can discuss issues in relaxed atmosphere a good way to gauge the opinions of the public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> private sector marketing roots limit ability to cover complex issues lack of informed participants produces superficial discussion potential for revealing and reinforcing social cleavages selection criteria can create bias in eliciting opinions limited number of participants limits representativeness of opinions potential for ideas expressed to be influenced/shaped by interaction/exchange with others (especially those who are dominant) resource intensive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> can be a tool for encouraging discussion and deliberation, but needs to be used with much caution because of the problems associated with it |
| Consensus building exercises — | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a process designed to help people reach a consensus by focussing on the issues themselves mediators are used to help people reach a consensus non-adversarial approach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> helps people to reach solutions they can all support provides time for people to get to know each other and their differing views | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> typically used to bring stakeholders together to reach consensus over an issue round tables are one approach where traditionally adversarial groups are brought together to |

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| Surveys — | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · solicit information from representative sample of citizens · same questions are asked of ever individual surveyed · there are a variety of survey types: postal, interviewer, telephone | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · can reach large numbers of people · if same questions are retained, can be used for longitudinal studies (e.g., monitoring change over time) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · the lists may not be representative or comprehensive · questions need to be somewhat simple and straightforward, the information gathered then can be simplistic and superficial · survey results are often not comparable · the effectiveness of surveys are affected by the rates of response · fundamental decisions have to be made before the survey begins and cannot be changed once survey has been implemented | discuss an issue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · because this is a time consuming process, it is not a good method if quick results are required · can be used during the beginning phases of a study (useful in detecting issues that need to be addressed) |
| Public Hearings N | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · form of public meeting limited in size · tends to involve only interested citizens · usually experts and interested citizens · presentations are made | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · potential to inform citizens · potential for improved decision making · potential to minimize conflict | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · may be dominated by special interest groups · feed-back obtained from this format needs to be treated carefully because it may not be representative of the community · does not generate a sense of ownership · excludes the inarticulate and perhaps disadvantaged groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · have a "pre-submission" phase which allows the public time to become familiar with the issues |
| Open Houses t | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · the public is invited to drop by at any time at a set location on a set day(s) and times · they can speak with staff, view the displays set up in the room and break into small discussion groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · relaxed atmosphere · enables staff to tailor responses according to the needs/questions of the public · allows for sensitive topics to be discussed · develops links for the future | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · potential for lack of clarity in purpose · staff resource intensive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · suitable for confrontational issues |
| Citizen Advisory Committee ✧ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · can be made up of a variety of different organizations (e.g. from governmental to public) · intended to represent the broader public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · if committee is balanced, deliberations can be fruitful · their advise should influence decision making process · should also produce informed citizens, boost trust in institutions and reduce conflict | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · not a representative group of people | |
| Community Planning ☒ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · participation on a broader level to set policy agenda and to discuss citizens' vision for community and services provided in it · more about the outcome of participation (i.e. consensus about the vision or plan) than the process of engagement (who participated and how) · draws upon a range of participation techniques (e.g., pre-circulated consultation documents, written responses, structured public meetings) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · allows for underlying assumptions to be dealt with in a deliberative manner · emphasizes consensus building, collaboration and cooperation · formal outcome is a community plan but emphasis is on reaching a common understanding of issues and finding a shared vision for dealing with them · fosters connections/partnerships between different organizations · educative role | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · may set/raise expectations that public bodies are unable to meet | |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · outcome is a gradual refining of preferences and priorities which gives participants a deeper understanding of problems | | | |
| Visioning  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · similar to community planning but input sought is about broader “vision” for community services and less about specifics on how to achieve the vision · deliberative process where ideas are gradually refined through iterative process until a clear statement emerges · outcome is typically an overview of possibilities rather than a definitive plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · emphasizes consensus building, collaboration and cooperation · formal outcome is a community plan but emphasis is on reaching a common understanding of issues and finding a shared vision for dealing with them · fosters connections/partnerships between different organizations · educative role | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · may set/raise expectations that public bodies are unable to meet | |
| Notification, Distribution & Solicitation of Comments  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · simplest form of consultation · can involve the sending out of reports · may also involve other methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · broad and representative in theory · transparency guaranteed through notification process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · questionable effectiveness in reaching some populations · risk that consultation will be dominated by the best organized groups with easy access to publication · despite the potential for broad participation, the interaction between concerned public and the authorities is often very limited, with no real possibility for dialogue or negotiation · transparency is threatened when solicitation of comments is targeted to specific groups · not enough time given to soliciting feedback (i.e sham consultation) | |
| Referenda  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · the process wherein an issue is put to popular vote · can be initiated by governmental or other organizations, or sometimes the citizenry · results may or may not be considered binding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · incites discussion and interest · way to learn public views · way to get citizens directly involved with the legislative process · all voters have equal influence · can potentially involve all members of a local or national population · difficult for the government to ignore the results of a referendum | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · results may not be representative if there is low voter turnout · wording can present problems · limited number of times you can use it (i.e. voter fatigue) · potential for undue influence if one organization has greater resources than another when campaigning for or against a proposed referendum · very costly process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · should not replace representative democracy · issue should be answerable by “yes” or “no” · issue should stand on its own (i.e. not so intertwined with another that it becomes impossible to answer) · need to inform citizenry on issue beforehand |
| Structured Value Referenda  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · voting based method for eliciting public preferences · uses “decision analysis” principles where preferences are elicited by voters who select among specified alternatives · Key components: 1)select the policy decision; 2)structure objectives; 3)develop alternatives - technical process; 4)determine impacts of | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · participants have a wider range of response options · easy to use and understand and useful for guiding policy · information disseminated and question wording may be more neutral than with traditional referenda. · voters have an easier time choosing among preferences because their alternatives are well defined and they are educated about | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · complex task and can require substantial resources · potential for undue influence over the wording by those who control the referendum · only those truly interested in seeking out preferences would employ this method · Decisions regarding what cost information and the number of alternatives to select from have the | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · best for contexts with a specific issue and with a number of alternative answers · for this to be successful, political leaders will need to be willing to share control and listen to the advice given · can reduce cost of this process by combining it with an established electoral process |

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| | alternatives; 5)frame the questions; 6)select the voting task; 7)develop a communication program | these alternatives and consequences | potential to bias the outcome of the vote. | · can be administered as a survey, but has the drawback of not attracting the same attention |

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