



4. Deliberative Forums

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Deliberative forums are spaces where a topic is brought up in a way that invites participants to carefully contemplate lock-ins, actions, and strategies forward to a problem in a constructive manner. In the context of climate-energy-mobility, topics may cover reducing dependence on fossil fuels, promoting alternative modes of transportation, just renewable energy transitions or climate mitigation/adaptation strategies. Forums are typically kept small and can either consist of a range of actors or a specific group of participants with knowledge on particular issues.



DELIBERATIVE FORUMS AT-A-GLANCE

- Provides a space for informed and structured discussion among diverse or select actors.
- Requires good facilitation and willingness from participants to deliberate.



Benefits

1. Increases participation in social change in an easy to implement and potentially low-cost way.
2. Can support the acceptance of public policies through agency and ownership.
3. By including a diversity of opinion in a constructive manner, can generate increased understanding, trust and social cohesion.
4. Demonstrates the value of informed and respectful deliberation as an objective and process in itself without the need of reaching a consensus.



Challenges and limitations

1. **Good facilitation:** Balancing interests and power relations between participants is needed, otherwise some topics or voices may dominate.
2. **Participation:** There is a risk of participants bringing their existing biases; lack of willingness of participants to take different points into account may also lock certain discussions in.
3. **Ensuring impact:** If not binding or linked beforehand to specific public policy outcomes, deliberation results may only have a limited impact.



Participants

Types of Forums include: (1) Community Forums for engaging with residents and (2) Deliberative Mini-Publics where a group of citizens develop policy recommendations. Forums can range between 8-12 participants who are affected by the topic of focus (although larger groups can be involved if you have several facilitators). Participants can be of all ages (usually adult), backgrounds, and genders with either a focus on diversity, or representative of a specific target audience e.g. with knowledge on particular issues. Mini-publics should target a representative sample of the population, randomly selected.

STEPS

Deliberative Forums do not have set guidelines, however suggested steps consist of:



In addition, a pre- and post-forum survey may optionally be conducted to observe whether having an opportunity to deliberate with others changes participants' perceptions.

The **OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision-Making** (link below) encourages: (i) defining a neutral and clear task purpose, (ii) being accountable that deliberation outcomes impact public decision-making, (iii) being transparent and public, (iv) being inclusive, (v) being representative, (vi) being informative, giving participants equal access to evidence, (vii) ensuring group deliberation, (viii) giving enough time for deliberation, (ix) ensuring integrity, (x) ensuring participant privacy (GDPR), (xi) evaluating post activity.

Timeframe: Deliberative Forums can take place across a day or two, or span several weeks, with planning and analysis needed before and after this.



OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Depending on the specific goals, Deliberative Forums may result in direct policy recommendations and/or action plans at the community level. Overall they add to improved understanding, capacity building and collective communication.

Having spaces to deliberate in is linked to increased community engagement and opening up processes for more democratic participation and social change. For participants, deliberation may lead to increased awareness, knowledge and capacity building.



ONLINE/OFFLINE

Cost, time, and geographical coverage are important factors in judging whether to hold deliberations face-to-face or virtually. Offline (face-to-face) deliberations have the possibility of establishing intimacy, connections, and trust. Online (virtual) meetings have the advantage of reaching a wider geographical scope, however, have the trade-off of losing computer illiterate/inaccessible audiences.



RESOURCES NEEDED

Facilitation skills are the most critical, in addition organisers may need technical infrastructure for data collection, and/or software for data analysis.

LEARN MORE

- <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/good-practice-principles-for-deliberative-processes-for-public-decision-making.pdf> - Short flyer which outlines 11 principles for deliberative processes
- <https://participedia.net/method/4345> - Method: Deliberative Forum
- Escobar, O., and Elstub, S., 2017. *Forms of mini-publics: An introduction to deliberative innovations in democratic practice*. Research and Development Note, 4 (1-14).
- Fishkin, J., 2009. *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation*. Oxford: OUP.
- OECD, 2020. *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE: SEARBO project

This three-day forum in the Philippines deliberated on disinformation and the spread of "fake news" regarding the 2022 elections. It involved 26 randomly selected Filipinos and came up with recommendations on a near-consensus See [SEARBO repor](#) for more.