The Democratic Society

newDEMOCRACY

Designing an online public deliberation

The Democratic Society and The newDemocracy Foundation

Where we start from

The measures implemented for social distancing to slow the spread of Covid-19 Coronavirus are driving new thinking around public deliberation. We must resolve long standing challenges to taking deliberation 'online' while retaining the qualities that make such deliberation useful. Nowhere in the world has solved this problem, but there are components and exercises that have worked. We're drawing on these individual points of success.

Shifting to an online or digital medium places barriers at almost every aspect of a typical public deliberation. It immediately reduces the pool of people available or capable of comfortably contributing. More critically, public deliberations rely heavily on the ability for everyday people to build personal relationships with one another (engaging at length with people with different views and different life experiences) while solving a shared problem. Online meetings mean the same quality of deliberation needs to be delivered in very different circumstances.

We believe, though, that authentic, valuable and high quality online deliberation is possible, and that online tools can strengthen some aspects of the deliberative process, even as they make other aspects more difficult.

Digital access can make people feel more able to contribute, but it also means they're more prone to distraction. It can be harder to focus when working from home and covering complex learning tasks. Our online attention-spans are much shorter than our in-person ones. However, the "flat" nature of digital participation can encourage deeper participation, particularly by those who lack confidence, because multiple different contribution methods can be combined. We need to work within people's capacity for communicating through a screen, but also make the most of it to broaden contributions.

We need to think about issues of connectivity, digital skills and troubleshooting. Hands on assistance with technology will be needed by someone at some point and our solutions need to pre-empt it.

It will also be important, when video participation is being used, to ensure that participants are able to create a space that is as distraction-free as possible, and do not feel embarrassed by their surroundings or overawed by the homes of others.

The combination of these elements makes it difficult to adapt processes we would normally use in-person to an online format.

A simple "lift and shift" online will not work as well – if it even works at all.

This requires us to start our thinking again, developing a project model with both deliberative principles and specific barriers and opportunities in mind.

This note, created by the newDemocracy Foundation in Australia and The Democratic Society in Europe, sets out how some of these challenges can be addressed, not through a simplistic digitisation of offline methods, but by creating assemblages of tools and techniques that realise the maximum benefit of online tools while preserving the qualities that make offline deliberation a recognised gold standard.

This is one contribution to a development process that is happening across the world. We want to exchange knowledge not only with our peers in the democratic sector, but with those facing similar challenges to high quality participation in governments, schools, colleges and businesses. We will continue to update these ideas as they are tested and developed, and reflect the ideas and experiences of our peers and partners in the democratic innovation sector. If you would be interested in exploring some of these issues with us, or sharing your experiences, our contact details are at the end of this working paper.

Building on the core process

The core of all deliberative democratic processes is:

1. Recruiting and retaining a representative random sample of citizens;

2. Having the group work as a cohesive whole, not an aggregation of individual views;

3. The deepest achievable process of learning that drives people to ask critical questions, seek out primary sources and hear from a more diverse range of perspectives;

4. Deliberating to explore which information they found most (and least) important to the decision at hand;

5. Finding common ground around a single set of recommendations.

Our approach here retains that core philosophy, which is well understood, and then uses the options of technology to assist as needed. A guiding principle is a 'light touch': we'd rather participate in an effective 40-minute conversation with a single task than a 6-hour grand tour of speakers and multiple tasks where it is inevitable technology will fail on multiple occasions.

We do this through the use of a mixed model. Some learning is asynchronous – participants complete some of the tasks in their own time. Some small group work is flexibly arranged at a time that works for all members of the group. Exercises that seek broader sharing and deliberation are synchronous, happening at the same time for all.

Process methodologies

Method	Functional Focus	Considerations
Video Conference (synchronous)	Prioritise for when common ground agreement is needed and when facilitators will need to repeatedly mix groups and bring to plenary.	Use sparingly; high risk of connectivity issues across a 30-person group and can be a draining experience.
3-way Phone call (flexible synchronous: within a time-window)	A more natural and familiar way to talk. Needs to be paired with clear activity templates so the task has no ambiguity. Fills the gap between large groups and individuals.	Requires no additional tech infrastructure, and very low risk of connectivity problems. Will require consent to share phone numbers to the group.
Individual activities (asynchronous)	Read with a task contributing to a shared goal (so as to maintain cohesion with the whole group). Again, clear activity (note taking templates will be essential)	Easy to have jurors "drop off" as a non-scheduled task. Will require active monitoring of those contributing notes and follow-up retention calls.

Recruiting

Recruitment methodologies vary around the world. Best practice is centred on extending a hard-copy invitation to a random sample of postal addresses to gather RSVPs or expressions of interest for selection, from which a stratified random sample is then drawn to descriptively match the demographic profile of the population. Those chosen are then contacted to confirm their availability and affirm their commitment to the length of the process.

Though this approach does not change dramatically with the move online, it requires specific emphasis on the efforts that will be made to ensure everyone has an opportunity to participate, independent of their technological access.

Recipients will need to be reassured that their selection will be independent of their any skills or device ownership. The invitation should make clear that hardware will be provided to those that need it, and that skills training will be available to anyone not quite comfortable with learning new programs on the fly.

Preparing participants

In normal circumstances, we would stay in close contact with participants who were selected to attend, to ensure that they have the practical and process information they need and that they feel prepared. Those who have special requirements would also be identified at this stage, and we would work with them to try to ensure a seamless experience, that ensures they are able to participate equally and fully with all members.

In this case, an additional step will be to ensure that the technology setup is right for all participants, and that those who for some reason (personal needs, connectivity, skill or equipment) are unable to use the selected video conferencing tool are identified so alternative provision (hardware provision, dial-in access, for instance) can be provided.

Accessibility needs must be accommodated throughout the whole process; for instance providing printed information, data and hardware as needed and ensuring language and literacy are not barriers to equitable participation.

We would also run a couple of getting to know each other online meetups, using an informal approach to build confidence and practice using the online tools and online behaviours.

Technology access

The most difficult problem to solve with any online model is the asymmetry of people's digital access and capability. How do you recruit a representative mix of people when a portion of the community has limited digital access or lack the skills to equally participate?

It is important that our democratic processes are not exclusionary and so we must develop practices that break down these barriers. There are three types of technology access issues that are not mutually exclusive:

- Hardware – someone does not own the right product to access the internet.
- Connectivity – someone cannot connect to the internet because of their location.
- Accessibility – someone has not acquired the specific technology skills required.

Each of these access issues must be addressed to ensure that anyone who would like to participate has the option.

Hardware

The easiest solution to the hardware problem is to make the offer to provide a device on loan to each participant who does not have one capable of accessing the online platforms the process will rely on. We will preload the device with the right applications, instructions and reading materials. There are a range of cheaper options available that are simple notebook devices that can access the internet and take notes. We expect less than a handful of participants will need to take up this load offer.

Connectivity

Social distancing makes it difficult for participants to move for the sake of connectivity. What is allowed will vary jurisdictionally, but the most simple solution is for participants to visit a nearby location that does have connectivity – a library, sharing with a neighbour or another Council premise for example.

Where this is not possible, a solution is to provide data access directly to participants in the form of USB Modems or Pocket WiFi devices. These prepaid services will be able to give access to some participants who might not have internet infrastructure at their home but are in an area that has connectivity.

Accessibility

We will be required to help participants through their learning of new digital technologies. Even for someone who is comfortable with technology, new platforms or tools can be difficult to navigate at first. To do this – we will record tutorial videos that demonstrate use of each tool and platform participants will be required to use. We will set aside time to troubleshoot any issues that arise and coach participants through any issues they have setting up their own devices. This will require some overhead but not everyone will need to use the service.

Overall, we must make it clear that the Commissioner is prepared to address each of these issues from the outset. A prospective participant must read the invitation and feel assured that, despite not having access at that point in time, they will be accomodated.

Learning online by doing more offline

In a standard multi-weekend offline deliberation, about 40 participants would learn for about three weekends, in other words for about 24 hours each, or 1120 hours in total. This whole-room large-group learning is much harder to achieve for sustained periods online. Reading, learning and understanding through a screen is difficult for even the most attuned student. Our design needs to cater for this student and everyone else.

The approach proposed is a mix of two three-hour online sessions and three to four hours per week of individual and small group learning with a collaborative discovery and project mindset. Although the same number of hours of learning will be delivered, the format allows for a wider exploration, at the cost of giving all participants identical early information - this shortfall can be compensated by an extra focus on pre-event materials.

To do this, we will develop an asynchronous learning schedule for individuals and mixed groups of three. When we give initial briefing calls to participants, we often emphasise that the briefing material is not strictly 'homework' and that a lot of their learning will be done in the room with others. We're flipping this switch.

Participants will be given some material that is a must read or watch and given the opportunity to free roam through any information made available to them and whatever other research they happen to do. This helps distribute the shared learning task – not everyone can do everything but between everyone they can cover the essentials and build from there.

By adjusting the balance of the "in-the-room" and "at home" workloads, we can ensure online discussions are focused and productive.

Participating in several different shorter meetings is dramatically less demanding than more than four hours of reading and learning together through a screen.

To manage this, we will need to make use of an online learning tool that helps coordinate and clearly communicate what each participant's tasks and set materials are for each week. This web platform will be their point of access for everything. They reference it for their information and reading materials, the calendar details when they're meeting online and which link to click for the correct video call, it houses the combined notes taken by the group and stores recorded presentations and materials from expert speakers.

One way of thinking about this is to consider the participants working towards a group assignment. The assignment is their final recommendation report. Together they must collaborate on reading, noting insights and reporting back to the group as a whole. The criterion for passing their final assignment is whether or not they all stand behind what they've written.

Working as a group, not as isolated individuals

Our deliberative processes rely on a representative mix of people coming together around a shared problem. They hear each other's views, learn from their lived experiences and find common ground around solutions. This requires that they work together rather than as a set of individuals expressing their own views separately.

Typically, this sense of togetherness is fostered through getting-to-know-you exercises, small conversations over morning tea and the realisation that they have a lot in common even with those outside of their usual social connections.

This is harder to generate when talking through a screen or even over the phone. People will still build connections, but we'll need more exercises and to deliberately create more time for people to talk outside of their set tasks.

One way to go about this is to include a participant photo sheet in the initial information kit. Photos of everyone can be matched with a short blurb submitted by themselves

– an informative yearbook. This will help participants put a name to a face when they're talking over the phone and help people remember who it was that they were talking to at various times. We normally build these memories through visual cues in face-to-face conversations – we need to develop a number of approaches to help fill this gap.

Another way we'll do this is to allow time before, between and after tasks for participants to hang around and talk on a video call. This replicates the productive morning coffee conversations that we would otherwise be missing. These are opportunities to share what was just learned during the previous exercise and equally opportunities to share what happened during offline times in a more personal capacity.

We'll also have greater control over group structure. Participants are drawn to people like them. It's common for the younger members of a group to sit together, often requiring a bit of facilitation intervention to ensure mixed groups. By allocating who is in what virtual call we'll have a little extra control to make sure everyone has the chance to work with everyone, thus ensuring essential diversity of views.

Deliberation: 'In the room' becomes 'In the space'

People's attention to a conversation online can wax and wane – often in relation to a perceived pressure to participate. The more people on any given call, the less pressure to participate, and the easier it is to respond to other attention grabbing interjections.

To address this, we will work in small groups of roughly three, each group on different video calls, and each with a facilitator responsible for ensuring a mix of voice, a focus on the task and good note taking. Group exercises will be adjusted to ensure they work more comfortably online and that they clearly fit together in a logical progression.

This will require quite a significant adjustment in how the facilitation of the group works. The background administration on ensuring the right people are in the right video calls, have the right links and are taking notes in the correct document, will be difficult at first. Project teams will need test runs to ensure the right capability for hosting a number of calls in parallel and coordinated access to the correct tools.

We propose a facilitator for each group of three. An in-person process has the benefit of facilitators being able to quickly scan and assess the whole room in a sweep – video meetings are closed-off group exercises that require either dipping in and out of or a consistent presence. We recommend that the consistent presence path be taken to ensure tech support and task questions can be easily answered without participants wasting precious time trying to contact the right person to answer their question. Meetings might be staggered to ease the personnel load here.

Shifting from small group work to whole group identity in an offline environment occurs through key process design elements; the people in small groups are changed for each session ensuring people get to discuss with everyone, small groups present to each other their outputs and thinking, and small groups get to comment and give feedback to each other's work in progress. To ensure a whole group dynamic and identity, we will mix up the participants when the learning task changes. We will also ask small groups

to create a summary of key outputs for sharing with others, and build in reflection and feedback mechanisms (these may be presentations or short recordings).

Digital tool choices

A common set of tools will need to be chosen to ensure a consistent experience and ease of use. As far as possible technology and tools are developing rapidly, but at the moment we would recommend:

- **An online platform for connection –** a website with areas for participants and the wider public that enables them to track through the process and follow what is going on. This may need to be specifically created for the exercise, though a number of templates and frameworks exist that should make this reasonably straightforward.

- **Online learning –** a number of online learning platforms such as Canvas or Learnworld are available for more structured learning. Online whiteboards such as Miro could be useful as ways of providing templates on which participants can record their explorations.

- **Video and phone conferencing tools –** A wide range of these are available. Microsoft Teams, if available, and Google Hangouts are well tested and well known. Newer alternatives such as Jitsi and Zoom are also possible choices particularly for smaller groups, but Jisti requires a host server, and there have been some security concerns around Zoom.

- **Collaborative drafting –** this is the best-served area, with Microsoft Office Online (which can also connect with Teams) allowing collaborative drafting, and Google Docs (which could link with Google Hangouts) doing the same.

- **Voting tools –** several online ranking tools are available, including polling platforms such as Survey Monkey or the simple tools built into Google and Microsoft products. More complicated open source platforms such as CONSUL or Your Priorities could be adaptable to these needs over time.

In between sessions – ensuring participant retention

It is crucial that the participants that begin the process continue throughout. We aren't able to backfill people because of the sheer amount of catching-up that would be required of them. Typically, this means we put particular effort in when recruiting to explain the uniqueness of the opportunity, ensure all needs and concerns are met and reduce as many barriers to entry. This is all with the view that once actually in the room with fellow participants for the first time, everyone will buy into the mutual feeling of purpose and togetherness.

Online presents a significant challenge here. It will be quite easy for an unsatisfied participant to log-off and not return. It is therefore important we put an even more acute focus on retaining participants. This occurs in three distinct ways:

- **Before** someone participants in an online conversation for the first time, they must feel adequately prepared and comfortable with the tools they'll be using and the types of conversations they'll be having. Where we might usually have one or two induction calls, an online process might call for 3 or 4 depending on how quickly participants pick up these new digital skills.

- **During** a process, the facilitator has the ability to filter between tables and watch for body language that might suggest someone is disinterested or uncomfortable. These are indicators for someone who might potentially drop out of the process for any given reason. With online conversations, it'll be much more difficult to monitor for these signs. We'll need to ensure facilitators build in regular process feedback channels so participants can raise any issues and have them quickly addressed.

- **After** each meeting it will be important that we check back in with participants about how the recent meetings went for them and if they had any issues of feedback to provide. This contact time will be used to check that people are clear on what their current learning task is and help resolve any questions or uncertainty.

The above steps outline a very hands-on management approach that is above the standard level of personal management that we would typically provide.

Participants must know beforehand what their journey will look like and how each specific task will contribute to the project overall. You would want to see how each hour you commit makes sense and is a good use of your time.

We've included an example of this project map at the end of this note. It helps explain the flow of exercises so that each small building block can be traced to the final product. An in-person deliberation achieves this at the end of each day, the facilitator is able to wrap-up the day's work and communicate the path forward. With an online model, we need to make clear the path home from each small exercise so that 40 minutes of social cohesion exercises don't feel like wasted time.

In addition to this, we recommend keeping the same level of reimbursement that participants would otherwise be paid on a daily rate – this accounts for the distributed learning time and covers the general time commitment spread throughout the process.

Experts and additional sources

Time is an important dimension in an offline process and this is particularly felt in the role of experts who often have a limited time to present and share information and engage in Q&A or dialogue with members.

There are disadvantages to this asynchronous presentation. Without clear sight of participants in the room, it is easier for experts to miss nonverbal cues that they are losing the attention of the group, or that members do not understand a technical term. For this reason, preparing experts for online participation is just as important as the participants, ensuring that they know and cater for any needs identified, and how the learning tasks fit into the overall design.

Additionally, experts in offline processes can be used for further knowledge and input when members are drafting recommendations. This can be achieved online by building in time for experts to give feedback and thoughts between initial drafting and refinement activities.

Reaching recommendations and voting online

The process of moving from deliberation to recommendation always includes a collaborative drafting phase, where participants work together to develop ideas and collaboratively write recommendations that might form part of the assembly's output. This occurs in a typical face-to-face deliberation. Participants analyse a problem, form around a key set of themes or ideas and then begin to develop a set of solutions. They find agreement on some draft recommendations before developing them further into complete recommendations with complementary rationale and evidence to support their claims.

We're able to capture this deliberative logic in a digital format because initial ideas, drafts and final recommendations are usually structured using templates. A mix of templates, interim votes, and small group working can then be put together in a digitised process, using common platforms such as Microsoft OneDrive or Google Docs.

Clear writing instructions emphasise simplicity. Given the time, some individuals will develop long and complicated responses to their favourite topics. While this normally happens, the ease of 'copy and paste' from a personal document into the shared document makes this more likely.

Templates are crucial to how this exercise works normally and they will be even more crucial here.

They must make clear writing instructions that nudge participants toward shorter and more precise recommendations that have total group support – it is harder to agree with everything in a long-winded recommendation than it is to agree with something with total clarity.

The online process will need to ensure that participants have an equal opportunity to contribute, and drafting windows should be at set times to ensure that facilitators are able to support and hold the process. In particular, some collaborative drafting online

can devolve into "edit wars", as has been seen on some platforms such as Wikipedia. Skilled facilitation avoids this but it is important that writing instructions focus on clear statements that reflect the room. Recommendations drafted in small groups must be genuinely collaborative products, rather than merely the dictation of the strongest voice.

Once the recommendations are drafted by the small groups, they can be sorted and judged by the group through nuanced (multiple option; not binary) voting and organising tools. One difference of online spaces is that the voting can be done without the social aspect of people in a room around you. This 'lack of the social' in decision making is at times a positive and also a downside. We lose the nuance that is brought out by people changing their minds together when presented with different viewpoints or finding points of agreement, but online may allow minority views to be more clearly expressed than in offline exercises.

The final result of the group decision making process is that the whole room can live with what is written in the recommendations report.

The final results of the ranking could be announced to the participants and public as the results, though practice on this varies in offline events. It is ultimately important that the participants all stand behind what is written in the report – the recommendations reflect the collective judgement of a representative mix of everyday people.

A positive aspect of offline processes that is inevitably lost in the move online is participants' sense of common achievement at the end, acknowledging their achievement and talking through next steps. The buzz of producing a final set of recommendations is inevitably going to be reduced when spread across an online community rather than felt in a room after weekends of intensive work.

Ideally, an element of in-person celebration would be included, when possible, so participants feel like they are able to relax and take credit for the work that they have done along with their colleagues.

Some practical considerations

Making the process visible to the public

The complete transparency of any deliberative process is fundamental to building its public legitimacy. The public needs to know that people like them are making decisions, this is only communicated when the 'everydayness' of those selected is clear and obvious. Closed off conversations in digital conference rooms are about as far removed from observable public dialogue. To overcome this, we will need to develop new ways of sharing the process with the wider public. These will need to go beyond any typical

communications plan and focus on clearly explaining the process through the voices of the participants.

These communication processes should focus on video media that captures the 'everydayness' of the participants and the journey they are embarking on.

Online conversations can easily be recorded, and we are able to interview participants about their experiences through the same tools they use for their regular exercises. This will require someone to regularly put together small vignettes that summarise the 'day'.

Making the process visible to commissioners

It will also be difficult for sponsoring organisations to sit in on conversations, watch the room work together in small groups and get a sense of the group progress. One approach here will be for project managers from the organisation to sit in with facilitators and follow the process from behind the screen but not take part in the conversation. Another will be by giving them access to recording of parts of the process that they're able to watch back, or skim through for any specific points of interest.

Staff training and skills

Facilitation teams and staff will need to be brought up to speed on all aspects of online deliberation. This ranges from translating exercises to an online suitable format to having a complete understanding of the tools planned for use throughout the process. The facilitation team will need to be adept at resolving any tech challenges that arise.

To support the production of recorded presentations, documenting the meetings and communicating the process to the public, we recommend that the sponsoring organisation bring on someone who can oversee video production for the project. This will range from producing videos that capture the personal aspect of the process right through to coordinating the quality and accessibility of video information material.

Example project outline

An outline similar to this example should be made available to all the participants to help communicate the path from their first set of online meetings right through to the final product. They need to know that their set of 20+ small building blocks follow a logical plan.

Task/Objective	Activity	Output and rationale
Group Cohesion Introductions Getting comfortable	(Online) Small group "getting-to-know-you" tasks. 10-15 min sessions as 5s or 6s. Reference your bios in the information kit and take note to help you remember everyone.	We need you to be familiar with one another to make working together easy. Doing this online helps build your comfort with the tool/s.
Understanding the Question	(Prepare alone, discuss online) You need to consider what "the question" means to you. Take notes.\n\nYou'll share your thoughts in small groups before we bring the conversation to the whole group.	As a group, you'll find agreement on what criteria you'll use to judge solutions and final recommendations with consistency. This is also your first go at finding agreement as a group.
Baseline Learning	(Offline) Throughout this process, you'll be asked to do some work on your own in your own time. What you need to read and when is available online. Sometimes you might need to watch a video for 10 minutes.\n\nYou will need to take notes following the templates and guides.	Everyone works on their own to cover a baseline of information across the whole group. Not everyone can read everything but as a group you can cover the essentials. The note templates help ensure everyone's notes are consistent and easily read.
Critical Thinking and Biases	(Offline) You will need to watch the "Critical Thinking" and "Unconscious Biases" videos. Take some notes and remember to apply them in conversation or when listening to expert speakers.	Everyone has the skills required to critically question information and find gaps in their knowledge.
Organisational/ Commissioning Staff Presentations	(Offline) Staff have recorded introductions to the problem. You need to watch these, take notes and remember to reflect on your critical thinking. Take notes in the template for any questions you want to ask.	Everyone has watched the videos and has prepared some questions for the Staff Q&A.
Q&A Staff session	(Online) Before you speak to Staff, you work in small groups to agree on some priority questions out of what you've prepared beforehand.\n\nEveryone then takes part in an online Q&A format where members of staff each get ~10 minutes with a group before rotating around. Everyone speaks to each staff member.	Each group captures notes separately before sharing with the wider group. We follow a set standard use of bold or highlight for key points and provide templates for consistency.

Task/Objective	Activity	Output and rationale
Active Interests	(Offline) Stakeholders and active interests have recorded 10-minute videos to make their case and answer any preliminary questions you have asked. Remember your critical thinking training and re-watch if you need. Everyone takes notes in templated form.	Everyone comes prepared to the active interest Q&A.
Active Interest Q&A	(Online) Before you speak to Stakeholders, you work in small groups to agree on some priority questions out of what you've prepared beforehand. Everyone then takes part in an online Q&A format where active interests/stakeholders each get ~10 minutes with a group before rotating around. Everyone speaks to each active interest/stakeholder.	Each group captures notes separately before sharing with the wider group. We follow a set standard use of bold or highlight for key points and provide templates for consistency.
What more do we need to know?	(Offline) You've covered a lot of material by now. What information is still missing? Are there any clear gaps? Have you not heard from a perspective? Take notes in the template. (Online) Everyone cross references their notes in regularly mixing small groups. Goal is to find agreement on what information to ask for and who you trust to provide it.	The group ends up with a list of questions, sources and experts that you need to hear from to have a more complete knowledge of the topic. This helps ensure you hear from a diversity of views on any given topic.
Expert speakers	(Offline) Expert speakers have recorded 10-minute videos to make their case and answer any preliminary questions you have asked. Remember your critical thinking training and re-watch if you need. Everyone takes notes in templated form.	Everyone comes prepared to the expert speakers Q&A.
Expert Speakers Q&A	(Online) Before you speak to the Experts you requested, you work in small groups to agree on some priority questions out of what you've prepared beforehand. Everyone then takes part in an online Q&A format where your requested speakers each get ~10 minutes with a group before rotating around. Everyone speaks to each expert.	Each group captures notes separately before sharing with the wider group. We follow a set standard use of bold or highlight for key points and provide templates for consistency.

Task/Objective	Activity	Output and rationale
Key insights	(Offline) It is time to cross reference everyone else's notes. The aim here is to cover the key insights of the group. What information has been most important or most insightful? (Online) Compare notes in small groups. Do you agree? Take notes together and highlight the overlap.	Highlight key insights helps you find overlap between what the rest of the group finds important. This will help you narrow down on the problem, which will help you come up with solutions.
Early ideas	(Offline) You now need to start thinking about answering the question. What problems need solving? Are there any solutions emerging? Take notes in the template. (Online) Small group discussions to compare notes and see if there is any overlap. What needs to change?	We need you to start thinking about a solution. You'll need to compare notes with everyone and start to find some common ground. Does everyone agree? What will change people's minds?
Whole group comparison	(Offline) Take a look at the work from the other small groups, are they different, have you missed something? Have they?	This is your chance to pause and think to ensure there are no gaps or ask for some clarity around why some people arrived at a different conclusion.
Finding common ground	(Online) You'll work in small groups to use decision-making tools that help show levels of comfort with an idea. This is a 5-point scale that captures more nuance than a simple yes or no.	We need to get a sense of how the whole group is feeling and how close we are to finding group agreement on a direction or what might need to change.
Writing a draft recommendation	(Online) You work together in small groups again to find agreement on wording in draft recommendations. This is done in templates on Google Docs. You'll then build into larger groups to combine notes and simplify the language.	By working your way up from small groups to a whole, you ensure you maintain agreement while capturing the best from each set for drafts.
Is anything missing?	(Offline) Now is your final chance to stop and think about what you've written. Does it make sense? Is it clear about what it asks for?	Everyone has the chance to reflect on their own, considering their unconscious biases training and focusing on clarity of intent.
Final decision	(Online) You work as small groups building up to the whole group to agree on the final wording of the advice before it is published.	We make sure everyone stands behind the final report, that it flows logically from the established criteria and that minority views are captured.

Conclusion

There are a range of perspectives on how to adapt deliberative processes either currently underway or about to begin that vary quite widely from 'we have to rethink everything for an online context' to 'let's do our 7-hour-per-day-two-day session as planned, but through a video conference'.

We've developed a fresh application of deliberative principles, not a direct translation of an in-person deliberative design to an online environment. Shifting to an online or digital medium places barriers at almost every aspect of a typical public deliberation. Our approach merges techniques and systems to achieve the maximum benefit of online tools while preserving the qualities that make in-person deliberation a recognised, proven 'gold standard'.

We'll continue to develop and build on these innovations through our practice and research in the field.

For further information, or to discuss any of the issues raised, please contact us:

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