

Research and Development Note

How to Recruit Participants for Citizens' Assemblies

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This paper draws lessons from newDemocracy's experiences operating various citizens' juries in Australia including, the South Australia Nuclear Fuel Cycle, Democracy in Geelong, and the Australian Citizens' Parliament.

Follow these and additional works at http://www.newdemocracy.com.au

^{*} newDemocracy is an independent, non-partisan research and development organisation. We aim to discover, develop, demonstrate, and promote complementary alternatives which will restore trust in public decision making. These R&D notes are discoveries and reflections that we are documenting in order to share what we learn and stimulate further research and development.

How to Recruit Participants for Citizens' Assemblies

What is the question?

What is the best way to recruit participants for citizens' assemblies?

What is the usual answer, and why Is it inadequate?

Typically, community engagement practitioners and public decision-makers hear from those who make themselves heard. These are people who have some combination of the time and resources to amplify their voice and are usually motivated by being particularly affected by a decision (positively or negatively). No matter which side of a decision these groups claim to speak for, they are never as diverse or representative of the wider population because they are a wholly self-selected group.

Democratic lotteries aim to address this skew by drawing a randomly selected group of people from an area and stratifying their selection by some simple demographic criteria. This ensures that the group that is selected is broadly representative of the wider population.

All citizens' assemblies make use of democratic lotteries to randomly select their participants. However, not all lotteries are created equal. Some use methods that skew toward more self-selection while some result in severe drop-out rates that compromise the overall representativeness of the group who remain.

There are four clear goals when recruiting participants by democratic lottery for a citizens' assembly. They are:

- 1. Fairness everyone should have a fair chance of being chosen
- 2. Representativeness the room should descriptively represent the population
- 3. Retention the process must retain participants throughout
- 4. Public trust the wider public must trust the way people were chosen

If your selection and recruitment methodologies do not successfully meet these goals, they will undermine the entire purpose of the citizens' assembly.

Some methods have weaknesses that undermine certain goals. For example: Retaining a polling or survey company might achieve public trust through its independence but their unfamiliarity with the project will undermine retention and their chosen databases can undermine fairness and as a result, representativeness.

Some selection methods and tools do not stratify their selections to strictly match a measured population profile (e.g., Census data). Instead, these tools re-weight applicants to "un-skew" their representation in the selection pool. Statistical 'tricks' such as these introduce an opportunity for people to distrust the selection process. You must explain your method clearly and demonstrate how it is fair, but if the explanation is complicated and difficult to follow, this creates fuel for scepticism and distrust (See, Ofbyfor explaining their selection process).

All methods will encounter challenges: it is difficult to recruit those who are extremely sceptical or wary of government initiatives, those who struggle with the dominant language or culture, and particularly younger people (under 25). At times additional methods will be

needed to capture these voices. However, the democratic lottery is an extremely viable way to meet these challenges and to overcome most of the problems associated with self-selection.

How should we recruit participants?

When recruiting participants, you can follow some simple steps to ensure the method is robust.

The first step is to decide who will be doing the recruiting. This should be a non-partisan and independent operator whose reputation is clearly tied to the integrity and quality of the recruitment. For example, newDemocracy regularly performs this role. Independent electoral authorities are well-suited given their public reputation for being apolitical.

A simple public trust test can be applied here: Who does the public trust most to do this fairly?

Many government agencies will need someone like newDemocracy to do the recruitment not just for logistical reasons, but because no one would trust them not to have 'put their fingers on the scales' (even if they didn't, that sceptical view will always get traction). Independent organisations that regularly perform this task will be able to build their trusted reputation over time. In 2014, newDemocracy randomly selected the Head of Communications for the State Opposition Leader (such is the nature of the random draw). The benefit to this was that because we didn't filter that person out (and the news story is easily discoverable via Google) it strengthens the claim for future projects that we don't exclude people who hold views contrary to the government of the day.

It's important that the operator understands the process and the weight of their role in the integrity of the process. The recruiter should be able to speak with confidence about all aspects of project operation.

For this reason, we recommend against using polling or survey companies who conduct recruitment outside of random selection – their default behaviour can compromise on selection integrity to complete the task (as was seen when Irish Polling company Red C Research and Marketing confirmed that seven of the 99 citizens in the Irish Citizens' Assembly on the Eighth Amendment had been recruited improperly).

The second step is to set your size and stratification criteria to determine what the group will eventually look like. Your size will strike a balance between resourcing and deliberative quality, usually somewhere between 30 and 50 (See, <u>Sample Size for Mini-publics</u>).

Stratification should be simple. To achieve a descriptively representative sample, newDemocracy recommends using the following five standard stratification variables: age, gender, education, home ownership, and geography. And where required, ethnicity.

Education and home ownership are used because they are strong indicators for socio-economic stratification. How closely they track income and wealth will vary across cultures so you should be prepared to substitute them with questions (surrogate indicators) that you know people will answer honestly and will reveal a representative mix of people. Asking people whether they own or rent where they live may elicit more honest answers than asking people for their income band while achieving the same goal.

Ethnicity can also be complicated. Some people can respond cynically when they think they're being unreasonably excluded from a process, and it can be difficult to cross-check or validate some claims. You should stratify by ethnicity when it is required to ensure public trust in the process.

This range of variables broadly offers everyone in the community a fair chance of participating. The lottery process does not make the claim that the assembly is a perfect statistical representation of the community – rounding down a population of thousands to 30-50 people will necessitate that there aren't specific quotas for all population sub-groups.

For example, providing a quota for a sub-group that is less than 2.7% of the population (the threshold for one seat in the panel) would skew the overall profile in a way that altered the representation of other groups. We therefore must draw a line somewhere that ensures the overall group is fair to everyone while maintaining a robust methodology that delivers trusted descriptive representation.

Someone who is a member of a sub-group that does not receive a specific quota *will still be able to participate* and will have an opportunity to be chosen. Quotas are set to ensure that the group meets a minimum threshold of representation but in no way serves to exclude participants. Our sole exclusion (printed on the invitations) is for people in paid political employment.

What do we mean by representation?

A common question we hear is: If you are only having a few levels of basic stratification, won't a whole range of minority voices be lost?

The answer is: there is a second layer (stakeholder contributions of content and speakers) that lets these minority voices contribute.

Representation in a citizens' assembly is not limited to membership in the assembly itself. We must take a broad view of the process and the many contributing elements that influence the process. Often the best form of representation for views and experiences is through stakeholder and expert speakers who are given the time and platform to clearly communicate their own views or the views of the community they speak for to convince the randomly selected decision-making group about the validity of their claims.

When it comes down to sharing a specific point of view or speaking for a specific community, spokespeople for advocacy groups are usually best placed to provide this. Their regular role is to channel the views of their community. In contrast, the expectation that an everyday person can speak for their whole community can often be unfair (not everyone enjoys public speaking, not everyone shares the same view).

Where the divisions between quotas are made is always motivated by fostering public trust and political legitimacy. The question is asked: "Will the wider public agree that the process was a fair reflection of their community?"

A quick test for this is: Will everyone see "someone like me" in the room? Whether it is by age, neighbourhood, job type or sporting club.

A quick note on incentives: There are several methods for appealing to people who would not normally participate in community engagement. These are:

- Paying people for their time (think about how much you would need to be paid to incentivise you to take time off work) (See, Financial Compensation)
- Clearly demonstrating the level of influence the process will have (the more influence that people know they will have, the more likely that they will commit their time).
- Clearly scheduling the meetings (this allows people to plan around them in advance).

In one project people who accepted the invitation (including those who were not finally selected) were surveyed about why they said yes. Three responses stood out:

- First, while it was a considerable amount of time it had a clear endpoint (unlike many other commitments).
- Second, that it was clear that they would get a detailed answer within a fixed time.
- Third, interestingly, was the response that as the invitation had come to them, they deduced that it had gone to other normal people (in contrast to those more noisily active in traditional engagement processes).

The combination of these incentives allows people who would not normally be motivated to contribute their voice the opportunity to do so.

The third step is to find the largest and most complete database or sample from which you will be able to invite people to partake in the process. newDemocracy makes use of Australia Post's Postal Address File (PAF), G-NAF and NZ Post's GeoPAF. These datasets are accredited by Australia Post's AMAS Program and allow us to send invitations to deliverable addresses throughout Australia and New Zealand.

It is important that people throughout the region are given an equal opportunity to participate. Invitations should be sent to random physical addresses so as not to discriminate between those who own or rent their property. The datasets we use are resident neutral and allow us to draw a random sample for mailing invitations. This is crucial because the sample from which you invite people must not be skewed; otherwise, it will skew the final sample.

The fourth step is to send invitations to people. This can be done via mail or digitally if you're confident that you have a complete electronic dataset from which to invite members of the community.

Printed invitations offer the chance to convey more information for a longer time, let people know that they are important and explain in full what they're about to be involved in. Email invitations are cheaper but usually have much lower response rates.

Invitations should do everything they can to encourage people to open them. Personalised addresses, messaging that emphasises the unique opportunity, clear signalling of the due date and avoiding looking like regular community engagement are all good examples. A shorthand phrase we use is to produce a 'royal wedding invitation' – something with enough impact to compel the recipients' attention and have them seriously consider responding.

You can see some example invitations and envelopes in the resources section below.

To generate a sufficient pool of individuals from which to randomly select, we can calculate the number of invitations we need to send by working backward from our final selection.

For example, if we are recruiting for a citizens' assembly with 50 participants, and we expect a conservative response rate of 5%, and we require a 10:1 ratio of applicants to selected participants (to dilute self-selection in invitation acceptances), then we will need 500 applicants and 10,000 invitations.

This method is not perfect. People accepting invitations are still self-selecting their participation but between the two rounds of random selection and the dilution in the 10:1 ratio of applicants and participants, we can be satisfied that the final assembly will be broadly representative of the wider population.

It's important to include contact details for staff involved in operating the project to ensure recipients can ask questions about the project, this is better than creating a point of failure where people are calling and asking uninformed staff (i.e., doorknockers or call-centre staff).

The fifth step is then to draw your participants. <u>newDemocracy provides a free open-source</u> tool that people can use.

At this stage, you should draw your chosen number of participants and then over-recruit an additional sample (roughly 10%). Life happens and some people will not be able to complete the process, but it isn't possible to backfill their positions. The time dedicated to reading, learning, and deliberating cannot be caught up.

In 30 projects, we have had more dropouts than this in only three projects: two where the facilitation style grated on participants, and one where the project ran overtime and into additional meetings while coming under political attack.

The final step is to contact these chosen participants to confirm their participation. This is a critical step in securing retention. The more personal the communication and the level of importance you convey, the more likely the participant will feel an obligation and responsibility to partake. If people spend 15 minutes on the phone with someone that they will see on the day they will have a sense of obligation to them personally – increasing the likelihood they'll show up and stay throughout. Doing this with disjointed and separate contractors loses this point.

What is still unknown or untested?

There are still some unanswered questions that need answering.

Which people say yes to invitations and why?

There has not been an in-depth analysis of exactly who responds to invitations and how this compares to the wider population, including reasons why people do and do not accept invites. This will vary in each local context but it's important for practitioners to be aware.

What incentives matter the most?

Incentives vary from project to project depending on the resources and influence available to the project operator. Which work the best and deliver strong response rates and participant retention? A comparison of recruitment methods with incentives and response rates would reveal more.

What about standing panels?

As citizens' assemblies grow in popularity, it will be common that jurisdictions will want to recruit multiple citizens' assemblies at once. What is the best way to do this?

More experimentation?

There is a level of homogeneity in the way practitioners recruit for citizens' assemblies. Is this because we have all landed on the best option? Or would we benefit from more experimentation with the aim of increasing response rates?

Resources

- newDemocracy's Open-Source Stratified Random Selection Tool
- MASSLBP's "How to run a Civic Lottery"
- <u>newDemocracy's UNDEF Handbook</u>, See Chapter 4 for detailed instructions on recruitment.

Below are some examples of invitations and envelopes sent to potential participants.

Invitations:

South Australia Nuclear Fuel Cycle



The Premier of South Australia Jay Weatherill

Invites you to take part in

The Second Citizens' Jury for the Nuclear Fuel Cycle Royal Commission's Report

Supported by the Research Committee of the newDemocracy Foundation

Topic:

Under what circumstances, if any, could South Australia pursue the opportunity to store and dispose of nuclear waste from other countries?



A Citizens' Jury met in July to discuss the findings of the Nuclear Fuel Cycle Royal Commission. The jury identified four topics for more discussion about the benefits and risks in pursuing the opportunity to store and dispose of nuclear waste from other countries. These topics were safety, consent, trust and economics.

As part of the second Citizens' Jury you are being invited to deliberate on the question above using both the Royal Commission and first Citizens' Jury reports. Deliberation will include the consideration of a range of scenarios.

You will also be given access to feedback from the community consultation that is currently underway and asked to consider what, when combined with your own judgement, would inform your answer to this question.

We are seeking your informed view: ie: considered public judgement rather than public opinion.

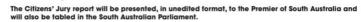
Selection:

You have been randomly selected to be involved.

Following the receipt of acceptances to be involved.

Following the receipt of acceptances to this invitation, newDemocracy will conduct a stratified, random selection to finalise a Jury of 350 citizens. This is similar to a criminal jury selection, but attempts to match the Jury demographics to the South Australian population profile from the Census. For this reason you will be asked your age and gender when you register. Names will not be considered in the random drow and your privacy will be protected. No contact information will be provided by newDemocracy to the South Australian Government or any other Agency.

Authority:





A response to this report will be publicly provided by the Premier.

Process:

As a Jury member you will be provided with access to the feedback of the wider community and to relevant experts to assist you resolve any questions that arise. You will be given the time to reach an informed consensus style recommendation. A jury of 350 people has been identified as the size that ensures the views of the South Australian population are represented. The final randomly selected Jurors will be sent a background kit of pre-reading in September.

Meals will be provided and a payment of \$500 made out of respect for your time and to cover expenses.

If you live over 60kms away from Adelaide, you will receive travel assistance which may include air travel and accommodation.

This is a unique opportunity for everyday South Australians to make a key recommendation to the Premier and Government of South Australia.

When:



DEMOCRACY

In person for three weekends: Saturday Oct 8th & Sunday Oct 9th 9:30am - 4:30pm (both days)

Saturday Oct 29th & Sunday Oct 30th 9:30am – 4:30pm (both days)

Saturday 12.30pm - 5.00pm, Sunday 9.30am - 5.00pm

The Premier of South Australia Jay Weatherill will address the first and last day of the Jury. (A private online discussion environment will also be facilitated over the course of the Jury period.)

Where:

Convention Centre, North Terrace Adelaide 5000.

RSVP:

Register before Friday September 9th 2016 at 5:00pm by clicking on the RSVP button at newdemocracy.com.au

Any Problems? Call or text 0467 066 185

Further information

People in paid political employment are ineliaible for selection.

Contact newDemocracy on **0467 066 185** or **PremiersProjectHelp@newdemocracy.com.au**

The newDemocracy Foundation is a non-partisan, non-issue based research organisation exploring less adversarial and more representative modes of public decision making.

The Foundation does not receive funding from government or any political parties: any cost recovery is disclosed on the Our Work page of the website below.

More information is available at www.newdemocracy.com.au

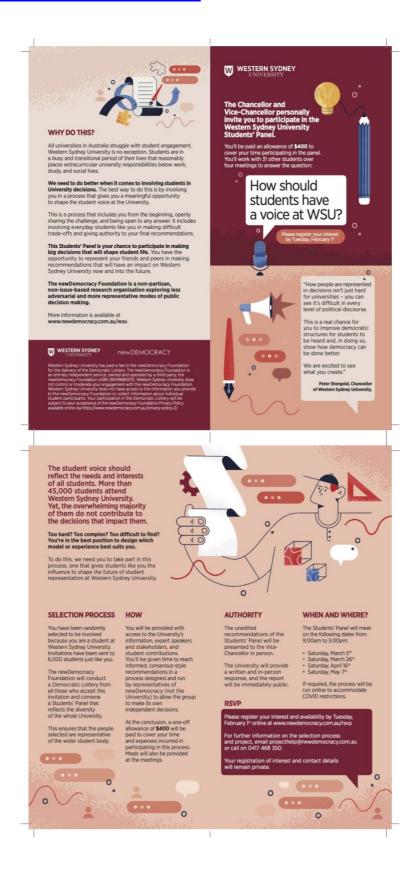
Australian Citizens' Parliament



ACT Government – Housing Choices



Western Sydney University – Students' Panel



Please turn over

Toronto Planning Review Panel



September 4, 2015

Dear Toronto Resident.

The City's Planning Division needs your help to make sure we are creating a city that is prosperous, livable, equitable, and environmentally responsible.

This letter is a special invitation to apply to be part of the new Planning Review Panel, and to add your voice to Toronto's planning process. If you are 18 years of age or older and live in Toronto, you can apply — no experience is necessary.

Whether you're new to Toronto or a long-time resident, you know the city is changing fast.

New buildings and infrastructure are being constructed to meet the needs of the 20,000 net new residents who each year decide to make Toronto their home. This makes Toronto one of the fastest-growing and most dynamic cities in North America.

The City's Planning Division is responsible for ensuring that this growth enhances the city we share — from Steeles Avenue to the waterfront, and from Rouge River to Etobicoke Creek.

This means thinking about the long-term impacts of growth, while balancing the different interests, needs, and priorities of the city's 2.8 million residents. We need your help to get this balance right.

The Planning Review Panel is a new way for City Planning to hear the perspectives of Torontonians like you. As a member of the Panel, you will learn about your city and provide input and local expertise on important planning issues shaping Toronto. These issues could relate to transportation, zoning for new homes and businesses, neighbourhood density and character, historic buildings, and the locations of libraries, community centres, parks, and other neighbourhood amenities.

Membership on the panel is open to any Toronto resident who receives this letter and is 18 years of age or older. From among the pool of applicants, 28 members will be randomly selected to ensure broad representation from across the city. You do not need to be a Canadian citizen, and there is no cost to participate.

The Planning Review Panel will meet six times each year, following a special orientation program this fall. Each member will serve on the Panel for two years.

Joining the Panel is a great way to:

- · Learn first-hand about your city and the planning process;
- · Contribute your perspective and learn about the views of other Toronto residents; and
- Provide insight to the Planning Division concerning important issues shaping the city.

You do not need to be an expert to participate. It's your perspective as a Toronto resident that matters most.



Envelopes:



If undeliverable, please return to:

POSTAGE PAID AUSTRALIA

Only 15,000 households in Sydney have been randomly selected to receive this invitation You will be paid to be part of the City of Sydney's new Citizens' Jury





TORONTO

Only 12,000 households in Toronto have been randomly selected to receive this invitation

We need you to volunteer for the City of Toronto's new Planning Review Panel

Sanjay Smith #2-143 York View Dr Toronto, ON M5A 1D3



IF UNDELIVERED RETURN TO: PO BOX R418 ROYAL EXCHANGE NSW 1225



Mr A Sample 321 Exhibition Street MELBOURNE VIC 3000