

A Citizens' Assembly On Housing Affordability

Housing affordability is politically difficult. Voters want their own houses to grow in value, and houses for their children to fall to an affordable price.

But while raw public opinion gets mired in these often-contradictory wishlists, public judgment sees people confront difficult trade-offs.

Public opinion constrains elected representatives, while public judgment empowers them by giving the difficult first step of proposing potential reforms to everyday people from all walks of life.

This proposal will start a true national conversation about those trade-offs using a method that has been successful in Ireland, is being adopted by other European leaders, and is being lauded by the OECD.





ABOUT US:

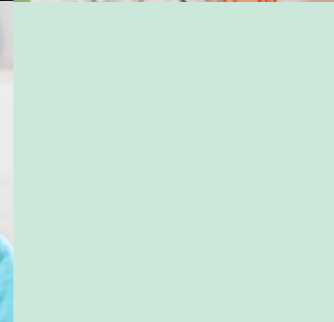
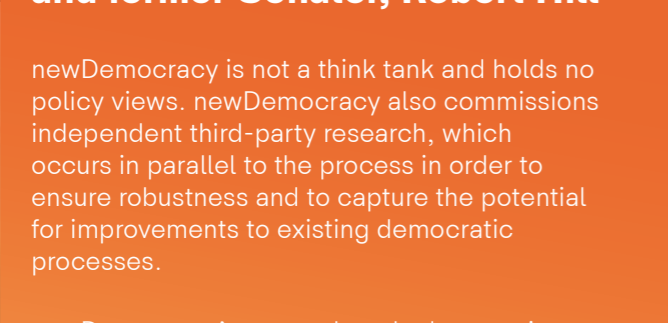
newDemocracy is a not-for-profit research foundation, with a particular focus on best-practice citizen engagement and innovations in democratic structures. Our Research Committee is overseen by former Premier Geoff Gallop and former Senator, Robert Hill

newDemocracy is not a think tank and holds no policy views. newDemocracy also commissions independent third-party research, which occurs in parallel to the process in order to ensure robustness and to capture the potential for improvements to existing democratic processes.

newDemocracy's research and advocacy is focused on identifying less adversarial, more deliberative and more inclusive public decision-making processes.



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What is the problem?

01

Housing affordability is a policy issue with an obvious public opinion tripwire.

Many voters simultaneously want their own homes to grow in value, while wanting homes for their children to fall to a more reasonable price. Many voters want to see housing supply increased, but somewhere other than where they live.

We do not underestimate the challenge of the issue. It is a policy area with an *incredible* number of variables (from taxation treatment to transport options to proximity to jobs, schools, recreation, etc.) and it touches every tier of government. And each of those variables contains *another* pool of public opinion contradictions with further tripwires.

And with it taking the largest part of the income of almost every Australian, most of us have deep lived-experience which makes us *feel* like an expert and therefore suitably positioned to critique any reform attempt.

Stepping into this arena sees politicians risking being unwilling victims to the perils of raw public opinion. Everyone's a critic.

Adding to the political risk is that homeowners, renters, those aspiring to buy and those unlikely to buy have a lot at stake in terms of personal finances in the event of any change. And in politics, those who stand to lose have far more incentive to act disruptively than those who stand to gain.

This rationale then shapes policy debate: the lack of appeal in touching the issue sees it deferred. Do nothing and the problem grows, but that remains politically preferable to publicly owning a difficult decision that has far-in-the-future payoffs that no one will thank you for (with their vote). A new approach is clearly required.

As we cannot ask you to ignore public opinion, we are offering the chance to run a *public judgment* process. Much as our **courts give a complementary role to everyday people in the jury system, so our parliament can extend a similar role**: a chance for a random group of everyday people to hear competing viewpoints and find common ground based on evidence, not headlines. In projects run by national governments around the world, it has been shown that the public identifies with participants as 'people just like me' and is more willing to consider what they recommend.

This document has been prepared at the request of a cross-section of crossbench members (House of Representatives and the Senate) who have asked how a citizens' assembly process could be utilised as that new approach to address the issue.

Imagine this:

- A group of 100 Australians from different backgrounds, regions, and perspectives, coming together to learn about the housing affordability problem from experts in the field, from housing advocates, from developers, from landlords, from tenants, from economists, from urban planners, and from community leaders.
- We will put rich and poor, old and young, in *one room to work on the problem together*.
- Their mix of perspectives will be grappling with the trade-offs and tensions between different solutions, weighing up the costs and benefits, and thinking creatively about new approaches.
- Then, as a group, coming up with a shared set of recommendations, with detailed reasoning and evidence, that reflect the experiences and diversity of our country, that can command broad support and legitimacy, and that can break through the public opinion gridlock that has discouraged action on this issue. **We view so many experts with a cynical eye, but regular people are those we are most inclined to trust.**



The Citizens' Assembly will deliver one thing: **a new starting point for all participants in the parliament (and the stakeholders beyond it) to respond to.** This starting point will come from a representative sample of the Australian population presenting their informed common ground recommendations – what they can agree upon as a group – after having the best democratic opportunity available. An opportunity that immerses them in the topic and allows them access to whatever experts and analysis they request. Traditional politics gives MPs an unenviable role where governments propose reforms with responses dominated by think tanks, stakeholders, and media commentators. This process inverts that approach: experts instead make their case to citizens who propose reforms having drawn on their advice and input; this then allows governments to act knowing the informed views of everyday people from all walks of life have filtered the range of options down to those they are willing to stand behind.

Critically, a Citizens' Assembly asks people to confront trade-offs, and it puts homeowners and renters in the same room and gives them the task of finding agreement. If this group can find agreement, then the fact that these recommendations come from 'people like us' can empower political leaders to act.

We think governments of all persuasions have a significant interest in addressing the issue, but the political cost of placing it on the agenda by doing 'politics as usual' is unpalatable. Citizens' Assemblies used by leaders across Europe have shown that citizens who do not face re-election can shift the starting point for discussion. If Ireland, a country with a religious population, a significant role for the church in public life and a right to life in the Constitution can have a national conversation and pursue reforms in abortion law, then we are confident that Australia can have a conversation about the hard trade-offs that are needed to improve housing affordability.



This document gives a summary of the process and the principles underpinning the approach.

Potential demonstration project for:



An innovation in democracy that works

The goal of democracy is social cohesion. National decisions must be made that will impact a diverse range of people who all expect to benefit as individuals and as a whole. We need to design complementary democratic processes that assist elected leaders to deliver that.

There are many case studies that show that—when combined—the five elements of random selection through a democratic lottery, the provision of extended time, access to a diverse range of information, influence over a decision, and independently facilitated forums for dialogue and deliberation lead to much more robust and publicly-trusted outcomes on issues of significance. Governments can find public acceptance for hard trade-offs using these elements.

Across the globe, public authorities are increasingly using *citizens' assemblies* to involve people more directly in solving some of the most pressing policy challenges. Pioneering work in Ireland saw citizens' assemblies on same-sex marriage (2013) and abortion law (2016) deliver world-leading constitutional change in a complex social and political environment.

In 2023, Ireland has just begun a Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use with bipartisan support. This firsthand experience with effective and useful citizens' assemblies has produced support across the political spectrum such that instead of the Oireachtas debating whether to hold a citizens' assembly at all, their MPs now disagree over which topics to prioritise.

French President Emmanuel Macron recently received recommendations from 180 everyday people after a similar process on the topic of euthanasia and assisted dying. This followed France's Citizens' Convention for the Climate held in 2019 and 2020. President Macron has also committed to future conventions on other national issues.

This year, the European Commission invited 150 people from across the European Union to provide recommendations on reducing food waste. Belgium has incorporated citizen deliberation into parliamentary committees and established permanent advisory roles for citizens' assemblies in many local and regional parliaments.

This growth in the use of citizens' assembly processes has been described by the OECD as the "Deliberative Wave" in a 2020 report documenting research on 600 global examples.

These projects are producing a shift in democracies, using innovative techniques that work for citizens and elected representatives in a complementary way.

This document has been prepared with reference to best-practice learnings from these examples and more because of our involvement in OECD working groups, advice to the United Nations Democracy Fund and founding role in the global Democracy R&D Network.

It explains **how a representative sample of the community** could come together to **deliberate and find common ground on housing affordability** in a way that would build public trust in and ownership of the resulting recommendations. This will help elected leaders to lead.



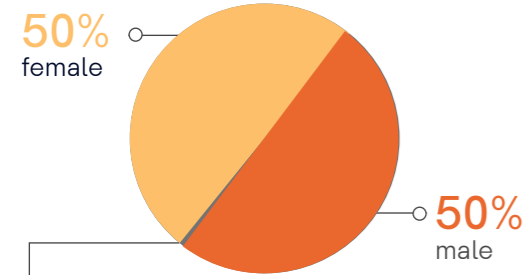
The Citizens' Assembly

100 people

chosen by democratic lottery such that they are representative of Australia by age, gender, location, education, living situation and investment property ownership.

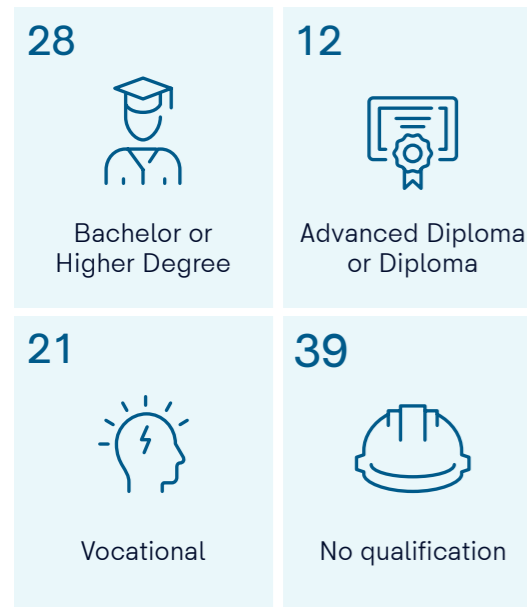
*Based on the 2021 Census

Gender

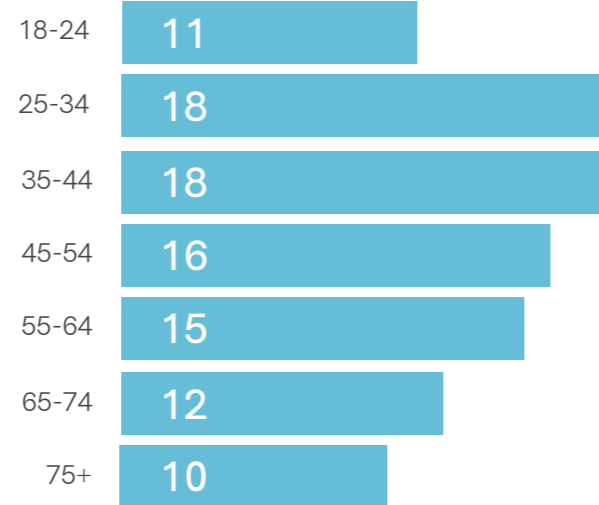


Gender diverse or non-binary
* (The ABS does not have high-quality data on this population, however, people who are gender diverse, non-binary or trans will be able to be selected as part of the panel)

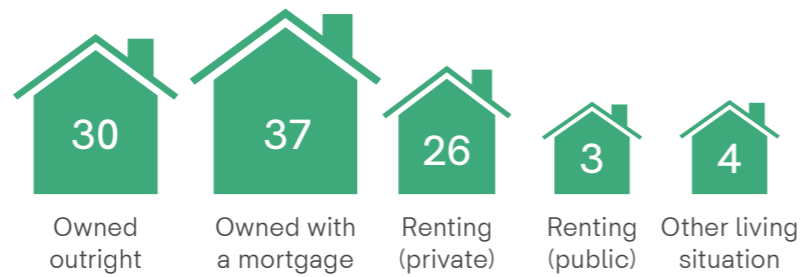
Education



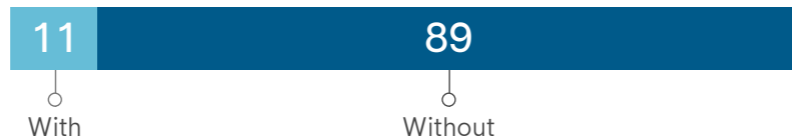
Age



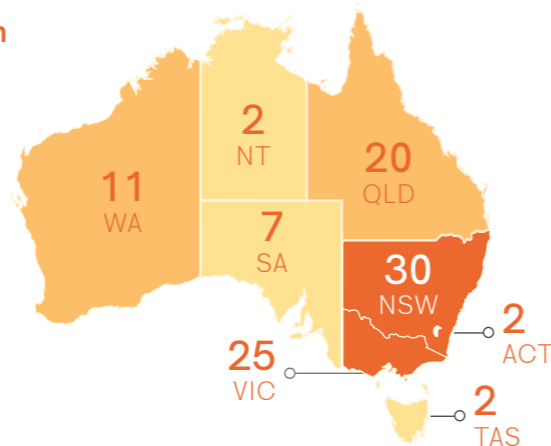
Living Situation



Investment in Property



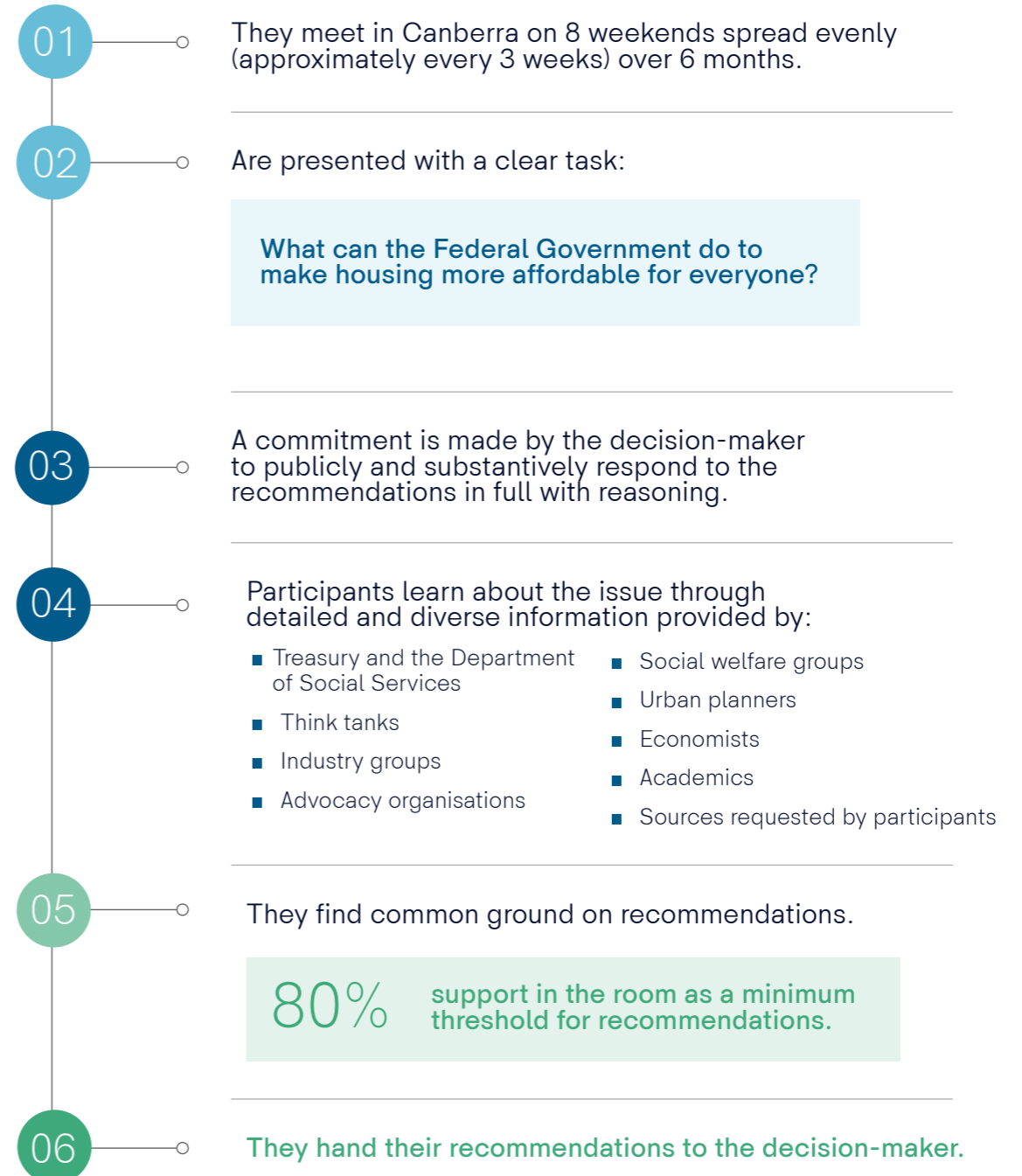
Location



Process Snapshot

The process brings together a representative mix of Australians and provides them with equal access to information and an equal share of voice.

By offering the most meaningful opportunity to be heard in a public decision, we create the incentive to invest the time to find common ground on recommendations grounded in reasoning and evidence.



A Key Design Choice

Citizens' assemblies are bespoke processes — they account for differences in geography, the nature and scale of the issue and who is impacted by any decision.

These factors are expressed differently in each community and so it is important that a process design accounts for them uniquely.

There are two different approaches to consider, each providing a different answer to the question:

“Will people from across Australia trust a process more or less if it includes MPs in the deliberations?”



A. The Irish Model

The **‘Irish Model’** blends a small cross-section of MPs (~10) into the assembly for around 80% of the process. This has the benefit of being a two-way trust-building exercise: MPs from all parties can see directly the representativeness of the group and the diligence with which they embrace the task - this will have an impact on the credibility with which they treat the Citizens' Assembly report. At the same time, there is a trust dividend when citizens work alongside MPs from different parties - an experience that will be very different to what they see through snippets in the media. Ireland's Constitutional Convention grew public confidence in the parliament as a result of this direct exposure.

Benefits

- The unique opportunity to sit alongside everyday people gives MPs a different perspective on the process, they see their ability to learn and consider trade-offs up close.
- Assembly members work alongside MPs which builds a deeper appreciation for the role of an MP as well as the nuances of the issue.
- Bipartisan MP involvement builds champions for the process through their participation. This strengthens wider political support for the process due to their involvement in the room.

B. The French Model

The **‘French Model’** limits membership of the assembly to everyday people with only limited interaction with MPs (expert informational role). The benefits of this are where MPs fear the potential political risk of recommendations that may emerge, so seek to remain at arms' length. Their direct involvement in influencing recommendations alongside assembly members also risks compromising the outcome by undermining the trust generated by including everyday people in such a substantive way.

Benefits

- Maintains thorough topic exploration and learning throughout the process, avoiding any rush to judgement that might occur with MPs who may already have familiarity with the topic and might skip ahead to solutions. (i.e., advocacy of existing party policy)
- Avoids a group dynamic where MPs have a different level of importance or influence in the room, which can be detrimental to the deliberative quality of their work.

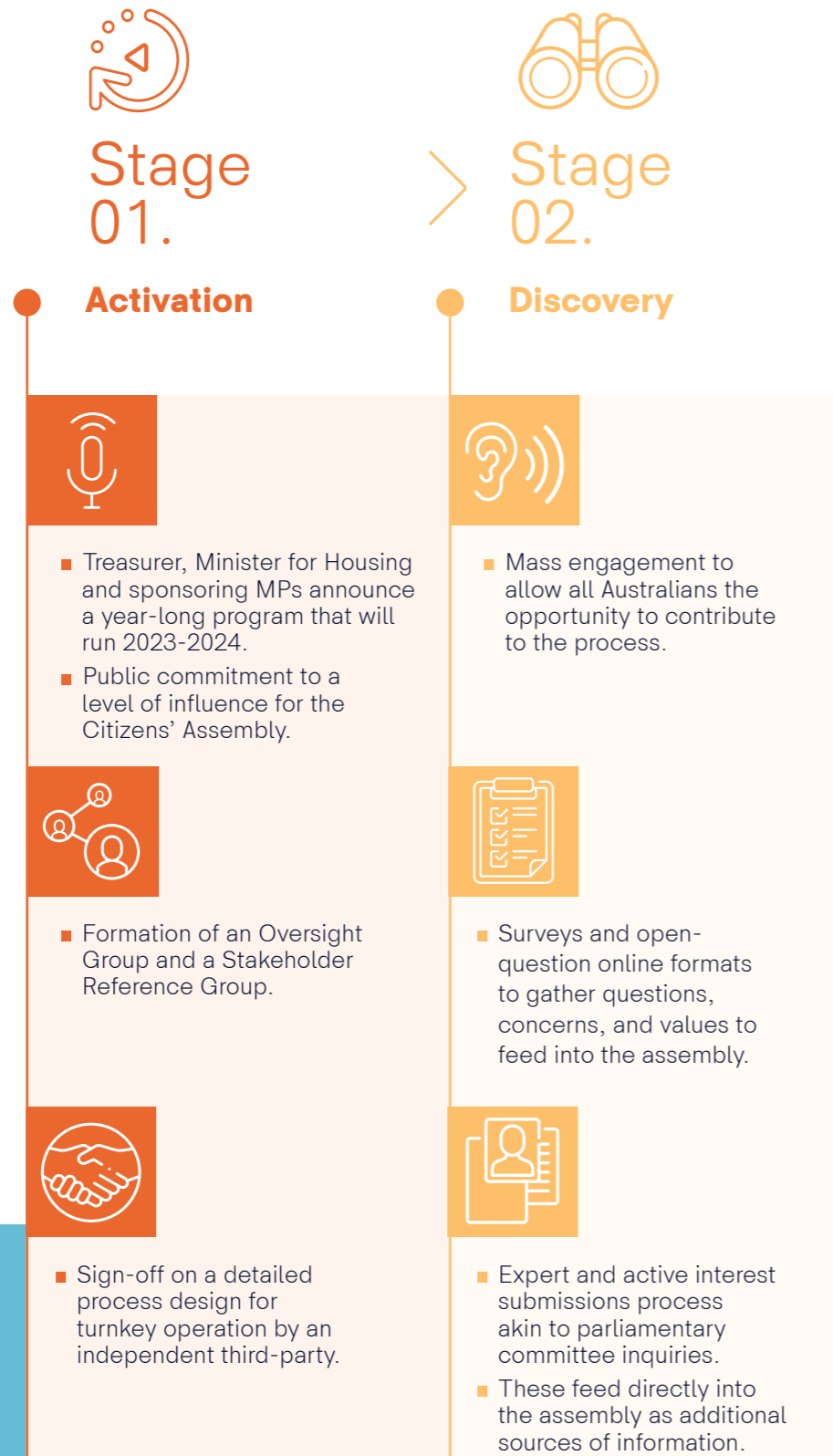
Either option can be very successfully pursued. newDemocracy recommends the Irish Model as this has proven to have such a transformative effect on confidence in democracy there.

The process

The process is task-based and sequential, with each output being used as the basis for the next component:

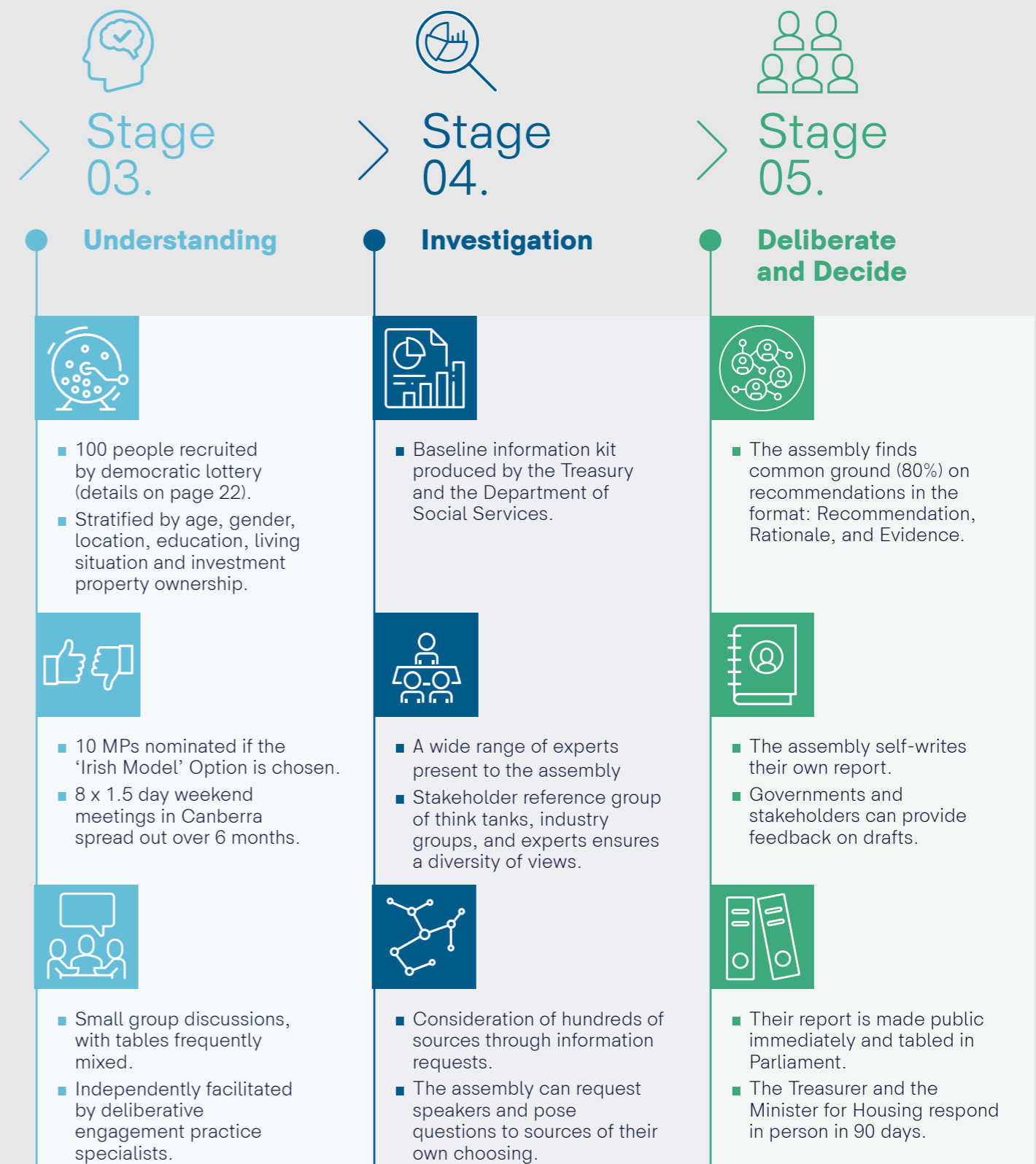
Project Outcomes

- A large, diverse group of everyday people will take the time to learn about the challenges and drivers of housing affordability and the range of policy options available.
- This same group will work together to find common ground around recommendations that balance the difficult trade-offs.
- They will learn from a range of Members of Parliament to reach these final recommendations.
- Ultimately, everyday people from all over the country will stand alongside Members of Parliament to share what they see as trusted and agreed-upon steps toward improving housing affordability in Australia.



Citizens' Assembly Remit

“How can the Federal Government make housing more affordable for all Australians?”

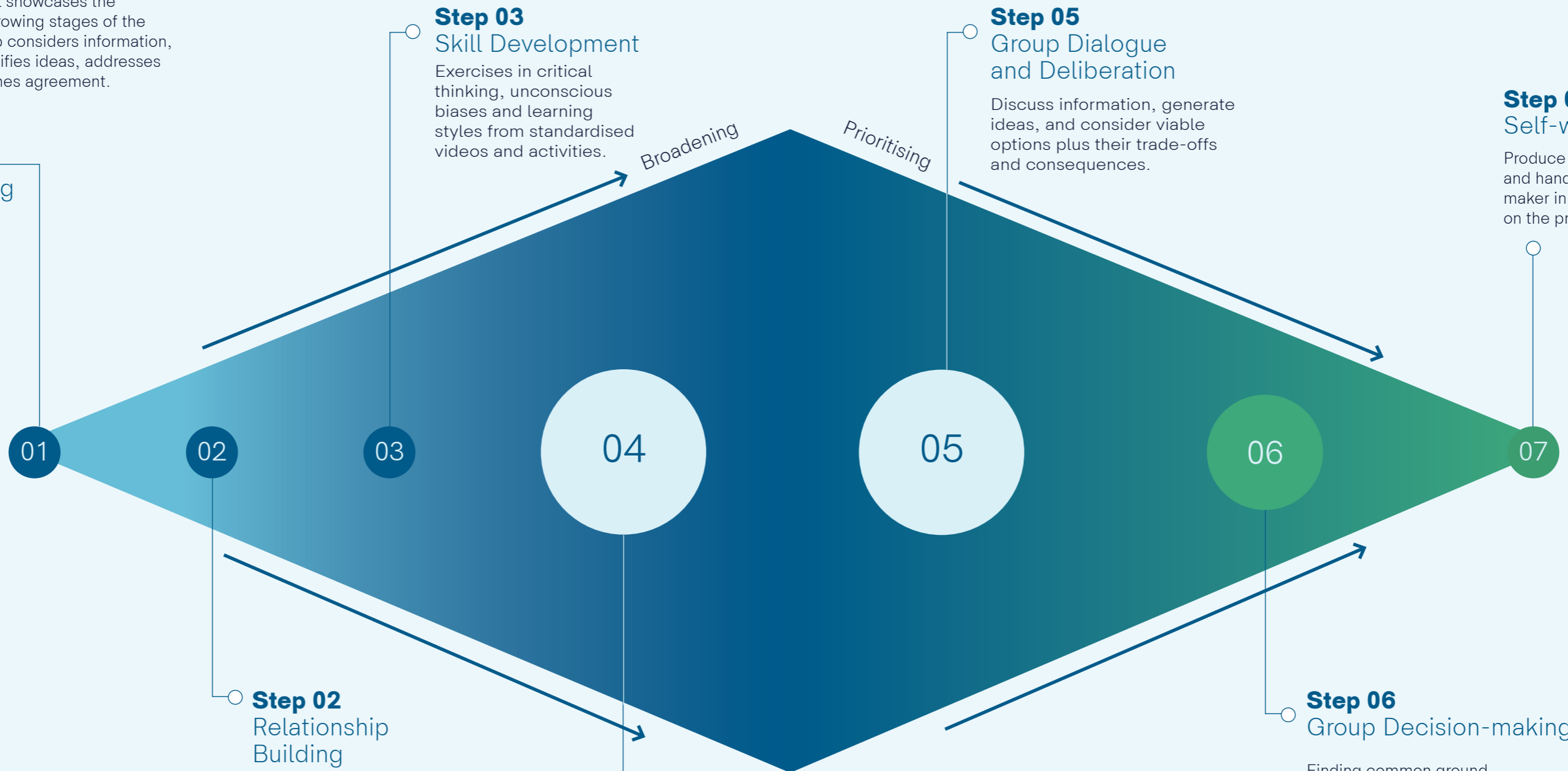


The Citizens' Assembly Journey

The diamond model showcases the broadening and narrowing stages of the journey as the group considers information, generates and identifies ideas, addresses trade-offs and reaches agreement.

Step 01 Understanding Purpose

Establishing the topic, scope, commitment and significance of the project.



Step 03 Skill Development

Exercises in critical thinking, unconscious biases and learning styles from standardised videos and activities.

Step 05 Group Dialogue and Deliberation

Discuss information, generate ideas, and consider viable options plus their trade-offs and consequences.

Step 07 Self-write Report

Produce the final report and hand it to the decision-maker in person, and reflect on the process as a group.

Step 02 Relationship Building

Group collaboration requires respectful relationships built on conversations. This is developed through early exercises in finding common ground as a group.

Step 04 Information

Detailed and diverse information provided in a range of formats with time to consider and ask for additional sources.

Step 06 Group Decision-making

Finding common ground on recommendations that respond to the remit and reflect the views of the room.

Why is deliberation different?

05

It is difficult for large groups of people to find agreement on complex decisions. However, there are a set of prerequisites that make it easier.

These prerequisites or *principles* improve the deliberative quality of group work by creating the environment for the consideration of the broadest range of sources while giving participants time, an equal share of voice, and authority.

There are **seven principles** that underpin how we approach producing the detailed process to enable members of the assembly to explore a topic deeply and freely to provide elected leaders with an informed common-ground position.



01.

Clear remit

A clear, plain-English challenge or question is placed before a group:

What can the Federal Government do to make housing more affordable for everyone?

This is a neutrally phrased question that goes to the core of the issue and provides a strong platform for discussion about priorities and trade-offs. A focus group would merely test an answer (or the way an answer is presented); in contrast, a deliberative method poses an open question.

02.

Diversity of information

Detailed, in-depth information is provided to the participants to help them understand the nuances and complexities of the issue. Through the different stages of the process, a diversity of sources will be brought into the discussion. These include the initial information kit, parliamentary committee reports including the recent Inquiry into housing affordability and supply in Australia, and the views of the wider community, stakeholders, experts, and think tanks. By doing this, the group can move beyond opinion to an informed and balanced view. Not all participants read everything, but collectively, an enormous amount is read, understood, and shared in the conversations and decisions. Assembly members will also spend extensive time asking questions and identifying sources they trust for the information they need. They will also have the opportunity to make site visits.

03.

Representative

A stratified random sample of the community is recruited through a democratic lottery. Simple demographic filters (age, gender, location, education, living situation and investment property ownership) are used to help stratify this sample to reflect the entire population. Most public engagement by governments does not enable a representative cross-section of the community to be heard; instead, incentives to participate are often geared toward those with the most acute interest or abundant time. It is important for members of the assembly to deliberate with people with differing perspectives and backgrounds - a democratic lottery delivers this.

04.

Extended time

The goal of this process is to find common ground among people with very different views, not to aggregate individual views (like a poll). By engaging with experts and each other, participants can develop a deeper understanding of a complex issue and work together to identify trusted sources of information. Throughout the process, participants will engage in various exercises to approach the problem from different angles and to have ample time for discussion before making final recommendations. Time is a critical factor for this type of deliberation because people are not pushed to find agreement, they are given time to find agreement.

05.

Influence

The Citizens' Assembly's final report must have weight. It needs to be considered at the highest level of decision-making power and responded to directly by the decision-maker. Some participants will be asked to present their report and recommendations directly to the Treasurer and the Minister for Housing to demonstrate the gravitas of the report and the participants' role. Insistent voices talk when no one is listening; invited voices need the incentive of a Parliamentary commitment to respond.

06.

Dialogue, not debate

The task for the group is to find common ground on answers to their remit. The process does not use simple majorities and it is not a debate of one position seeking to defeat another. Instead, it asks people what trade-offs or changes they can accept to reach an agreement. A minimum level of 80% of the room agreeing to a recommendation for it to be included assures leaders that there is genuinely broad support. There is room for contributions that do not meet this threshold but add value to the report.

07.

Free response

The Citizens' Assembly is not being asked to critically review a government or parliamentary reform proposal, so in this way the task is not framed negatively and does not seek to find gaps. The assembly is given a "blank page" and provides a set of recommendations with a rationale that emerges from their shared learning.

06 Ministerial commitment

For everyday people, investing time is only worthwhile if they have a meaningful opportunity to influence a public decision that impacts their lives. The government's commitment to respond must be clearly conveyed from the outset.



The Citizens' Assembly will be asked to respond to the question:

THE QUESTION:

What can the Federal Government do to make housing more affordable for everyone?

The government's commitment to respond in detail to their work will be published on invitations sent out to thousands of Australians. It's the primary incentive to participate and will be made public well before any final recommendations are made. It demonstrates the government's sincerity in the process and gives the assembly its purpose.

Minister's commitment

The complete unedited report will be public immediately and tabled in Parliament in the current session.

The Treasurer and the Minister for Housing will provide a public response to the recommendations report in writing within 90 days.

The Treasurer and Minister for Housing will also respond to the Citizens' Assembly in person within 90 days.

In short, this needs to pass the test of being the most meaningful offer anyone has had to participate in a shared public decision — not just another forum.

Opportunities for non-government MPs

MPs will be able to provide a public response to the final recommendations report. This is an opportunity to address each recommendation, indicate a level of support and note intended actions. MPs will also be able to contribute to the process throughout via submissions and when called upon as information sources.

What makes this hard?

The design for this process must overcome seven challenges in order to arrive at actionable recommendations.



01. Overlapping jurisdiction

All levels of government hold some responsibility for housing in Australia, and the federal government cannot *directly* address state and local responsibilities. The assembly will need to develop an understanding of allocation of responsibility in the learning phase to ensure participants are aware of these jurisdictional boundaries.

The Assembly will be limited as to what jurisdiction it can have direct influence over. To address this, we will set a remit that clearly states the scope of the project: what the *Federal Government* can do to make housing more affordable. This sets boundaries on the task while allowing participants to explore state and local issues through the lens of what the federal government can do.

Independent facilitators keep a continual focus on the question throughout the project to keep the group on topic. It is displayed on screens throughout most tasks.

The Treasurer and the Minister for Housing will also clearly set the 'edges of the box' for the influence of the assembly in writing and at the opening meeting.



02. Complexity

Accessibility to housing is affected by everything from transport options, available employment, public services, schools, amenities and beyond. There is an almost limitless number of variables people could consider.

People can manage this complexity when given the time, access to experts and support. **Citizens' assemblies are group-learning exercises.** The task is not for participants to become experts themselves but to engage and think critically about the information from economists, urban planners, developers, and housing advocates and synthesise those views.

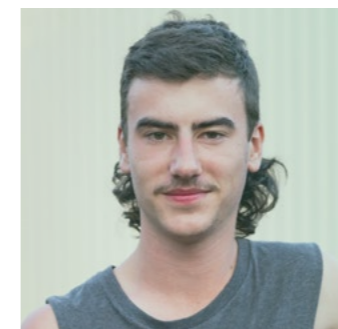
This process is not an audit. The group will explore the issue, hear from people with particular views and, as a group, prioritise what they see as most important.

This means that the ambition of the assembly is not to solve housing affordability once and for all, but to consider the available evidence and reach common ground on what we should do first.



03. We all want a say

Naturally, all Australians would like a say in housing policy – it impacts so much of our lives. To ensure people have an opportunity to contribute, even if they don't come up in the democratic lottery, we'll provide mass engagement options that will capture **attitudes, priorities, questions, and values.** The key difference is that people will appreciate the chance to make their case to regular people, not government departments or people they perceive as already having their minds made up. At the same time, we will pose questions that avoid a rush to judgment, instead being designed to create useful additional sources for the Citizens' Assembly.





04.

The personal financial impact is significant

The majority of Australians own their own home either outright or with a mortgage. Making decisions that impact the value of peoples' homes will have large financial impacts on everyone involved.

The Citizens' Assembly will recruit a representative mix of people across a range of variables, including matching the Census profile for levels of housing tenure (own outright, own with a mortgage, renting privately, renting through social housing, or other living situation) such that they will have a comparative level of financial exposure to the rest of Australia.

While politicians are often seen as placing costs on regular people, the Citizens' Assembly is a group of relatable everyday people recognising the need to directly bear certain financial trade-offs – whatever they end up being.

Notably, no single cohort of owners or renters is sufficiently large as to be able to put a measure through into the report.



05.

State governments' planning regulations are different

Rules vary by state, often quite dramatically, yet we're including people from across the country. We need to manage this within a national conversation.

Representatives from each state departments of planning will be included as expert sources throughout the process, including by providing feedback on draft recommendations and supporting the learning phase.

These differences can be a benefit because they allow a national group to see the impact of different regulations in different places. Recommendations will be made in a way that accounts for these differences because assembly members will have heard from experts and state-level decision-makers to inform their recommendation-making process.



06.

This will be the first time Australia uses a citizens' assembly on a national scale

The process will need to be clearly explained to the wider population. It must be transparent and visible because it will be countering significant cynicism and weariness with a public that has 'heard it all before'. This project represents a major innovation and one that must be met with openness to and by the public.

It will be critical that the wider population is brought along with the nature and substance of the assembly. Questions such as: "Who is in the room making decisions?", "How have they been chosen?", and "What is the scope of their power?" will all need to be publicly answered before any work is done in the room.

Meetings will be open to observation by the public, the material provided to participants will be available online for anyone to follow along and, ultimately, the final recommendation report written entirely by participants must be made public immediately. These measures are fundamental to ensuring the public has trust in the fairness of the process.

Without trust in the process, there will be no acceptance or trust in the final report. Most importantly, the wider community must meet and connect with the assembly members from the outset. They should see people with jobs like them, lives like them and pressures like them.



07.

People from all over the country must be able to participate.

We require a descriptively representative sample of the population present in the room. It's important that everyone who receives an invitation to participate in the process feels that they're able to say "yes". Without sufficient incentive and support, people will not be able to or interested enough to participate, undermining the democratic legitimacy of the process.

To account for this, participants will need to be appropriately reimbursed for their time including having childcare and travel considerations accounted for. They must also be reassured that the output of their work will be influential on a decision – without which they will likely default to cynicism which will depress invitation acceptance.

Democratic lottery

08



newDemocracy will send out 200,000 invitations across the country to give Australians a roughly 1-in-100 chance of receiving one.

Democratic lotteries make use of stratified random selection to select an assembly that descriptively matches the population. The strength of this selection process lies in the wider community clearly seeing “people like me” in decision-making positions — descriptive representation in this way fosters trust in the substantive representation of the panel and ultimately trust in its decision-making.

To avoid an overemphasis on those who are traditionally likely to opt into community engagement, we will send invitations to a randomly selected set of postal addresses.

Assembly members will be recruited from the pool of those who indicate their interest and availability to participate in the assembly.



To achieve a descriptively representative sample, newDemocracy recommends using five standard stratification variables.

These are age, gender, education, living situation (owner (outright), owner (mortgage), renter (private), renter (social) or other living situation), location (by state, and by metropolitan, suburban, regional, rural), and investment property ownership.

This stratification is not claimed to be a *statistically* representative sample. Deliberative processes face deteriorating effects with sizes above 100 (e.g., declining incentives to read) and so this sample is as close as possible to being statistically representative while maintaining its deliberative integrity. **It delivers a more representative sample than any other community process with people from all walks of life in one room.**



It is important that people throughout the country are given an equal opportunity to participate.

These invitations will be sent to random physical addresses so as not to discriminate between those who own or rent their property.

From this round of invitations, a conservative response rate of 5% will return a pool of approximately 10,000 people (France and Ireland’s processes delivered much higher response rates). The size of this pool in combination with a further round of random selection overcomes concerns about the mild self-selection problem and the skew that might create. This will generate a sufficient pool of individuals from which to draw.

When combined with the stratification parameters outlined above, **the weight of an inherent self-selection skew within the sample is negligible.**





The invitations will come from the Australian Government, emphasising the remit and commitments made by the Treasurer and Minister for Housing to the level of influence of the final report.

Emphasis on the role of newDemocracy and independence of the selection process as outside the control of the Australian Government will **demonstrate the participants' autonomy and freedom in the project.**

This link to democratic reform and autonomy is crucial to capturing participant interest; it builds upon latent social disaffection with public decision-making by reinforcing the uniqueness of this opportunity. **They have a significant and meaningful role in making a public decision that impacts their own lives.**



Importantly, newDemocracy will not provide any participant information to the Australian Government (personal or contact details).

Public cynicism around potential vetting is sufficiently high that newDemocracy's goal of public trust is threatened by any perception that lists are reviewed. MPs and the Australian Government will meet the participants for the first time on the first day of the Citizens' Assembly.



Interested participants will register online with newDemocracy to indicate that they are available for the final selection.

As a fallback, newDemocracy also provides a phone number for people who prefer to contact us to register.

This registration process involves collecting relevant stratification data. Based on the registrations received, the stratified random draw will be conducted by newDemocracy seeking to match the demographic stratification criteria drawn from Census data.



Just as in criminal juries, payment of per diems (\$3000 in total) is strongly advised to avoid excluding participants who may find participation difficult through hardship.

Invitations will clearly note that this payment will be made for time spent, that meals are provided at the weekend meetings, and that necessary travel and accommodation will be covered, as well as any childcare and caring needs.



newDemocracy will contact the drawn sample to confirm and explain the process to participants when asking the recipient to confirm availability for selection in individual briefing calls.

This exercise in personal communication establishes a relationship between newDemocracy and the participants, **emphasising the independence of the process and the role of the participants.**

Additionally, contact with each participant builds a strong personal commitment to the process, noting that once underway, we cannot backfill for non-attendees. At this point, those who are not selected in the second round will be advised and encouraged to follow the process by contributing to wider community engagement processes.

Participants will have a significant and meaningful role in making a public decision that impacts their own lives.

Sources of Information

Information and judgment are required in equal parts to reach decisions.



While the judgment of randomly selected groups has been shown to achieve very high levels of public trust, it is imperative that the method of provision of information to the deliberative process does not erode that trust.

The government should involve active stakeholders in the preparation of materials and in approving what is sent out. There will be four key sources of information to inform the group deliberations:

ITEM 01:

A baseline information kit will be provided by the Department of Social Services and the Treasury.

Written in plain English, this should candidly describe the problem. This includes issues and challenges as the government sees them, and the 'levers' available for acting. It should not be a brochure; rather, it should err on the side of providing too much detail. **This is fundamental to ensuring the process starts on the front foot and participants are given every opportunity to become as informed as possible.**

It should outline the process in its entirety before introducing the questions and challenges in front of the panel. As the information kit is the primary resource for the participants, it is crucial that the information clearly shares the problem at hand without shying away from detail or data.

The kit should include:

- a. An introduction from the Treasurer and the Minister for Housing
- b. A statement on the government's commitment to respond and any non-negotiables
- c. An introduction to the citizens' assembly process
- d. Thorough background information on the issue including explanations of federal, state, and local responsibilities, current and previous housing policies, detailed data and statistics, and barriers to implementation or improvement
- e. What advice and recommendations the Australian Government would like from the assembly including specific questions it would like answered
- f. Any current thinking on the topic from either the government or the department
- g. International examples

newDemocracy can provide examples of how these kits have been prepared for projects elsewhere.

ITEM 02:

A curated library of background information that goes beyond government sources.

This is a companion library of a further ~50 sources: expert reports, international examples, think tank perspectives and Parliamentary Committee reports.

This will include The Standing Committee on Tax and Revenue's 2022 report *The Australian Dream: Inquiry into housing affordability and supply in Australia*.

These might also include (but are not limited to):

- a. Historical think tank reports
- b. International reports and examples
- c. Previous Parliamentary Committee reports on the topic
- d. Productivity Commission reports
- e. Academic literature
- f. Historical advocacy documents
- g. Input from wider and targeted engagement activities



ITEM 03:

Submissions from key stakeholders, industry groups, the wider community, interest groups, experts, academics, and advocacy organisations will provide complementary information to round out perspectives on the topic.

Experts contribute to the process by sharing their views on possible solutions or answers to the question.

We will convene a Stakeholder Reference Group at the core of this process. The Stakeholder Reference Group will have five tasks:

- a. Review the methodology for potential biases
- b. Make submissions that respond to the remit (how they would answer the question)
- c. Recommend experts to present on the opening weekend
- d. Provide a long list of experts to assist the assembly with information gaps
- e. Respond to questions and requests for fact check from the assembly

These views allow them to hear from a group of stakeholders who differ from elected officials or anyone within the political system. This might include academics, industry groups, think tanks, unions, advocacy groups and other civil society organisations.

The submissions will help participants assess the issue before contributing to recommendations. **They also give people outside of the process a direct channel.** This helps address concerns that the process is in any way shut off or exclusionary to any perspective on the topic.

From mass engagement we will provide summary reports and raw data of questions, values and trade-offs elicited from the wider community.

ITEM 04:

Central to the open, non-leading nature of what we do is to simply ask participants: **"What do you need to know and who do you trust to inform you?"**

This question will be posed to participants as part of their deliberations. After each meeting, they will be tasked with a refined version of the question: "What more do you need to know to make an informed decision?"

This means participants will have the **freedom to ask for the information they need and request the sources they trust.**

newDemocracy can lead the task of sourcing the information requests that are external to the Government. **Those that request information from government departments will be the responsibility of the departments to gather.**

A single liaison point within the government will be required in order to expedite requests made to departments.

10 Role of MPs and Senators

The Treasurer and the Minister for Housing will lead a cross-party group of MPs as the visible public owners of the project.

They will set the level of influence — how the participants will be heard and what they can expect — and need to be prepared to respond to the Citizens' Assembly's recommendations.



The Assembly process will produce its report for the Treasurer and the Minister for Housing, and they will provide a detailed, substantive response back.

The Treasurer and the Minister for Housing are strongly encouraged to consider appointing an **Oversight Group made up of a cross-party mix** of current MPs and chaired by a former judge who will have the freedom to interrogate design decisions made by newDemocracy and **act as a final contact point for assembly members who feel that the project is being in any way 'steered' to a given result.**

This contributes to the fundamental transparency and impartiality of the project's governance. **This should also include a process expert, which we recommend sourcing from Ireland.**

Federal government departments will be required to respond to information requests from the assembly, source some expert speakers where required and provide feedback on draft recommendations as to their interpretation and impact.



ROLE A:

Role of the 10 elected representatives in the Citizens' Assembly

This role only applies if the 'Irish Model' option is chosen.

01. Take on the role of a member of the assembly

Attend the required weekend meetings with assembly members at Parliament House and participate as an equal part of a conversation with 100 people who will be selected through a democratic lottery.

02. Come along well prepared

Be highly familiar with the reference materials and expert submissions provided to all participants.

newDemocracy works hard to provide incentives for people to read in-depth, primarily through a guarantee of how they will be heard and responded to.

We are aware that these don't work the same way for MPs, and if assembly members sense that MPs are not familiar with materials, their incentives to read will decline in parallel. "I haven't bothered to read that" is a statement with more consequences than usual.

03. Do everything other MPs do

Do everything other MPs do **except** make a submission as your voice will be heard within the assembly.



ROLE B:

Role of the elected representatives outside of the process

01. Tell your story

The process aims to expose assembly members to a wide range of views and provide strong incentives for them to read the information in greater detail and volume than they otherwise would. Many elected representatives will have insights into viable reforms and opportunities for innovation — these are ideally shared as written submissions for all participants to critically review.

02. Encourage your local community to participate

In the learning stage of the project, we aim for a considered level of mass engagement: asking everyone we can reach a series of simple questions including: "What questions do you want to see answered?" MPs' profiles can encourage people to have their say. It is also appealing that not only are MPs listening, but public responses will go directly to an assembly of 100 people just like them who've been drawn from across the country. It's a good offer.

03. Come and watch

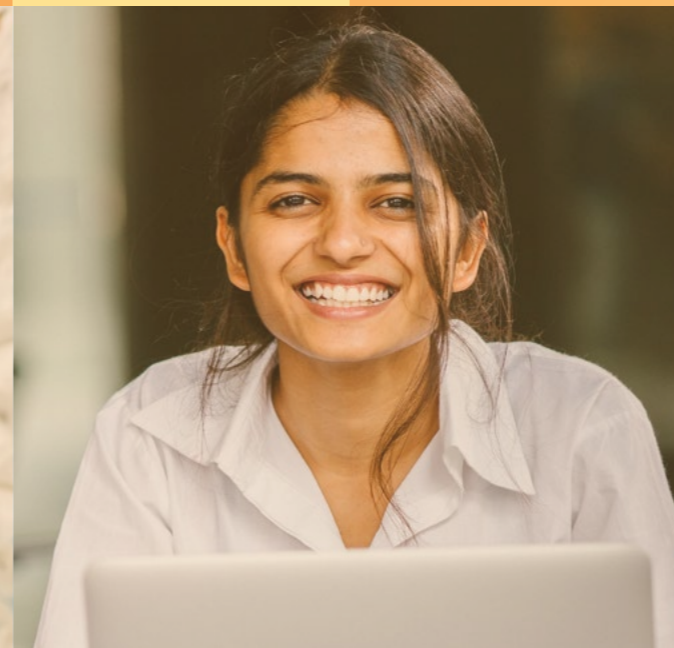
We appreciate that a proportion of members will approach this with some justifiable scepticism: there is no shortage of unrepresentative "community engagement" process and its frequent shallowness may leave MPs thinking, "There's no way everyday people can manage this topic." We would ask MPs to take just half an hour to see who has been selected and the diligence with which they approach the task. Meeting them during a coffee break will give an MP a rapid sense of how well participants have a handle on the source material and how well they understand the complexity of their task.



11 Role of the media

Successful projects rely on the media to help scale the experience and tell the story of people from across the country learning about what challenges need to be addressed and how they think they should be approached.

The media also play a key role in demystifying a new idea and thus creating a baseline of agreed facts before the rumour mill takes on a life of its own.



The major projects in Ireland exemplify both of these points. At its best, this saw everyday people from all walks of life explaining what they were learning and the trade-offs they were weighing up on complex and highly controversial topics. By being front and centre of the debate, they altered the tone of public discourse and enabled MPs to move beyond being barraged by simplistic attacks.

Equally, the Irish project organisers note that stories regarding recruitment (“Who are the mysterious high priests who have picked this group?” was one notable feature story) would not have occurred if a **detailed media kit** — including visualisations of how the project would work, ready for media use — had been provided for the media in advance.

We are fortunate in Australia to have **several political correspondents spanning the major print outlets with a detailed understanding of how this methodology works.**

With this process design being published at the outset, it makes sense to transparently outline our aspirations for the media here.

Given the global resonance of the project, we suggest including correspondents from The Economist and the New York Times to be equally as connected as local journalists.

Everyone can contribute to wider community engagement on expert speaker nominations and emerging issues. These contributions help the participants get a sense of what the community thinks is important.



With support, the media can:

01. Explain the process

Involving randomly selected people in this way and at this scale is a new thing for people. We are used to community involvement being forums for the actively interested and being driven by campaigned opinions (and often some simplistic slogans). That is the exact opposite of what is planned, and we need the help of the media to share how we are doing this so that people can make up their own minds.

Online comments often say, “How can people be capable?” We think we make a clear case in this document for how assembly members can be given the opportunity. The graphics on pages 10-11, 14-15, and 16-17 are intended for media use.

02. Encourage RSVP response to the 200,000 invitations

Most newspapers take the view that their readers would do a better job than the people we elect to parliament. This project gives those readers exactly this opportunity.

03. Get involved

Anyone in Australia will be able to answer some early questions that will contribute directly to how the process functions. We need to let people know the opportunity exists, and for most people, daily newspapers and evening news remains the core of how they become informed.

The project features two clear opportunities for people to have a conversation directly connected to the work of the assembly:

First, everyone can contribute to wider community engagement on expert speaker nominations, emerging issues and priorities. These contributions help the participants get a sense of what the community thinks is important, ensuring they do not miss anything obvious. Sharing this call for contributions through the media provides the greatest opportunity for everyone.

Second, the participants will produce a short document bringing together what they’ve learned about how housing affordability impacts Australia, alongside what they have found from hearing from expert speakers and each other. **This helps people understand the problem as presented by people like them and gives a sense of where the assembly might be heading.** Sharing this conversation through national platforms gives people familiarity with the process and the people making recommendations.

We will disclose where there are paid media insertions and, recognising that people often choose a newspaper that reflects their views, we will ensure a mix of papers are drawn on to ensure the broadest possible reach.

04. Let the country meet the participants

There is literally one way for anyone to decide if the process is genuine and it really is a random group: look at them and hear from them.

We need the media’s help to give the country some insight into who they are and what they are experiencing. This is also the process’ key probity measure: if there is any attempt to skew or bias the participants, there is no way those people will fail to say something. You cannot get randomly drawn people to stand in front of a decision they have been fed from elsewhere.



Risk management

12

Concern or Risk	Mitigation Approach
Project outcomes not met Not reaching project outcomes, budget, and timeframes due to ineffective engagement.	Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Secure highest quality facilitators. ■ Invest time to ensure process is both well planned and adaptive, enabling different perspectives to emerge. The right skills and expertise are brought to the project. ■ 'Light touch' templates for note taking (capture learnings) and report writing (recommendation, reasoning, evidence)
Simplistic solution to a complex situation The process is too simple and asks simplistic questions that elicit uninformed and habitual or bland responses to the situation.	Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Time. Provide a lengthy process that enables new opportunities and innovations to be explored. ■ Depth of background materials and database of expertise to help build knowledge about the situation and its complexity. ■ The deliberative process will ensure that trade-offs and implications are discussed and considered. A simple report template makes clear the requirement for evidence. ■ Bipartisan MPs' support for fair process serves to depoliticise.
"Too technical: everyday people won't understand" The process could be too broad and underestimate the need for building increased knowledge in participants.	Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The deliberative (deep learning) process ensures time and information are provided to a group that considers data carefully before making recommendations. ■ People have active incentives to learn as they have been chosen to be part of a small, select group who have the promise of a Ministerial response. ■ It is important to use many forms of communication of information — written, graphic, verbal, and smaller group conversations can be used to ensure that the technical aspects are unpacked. Observers are always pleasantly surprised at how everyday people can understand quite technical information when they are given the time to understand it properly. They also often ask very good questions about the issue that helps the organisation to think differently about an "old" problem. ■ Project experience (and court experience) shows people are capable if given the opportunity.
The "usual" voices are the only ones heard	Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide both broad community engagement activities and a deliberative process as planned. ■ A stratified random selection process for the participants will ensure that new people are heard who represent the demographics of the country. ■ Invest in targeted sessions with diverse (hard to reach) groups and meet on their terms — add this to the process as expert input. ■ People look for support and validation of their ideas from others. In a public deliberation, diverse perspectives guard against polarisation. This is because of the nature of stratified random selection. This dilutes the power from extreme views as they will be reflected in proportion to the wider population (in other words, part of the conversation, not all the conversation).

Concern or Risk	Mitigation Approach
No one representing [insert group] is in the room	Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recruitment captures a representative sample by age, gender, location, education, living situation and investment property ownership. ■ Facilitators do activities on missing voices. ■ Open submission process and media-driven submissions. ■ Stakeholder Reference Group suggests and sources inputs.
Lack of transparency Non-participating Australians feel unheard. That their ideas land on "deaf ears" or that "decisions have already been made".	Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Set wider engagement tasks so that their value as an assembly input is obvious and explicit. ■ Publish mass engagement insights in a separate report. ■ Map out the process and explain if it changes. ■ This process design is public at announcement. ■ Provide feedback on people's input within an agreed time. ■ Be accountable to the community - ask them to monitor the decision makers, only then will they trust them. ■ Work with the media.
"It is too risky — the response may be something we can't cope with" The response is fundamentally "an unknown" which makes it hard to plan for what will come out of the process.	Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Decision-makers are committing to <i>listen and substantively respond</i>, not to implementing recommendations without filter. ■ It's okay to say no to a recommendation, if decision makers explain why. ■ Whilst elected officials cannot control the assembly's recommendations, they can control how and when recommendations are implemented. It is important that each recommendation is seriously considered by decision makers and is given time and appreciation. ■ Some recommendations are just not possible to implement (legislation, policy, etc.), but this will be clearly and transparently communicated back to the assembly before they finalise their recommendations. ■ Usually, elected officials find the participants' response is very reasonable, rational, and considered. ■ It is also beneficial to have decision makers attend the project as observers (in addition to those participating) to ensure they understand the time, effort, and commitment of the participants. This will highlight the struggles participants face weighing up pros and cons, the challenges, and considerations they make. Decision makers will see how each idea is developed and explored, and not just thought up out of nowhere.
Community don't trust the organisers Confusion about roles and scope of the project mean that the organisers aren't trusted.	Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop clear project governance systems and project teams. ■ A clear and strong engagement plan is developed that ensure both depth and breadth of process and clear scope. ■ Highly transparent approach with upfront disclosure of program and funding. ■ Honorary Oversight Group provides independent supervision of the process in an ombudsman-like role.



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