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Basic Standards for Organising Citizens' Assemblies

These standards are from Citizens' Assemblies - a guide to democracy that works by Marcin Gerwin.

1. Random selection of participants
All members of a citizens' assembly are selected by lot. Ideally, every member of the population eligible to take part in a citizens' assembly should be able to potentially receive an invitation to participate.

2. Demographic representation
The composition of a citizens' assembly should broadly match the demographic profile of the community participating in the process. A set of criteria may be used to ensure demographic representativeness of the group, like age, gender, geographic area, or others. The aim is to create a community in a small scale that "feels like us". The size of the group should allow for inclusion of a wide diversity of views. A stipend should be provided to all participants to the amount that would at least cover the costs of attending the citizens' assembly.

3. Independent coordination
The citizens' assembly is run by an independent team of coordinators, which is responsible especially for preparing the process of random selection, developing the agenda, and inviting experts and facilitators. If the citizens' assembly is organized by local authorities or the parliament, it is important that all members of the coordination team are not part of the civil service. The coordinators should be impartial, e.g. not active politicians or direct stakeholders.

4. Citizens' assembly can invite experts
Despite the programme being prepared by the team of coordinators, the citizens' assembly can invite additional experts of their own choice. This may be in the form of a speech in person, a video streaming, a recording, a written note or other.

5. Inclusion of a widest practical range of perspectives
If there are diverse solutions and perspectives on a subject, ideally all of them should be presented during the educational phase of the citizens' assembly (by expert speakers). A method of combining perspectives due to a limited time or other practical considerations may be applied. Presentations may have the form of a speech in person, a video streaming, a recording, a written

note or other.

6. Inviting all stakeholders
Any organisation, informal group or an institution whose area of work and expertise is related to the topic of the citizens' assembly has the right to present its opinion to the citizens' assembly in person. The role of the team of coordinators is only to identify the stakeholders – they don't make a selection. Due to limited time and a large number of stakeholders, a method of choosing their representatives may be used. In this case, a diversity of perspectives should be taken into account.

7. Deliberation
Discussions which include listening to others mindfully and weighing options are the key elements of a citizens' assembly. The programme should involve discussions in small groups as well as in the plenary in order to maximize opportunities to speak and to be heard. The deliberation phase should be run by skilled facilitators.

8. Openness
All members of society should be able to provide input to the citizens' assembly in the form of comments, proposals or suggestions.

9. Sufficient time for reflection
Providing a sufficient amount of time for reflection is necessary to achieve well-thought-out decisions. If the matter is not urgent, it is best not to rush. The citizens' assembly should be able to prolong its meetings – their length and number – if it chooses to do so (subject to budgetary limits).

10. Impact
The follow-up to the citizens' assembly's recommendations should be clear from the outset. Ideally, recommendations that receive the support of the citizens' assembly at an agreed threshold should be treated as binding (to such an extent that is legally permissible in the given situation).

11. Transparency
All presentations during the educational, plenary phase should be transmitted live and recorded. All materials presented to the citizens' assembly should be made available online. Clear information about how recommendations of the citizens' assembly will be implemented should be provided online and updated as actions occur. A report presenting details of methodology used for organizing a citizens' assembly should be provided by the coordination team.

12. Visibility
Each citizens' assembly is an important event in the life of a community and citizens should be informed that it is happening and information on how they can get involved and follow it should be provided. The citizens' assembly should be publicly announced before it is formed.

Quotes About Citizens' Assemblies

From Ireland's Citizens' Assembly:

'I think this issue in Ireland could never have gotten to the point we're at today were it not for the CA. I think we would have been years getting there, if we ever got there.' *Kate O'Donnell (serving member of Fine Gael)*

"So I would say we probably put a couple of hundred hours of total time into it which is probably more than any parliamentary party committee would have put into it. So we're probably the best informed amateurs in the country on this topic at the moment." *John Long 56*

"The CA was very respectful and very congenial to everybody's opinion. So there were no major arguments or disputes here at the CA." *John Long 56*

"It's not just a particular type of people and they've gone to college and they've studied something and they're all making views in it. You get to hear what the ordinary people, the people that it affects on the ground, how they feel about something. What they would like to change about it and then go about it in a political manner after gaining all of the information." *Noreen O'Flynn*

"If you are cynical about your politician's ability to change legislation, pass legislation or come up with legislation but if there's an issue that's burning to your society in general - have an assembly." *David Keogh*

From the French Citizens' Climate Convention:

"I understand that people busy to try to feed their family don't care about #climate policies but each of us can contribute to our future. Democracy means each of us can speak up. We were not controlled by experts or the governance committee." *Agny*

"We saw the weight of lobbies. I'm an electrician. If I set your house on fire, would you hire me again? Why do we let powerful industries pollute the planet? I'm disappointed." *Grégory*

"The problem is trust. We had the #greatnationaldebate the #conventioncitoyenne... When are we going to listen to citizens? We believe in this. Can we make our society better. I want to open the debate. We need to talk about this with our representatives" *Samyr*

"The #conventioncitoyenne does not end tonight. The door is just opening. See you soon" (paraphrased quote) *Sylvie*

"The #conventioncitoyenne gives me a lot of hope, it's the only way we can address the emergency of #climatechange" *Mohamed*

Other Organisations and Further Reading

As a starting point you can find loads more information from XRUK's Citizen's Assembly Working Group (CAWG) on the XRUK Website.

Democracy Next: Checkout their Assembling an Assembly Guide for a really good explanation of how an assembly works.

KNOCA - Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies
A European network for sharing best practice on the design and implementation of Climate Assemblies. Tracks climate assemblies across the world, and organises workshops on best practice. Workshops are recorded and available to view on their website.

Climate assemblies-emerging trends challenges and opportunities: KNOCA report that draws lessons from the recent wave of climate assemblies and considers how they can improve their impact.

Sortition Foundation provides citizens' assembly services, and also have a proposal for the House of Lords to be replaced by a House of Citizens.

Involve works to make public participation and deliberation an everyday part of our democracy, and help solve the big challenges of our time.

Zero Hour campaigns for the Climate & Nature Bill — a plan for the UK to do its bit in keeping global warming down to 1.5°C and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030. The bill includes a Citizens Assembly on Climate and Nature.

Manuel Arriga - expert on Citizens' Assemblies and author of Rebooting Democracy: A Citizen's Guide to Reinventing Politics. He also created a series of youtube videos for XR including

"What is a Citizens' Assembly?", "Why is Extinction Rebellion calling for a Citizens' Assembly?", and "How do Citizens' Assemblies relate to the global climate emergency?"

When Citizens Assemble video (16mins): Ireland's efforts to break a political deadlock over its de facto ban on abortion inspired a bold response - the creation of a Citizens' Assembly to tackle on the issue. During five weekends spread over five months, a random selection of Irish people deliberated on the highly divisive and controversial issue. Their conclusion, in April 2017, recommended a radical liberalisation of existing laws, including a change to the Constitution.

The People vs. Climate Change: BBC Documentary on government committees' commissioning an assembly on achieving net zero by 2050.

The People's Plan for Nature: the outcome of a Citizen's Assembly on Nature convened by by National Trust, WWF & the RSPB.

Scotland's Climate Assembly: an assembly of 106 citizens, who met online over seven weekends between November 2020 and March 2021 to deliberate on information provided by experts and produce a set of recommendations, addressing the question 'How should Scotland change to tackle the climate emergency in an effective and fair way?'

UK Parliament Debate about the use of Citizens' Assemblies (Jan 2020)

This Children's Assembly on Biodiversity called on Ireland to 'treat the Earth like family'.

Luxembourg 'step up' green energy and efficiency targets partly due to citizens' assembly.

The COP26 Global Assembly produced a report answering the question 'How can humanity address the climate and ecological crisis in a fair and effective way?' Interestingly, the findings of the report came from both a Global Citizens' Assembly, and self-organised Community Assemblies around the world.

Reforming The Political System Messaging Guide.

'When Citizens Decide: Lessons from Citizens' Assemblies on Electoral Reform' - Patrick Fournier, Henk van der Kolk, R. Kenneth Carty, André Blais & Jonathan Rose.

Participipedia: A global network and crowdsourcing platform for researchers, educators, practitioners, policymakers, activists, and anyone interested in public participation and democratic innovations.

Reflecting on interacting with a government-led Climate Citizens Assembly: XR Scotland's Political Engagement Circle ltalks about Lessons to learn to ensure inclusivity, fairness, transparency and more.