Script for People's Assembly

Please note that this script is written in such a way as to ensure that those who are new to people's assemblies are fully supported throughout. If you are an experienced PA facilitator and are working with those who understand how PAs work, understand their history and the hand signals, you may wish to skip over certain sections. In short, please adapt this script to the needs of your situation and your audience.

Input Phase

Facilitators can start by introducing themselves, perhaps say a little of your background and experience with PA's and Community Organising or Projects - Brief but inspiring! If you want to bring people into the space, perhaps do a short visioning exercise, inviting people to imagine something or think about what brought them to the space.

Then begin by explaining that People's Assemblies have three 'phases':

Input Phase
During the input phase, we explain the process and structure of the assembly, we introduce the hand signals, and frame the focus of the assembly, as well as what will happen with the outcomes from the assembly.

[If you are having more input here than just presenting the topic for discussion, such as speakers, video etc you can explain that here too.]

Deliberation Phase
During the Deliberation (discussion) phase, you will be placed in small groups for [insert chosen length of deliberation phase] minutes and discuss the question/topic of this assembly.

Intergration Phase At the end of the Deliberation phase, the groups will come back into the full assembly and feedback what was generated in their small discussion group.

Facilitator 2: Hand Signals

We use hand signals to facilitate a discussion in which all voices get heard, no one dominates and we don't speak over each other. We will outline the hand signals you will need to take part today. Don't worry if you can't remember them as they will be repeated later in the session. [As you verbally outline the hand signals, physically show them to ensure people fully understand them].

Make a point: One index finger pointed upwards. The facilitator will stack, but they can choose to

stack out of order to ensure radical inclusivity and ensure all voices are heard. **Agreement:** Wavy hands for agreement. This is to help note taker, who can record the level of agreement, and to make sure people are not interrupting others. **Clarification:** Create a c shape with one hand. This is to ensure all are able to fully participate. It is useful if people do not understand anything, particularly important if unfamiliar terms and acronyms are used. **Direct point**: Two index fingers pointing upwards. This is not for responding, this is just for extra added information that is directly relevant to what is being said – people must be careful not to misuse this to jump ahead in the queue! **Technical point**: Create a t-shape with your hands. This is used for technical information such as breaks or timings. **Round up**: Create a circle with both hands. Do this after 2 minutes to make sure that those who are more comfortable speaking don't go on and on. **Speak up**: Move your hands upwards with their palms facing upwards. **Temperature check**: Jiggle fingers at a level that corresponds with feelings i.e. upwards - support, horizontally - ambivalent, downwards - don't support. This can be used to quickly check the feelings of the group.

FACILITATOR 1: Introduce the concept of a People's Assembly

What is a People's Assembly?

A people's assembly is a structured way for a group of people to discuss issues, generate ideas and/or make decisions collectively in a manner in which all voices are heard and valued equally and no one person, or group, is able to dominate the process.

People's assemblies are 'self selected' meaning that anyone can choose to take part. They are not to be confused with Citizens Assemblies which are randomly selected from the population by the process of Sortition, to make sure it is representative in terms of key characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, education level and geography. Citizens' Assembly members would learn about critical thinking before they hear balanced information from experts and stakeholders. They would then spend time deliberating in small facilitated groups, similar to the break-out groups we're going to use in this People's Assembly.

People's Assemblies have been used throughout history and all over the world as a means to enable people to come together and achieve real social change:

- In Ancient Athens, for example, a people's assembly known as the ekklesia, which was open to all male citizens regardless of class, was where major decisions such as going to war, military strategy and the election of public officials were made.
- More recently, in Rojava, Kurdistan, people's assemblies have been at the centre of a democratic revolution. Decisions are made by the community, and the role of the elected representatives is simply to carry out these decisions. The community itself is the seat of power.
- In Spain, the Spanish municipalist movement, known as the Indignados or 15-M movement, used PAs to discuss and protest against the government's austerity policies. At the movement's peak, 80 assemblies were being held each week alone in Madrid.
- In 2014 the Y'en a Marre movement in Senegal helped oust the incumbent and corrupt President by mobilising the youth vote using people's assemblies and hip-hop.

- Closer to home there are the examples of Frome, Torridge and others, all of which are councils that have been reclaimed to some degree by residents in local elections. When councils are run by residents we see decisions get made that prioritise the needs of that community. To give a couple of brief examples, Frome has a Library of Things. This came from a small start up grant of £9000, which enabled over 300 things such as power tools, musical instruments, to be gathered for the whole community to borrow for a small fee. They also repurposed derelict buildings, solar panels sprung up everywhere, a local NHS initiative to prescribe volunteering plus the councils investment in civic and volunteer groups, this led to a 22% reduction in A&E attendances.

Inclusivity Statement

Before we start a People's Assembly, we like to read out this inclusivity statement

- "We value all voices equally in the assembly, as the aim is to hear the wisdom of the crowd gathered here and not to have the assembly dominated by individual voices or groups. We recognise that confident speakers are not always right and that those who are not confident speakers will often have the most useful ideas or opinions to put into the discussion. This is why we value all voices equally and we ask you to do the same. We do not tolerate any calling out, abuse or shaming. We welcome all people but not all behaviours."

We want to hear your voice, if you want to speak, no matter what. Whatever age you are, wherever you are from and whatever you do.

The whole process will take about an hour and a half*, and we'd love you to stay for the whole of that, but feel free to go or come as you like or need.

[*If you have the time, it's good to do a TESTIFY at this point. It'll add about 15-30 minutes to the overall length of the PA, but gets people talking about why they are at the PA before the main section of the assembly…]

Testify

Before we get into the section of the People's Assembly where you will all be able to talk through our specific issue in a facilitated way, we first like to give anyone who would like an opportunity to talk about what has brought them here today.

[Offer the floor to anyone who wants to speak. It can be good to ask for a woman to speak first as women tend to speak up less in these situations. Allow as much dead air as is necessary for people to build up the courage to come and talk!]

[FACILITATOR 2 is timing and doing the 'round up' signal as necessary. After 15-30 minutes, move into the remainder of the PA.]

FACILITATOR 2: The Three Pillars

A people's assembly differs from debate where one person is 'right' and the other is 'wrong' and from the typical discussion or conversation where people have a tendency to dominate with questions and interjections. The assembly allows each participant to be held with respect and full attention - and no judgement - whilst sharing from the heart and for each participant to get a turn.

It's ok not to actively share too. Witnessing the sharing of others' feelings and experiences is as important as expressing one's own.

In an assembly, the focus is on personal feelings and experiences. Each speaker is encouraged to say 'I' - rather than 'we' or 'they' whilst sharing with others.

This can be encapsulated within the THREE PILLARS, which are:

- **Radical Inclusivity:** Effective assemblies achieve radical inclusivity, where the emphasis on all being heard and valued equally means no voices are dominating and the collective wisdom of the assembly can be reached. People can participate safely and openly, without fear of judgement or ridicule. For those who often speak up in situations like this, think 'Wait! Why Am I Talking?' Try to say only what is needed.

[Radical Inclusivity also means being aware of potential barriers to engagement and working with those affected to enable participation. Think about disabled access, sign language, whisper interpretation for those for whom English isn't their first language and other possible means by which those barriers can be removed. Ask at the start of an assembly if there are any barriers to engagement that people need to identify and then request that the group work together to find ways to remove them.]

- **Active listening:** It is easy to start mapping out in your mind what your response may be while someone is still talking. Active listening is focusing on hearing someone all the way through before developing your responses. Assemblies are not an arena for intellectual jousting or point-scoring but a place that recognises that no one person or group holds all the answers and that through the wisdom of the crowds we achieve powerful intelligence about the core issues being discussed.

- **Trust:** We need to trust the process/facilitators/other participants. This is not a perfect system! It is only effective if we all trust the intentions of the people in the room – if we work in humility and accept that our ideas may not be the best ideas – and we work towards the best decision for everyone.

FACILITATOR 1: Framing the Topic - What is the aim of THIS people's assembly?

Background

[Frame your assembly here:

- Why has it been convened?
- What are the aims of this assembly?
- Where will the results of this assembly go and what legitimacy do they hold?
- Is it a decision making assembly? Is there a yes or no answer that needs to be generated?
- Is it to generate ideas or feedback? Where will these go and are they recommendations that will be acted upon or are they feeding into a wider discussion?]

Question(s)

State your question or topic for discussion clearly here, and if possible write it up in the exact wording you use somewhere that will remain visible to all participants throughout the assembly.

Always ask for any clarifications at this point, and be open to working to reword the question/topic if needed you can ask for a 'temperature check' here to make sure the assembly agrees with the proposed wording.

A good question is worded in accessible language, not too long, and is broad enough to allow for free discussion, but not so broad that a structured conversation around it is difficult. Likewise a very specific question won't generate a very diverse response.

For example, if you would like to engage people around the topic of buying local produce, you might ask:

- 'Should we start a Food Hub?
  -This question is very narrow, and really requires a yes or no, so it is unlikely to generate a lot of great ideas.
- 'How can we improve access to local produce?'
  -This question is broader, still focused on local access, gives scope for creativity.
- 'What can we do to reduce food miles?
  -Too broad, this could encompass all manner of different approaches and likely to lead to the conversation jumping from local to regional to national issues.

Deliberation Phase

FACILITATOR 2: How does a People's Assembly work?

You will discuss the PA question in breakout groups of 8-10, then feedback to the entire assembly.

Each group needs a facilitator and a note taker:

- It is the role of the facilitator to ensure that all voices are heard (radical inclusivity). To do this, allow two minutes per statement (maximum) and if people go over, give them the round up symbol.

- It is the role of the note taker to make notes on what is discussed, and to share their group's key points of discussion in the integration phase i.e. when all of the groups have returned to the assembly.
- When the note-taker is taking notes, they can do so in bullet points for ease of recording. Try to capture exactly what someone means, rather than adding any personal interpretations.

10 minutes before the end of your allocated time, the note-taker should summarise the group's notes, then use temperature checks to identify the points that have the most support or acceptance.

The group should then work together to reach agreement on the main points to feed back to the Assembly.

[Decide how you want the feedback to happen- select the most appropriate option depending on size of group/time available:

- We would like the notetaker to share the top 3 points with the whole assembly after we reunite as an assembly.
- We would like the notetake to share 1 sentence or 10 words to the whole assembly.
- We would like 3 key points delivered in writing.]

GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Discussion [25 mins or whatever your allocated time is]

Integration/Output Phase

FACILITATOR 1: Ending

Feedback (15 minutes)

Remember to get the names of the people giving feedback, and show appreciation.

Thank everyone for participating. Then explain what will happen to the results of the assembly, including any possible 'next steps' that people could take, or plans for further assemblies.

[At this point you can offer space for 'shout outs' - 'Shout Outs' are an invitation for those gathered to call out brief notifications such as upcoming meetings or events. These should be short and arranged with the facilitators beforehand if possible. This should take no more than 10 mins]

Close the assembly and ideally let everyone know when the next assembly will be if appropriate.

Tips for Dealing with Difficult Interactions

A collection of thoughts and ideas on how to approach difficult interactions and behaviours. Remember that arguments can be won by the loudest voices, you are hear to ensure that everyone gets heard.

- Stress that “we welcome all people, but not all behaviours”.
- Move in when people are interjecting, challenging or talking too much.
- “The points you are making are really interesting and important but it is also important to hear from other people here.”
- “There is always a danger that we only hear from the most confident voices - let’s make sure that we also hear from the people who haven't spoken so far.”
- “I am conscious of time and our agenda - what is the final point you want to make?”
- "Remember radical inclusivity - we want time for everyone."
- "It's important for people to feel listened to without interrupting."
- You can offer to talk to people in more detail in a break or afterwards. If you need someone to behave differently it can be an expression of Radical Inclusion to connect with them in a break or afterwards to keep in relationship with them.
- Sometimes with someone who is very unconsciously in need of attention and can't be satisfied with a short interaction, avoiding eye contact may keep them quiet or let them know they have been talking for too long.
- If necessary, overtly clarify the objectives of the session again and what is needed to achieve those objectives.

Tips for Online Assemblies

Before the Meeting: Setting up Zoom

Under **my meetings**, click on the meeting you are facilitating. On the left you will see **settings**. Make sure the following are selected:

- Start meetings with participant video on. Participants can change this during the meeting.
- Automatically mute all participants when they join the meeting. The host controls whether participants can unmute themselves.
- Allow meeting participants to send a message visible to all participants in the chat.
- Automatically save all in-meeting chats so that hosts do not need to manually save the text of the chat after the meeting starts.
- Allow the host to add co-hosts. Co-hosts have the same in-meeting controls as the host.
- Participants in a meeting can provide nonverbal feedback and express opinions by clicking on icons in the Participants panel.
- Allow host to split meeting participants into separate, smaller breakout rooms.
- To reduce risk of strangers showing inappropriate material in your Zoom Room only permit hosts and co-hosts to share their screens; and do not permit use of virtual backgrounds, as this too is another way trolls can project material into the room.

Laptops are best for online Zooms, but it can be done on smartphones too. **Facilitators need to be on Laptops.** Ask people who have used Zoom before to sign in 5 minutes before the start time, and those who have not used Zoom before to sign in 10 minutes early and work out how to use the

buttons on the screen.

Online Deliberation

For this phase online, the Technical Facilitator should be logged in as the Host. They can then select **'Breakout Rooms'** on the control panel. Divide the number of participants in the assembly by number of people you would like in each group and Zoom will automatically assign them to groups. Get a few friends and give this a try before your People's Assembly!

Once everyone is ready, the Technical Facilitator can go to 'manage participants' and unmute everyone in preparation for discussion, and then send them out into breakout groups.
You can use **'Breakout Rooms- Broadcast'** to give timing reminders to all groups during the discussion.
When the discussion time is up, you can click 'close groups' and this will give breakout groups 1 minute before they are returned to the main group (you can change this in Breakout Room settings if you want to).

Downloadable Script for People's Assembly
