

Box 13.1 Citizens' assemblies, juries and panels

Citizens' assemblies, juries and panels are ways of enhancing public participation in decision making by bringing members of a community together in a group which is deliberative, representative of the community and considered fully in the final decisions.

A group is 'deliberative' if the members obtain and discuss information thoughtfully and respectfully enough to reach decisions together. They might not entirely agree with each other but they should understand the basis of their disagreements. To bring this about they need enough time and help; this typically includes expert briefings and facilitation by people who are outside the group.

The group is made representative of the community by being formed by random sampling (or 'sortition') from the community. Often it is formed in two stages. In the first stage, all the people in the community (or in a random sample of the community) are asked about their willingness to participate. In the second stage, those who are willing to participate are put into separate groups (according to gender and ethnicity, for example) and a random sample is drawn from each group. Larger samples are drawn from groups that would otherwise be under-represented, to ensure that the groups represent the community in the desired way when they are combined into one; algorithms can ensure that samples are nonetheless as fair as they can be, in that different people have almost equal chances of being selected.

The choice of name ('assembly', 'jury' or 'panel') has little significance, though citizens' assemblies have usually more members (perhaps 40 – 100 instead of 10 – 40), citizens' juries might have short lives (with consecutive sessions about one topic over four days) and citizen's panels have long lives (with occasional sessions about different topics over two years). In all cases there could be about twelve sessions, in which the members of the group obtain and discuss information before reaching decisions.

Citizens' assemblies, juries and panels tend to be concerned with broad matters of policy, such as the treatment of climate change. Those concerned with urban planning have considered overall local plans, not individual planning applications. For planning applications bodies such as area advisory committees and design panels are widespread, but they are not representative of the community as a whole.

More information is available on random sampling of otherwise under-represented groups¹, using citizens' assemblies, juries and panels², and facilitating deliberation³.

¹ Sortition Foundation. <https://www.sortitionfoundation.org/>.

² Involve. <https://www.involve.org.uk/>.

³ Navigate. <https://www.navigate.org.uk/>.