Citizen Juries – an overview

Citizen juries (sometimes called 'Panels) have now been employed in several local government settings around Australia – and, increasingly, in Victoria. They differ in their scale, scope and level of resourcing but have all sought to improve both understanding and decision-making on the issue at hand.

How does a jury work ?

Citizen juries provide the opportunity for a randomly selected 'mini-public' to deliberate thoroughly over an issue, often over several days. Typically, invitations will be sent out to a randomly-selected group of ratepayers. From those who take up the invitation, a further (stratified) sample will be selected to ensure that the final jury best represents the demographic of the wider community.

The selected 'jurors' are given a key question, or 'remit' to work through, with the aim of working together towards a clearly defined set of recommendations. This process is typically facilitated by an independent, expert facilitator; this is important, because it affords council some distance from the process and means that the outcomes of the process are more likely to be trusted.

In the course of their deliberations, the jury has access to expert help, through background material and presentations from 'witnesses' with expert knowledge relevant to their task. These experts are sometimes internal to councils – but, most often, content experts are called on from outside of council. The jury's deliberations are typically closed sessions but are open to observers at certain times, subject to observers signing a code of conduct.

At the end of the process, the jury will issue findings and recommendations to council.

At the outset, it is critical that jurors understand the degree of *influence* that they are being offered by the council. The idea of a panel or jury can sometimes be perceived as challenge to the role of elected representatives, but the final decision around an issue will always rest with the council. The role of a jury is to assist council in making informed decisions.

What's involved ?

Planning and design

As with any community engagement, it is important to have a clear purpose in mind which will inform the design of a jury process. It requires many months of careful planning and considerations of issues such as the jury selection, the remit, background material, observers, the authority of the jury's recommendations, costing and evaluation. Excellent examples of the thinking involved in jury process design can be found on the newDemocracy Foundation website: www.newdemocracy.com.au/ndf-work/

In particular, council needs to be clear about what it will do with the jury's recommendations. On receiving the jury's final report, council will be expected to respond publicly to the recommendations, outlining the reasons behind their response.

Time, energy and support

Anecdotal evidence speaks to the enormous amount of time and energy that a jury process requires of council officers with the responsibility of making it happen. One fundamental task is to ensure that colleagues and elected representatives understand what's involved. This is in addition to all of the many practical considerations about the design of the process and the smooth running of the jury on the day.

By way of example, on the Deliberative Democracy Hub (www.vlga.org.au), you will find the planning schedule that sat behind the City of Darebin's Citizens' Jury. In this particular case, the council's Chief Financial Officer carried responsibility for the jury process. Typically, the running of a jury process tends to fall to community engagement/development teams in council. Where a jury process sits in council is an important consideration.

Resources

The cost of convening a citizen's jury varies considerably with the design of the process. Detail contained in council budgets can be difficult to access and, even then, it may be unclear the extent to which internal costs have been factored in - the best approach is to ask the people involved. That said, there is evidence that juries have been successfully staged for a cost in the order of $10K but the figure is often closer to $50 - $60K, which includes the cost of an external facilitator and officers' time; the City of Greater Bendigo's Citizens' Jury budget is given as $89K; and the City of Melbourne's large-scale People's Panel on the Council's 10-year financial plan cost in the order of $180K. Some creative thinking and adaptation can help manage the budget without compromising the process; see, for example, the Yarra Ranges Council case study below.

A common question is whether funds committed to a jury are well spent or represent value for money over other approaches to community consultation. This too will vary case by case but it will be important to consider the cost-savings from running a robust jury process which may reduce the need for other less effective engagement processes down the track. It will also be important to consider some of the less tangible outcomes, such as the goodwill generated and the capacity of juries to unlock previously untapped resources and ideas. This question of value for money is addressed, explicitly, in an evaluation of the City of Melbourne's People's Panel; see http://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/10yearplan.

Some of the cases studies in the table below also provide further commentary on these points.

Evaluation

It is essential to consider how the 'success' of the jury will be measured. Every setting is different but common considerations will include those around the integrity of the process; whether participants were given the resources and time they needed to participate meaningfully; the extent to which the jury was representative of the local community; the jury's involvement in the evaluation; and the extent to which the influence of the jury's recommendations can be demonstrated.

Examples of evaluation frameworks are provided in the DD Resource Library (www.vlga.org.au).

When to use a jury

A jury is useful when a council wants to know what an informed, representative group of people thinks about a particular issue. In the context of rate capping, it lends itself to an early discussion of the trade-offs involved in a rate-capping environment and the options that could best be taken forward as part of a broader engagement strategy.

Citizen Jury Case Studies - at a glance

The table following captures some examples of the ways in which juries have been used in different settings in Australia – and links to further information. On the DD Hub on the VLGA website, you will find more detail on those marked with a '✓' in the Local Government Case Studies handout. You will also find a detailed account of the Yarra Ranges Council People's Panel in a separate handout.

Citizen Jury Case Studies - at a glance

Many of the sponsors listed provide considerable detail about timing, background information, jury reports, expert presentations and juror feedback. Design notes on several of these juries can be found on the newDemocracy Foundation website: www.newdemocracy.com.au/ndf-work/

Sponsor	Task	Timing	Further info	Case study
Victorian Government: Geelong Citizens' Jury	A randomly-selected 100-member jury convened to deliberate on local governance arrangements following the dismissal of the Greater Geelong City Council in April 2016.The Jury will be asked to consider: *Our council was dismissed. How do we want to be democratically represented by a future council?*	October - November 2016	http://geelongcitizensjury.vic.gov.au/	✖
City of Greater Bendigo	A jury of about 24 people drawn together to offer a considered view on the range and level of services to be provided across the municipality. This forms part of the engagement on the City's new Council Plan (2017 – 2021). *What should Council spend our money on to shape the community's future ?*	July- September 2016	https://www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/your-say/Have-your-say/Citizens-Jury This site includes documents provided to the jury (such as the Jury Briefing Book) and information requested by the jury.	✖
Infrastructure Victoria	Infrastructure Victoria was created in October 2015. In developing its 30-year strategy, two citizen juries (in Shepparton and Melbourne), made up of about 40 randomly selected people considered: *What should we do to meet Victoria's infrastructure needs?*	June - July 2016	http://yoursay.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/30-year-strategy/citizen-jury	✖

Sponsor	Task	Timing	Further info	Case study
City of Melbourne: Citizens Jury	A randomly selected jury of 52 people met to produce a refresh of *Future Melbourne 2026*. The jury was the third of three phases of consultation on a refresh of the *Future Melbourne* plan, beginning in February 2016.	May - June 2016	http://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/future/creating-future-melbourne-2026-plan A comprehensive site with detailed information on engagement around the *Future Melbourne* refresh and the role of the jury, including video.	✖
Yarra Ranges Council	People's Panel of 12 people drawn at random from the community of Yarra Glen, met to identify infrastructure projects to be funded by proceeds from the sale of council-owned land in the town.	April - May 2016	http://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Lists/Current-consultation/Yarra-Glen-Peoples-Panel/Yarra-Glen-Peoples-Panel	✓ (see also separate handout)
City of Yarra: Liveable Yarra People's Panel	As part of the 'Liveable Yarra' project, the Council hosted a four session deliberative forum on the question of: *What advice would you give Council on rewriting the Planning Scheme?*	In November 2015, Council resolved to receive and note the Panel's advice and supported it being used to inform the Planning Scheme rewrite.	http://www.yarracity.vic.gov.au/planning--building/Yarra-planning-scheme/liveable-yarra-project/ This includes background information and council reports.	✓
Surf Coast Shire Council: Spring Creek Precinct Structure Plan	Surf Coast Shire ran a Community Panel (of 32) to consider: *How do we design for urban growth that is in balance with the surrounding environment?*	Panel met during August 2015; Council responded to the Panel's report in November 2015.	http://www.surfcoast.vic.gov.au/My_Property/Building_Planning/Planning/Strategic_Projects_Studies/Spring_Creek_Structure_Plan	✓

Sponsor	Task	Timing	Further info	Case study
VicHealth	Vic Health held a Citizen's Jury (of 78) with the aim of engaging the community in a discussion and debate around potential solutions for overweight and obesity: *We have an obesity problem. How can we make it easier to eat better?*	October 2015	https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects/victorias-citizens-jury-on-obesity This process first involved an online phase exploring evidence and questioning experts, before the jury met face-to-face.	✖
Shire of Nillumbik	As part of a broader community engagement plan on rate capping, the Shire convened a Community Panel to discuss rate capping and future budget priorities: *Are the current service levels about right, too high or too low ? Are the infrastructure investment levels about right, too high or too low ?*	Panel recommendations reported at Council meeting, October 2015	http://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/News/Council-endorses-broad-consultation-on-rate-capping	✔
Marrickville Council Infrastructure Jury (NSW)	The Marrickville Infrastructure Jury (MIJ) was convened to consider the Council's infrastructure needs: 1. *What level of infrastructure quality do we want to pay for in Marrickville?* 2. *What are our local priorities for investment?*	Jury met September – November, 2014. Council received the report in November 2014. The Jury was reconvened to consider the pros and cons of a proposed special rate variation to fund infrastructure renewal. A supplementary Jury report was completed in early February 2015.	http://yoursaymarrickville.com.au/marrickville-infrastructure-jury	✔

Sponsor	Task	Timing	Further info	Case study
City of Melbourne: People's Panel	As one component of a comprehensive community engagement strategy, the City of Melbourne's People's Panel convened to consider the Council's first 10-year financial plan.	The Panel formally presented its recommendations to Council at a special Future Melbourne Committee in November 2014.	http://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/10yearplan	✓
City of Darebin: Citizen's Jury	A citizen's jury of 31 randomly selected community members considered: *How should we best spend $2 million to improve our community through the use of infrastructure funding?*	Council unanimously approved the Jury's recommendations in September 2014.	http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/en/Your-Council/How-council-works/Council-Initiatives	✓
Government of South Australia	The Government of South Australia has run two citizen juries. The first considered: *How can we ensure we have a vibrant and safe Adelaide nightlife?*	Report to Premier October 2013. The Jury's report and the government's response were tabled in Parliament in November 2013.	A report of the process, including status updates and an evaluation of the process can be found at: http://yoursay.sa.gov.au/decisions/creating-a-safe-and-vibrant-adelaide-nightlife/about	✗
✗	A second jury considered issues around cycle safety: *Motorists and cyclists will always be using our roads. What things could we trial to ensure they share the roads safely?*	Jury presented its recommendations to the State Premier in November 2014. The South Australian Government Response to the Citizens' Jury Report was released in January 2015.	The outcomes of the jury process, including an evaluation, can be found at: http://yoursay.sa.gov.au/decisions/sharing-our-roads-safely/outcome	✗

Sponsor	Task	Timing	Further info	Case study
City of Greater Geraldton (WA): #changesCGG Community project	The #changesCGG Community project is how the City is delivering on a commitment made following the highly successful 2029 and Beyond project, a city wide consultation and engagement program that opened up its decision making processes to the wider community. An excellent example of how a council has used deliberative approaches as part of a broader engagement strategy and the conditions requisite to successful deliberation.	2013 +	http://www.cgg.wa.gov.au/your-council/having-your-say/changescgg-community.aspx See also: Hartz-Karp (2012	✘
City of Canada Bay (NSW)	In 2012, the City convened a Citizens' Panel project of 36 members) to make decisions as to the desired range and quality level of Council services.	The Panel reached a broad consensus on their findings and presented their report formally to Council in November 2012	http://www.canadabay.nsw.gov.au/citizens-panel-pg.html	✘

Want to know more ?

For further information, visit the Resource Library at Deliberative Democracy Hub at vlga.org.au.

Also:

ABC Radio National – Big Ideas
ABC Radio National pulled together a special panel to discuss on participatory approaches as part of its Big Ideas program. *Citizen juries – leadership for a new democracy* gives a useful overview of this field. Well worth a listen: http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/citizen-juries---leadership-for-a-new-democracy/6477686

A guide to using citizens' juries
Another useful resource is a report prepared by Dr Lyn Carson for Planning NSW: Carson, L. 2003, *Consult your community: a guide to using citizens' juries* which touches on the role of juries relative to existing public participation approaches, the logistics of organising a jury and the many considerations along the way. www.activedemocracy.net/articles/cj_handbook.pdf

Evaluation
From South Australia, *More verdicts of the Jury: stories, insights and improvements for the Citizens' Jury model.* An independent review of the second citizen's jury commissioned by the Department of Premier and Cabinet: http://yoursay.sa.gov.au/decisions/sharing-our-roads-safely/about

Research
Hartz-Karp, J., 2012, Laying the groundwork for participatory budgeting – developing a deliberative community and collaborative governance: Greater Geraldton, Western Australia, *Journal of Public Deliberation* 8 (2) Article 6
[online] http://www.publicdeliberation.net/jpd/vol8/iss2/art6/