



## Deliberative approaches ‘101’

### A deliberative turn

In the 1990s, there was a shift in thinking among democratic theorists, about the role of collective, deliberative decision-making in democratic institutions such as local government. This thinking around deliberative democracy (DD) began as an attempt to make *deliberation* central to decision-making, on a mass scale. Nowadays, DD is practised more typically through ‘mini-publics’ where small groups of citizens (from ~20 up to ~ 2000) come together to carefully examine a problem, deliberate together and work towards a shared resolution or set of recommendations (Estlund et al., 2016; Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2012).

Along the way there has been a growing interest, and literature, on various participatory approaches which foster deliberative practices, such as citizen juries, consensus conferences and participatory budgeting. There has also been a focus on the design of deliberative institutions and ways of embedding deliberative democracy in decision-making, not just as a one-off process, but rather as a habit (Winstanley and Cronin, 2012).

### Why the interest ?

There are several drivers behind the growing interest in DD; these include the complexity of contemporary issues in which multiple stakeholders are involved; a loss of trust in institutions of governance; some dissatisfaction with traditional approaches to engagement; and the emergence of organisations and networks promoting the theory and practice of DD.

Hundreds of new articles now appear on deliberative democracy each year and, in Victoria, an increasing number of councils are thinking of using deliberative approaches as part of their broader engagement strategy. DD practices are also being used, increasingly, by industry organisations and NGOs.

### How do DD techniques differ from traditional approaches to engagement ?

Deliberative process typically take the form of workshops involving citizens recruited to be broadly representative of the local population (often referred to as ‘mini-publics’). Over an extended time period, often a few days, the selected mini-public is given time to learn about the issue to be explored, to call on outside expertise and to think deeply, together, on the questions they have been asked to consider.

Two of Australia's leading practitioners on DD techniques suggest that they can be distinguished from the usual community consultation in at least three critical ways; they are representative, deliberative and influential (Carson and Hartz-Karp, 2005):

- Representative** in the sense that they involve a representative cross-section (or mini-public) of the community, usually selected at random;
- Deliberative** allowing for extended consideration of a key question; and
- Influential** which refers to the presumption that decision-makers will take direction from the outcomes of the deliberation.

## Why should councils consider using deliberative approaches ?

Advocates suggest that there are a number of good reasons for organisations to consider deliberative approaches:

- A focus is put on the fundamental idea of democracy with an emphasis on listening, participation and cooperation and the opportunity to consider, respectfully, a range of views and ideas.
- The random selection of participants gives access to quiet voices and to people who may not otherwise have had any engagement with council.
- It can lead to better, more sustainable decisions by providing people the time and opportunity to take a 'deep dive' into difficult issues.
- People are more likely to trust the outcomes of a process which is seen to be representative and informed by ordinary people, 'just like me'.
- It helps to promote mutuality and trust between citizens and councillors, a greater understanding of the work of councils and a greater willingness to engage actively with council in future
- Participants have the opportunity to build on their skills and experience

The Resource Library provides examples of evaluations of deliberative processes and their outcomes.

## Deliberative techniques

Depending on where you look, different people offer different descriptions of the techniques or approaches that can be considered as inclusive or deliberative and there are different ideas on who should deliberate and where deliberation should take place, for example.

The table below captures some of the key deliberative techniques. This is not a comprehensive list and you should refer to the Resource Library for resources which will give you further detail on the different techniques and when they are best used. In particular, the NCDD's *Engagement Streams Framework* is a good place to start and will help you understand and navigate the range of deliberative techniques available: see [www.ncdd.org/stream](http://www.ncdd.org/stream).

It is also worth bearing in mind the observations of Carson and Hartz-Karp (2005) who note that whilst Australia has imported many deliberative methods, practitioners have also adapted and combined methods to suit our particular circumstances. The critical point is that any adaptations should remain responsive to the challenge of maximising *inclusion, deliberation and influence*.

## Deliberative techniques – at a glance

Process	Focuses significantly on ...				Size of group	Type of session	Participant selection	Outline
	Exploration	Conflict transformation	Decision Making	Collaborative Action				
<b>Citizens Jury</b>			x		Small group	1-5 days of meeting	Random	A Citizens Jury involves a small mini-public which meets, often over several days, to deliberate thoroughly over an issue. They are assisted by expert witnesses and a professional facilitator. The jury issues findings and recommendations on the issues they have discussed.
<b>Consensus Conference</b>			x		Large group	8 days (over 3 months)	Varies	The Danish model of a consensus conference is typically designed around a technically or scientifically complex issue. It is based on a two-stage process; the first involves small 'lay' group meetings to learn about the topic and the process and set questions for the conference; the second is the public 'conference' phase, at which the main observations and conclusions are drawn and presented. The conference is overseen by an expert advisory committee.
<b>Deliberative polling</b>			x		Up to several hundred people in small groups in 1 room	1-4 days	Random	Deliberative polling combines a large population random survey for baseline information on their thoughts on a particular policy topic. Thereafter, a smaller representative and random groups of respondents are invited to come together. They are surveyed before and after listening to and questioning expert presentations on the topic and discussion with their peers. There is no attempt to reach consensus; rather, it provides an insight into the opportunity for shifts in community attitude.

<b>World Café</b>	x				Up to hundreds in 1 room at tables of 4-5	Single event ranging from 90 minutes to 3 days	Not random – typically invited	World Cafés enable large numbers of people to get involved in interactive conversations, exploring important issues. People move from group-to-group- sharing and building new insights. The process leads finally to a whole group conversation sharing findings and possibilities for actions.
<b>21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meeting</b>			x		Hundreds in 1 room at small tables	1-2	Open; but also recruit for representativeness across, for example, government, community and industry	This is a method of involving large numbers of people, organising them into small discussion groups and informed deliberation, connected through networked computers. Participant input can be quickly summarised and the goal is to provide common ground and give substantive feedback to decision- makers on priorities and areas of contention.
<b>Open Space Technology</b>	x			x	Up to hundreds in 1 room, then break up in interest groups multiple times	½ - 3 days	Open – a key principle is that those who come are the right people.	Open Space Technology is a process without keynotes speakers, and agenda or pre-planned workshops. Instead an environment is created where participants are invited to self-organise and offer and discuss topics on which they have a particular passion or interest. It concludes with a plenary session where participants can comment on the process or outcome; a report of actions and those responsible is circulated at the event or soon after.
<b>Online deliberation</b>	x					Window of participation typically several weeks	Open	This is a collective reference to processes in which participants deliberate through electronic communication, such as the Internet and social media. It allows a large number of people to be engaged at a time of their choosing and to participate in a discussion on a particular topic. For online processes to be truly deliberative is, however, challenging (Hartz-Karp and Sullivan, 2014).

Participatory Budgeting			x		Small group	4-8 days	Random	Through participatory budgeting (PB), ordinary people offer advice on how part (or all) of a council budget should be allocated. In the Australian setting (unlike the broad scale annual process of PB in Brazil, for example), PB typically involves a randomly selected panel of citizens brought together to learn about the ways in which a budget is constructed and to deliberate on the allocation of the budget.
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Adapted from NCDD's Engagement Streams Framework (2005). Created by Sandy Heierbacher and members of the NCDD community. National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation. [www.ncdd.org/stream](http://www.ncdd.org/stream); and material developed by Janette Hartz-Karp, Curtin University Sustainability Policy Institute, Western Australia.

## Want to know more ?

Visit the Deliberative Democracy Resource Library at [vlga.org.au](http://vlga.org.au)

Also:

### Research about public deliberation

The *Journal of Public Deliberation* is a peer reviewed, open access journal full of useful papers about research, opinion, projects, experiments and experiences of academics and practitioners in deliberative democracy: [www.publicdeliberation.net/jpd/](http://www.publicdeliberation.net/jpd/)

### newDemocracy Foundation

The newDemocracy Foundation is actively pursuing the question of whether there are ways in which democracy can be done better in Australia and has run several juries for a range of government bodies around the country. The Foundation's website has a wealth of information and resources, including case studies, research papers and videos: [www.newdemocracy.com.au](http://www.newdemocracy.com.au).

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