

Reporting on and telling the story of a Citizens' Assembly

Guidance to help commissioning bodies (e.g. a local authority) to think about how to cover the events of a citizens' assembly.

This guide provides different options and techniques to be adopted before, during and after the assembly

General objectives of covering an assembly

1. To show that the assembly is trustworthy - both in the present moment and, in particular, later - and an improved way of doing decision-making.
2. To illustrate trustworthiness with assets, media and a clear description of the process.
3. To leave in place a story of how the Assembly worked, how people were involved in learning about an issue in considerable depth, and how they worked carefully to think through that issue before coming up with views on how it should be taken forward.
4. To boost public understanding of the citizens' assembly.
5. To make sure the public (those not recruited as assembly members) can understand that while their involvement may be limited, their views - indeed a wide range of perspectives - came together in the development of the assembly and in its decision making.
6. To illustrate that decision makers backed the assembly, witnessed it and were able to see it happening - and understood the process and its value.
7. To illustrate that decision makers were 'on board' - and willing to absorb wider lessons of the process.

Key challenges:

Public understanding of deliberative processes is very limited. The notion of a 'jury' to decide upon issues usually left to politicians is alien - and it's hard to grasp how it can be an inclusive process when only a small number of people are involved.

People may be sceptical about a citizens' assembly because they are unsatisfied with other democratic processes - in other words their dissatisfaction with how decisions are made at the moment might colour their judgment about the assembly.

- The way that we deal with that is by showing that the assembly works, not by justifying each individual decision. By 'works' we mean:
 - People can see it's transparent and has a well thought through process.
 - People can see that the evidence is comprehensive, balanced and detailed.
 - People understand that participants are engaged in a thoughtful, meaningful deliberation of the evidence and options.
- The assembly is a long process - its impact happens once the assembly has run, and a decision has been made.

- It means that while the assembly is being carried out, it's quite hard to deal with people's initial cynicism. But remember that this is based on their fears and assumptions about what government does, not on what the assembly is or does.

Identifying who can tell the story

A number of different roles are involved in the assembly - each can help to tell their story in the assembly, and help other people to understand what is happening.

1. Participants (assembly members) (a small number from the whole group)
 - a. Speak afterwards (to media or to us)
 - b. Express interest in being involved in other similar activities
 - c. Brief others (who are going to be interested/involved in assemblies) about their experiences
2. Observers (including politicians, but also campaigners and others)
 - a. Write about the assembly positively
 - b. Tweet/use social media etc
 - c. Speak to the media afterwards
3. Advisory panel members
 - a. Write about the assembly positively
 - b. Tweet/use social media etc
 - c. Speak to the media afterwards
4. Delivery partners
 - a. Create comms about the assembly and how it works
5. LAs and delivery partners
 - a. Organised comms about the assembly and the process
 - b. Comms assets explain how this fits with LA ambitions
 - c. Illustration of the commitment to process
(how the recommendations go forward and are decided upon)
6. Decision makers (politicians)
 - a. State and demonstrate their commitment to the process
 - b. Help explain why this is different and of real value to decision making

Covering the Assembly

Below are, briefly, some of the ways you can cover the assembly, making what's happening public. All these ideas are in addition to the normal press release/photocall/etc.

Contemporaneous (live) reporting

There are a number of different options for creating contemporaneous records of the assembly, some relying on AV. These would cover the process of the assembly, the evidence giving but not the deliberations and decision making.

Live streaming

You can use live streaming to cover the convening of the assembly, evidence giving, and an overview of the process. Live streaming would typically be video and audio, but it might be possible to do audio only.

The videos may then be uploaded online to be publically available after the CA, and by uploading to YouTube, a free transcription can be added through auto transcribe.

Live text

Speech-to-text is another way of capturing all of the evidence-giving. Best practice is to use court stenographers to relay live text both in the room and available online. This can then be checked and developed into a transcript.

Multimedia/social reporting

Capturing the evidence giving and general proceedings live with reporters can happen in a number of ways:

1. Live blogging using a live blogging tool. You may be able to embed this into a website.
2. Use an existing tool you have (WordPress or similar) to send out multiple updates.
3. Live tweeting the event on a hashtag.

Media and content from the assembly

You'll need comms assets that help people to understand what's happening, as well as media that reflects the day and that you can capture during the event.

Being well equipped with media to use on the day (pre-prepared) will make all the difference. Before the assembly create some comms assets on how the assembly works, for example:

- Process of the day
- Some information on the evidence and a simplified running order of the evidence and other sessions
- Explanation of the way deliberation works (this could be an interview with lead facilitator, captured on the day or before)
- Support for the CA - from political lead stating intention to consider and respond to what the assembly recommends.
- Background assets, including
 - How CA works (again, could be interview with facilitator)
 - How deliberation works (focus on the three steps of deliberation, could be diagram or just bullet points)
 - Background on how people are selected to take part
 - Who is a facilitator? What does a facilitator do? (i.e. short explainer, again possibly an interview with a facilitator)
 - Evidence summaries
 - Evidence slideshows or individual slides/summaries
 - Media to indicate actions on the day (i.e. slice up the agenda items into twitter cards (possibly branded)).
- Live assets, potentially on the day:
 - Interviews with participants (if prior consent has been sought)
 - Pictures of evidence giving
 - Pictures of the table discussions (if this is permitted)
 - Pictures of facilitators leading conversations
 - Tweets of guidance on day given to participants (even short videos from phone)

mySociety have also produced these guidance documents which will help with the above:

- [Digital Tools for Citizens' Assemblies](#)
- [Citizens' Assembly Websites: practical guidance](#)

Follow ups

To be produced after the CA

- Montages of photos from the day
- Write ups of evidence (more summaries)
- Slide decks from evidence, if they can be published
- Transcripts and full notes from days
- Debrief interview with lead facilitator on how the day went and what it was like.
- A write up of each day, including some of the media, can be helpful for providing a good linear guide to what happened over each weekend.
- A project film telling the story of the assembly including general footage and vox pops with those involved (i.e. participants, decision makers, delivery partners, facilitators).

Final points

Once the citizens' assembly is complete, we'd suggest collecting up separate social media and assets and assembling into a multimedia report, possibly a website or web page, that helps to tell the story of the days of the assembly. This would aim to demonstrate that the process was in-depth and comprehensive - and can then be referred to and used as the recommendations become part of the political process for decision makers.

In time, this digital footprint of the activities of the assembly can help to tell the story of the decision, and how it was arrived at.

Created for the [Innovation in Democracy Programme](#) by [The RSA](#) and [The Democratic Society](#), commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.