# A Review of Public Participation and Consultation Methods


*NOTE: Shaded boxes represent deliberative methods, whereas the other boxes are non-deliberative. Symbols within each cell provide links to references at the end.*

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<th>Method</th>
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<th>Strengths</th>
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| Citizens Juries §    | · group of 12-20 randomly selected citizens, gathered in such a way as to represent a microcosm of their community, who meet over several days to deliberate on a policy question  
· they are informed about the issue, hear evidence from witnesses and cross-examine them  
· they then discuss the matter amongst themselves and reach a decision | · creates informed, active, engaged citizenry  
· promotes “common good” as a societal objective  
· promotes self-transformation and development  
· provides opportunities to introduce new perspectives and challenge existing ones  
· more careful examination of the issue  
· promotes consensus building  
· promotes communication between government and governed  
· brings legitimacy and democratic control to non-elected public bodies | · no formal powers; lack of binding decision accountability to act upon decision/recommendation  
· exclusive - only a few individuals participate  
· resource intensive time commitment for participants and organizers  
· potential problems lie in initial stages of preparation (i.e., jury selection, agenda setting, witness selection) - these have to do with representation (who participates?) responsiveness (what jury is asked to do); and information transfer (how jury is informed?) | · sponsoring organization should be clear about what issues it wants to address, how much it can spend on process, and whether it can follow through on the advice  
· should be designed for the public and not for special interest groups  
· better with value questions than technical questions  
· better for focussed questions about concrete issues, than on large scale issues and should be part of a wider public involvement strategy  
· the development of the agenda should be overseen by an advisory board made up of key stakeholders |
| Citizens Panels ⬤   | · randomly selected group of 12 citizens meet routinely (e.g. four times per year) to consider and discuss issues and make decisions  
· used to guide health resource allocation decision  
· panels act as “sounding boards” for governing authority | · proportion of panel members are replaced at each meeting (i.e. 4 members) to increase overall number of participants  
· multiple panels can be held and run to increase participant numbers (i.e. reduce exclusivity)  
· people benefit from discussion within groups, but also from discussing issues with family and friends outside of the panel | | |
| Planning Cells §     | · similar to a citizens’ jury in form and function  
· sponsored by local or national governing authorities to help with the decision making process  
· discussions/deliberation take place in Cells of about 25 participants in size  
· results are articulated in a report that is presented to the sponsor, the media, and any other interested group  
· local/national sponsor has to agree to take decisions into consideration | · small size of individual Cells and its non-intimidating nature allows for innovative ideas and active participation  
· participants represent all citizens and not special interest groups  
· anyone in the population has a chance of being selected to be a part of this process  
· makes decision makers more accountable because they have to defend their position  
· resulting decisions are frequently implemented  
· can renew public trust in democracy | · problems defined by local authority  
· only useful for problems in need of unique decisions  
· accountability and long-term planning - decisions not always feasible  
· hard to keep bias out of information dissemination process | · can be used when other methods fail to resolve a conflict  
· best in situations that require an quick response to an urgent issue where there are a number of possible decisions that can be made  
· not suited for issues with a “yes” or “no” answer |
| Consensus Conference | · a group of citizens with varied backgrounds meets to discuss issues  
· process of communicating information about the conference topic provides a strong | process of communicating information about the conference topic provides a strong | |

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| G76           | consists of 2 stages: 1) meetings with experts, discussions and work toward consensus (involves small group of people) 2) conference during which main observations and conclusions are presented to the media and general public | educational component  
• useful method for obtaining informed opinions from lay persons | • exclusive process for stage 1  
• elaborate process requiring significant resources  
• multiple conferences may be required to ensure that broad, representative opinions are sought | - Due to the expense as well as the design, the panel is best suited for the development of major community wide policy documents.  
- limited to new policy areas, where community opinion and policy direction have yet to be determined and mobilization has not yet occurred |
| Deliberative Polling | builds on the opinion poll by incorporating element of deliberation  
• involves larger numbers than citizen juries and may involve less time  
• measures what public would think if it was informed and engaged around an issue | provides insights into public opinions and how people come to decisions  
• seeks informed opinions, does not force people to reach consensus  
• large, random sample | • incentives (e.g., honorarium, transportation) are important  
• requires a lot of preparation time  
• although sample size is large and random, ensuring representativeness is difficult | - can provide useful insight into public opinion and useful input into public decision processes  
- complement to representative democracy  
- not good for crisis decisions  
- best suited to issues with options and about which the public is not knowledgeable |
| Citizens Panels | consists of statistically representative sample of residents in a given area  
• most comprise several thousand citizens who represent the general population of an area  
• panel views are regularly sought using a survey instrument (e.g., postal, telephone surveys) | inexpensive and effective way to learn about citizens' needs and preferences  
• panel data can be analyzed for multiple purposes and disaggregated for sub-level analysis (i.e., ethnicity, gender, socio-economic, geographic area)  
• opportunity to collect trend data through multiple surveys to monitor impact of policies over time | • exclusivity of participant selection process  
• consultation agenda determined by decision-making body (i.e., top down)  
• under-representation of hard-to-reach groups who refuse to participate  
• panel members vulnerable to Hawthorne effect (i.e., over time they may be prone to sympathize with decision-makers...) | - Due to the expense as well as the design, the panel is best suited for the development of major community wide policy documents.  
- limited to new policy areas, where community opinion and policy direction have yet to be determined and mobilization has not yet occurred |
| Focus Groups | one-time discussion of a particular topic  
• involves 6-12 individuals selected to meet specific criteria in order to broadly represent a particular segment of society  
• one-time face-to-face meeting structured to be informal to encourage open discussion among participants | successful focus group may lead to consensus and feelings of enrichment among participants  
• good venue for learning about needs of a particular group  
• remain largely informal, so participants can discuss issues in relaxed atmosphere  
• a good way to gauge the opinions of the public | • private sector marketing roots limit ability to cover complex issues  
• lack of informed participants produces superficial discussion  
• potential for revealing and reinforcing social cleavages  
• selection criteria can create bias in eliciting opinions  
• limited number of participants limits representativeness of opinions  
• potential for ideas expressed to be influenced/shaped by interaction/exchange with others (especially those who are dominant)  
• resource intensive | - can be a tool for encouraging discussion and deliberation, but needs to be used with much caution because of the problems associated with it |
| Consensus building exercises | a process designed to help people reach a consensus by focusing on the issues themselves  
• mediators are used to help people reach a consensus  
• non-adversarial approach | helps people to reach solutions they can all support  
• provides time for people to get to know each other and their differing views | | - typically used to bring stakeholders together to reach consensus over an issue  
- round tables are one approach where traditionally adversarial groups are brought together to |
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<td>Surveys</td>
<td>· solicit information from representative sample of citizens&lt;br&gt;· same questions are asked of ever individual surveyed&lt;br&gt;· there are a variety of survey types: postal, interviewer, telephone</td>
<td>· can reach large numbers of people&lt;br&gt;· if same questions are retained, can be used for longitudinal studies (e.g., monitoring change over time)</td>
<td>· the lists may not be representative or comprehensive&lt;br&gt;· questions need to be somewhat simple and straightforward, the information gathered then can be simplistic and superficial&lt;br&gt;· survey results are often not comparable&lt;br&gt;· the effectiveness of surveys are affected by the rates of response&lt;br&gt;· fundamental decisions have to be made before the survey begins and cannot be changed once survey has been implemented</td>
<td>· because this is a time consuming process, it is not a good method if quick results are required&lt;br&gt;· can be used during the beginning phases of a study (useful in detecting issues that need to be addressed)</td>
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<td>Public Hearings</td>
<td>· form of public meeting limited in size&lt;br&gt;· tends to involve only interested citizens&lt;br&gt;· usually experts and interested citizens&lt;br&gt;· presentations are made</td>
<td>· potential to inform citizens&lt;br&gt;· potential for improved decision making&lt;br&gt;· potential to minimize conflict</td>
<td>· may be dominated by special interest groups&lt;br&gt;· feedback obtained from this format needs to be treated carefully because it may not be representative of the community&lt;br&gt;· does not generate a sense of ownership&lt;br&gt;· excludes the inarticulate and perhaps disadvantaged groups</td>
<td>· have a “pre-submission” phase which allows the public time to become familiar with the issues</td>
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<td>Open Houses</td>
<td>· the public is invited to drop by at any time at a set location on a set day(s) and times&lt;br&gt;· they can speak with staff, view the displays set up in the room and break into small discussion groups</td>
<td>· relaxed atmosphere&lt;br&gt;· enables staff to tailor responses according to the needs/questions of the public&lt;br&gt;· allows for sensitive topics to be discussed&lt;br&gt;· develops links for the future</td>
<td>· potential for lack of clarity in purpose&lt;br&gt;· staff resource intensive</td>
<td>· suitable for confrontational issues</td>
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<td>Citizen Advisory Committee</td>
<td>· can be made up of a variety of different organizations (e.g. from governmental to public)&lt;br&gt;· intended to represent the broader public</td>
<td>· if committee is balanced, deliberations can be fruitful&lt;br&gt;· their advice should influence decision making process&lt;br&gt;· should also produce informed citizens, boost trust in institutions and reduce conflict</td>
<td>· not a representative group of people</td>
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<td>Community Planning</td>
<td>· participation on a broader level to set policy agenda and to discuss citizens' vision for community and services provided in it&lt;br&gt;· more about the outcome of participation (i.e. consensus about the vision or plan) than the process of engagement (who participated and how)&lt;br&gt;· draws upon a range of participation techniques (e.g., pre-circulated consultation documents, written responses, structured public meetings)</td>
<td>· allows for underlying assumptions to be dealt with in a deliberative manner&lt;br&gt;· emphasizes consensus building, collaboration and cooperation&lt;br&gt;· formal outcome is a community plan but emphasis is on reaching a common understanding of issues and finding a shared vision for dealing with them&lt;br&gt;· fosters connections/partnerships between different organizations&lt;br&gt;· educative role</td>
<td>· may set/raise expectations that public bodies are unable to meet</td>
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| Visioning           | · similar to community planning but input sought is about broader “vision” for community services and less about specifics on how to achieve the vision  
· deliberative process where ideas are gradually refined through iterative process until a clear statement emerges  
· outcome is typically an overview of possibilities rather than a definitive plan | · emphasizes consensus building, collaboration and cooperation  
· formal outcome is a community plan but emphasis is on reaching a common understanding of issues and finding a shared vision for dealing with them  
· fosters connections/partnerships between different organizations  
· educative role | · may set/raise expectations that public bodies are unable to meet |                                                                                               |
| Notification, Distribution & Solicitation of Comments | · simplest form of consultation  
· can involve the sending out of reports  
· may also involve other methods | · broad and representative in theory  
· transparency guaranteed through notification process | · questionable effectiveness in reaching some populations  
· risk that consultation will be dominated by the best organized groups with easy access to publication  
· despite the potential for broad participation, the interaction between concerned public and the authorities is often very limited, with no real possibility for dialogue or negotiation  
· transparency is threatened when solicitation of comments is targeted to specific groups  
· not enough time given to soliciting feedback (i.e. sham consultation) |                                                                                               |
| Referenda           | · the process wherein an issue is put to popular vote  
· can be initiated by governmental or other organizations, or sometimes the citizenry  
· results may or may not be considered binding | · incites discussion and interest  
· way to learn public views  
· way to get citizens directly involved with the legislative process  
· all voters have equal influence  
· can potentially involve all members of a local or national population  
· difficult for the government to ignore the results of a referendum | · results may not be representative if there is low voter turnout  
· wording can present problems  
· limited number of times you can use it (i.e. voter fatigue)  
· potential for undue influence if one organization has greater resources than another when campaigning for or against a proposed referendum  
· very costly process | · should not replace representative democracy  
· issue should be answerable by “yes” or “no”  
· issue should stand on its own (i.e. not so intertwined with another that it becomes impossible to answer)  
· need to inform citizenry on issue beforehand |                                                                                               |
| Structured Value Referenda | · voting based method for eliciting public preferences  
· uses “decision analysis” principles where preferences are elicited by voters who select among specified alternatives  
· Key components: 1) select the policy decision; 2)structure objectives; 3)develop alternatives - technical process; 4) determine impacts of | · participants have a wider range of response options  
· easy to use and understand and useful for guiding policy  
· information disseminated and question wording may be more neutral than with traditional referenda  
· voters have an easier time choosing among preferences because their alternatives are well defined and they are educated about | · complex task and can require substantial resources  
· potential for undue influence over the wording by those who control the referendum  
· only those truly interested in seeking out preferences would employ this method  
· Decisions regarding what cost information and the number of alternatives to select from have the | · best for contexts with a specific issue and with a number of alternative answers  
· for this to be successful, political leaders will need to be willing to share control and listen to the advice given  
· can reduce cost of this process by combining it with an established electoral process |                                                                                               |
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<td>alternatives; 5)frame the questions; 6)select the voting task; 7)develop a communication program</td>
<td>these alternatives and consequences</td>
<td>potential to bias the outcome of the vote.</td>
<td>· can be administered as a survey, but has the drawback of not attracting the same attention</td>
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LIST OF REFERENCES (SORTED BY METHOD)

DELIBERATIVE PROCESSES

§ Citizens Juries


Citizens Panels


Planning Cells


**Consensus Conference**


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**Deliberative Polling**


**NON-DELIBERATIVE PROCESSES**

**Citizens Panels**


**Focus Groups**


**Consensus Building Exercises**


**Surveys**


Myllykangas, Markku, Ryynänen, Olli-Pekka, Kinnunen, Juha, Takala, Jorma. Comparison of doctors’ nurses’, politicians’ and public attitudes to health care priorities. *J Health Serv Res*

N Public Hearings


Open Houses


Citizen Advisory Committee


Community Planning


Visioning


Notification, Distribution & Solicitation of Comments


Referenda


Structured Value Referenda
