

Citizens Assemblies

What to expect from these sessions

A citizens' assembly is a group of people who are brought together to discuss an issue or issues, and reach a conclusion about what they think should happen. The people who take part are chosen so they reflect the wider population – in terms of demographics (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, social class) and sometimes relevant attitudes (e.g. preferences for different types of programmes).

Citizens' assemblies give members of the public the time and opportunity to learn about and discuss a topic, before reaching conclusions. They adopt a three-step process of learning, deliberation and decision making. Participants are supported by a team of impartial moderators who guide participants through the process, ensuring that everyone is heard and is comfortable participating. At the end of the process, participants are asked to make trade-offs and arrive at workable recommendations.

In the first phase, participants **learn** about the range of opinions and research on the issue being addressed. There is also time given for experts to answer questions from participants.

In the second phase, participants **deliberate** on what they have heard within a small group. They reflect on their own opinions and develop a wider understanding of the opinions of others. Experts participate in this phase to provide additional information and clarification.

In the final phase, participants **come to some conclusions** on what they have learnt through the assembly process and **make recommendations** about the issue. Not all positions may be agreed: where there is disagreement among participants, individual voting is used to ensure the views of both majority and minority voices are heard.

Why conduct a Citizens' Assembly about Public Service Broadcasting?

Public service broadcasting has been an important principle underpinning the ways in which television is funded and delivered in the UK. However, the landscape for broadcasting and media production and consumption has changed significantly over recent years. The government is therefore conducting a review of the ideas, structures and provisions of public service media, to decide on how it should best be delivered in the future.

This series of discussions, modelled on the Citizens' Assembly process, but adapted to an online format because of the current pandemic, is part of the review process. Ofcom, the broadcasting regulator, is conducting research into the public's opinions on public service broadcasting, and how it might change in the future. In this series of discussions, we will gather your views and recommendations and deliver them to Ofcom. They will be incorporated into a discussion paper that will be the basis of a formal consultation in autumn 2020.

The online format does not change anything about the process, but it does make the interactions between participants slightly different as compared to a face-to-face setting. It is more difficult to 'read' non-verbal body language online, and so there is an extra emphasis on

the importance of mutual respect, allowing everyone to speak in the discussion, and actively ensuring all views are heard. It is also important that all participants feel they are able to speak: the emphasis is on mutual respect and developing an understanding of each others' views and thereby reflecting actively on one's own position. As such, it is fine to disagree, but it is important to disagree with *ideas*, not people, so that the discussion remains civil and individuals do not feel personally attacked. The moderator will play an important role here, but if all participants remain aware of these things, the discussion will remain productive and positive.

Source: <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods/citizens-assembly>