

# Info kit: Citizen Assembly as best practice consultation

Prepared by CAPaD Committee members - Beth Slatyer, Tom Swann, Mark Spain  
April 2016

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## 1) Who is CAPaD?

The Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy (CAPaD) is a local group of ACT citizens seeking to improve the democratic process by

- developing and supporting citizen, community and civil society engagement in public decision-making;
- empowering Canberrans to engage in owning and planning for our common future and the common good;
- facilitating opportunities for citizen input to government deliberations;
- developing citizens' capacity to hold governments and policy makers more directly accountable.

CAPaD aims to support and promote participatory and deliberative processes, such as Citizen Assemblies, in ACT policy, program and budget decisions. We are interested in helping the ACT Government implement credible and effective participatory processes so that the ACT is seen as an international leader in good governance.

Our website is at <http://www.canberra-alliance.org.au>

Our aspirations for this particular engagement with the ACT government are to:

1. Support implementation of a Citizens Assembly in the ACT on a key issue as proof of concept;
2. Review this experience and plan more Citizens Assembly processes to demonstrate ACT as a world leader in 21st Century governance.

## 2) What is a Citizen Assembly?

A Citizen Assembly is a form of citizen engagement or consultation that focuses on deliberation and participation. Depending on its purpose, there are many ways to design and run such a process, and indeed many names for such processes, including 'Citizen Panels', 'Citizen Juries', 'Citizen Wisdom Council'. These all have in common the following:

- 1) Citizens are randomly selected from the population to participate, similar to a jury. This ensures a representative range of voices is heard, not just the loudest.
- 2) Participants meet and are empowered to deliberate on the question at issue, consider evidence and perspectives and form a view. The goal may be to develop options or to prioritise between options. A trained facilitator guides the group through a structured process and there may be input from experts or stakeholders.

While such processes are advisory only, they can be very valuable to decision-makers. They can reveal deeper information about both the challenge at issue and about community values. They can empower and inform further public debate and participation. They can build trust between the government and community.

### **3) How have they been run before?**

#### **a. Example: a ‘Citizen Wisdom Council’ in Austria (5min video).**

<https://vimeo.com/135618811>

This is an example of a Civic Council being used for a most difficult collective decision making processes in Austria.

The Civic Council Process (as outlined in video) explains these four steps

1. Council Meeting
2. ‘Civic Café’
3. Responder Group
4. Implementation and Report

An important step is not outlined in the video. Prior to the Council meeting, ‘the Organizing and Responding Teams’ met to co-design the Council process, the starting-question of the Civic Council Meeting and the key elements of the invitation letter, which in this case was signed by the state-governor.

Having the participants involved in the pre-planning process makes a big difference. It greatly increases the chances that the stakeholders (local government politicians, public servants, local businesses, media and community members) take the results seriously and spread the news more widely. One reason is that when the individual members come together as a Civic Council they are already thinking about what they are hoping to learn from this randomly selected civic group. In addition it enables and encourages the stakeholders to start working together, which seldom happens in an administration setting or in society.

#### **b. ABC radio interview [55mins]**

Janette Hartz-Karp (Curtin University) and Iain Walker (CEO of the New Democracy Foundation) are interviewed and share their experience and learning insights from several citizens assemblies resolving difficult local governance problems across Australia. The original broadcast was on 9 June 2015. The interview is available at:

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/citizen-juries---leadership-for-a-new-democracy/6755314>

These two practitioners provide important advice for such a process in Canberra, as does Stephen Mayne (Councillor at Melbourne City Council) who is also interviewed.

### **c. Example from Melbourne City - Future Melbourne 2026**

The City of Melbourne ran a participatory budget planning process that produced a 10 Year Financial Plan. The process gave unparalleled access to a descriptively representative random sample of citizens to attempt to reach a considered set of recommendations to inform the Lord Mayor and Councillors. The City's scope of operations is immense – in the region of \$400m annually – and this was the largest city with the largest budget to open up their books to a deliberative process giving citizens this level of access and authority. The process operated from August until October 2014.

A description, videos and evaluation are available at:

<http://www.newdemocracy.com.au/ndf-work/183-city-of-melbourne-people-s-panel>

Based on this success the City of Melbourne is now involving citizens in the “Future Melbourne 2026” project. This is a community collaboration project to develop a long-term strategic plan for the city. Details at:

<http://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/future/how-it-works>

### **d. Example from SA**

A group in South Australia called the Australian Civic Trust has developed ten principles for better public consultation based on their work with governments in Adelaide. A two page overview is available at:

<http://www.civictrust.net.au/A4Brochure111126.pdf>

A Citizens Assembly process in the ACT could improve on this example.