

Democratic Governance toolkit

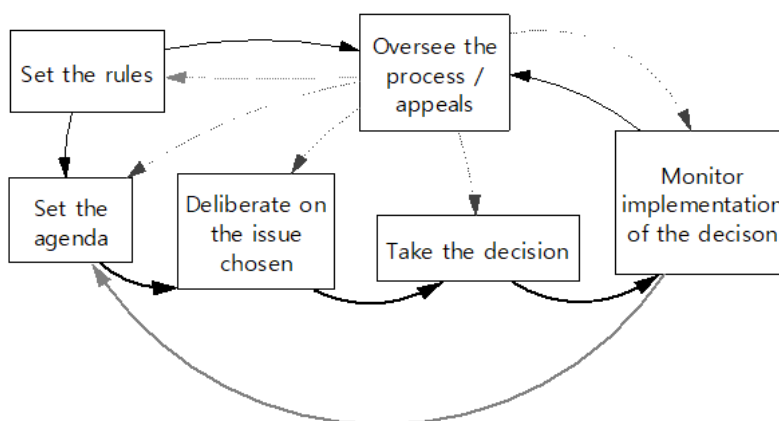
A Toolkit for Democratic Governance will have items for enabling as many relevant people as possible to participate and items for making wise decisions.

First some background, then the toolkit.

To govern is to decide what we want to do, do it, and make sure it is done well. To do this democratically is to make sure that at each step along the way, the people wearing the outcomes of the decisions are making the decisions.

A governance system might look like this.

Clearly decisions are needed at each stage. Some are high level and policy decisions such as who sets the rules, and who put things on the agenda while other decisions are more action and topic focused.



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The tools in the kit

Enabling participation

In direct democracy, everyone affected by the decision takes the decision. This works well in certain situations but can be cumbersome in large groups. So systems have been worked out to allow direct participation and for that participation to be scaled across large organisations and geographic areas.

One method for doing this is [sociocracy](#). It organises participants in small group 'circles' and a flat hierarchy of circles scale across space time. This is where smaller groups make direct decisions and then send representatives to other circles to represent their views there, up from very local (Kurdish [democratic confederalism](#) in Rojave, Rising Tide events) to global (People's Health Movement). It is like Ostrom's polycentric / nested governance¹.

Whether the representatives are sent along the chain as delegates, that is to carry the decision of the group without room to negotiate or change, or as trustees with room to negotiate in line with their group's prior positions, is up to the 'circle' to decide at each point.

Decision making

There are different methods of decision making each with application for a specific circumstance.

However, in general, each decision needs a clear definition of what the decision is and the outcome wanted, gathering information to inform the decision, deliberating on that information to understand it and then taking the decision.

¹ Ostrom, E, 2009, *Beyond markets and states: polycentric governance of complex economic systems*, Citeseer

At the decision taking step, again there are a few ways this can be done.

We have been taught about voting and this is used extensively in lots of situations. It may be quick but it opens the possibility that majorities can dominate minorities and sometimes even organised minorities can dominate majorities.

Consensus decision taking is another process where everyone present has to agree to the decision. This can foster inclusion but may also be slow and is open to being blocked. Many UN bodies use this and that is one reason why UN decision taking is arduous.

A variation on consensus is consent. This is the actual model used in newly emerging participatory and direct democracy models. It is the formal name for what Rising Tide calls consensus. In consent decision making, not everyone has to agree but everyone has to be able to live with the decisions and if the person or group doesn't agree with the decision then they can withdraw from participation. This overcomes one group blocking action being taken where there is otherwise broad agreement on that action.

Referendums are presented as another form of direct democracy and they have a place. However, unless coupled with deliberative practices, they risk poorly informed 'mob' decisions.

Conclusion

Both sets of tools permit large groups to make decisions with wide, direct participation of their members.

A sociocratic organisational model enables participation. Deliberative democracy methods are important tools for helping groups reach wise decisions. Consent decision taking permits rapid, flexible decisions.

The similarity to Rising Tide affinity groups and Spokes Councils is immediately apparent.

These are the tools for making democratic governance work in many other facets of our lives.