

Pillars

PILLARS – Pathways to Inclusive Labour Markets: Guidelines on public participation in the policy- making

Part of Deliverable 7.5

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1 Introduction

Over the years, **public participation**, including stakeholder and expert engagement, in the policy-making has become widespread.¹ Participation occurs in different shapes and forms and across all levels of governance. Optimally, public participation should lead to **better and more effective policy-making**, as the policymakers have access to more diverse and relevant information.² But what is the optimal way to bring about public participation? Despite its increasing popularity, there are still ambiguities surrounding the optimal design for policy participation methods – when and how it should be initiated.

The aim of this document is to help the policymakers understand the dynamics of public/stakeholder participation, why it is important, and to provide them with three examples of methods of public involvement in the policy-making process.



This document is structured as follows: the introductory chapter describes why participation is desired and highlights some methods to facilitate participation. Chapter 2 – 4 are dedicated to specific participatory methods: the participatory workshops (chapter 2), the Delphi method (chapter 3), and virtual town hall meetings (chapter 4).

1.1 Why should the public be involved in the policy-making?

Active participation of stakeholders, experts and citizens in the policy-making has several positive implications:³

- first, being part of the decision-making process solidifies **democratic support** and increases **public trust**;
- second, participatory methods can lead to the implementation and delivery of **better policies, services and projects**;
- third, active public participation contributes to a **more inclusive society** by involving different groups and minorities in the policymaking process, leading to policies that are applicable to the entire society;
- fourth, public participation increases **democratic legitimacy** and makes it easier to foster a relationship between the policymaker and the public.

¹ Saguin, k. & Cashore, B. (2022) Two logics of participation in policy design. Retrieved from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25741292.2022.2038978>

² United States Environmental Protection agency. (2022). Public Participation Guide: Introduction to Public Participation. Retrieved from: <https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-introduction-public-participation#:~:text=Public%20participation%20contributes%20to%20better,bear%20on%20the%20decision%20process.>

³ OECD (2022). Inspiratiegids burgerparticipatie. Retrieved from: https://www.grensregio.eu/assets/files/site/Inspiratiegids_burgerparticipatie.pdf

There are, however, also costs connected to the inclusion of stakeholders and citizens into the policy design and implementation. These include financial, human resources and time to approach stakeholders/public and to facilitate their participation.¹

1.2 Four steps in shaping public participation

Before engaging the public/stakeholders into the policy-making process, policymakers should have a clear idea about the **purpose of engagement** with the public and how it can contribute to a policy process. Based on this, a specific participation method can be selected. Selecting an appropriate method can be done by following **four steps**, being:

1. Identify the policy-making stage in which participation should occur;
2. Determine the desired degree of participation;
3. Select participants;
4. Decide on the participation format and methods.



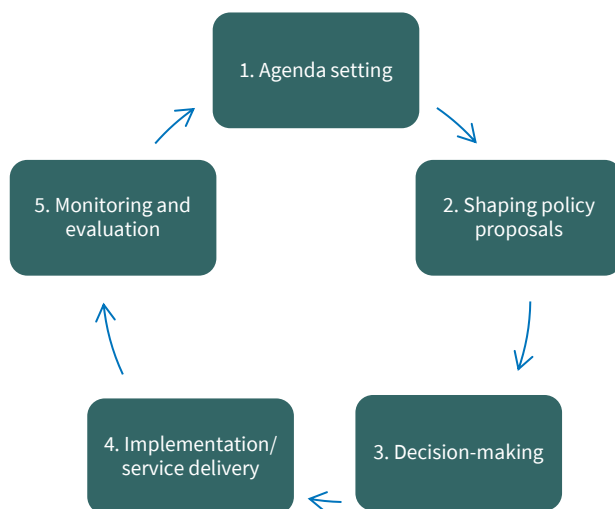
The policy-making process includes several stages (Figure 1). The extent of participation does not depend on a stage, but on its purpose. Typically, public/stakeholder engagement at early stages of the policy-making process (e.g., agenda setting) can help in identifying a problem, its scope, mapping possible bottlenecks and key stakeholder involved. Engagement at later stages can support policy implementation, monitoring or evaluation.

After the policymaker has identified stages of the policy-making process in which public/stakeholder participation is desired, the degree of participation should be determined. This document distinguishes between three degrees of participation - consultation, collaboration and co-creation.² These degrees are elaborated in Table 1.

¹ Involve (2022). Benefits and costs of public participation. Retrieved from: <https://involve.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base/what-impact-participation/benefits-and-costs-public-participation>

² OECD (2016). Open Government. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264268104-en>

Figure 1 Public/stakeholder engagement at different policy-making stages



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Table 1 Degree of public/stakeholder participation in the policy-making process

	Consultation	Collaboration	Co-creation
Purpose	To inform and receive feedback	To provide information, obtain feedback, and involve in decision-making	To work with public/stakeholders in terms of considering concerns and ideas
Examples of activities	Polls, surveys, message board, interviews, suggestion boxes	Forums, mapping, idea-collection and voting, training/knowledge-sharing events	Delphi, workshop, conference, crowdsourcing

We Solve (2022)¹

The lowest degree of public/stakeholder participation is **consultation**. This form of participation can be utilized when a policymaker wants to receive feedback on proposed changes or new initiatives. In this situation, the public has limited influence on the proposed policies or initiatives.² In contrast, the third and most intense form of participation is **co-creation**, where the policymakers, citizens/stakeholders shape or co-design policy as a joint effort. In such cases, citizens/stakeholders typically have moderate to high levels of influence on final decisions, and communication with the policymakers represents an intensive dialogue. **Collaboration** – the middle option of public/stakeholder participation - allows to collect views and share decision-making power, to some degree.

¹ Wesolve (2020). The Hierarchy of Participation: Levels, Techniques and Examples. Retrieved from: <https://wesolve.app/the-hierarchy-of-participation-levels-techniques-and-examples/>

² Wesolve (2020). The Hierarchy of Participation: Levels, Techniques and Examples. Retrieved from: <https://wesolve.app/the-hierarchy-of-participation-levels-techniques-and-examples/>

It is essential to ensure that public/stakeholder participation is well-managed. Otherwise, it could lead to more complications in the policy-making process.

As indicated earlier, the third step in shaping public participation in the policy-making process is the **participant selection**. The selection of participants is primarily dependent on the purpose of engagement. In this document, **three different groups of participants** are distinguished: citizens, experts and representatives/stakeholders. Table 2 provides an overview of the possible participants of the policy-making process, possible methods of engagement and selection of participants.

Table 2 Selection and approach of relevant participants of the policy-making process

Participants	Purpose of engagement	Possible methods of engagement	Possible method of selection of participants
Citizens	Gauge public opinion, gain legitimacy, reflection on policy proposals	Poll, survey, meetings	Civic lottery
Experts	Provide knowledge and insights	Hackathon, Delphi	Closed call
Representatives/ stakeholders	Generate ideas, support consensus-building and policy implementation	Workshop, focus groups	Open call

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Citizen engagement is typically low, as limited input is expected during consultation activities.¹ Experts and stakeholders, on the other hand, can provide useful expertise, ideas on a certain topic, support policy implementation, therefore their engagement might be characterised by higher degrees of involvement in the policy-making process. A workshop or focus group is generally an effective method to build collaboration with them.

How to reach intended participants? A convenient starting point is contacting existing networks, applying a snowball technique. The snowball technique implies that invited participants will recruit other participants.²



The final step in shaping public participation in the policy-making is to decide on the format and methods of participation. In a general sense, there are three formats of participation: online, in-person and mixed/hybrid.

Online participation usually requires less time and resources to organise, facilitate and to participate in. Online engagement methods can include polls, surveys or seminars etc. Despite advantages of online participation, potential risks include a lack of access to the Internet,

¹ OECD (2022). Inspiratiegids burgerparticipatie. Retrieved from: https://www.grensregio.eu/assets/files/site/Inspiratiegids_burgerparticipatie.pdf

² Naderifar, M., Goli, H., Ghaljaei, F. (2017). Snowball Sampling: A Purposeful Method of Sampling in Qualitative Research. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324590206_Snowball_Sampling_A_Purposeful_Method_of_Sampling_in_Qualitative_Research

insufficient digital skills to use virtual tools, limited engagement and inability to collect in-depth information. This points to the need to consider risks associated with a specific public/target group.

In-person participation is generally more time and resource consuming. However, it can generate more output, due to more intensive engagement with participants and between participants and the host. Finally, **mixed forms of participation** imply both online and offline forms of engagement with the public. A mixed design can be an in-person workshop that discusses ideas from a previously-held online forum, a hybrid event that includes both online and in-person participants etc.

2 Participatory workshops

The workshop is defined as an organised event which brings together a group of participants to collectively share ideas, opinions, knowledge and work on a specific issue. Typically, workshops represent very dynamic and engaging events, tailored to specific objectives and participants. The workshops include several sessions in different formats (e.g., presentations, panel discussion, group work).¹ Given importance of engagement with participants, careful selection of participants is needed (e.g., based on expertise, influence/decision-making power).

Degree of participation: high

Participants and selection: stakeholders, open call

Organized: best to organise in-person

2.1 Steps to get started



Step 1: **Define a clear objective** of the workshop and its scope, depending on how much public/stakeholder engagement is expected.



Step 2: **Select participants** and decide on their **total number**.

Invest in careful participant selection, as it will determine what input will be provided during the workshop. The following questions could be considered whilst selecting the participants:

1. Does the stakeholder have sufficient knowledge about the issue/topic at hand?
2. Is the stakeholder capable and willing to engage in a participatory activity?

¹ Technopolis Group, (2021).

Next, decide on the group size. Typically, a workshop consists of 15-30 participants. Inviting more participants means that it is more difficult to organize exercises, provide everyone with sufficient time to express opinions and to have more meaningful, in-depth conversations. Having too few people might, however, mean that some important perspectives are not present in the workshop. In general, small groups are better equipped for in-depth discussions, development of ideas, while bigger groups can help to scope the issue or to raise awareness.¹

We advise to approach participants **2 months** before the planned workshop. It is also advisable to provide participants with some general information about the workshop agenda in advance.



Step 3: Select a **venue** of the workshop

Participants should be able to find and access the venue without difficulties. Please check the public transport networks and make sure that there are sufficient parking spaces near the venue. If you plan to organise some group activities during the workshop, please consider whether the venue has enough space for this. Finally, the venue should have sufficient light and tools, such as a slide projector, whiteboard, computer, power plugs, Internet network and other facilities (e.g., toilets, place for a coffee). In case a participant has a physical disability, for example, the workshop should be hosted on the ground floor or in a building that has a convenient elevator.



Step 4: Decide who will be the **workshop facilitator**.

Every workshop requires a facilitator that guides participants throughout the workshop, explains activities, moderates discussions and keeps track of time. The facilitator should possess good facilitation skills and, ideally, have knowledge of the main topic of the workshop.

2.2 Activities for designing participatory workshops

A workshop consists of three phases:

Getting started phase:

- A welcome of the participants.

¹ OECD (2022). Inspiratiegids burgerparticipatie. Retrieved from: https://www.grensregio.eu/assets/files/site/Inspiratiegids_burgerparticipatie.pdf

The welcome should include an explanation of the purpose of the workshop, introduce the agenda, external speakers and high-level representatives.¹

- A “landing” activity.

The “landing” activity is expected to help participants fully immerse themselves in the activities of the workshop. For this purpose, devote time for tour de table, ask participants about their expectations and desired outcomes of the workshop. It is essential to ensure that participants start engaging with each other from the beginning of the workshop, as it builds trust and sets a productive mood for collaboration. Additionally, knowing each other’s expertise, roles and interests enables the facilitator and participants to better understand different perspectives and motives of the stakeholders.

Getting to work phase:

In this phase, the main workshop activities take place. This phase requires participants to become active. Try to keep in mind the following: 1) the knowledge base of participants, 2) time allocated for each session, 3) level of comfort with the activities and topic in focus, and 4) the incentives of participants.

It is important to document all input. Table 3 provides a non-exhaustive list of possible activities that could be conducted during this phase or in other phases.

Finishing up phase:

- Draw conclusions of the workshop and next steps.

Always give your workshop participants a proper wrap up of the workshop to allow for final input, a sense of accomplishment. This phase lays the foundation for potential follow-up meetings or activities after the workshop.

- Allow for feedback to review the effectiveness of the activity and to identify strengths and weaknesses that can be implemented in future activities.

This allows participants to provide final thoughts, insights and ideas that could spark future discussions. After this final round of input, it is important to summarize everything that has been said and done, and thank participants for joining the workshop.

In some cases, it can be beneficial to schedule some time for social interaction after the end of the workshop. This allows participants to build networks and exchange views in a more private way.

¹ Chambers, R. (2002), Participatory workshops. Retrieved from: <https://evalparticipativa.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/34.-participatory-workshops.pdf>

Table 4 Different activities that can be used in participatory workshops

Method	Short description	Best use
<i>'landers'</i>	Landers are quick activities that can be performed at the start of a workshop to allow participants to settle into the workshop. A useful lander is a quick "meet and greet with the person sitting next to you" as it allows participants to feel like a group. Participants could have a short conversation in random pairs addressing a few simple questions, you can also rotate the pairs a few times. If a lander focuses on expectations for the workshop it can help to create a sense of common understanding and common goals.	Start of the workshop.
<i>'energizers'</i>	Energizers come in many forms, ranging from physical to creative activities. Ideally, the energisers get people on their feet, but in professional settings not everybody appreciates very 'sportive' activities. Best is to keep it light, and humour can help with this. The type of energizer will depend on the timing in the programme. For example, you can ask at the start for the best and worst workshop experiences of the past, then ask for 2 wishes regarding the topic at hand, and at the end about the contribution they liked the most. It works well to give each participant the floor and let participants pass the turn around to increase interaction.	In-between sessions to keep energy up.
<i>'Plenary presentations'</i>	Plenary presentations are a well-known method in which a speaker addresses the attendees directly, often guided by presentation slides. This is often a non-interactive type of session. Using voting apps can allow for more interaction with the audience. Feedback on statements can provide dynamic input for the presentation and involve the audience.	The introduction of basic concepts and information needed for the workshop. Should be preferably be short.
<i>'Panel discussions'</i>	A panel discussion is a method in which a moderator guides a selection of experts through a set of interview questions on stage. Often interactive questions are posed to provide various perspectives on a specific topic. The audience can also ask questions.	When different perspectives matter, and experts can provide these.
<i>'Short panel discussions'</i>	Short panel discussions are not very different from the panel discussions. However, often they are performed with participants rather than with experts and in smaller groups. This allows to better share the context of various participants. The general concept is however the same.	When different perspectives matter, and different participants can provide these.
<i>'Fishbowl discussions'</i>	A fishbowl discussion is a method to facilitate a discussion amongst a group that is too big for a direct discussion. In this format about 5 people will start a discussion and one empty chair will be placed in this group as well. On certain times, other participants can join the discussion by taking the empty seat, this is also the sign for one of the others to leave the discussion. This way the participants can rotate their involvement in the discussion.	When a discussion is complex, but everybody needs to be involved. Requires very active technical facilitation in online settings.
<i>'Gallery walks'</i>	This method guides groups of participants by a set of posters that outline certain perspectives, insights and/or questions. Each group gets some time to discuss these matters before moving along to the next poster. This method required strong preparation as the written input need to be enough to facilitate discussion.	When you need to cover very detailed and different topics. Break-out rooms required in an online format.
<i>'conver-stations'</i>	Groups are formed amongst the participants to discuss a certain aspect of a larger topic. At set times one of the group members is rotated to another group, sharing the knowledge of their previous group. Different participants rotate each round to spread the knowledge.	Good for getting participants exposed to many different perspectives. Requires very active technical facilitation in online settings.
<i>'post-its session'</i>	Typically, the trainer/facilitator uses the post-it method to create a list of inputs from the group, lets the group cluster and prioritise these inputs. Through this method, the group first diverges their view on a topic and then converges to internalise findings and learnings. Post-its can be used to structure inputs.	When more conventional methods are preferred. Great for both gathering input and prioritisation. Requires a "board" to put and rearrange ideas. There

		are also digital solutions for boards.
<i>'Sticker session'</i>	Small & coloured stickers can be used to prioritise or select options/organisations/etc. on large posters with a raster format. This is a nice activity that can be used in parallel to other activities or throughout the workshop during downtime. When everybody has put their stickers on the poster it clearly shows the preference of participants. Using different colours for different types of participants or different preferences adds more depth.	When voting is required to get insight. In online settings voting apps are more suitable.
<i>'Snowball discussion'</i>	A snowball discussion starts by discussing a topic with two people. Afterwards these pairs of participants join another pair, starting a conversation amongst the four of them. This can be scaled to groups of 8 and further depending on the total number of participants.	Good for tackling more complex topics where different people might have different ideas. Requires very active technical facilitation in online settings.
<i>'The interview'</i>	In the interview method a set of predefined questions is used between two participants to quickly gain an understanding of each other's perspectives. By having a structured one directional conversation in turns, participants are able to gain insights that matter to their own perspective.	Good tool for participants to get to know each other and supportive of better understanding different perspectives.
<i>'Concentric circle (or speed dating)'</i>	The concentric circle or speed dating method allows participants to quickly get to know many others present at the event. Often a row of tables is set up so participants can form pairs in a row. After a few minutes one row is asked to move one spot to their left or right allowing for a quick transition between conversation partners.	Great when aiming for partnership building, but also useful to break the ice in longer workshops. Requires very active technical facilitation in online settings.
<i>Challenge sessions</i>	Challenge sessions are basically small mini-hackathon sessions with a very small and clearly defined questions/challenges.	Useful for outlining solutions based on an available analysis of challenges. Break-out rooms required in an online format.
<i>World café</i>	World café simulate what happens in a discussion in a bar. Putting people together at a table with no predetermined outcome and limited input allows participants to really discuss what comes to mind.	Can be very useful to support creative input or for reflection. Break-out rooms required in an online format.
<i>Appreciative inquiry</i>	During appreciative inquiry session, participants are taking 5 steps: 1) select and define topic, 2) discuss what is currently good, 3) discuss what might be good in the future, 4) discuss what should/will be done and 5) consolidate the outcomes into actions.	Great to get actions by departing from positive insights.

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Tips and tricks

- Prepare and come prepared (workshop equipment, be on time, etc.);
- Include different types of workshop activities, as this stimulates engagement;
- Monitor and manage energy of participants, be ready to adjust your schedule, if needed. Make sure the workshop includes breaks – they allow rest and networking. 'Energizer' activities can enhance energy levels;
- If you want to allow participants to be more in control of a workshop, create a flexible programme/agenda of the workshop;
- If the topic of discussion is complex, requires significant explanations, then consider sharing some materials prior to the workshop. Giving some "homework" to participants could be an effective mechanism if participants have a strong interest in the outcome of the workshop;

- Try to avoid mood killers – long presentations, limited interaction and going off topic;
- Give every participant an opportunity to speak, especially to silent participants. The facilitator could pose a question to such participants that is in line with their expertise;
- Make notes, summarize and validate results. Take pictures, if all participants give their explicit consent.

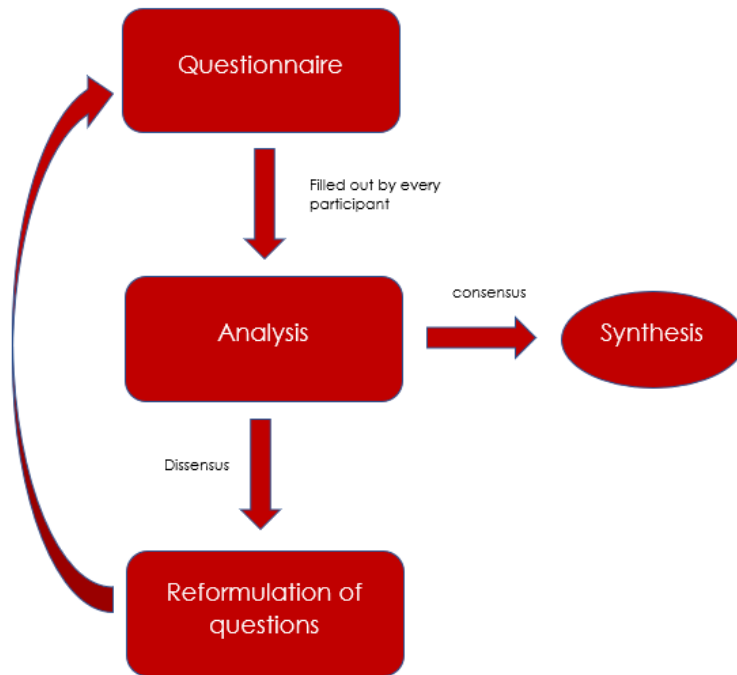
3 Delphi method

Delphi is a research method that consists of **multiple rounds of surveys and discussions**. The method allows for structuring group communication in such a way that a group of individuals can collectively deal with a complex problem, build consensus.¹ Figure 2 presents the structure of Delphi. The discussion of survey results continue until consensus is found. The survey questions can be reformulated in the next rounds, based on previous discussions.

This method could be organised in different ways. For example, participants can complete the survey online, prior to the discussion. This provides flexibility and allows to select participants for a discussion, based on their responses. Alternatively, participants could complete the survey during the workshop and then try to develop a common view on the topic in focus.

¹ Turof, H. & Linstone, M. (2002). The Delphi method: techniques and applications. Retrieved from: DOI:10.2307/3150755

Figure 3 Delphi structure scheme



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A Delphi can be a suitable data collection instrument in the following situations:

- If the topic requires subjectivity and/or cannot be analysed with precise analytical techniques;
- If participant engagement from different backgrounds is desirable to create a joint solution;
- If plurality of opinions, possible future scenarios should be explored.

Degree of participation: high

Participants and selection: experts, closed call

Organized: mixed setting

3.1 Steps for designing and running Delphi



Step 1: Formulate the **objective** and define the **scope**

The objective of a Delphi can be to forecast the outcome of a future policy or scenario, to reach consensus on a specific topic. While the objective does not necessarily have a big impact on structure of a Delphi, it will have an influence on the development of the survey and on the discussion session.

When an issue is defined too broadly, it might be challenging to decide what factors/aspects should be in focus of the research. In contrast, scoping down the topic could lead to overlooked important factors and to unrealistic outcomes. A good idea is to plan scoping interviews with experts prior to the survey design to discuss how to approach the topic in focus and what scope is considered manageable.



Step 2: Select **participants**

The key criteria for selection of participants for a Delphi is their knowledge/expertise of the topic. They must have thorough understanding of the topic to engage in technical discussions. It is important to select participants from different backgrounds, as it can provide different perspectives on the topic. Universities and research institutes typically have theoretical expertise, while companies usually have more applied knowledge and practical experience.

Delphi's can be conducted online, in person or in a mixed setting. Because of this flexibility, participants could be selected from different countries.¹ Participants or a selected group of them can be invited to complete a survey and/or to participate in the discussion of preliminary survey results. According to the literature on Delphi's, a group of 10 – 18 experts is considered optimal to foster productive discussions.²



Step 3: Design a **survey** and provide participants with **useful information** about Delphi

This includes background information regarding the aim of Delphi – survey and discussion, structure of the future discussions, login details to access the survey and/or to participate in the discussion.



Step 4: Select a **venue**

If a Delphi discussion is organised in person, the venue should be easily accessible. If it is organised online, the organising team should ensure that the digital platform includes all necessary tools, such as breakout rooms, polls, reactions, chat etc.



Step 5: Identify a **facilitator**

Besides facilitation skills, experience with research and data collection can be helpful for the facilitator to lead the sessions and collect the output in an efficient way.



Step 6: **Run a discussion** of Delphi results

¹ Turof, H. & Linstone, M. (2002). The Delphi method: techniques and applications. Retrieved from: DOI:10.2307/3150755

² Turof, H. & Linstone, M. (2002). The Delphi method: techniques and applications. Retrieved from: DOI:10.2307/3150755

During the first round of a survey, it can be useful to include open-ended questions, allowing participants to share insights, thoughts and opinions. After participants complete the survey, the facilitator reviews and discusses survey results with participants and makes a summary report. In the next round, the facilitator compares survey results from the previous round, and this may lead to adjustments of the survey and of the next discussion round. The facilitator will be initiating new rounds of data collection until the participants are satisfied with the degree of consensus they have reached.

Tips and tricks

- Organise Delphi rounds in such a way that the period between the survey completion and discussion is short. Sufficient time for analysis between rounds is however essential;
- Clear communication with Delphi participants is important before, during and after each Delphi round. Make sure objectives, expectations and next steps are clearly explained.

4 Virtual town hall meeting

Town hall meetings refer to public meetings held in large public buildings (town halls), in which local governments welcome citizens to discuss topics of interest and to gauge public opinion. While traditionally these meetings initially have been held in-person, access to digital platforms, as well as, preference for flexibility has increased the demand for online meetings.

Degree of participation: medium

Participants and selection: citizens. Civic lottery could be used in case generic topics are in focus. When expert knowledge is needed then networks and stakeholder organizations should suggest participants.

Organized: online

4.1 Steps to get started



Step 1: Define **objectives** and **format** of the meeting

The format of the meeting and its activities should depend on the objective of the meeting.¹

¹ Hart, R. & Sparrow, B. (2001). Politics, Discourse, and American Society: New Agendas. Retrieved from: <https://books.google.nl/books?hl=nl&lr=&id=U44JMDQO8loC&oi=fnd&pg=PA173&dq=town+hall+meeting&ots=ODMbBBsCXG&sig=2fJ1IH3mNt3qlzuWSfgV5bBpTCg#v=onepage&q=town%20hall%20meeting&f=false>



Step 2: **Raise awareness** about the meeting and **invite participants**

In general, the best way to inform citizens about the meeting is via post, emails and by advertising the meeting on the Internet. In case of the last two methods, some citizens might be excluded if they do not use the Internet frequently or do not have access to it. Thus, it is best to combine several methods while reaching out to participants. Invitations to the meeting should be sent out at least 2 months in advance.

If the topic requires expertise or is related to the interests of specific stakeholders, it is advisable to reach out to these stakeholders and their networks, and invite them to join the meeting.



Step 3: Plan a meeting in the **evening** or on the **weekend**

Given that the majority of the citizens have jobs and other responsibilities during the day, it is advised to plan the meeting in the evening or weekend.



Step 4: Select an **online platform** and provide a **user-friendly guide** on how to access and interact during the meeting

Consider what activities you plan to run during the online meeting and select an online platform that has suitable functionalities. Most common platforms for a large number of participants include Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Webex.

Some participants might not have excellent digital skills and/or experience with the selected online platform. Thus, develop a small, user-friendly guide on how to access and interact during the meeting.

4.2 Activities and structure of an online town hall meeting

In contrast to Delphi, a town hall meeting might not have a rigid structure and the degree of engagement is typically lower. Town hall meetings include more plenary sessions, although participant engagement is facilitated through polls and/or group discussions.

As in the case of participatory workshops, a town hall meeting includes three phases:

Getting started phase:

The facilitator and the organising team should join the online meeting well in advance to ensure that all functionalities of the online platform work properly, to respond to questions of participants and to address technical issues that participants face. As soon as the session starts, all participants should be muted to avoid unnecessary interruptions.

The facilitator should introduce the purpose of the meeting, provide some background information about the meeting – why the meeting was initiated, what results are expected and

how they will impact society. In addition, the facilitator should present some “house-keeping rules” (e.g., participants should raise a hand to speak).

Getting to work phase:

An effective way of starting the main part of a meeting is to run an activity that attracts attention of participants. For example, to launch a quick poll and discuss its results with participants.¹ As a next step, the facilitator should present key findings on the central topic of the meeting and try to collect ideas/feedback using different engagement methods. Table 5 provides an overview of possible methods and activities to perform during a town hall meeting.

Table 6 Common participant engagement methods during virtual town hall meetings

Method	Short description
Q&A	During this session the facilitator will provide participants with the possibility to ask questions regarding the policy or problem at hand.
Icebreaker sessions	These can include activities in which people have to introduce themselves in 5 words, or by showing an item and telling something about it.
Virtual masterclasses	The facilitator can invite an expert or professional in relation to the topic at hand to give a short masterclass.
Building stories	In this activity one person starts a story with one or two words and then other people have to follow up.
Pop quiz	A pop quiz is an unscheduled or unannounced quiz. Answers can be provided afterwards on the screen to spark fun debates.

Finishing up phase:

The facilitator should thank participants for their time to make them feel valued. In addition, it is important to ask for feedback about the session and schedule time for any last concerns or remarks from the participants.

After the session, participants could receive a summary report, which highlights their contribution, indicates dates of next meetings and requests additional feedback.

Tips and tricks

- If a meeting lasts more than 1.5 hour, remember to include breaks to ensure participant engagement;
- Prior to a meeting, share useful information to ensure participants understand the topic in focus and build anticipation.

¹ Benjamin, M. (2022). Virtual Town Hall Meetings Guide: Benefits & Best Practices. Retrieved from: <https://preciate.com/virtual-town-hall-meeting/#:~:text=Virtual%20town%20hall%20meetings%20are,break%2Dup%20meetings%2C%20etc>