

06 CLIMATE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

A climate citizens' assembly is a democratic process that allows participants to engage in dialogue and to co-develop solutions. It aims to involve citizens in the deliberation of municipal, regional, national, and international policies on climate change. By giving everyday people a seat at the governance table, they can be powerful in helping to strengthen or rebuild political legitimacy and accountability in the eyes of the public. The Assemblies are deliberative, meaning that they are based on a method of dialogue and argumentation among participants.

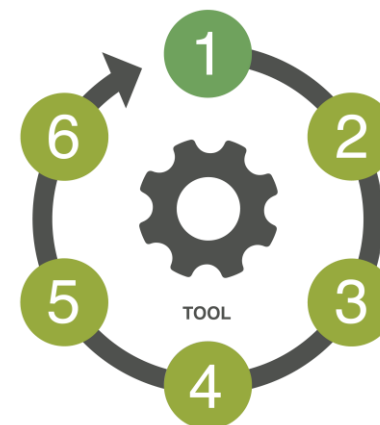
In the last decade they have been gaining increasing traction as a means to address a key need: ensuring a fair and inclusive climate transition and societal transformation.

HOW DOES IT WORK

The process begins with the creation of an independent expert committee tasked with co-designing a timespan, the core questions/topics and a follow-up plan for the assembly.

Assembly members should then be selected through sorting, by weighing factors such as age, sex, income, education and geographical location. To value citizens for their time and effort, it is important that they receive financial compensation, as well as travel reimbursements and child-care support.

Three key implementation steps can be distilled in a climate citizens' assembly: a learning step, a deliberation step, and the recommendation step.



TIPS

Ensuring that the conditions for decision-makers' follow-up are clear from since the onset, and that a proper media campaign and public support from a broad societal coalition are two key criteria for success. These help to increase the public pressure needed to further ensure Implementation of the recommendations emerging from the assembly.

REFERENCES

[Knowledge network on climate assemblies.](#)

Project "[Climate Citizens' Assemblies: learning with, from and for Europe](#)".

You can consult the [Greater Cambridge](#) climate citizens' assembly as a regional example.



Time



The design of the full process requires a substantial amount of time and effort. Experiences in the implementation of the assembly shows a time-range between 6 and 20 weeks. Some are now even permanent thus allocated an annual budget.



Skills



The members of the climate citizens’ assembly do not need any specific experience or previous knowledge on the topics to be discussed. What matters is a proactive and positive attitude and the willingness to collaborate. However, a carefully planned training needs to be provided to all members to ensure a common knowledge base.



Resources



A well-designed climate citizens’ assembly requires an important effort on the side of the implementing institution. Bespoke coordination among different government departments is needed, requiring working with colleagues across silos. In addition to expertise in deliberative practice and climate governance for the independent expert committee, you may need to draw on specific communities of practice and have trained facilitators to support the process.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS / OUTCOMES

- ★ Increased public awareness, knowledge and advocacy regarding climate change issues and the need for climate action.
- ★ Set of recommendations or policy proposals.
- ★ Broader public debate on climate change issues and better communication between policymakers and citizens, which tends to increase trust in the climate change policies.
- ★ Increased public engagement and ownership of action / Enhanced sense of legitimacy for climate change policy choices.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS AND BARRIERS

Climate citizens’ assemblies are generally regarded as having a positive impact on communities. However, those who critique climate citizens’ assemblies, such as ([Machin, 2023](#)), point to practical problems with the selection of participants and information, as well as potential power asymmetries during the assemblies.

Unlike elected bodies, climate citizens’ assemblies are not directly responsible for decision-making. As such, their direct impact on policymaking is difficult to assess. Knowledge is often required for the adequate design of the survey.

EXAMPLE ACTIONS

- ★ The newly established (i.e., 2023) [climate citizens' assembly of Bologna](#) (Italy) has been designed to stretch over eight meetings of half a day each during a total of about four months. The city is seeking citizens' direct involvement on the following key questions:
 - How can the city's energy transition be promoted from the most impactful climate-emitting sectors, while at the same time guaranteeing the principle of equity and climate justice and counteracting the phenomena of poverty and marginalisation?
 - How can institutions and citizens address and contain the city's main climate risks (heat islands, extreme weather events, floods, droughts, etc.)?
 - What obstacles, if any, do you see in municipal rules, services and regulations to achieving these objectives and possible improvements and innovations?

The members of the Assembly commit to attending at least 70% of the meetings, and to show a pro-active and participative attitude for their whole duration. Various forms of support are envisioned for Assembly members, including an attendance fee of EUR 72.96 (including all tax and social security charges) and babysitting services.

- ★ The world's first [permanent climate assembly began its work in Brussels](#) on 3 February 2023 as a deliberative support tool to accompany and inform local climate policy.

The Brussels Climate Assembly consists of a succession of several citizens' panels, each of them composed of one hundred randomly selected citizens who deliberate and make recommendations on specific topics related to the city climate policy.

As explained [within the 'Büergerrat' website](#), "citizens not only make recommendations, but also actively follow what happens with them through a commission that monitors how politicians deal with the recommendations. The Brussels government has undertaken to thoroughly examine all recommendations from citizens and to report transparently on what happens with them".



- ★ Another permanent climate citizens' assembly has begun operating in [Milan](#) (Italy) in 2023.