

Citizens' Jury



3 to 5 days



12 to 24 people



High

RESOURCES REQUIRED

MATERIALS:

- Large room available for several days;
- Chairs;
- Computer and projector.

HUMAN RESOURCES:

- One or more facilitators;
- A few expert witnesses.

SUMMARY

A citizens' jury gathers a group of people who are representative of the population to participate in political decision-making on a local or national issue. It recreates the various stages of forming a real jury: participants are first informed by expert "witnesses" on the issue and then they begin their deliberative process. The process aims to produce consensual recommendations in a report to be delivered to the organization that initiated the exercise. This method allows many people from various backgrounds to be at the same discussion table.

Strengths

- Credible and legitimate recommendations because they are agreed upon by a group of citizens;
- Based on expert opinions.

Weaknesses

- Long preparation;
- Limited number of participants;
- Expensive;
- Recruiting participants is sometimes difficult, especially in small communities;
- Considerable planning and preparation is required.

OBJECTIVES

A citizens' jury aims to simplify decision-making and make consensual recommendations in complex situations by consulting a representative sample of the population. Decision-making is democratic.

Information

CONSULTATION

INVOLVEMENT

COLLABORATION

Empowerment

WHEN TO USE

Citizens' juries are often initiated by communities, elected officials or private organizations facing a complex and often political situation. The organization initiating the exercise must be seen as neutral.

Citizens' juries can be used for many different topics, including economic, environmental, social and political issues. This method is very effective when having to choose one or more alternatives to a problem and reconcile conflicting interests. Participants in such an approach feel genuinely involved in the recommendation process and expect to see concrete action result.

BEFORE THE ACTIVITY

Estimated preparation time: 20 hours

1- Recruiting participants

The initiating group or organization chooses an organizing committee to establish a citizens' jury about a complex issue in the community. It first selects participants who are randomly selected from the population (e.g., electoral list, phone books, etc.) to represent the diversity of the population and to have people who do not have an opinion or special knowledge about the issue.

Initially, many people are invited to participate in the exercise. This broad invitation aims to get enough people willing to participate, as citizen participation is voluntary. A questionnaire may accompany the invitation to better ascertain the potential participant's interest.

The organizing committee sends the selected candidates information on the activity, including the date, time and location as well as the desired involvement (time, availability, etc.).

2- Logistics

The organizing committee is also responsible for setting the agenda of the citizens' jury. The exercise can last for three to five, days, preferably consecutive.

The committee then selects one or more facilitators to impartially conduct the various stages of the activity. It also needs to select speakers, or "expert witnesses", on the issue to inform citizens. They will have to prepare their arguments.

For more technical information, the committee has to book a sufficiently large room for a few days.

ACTIVITIES

1. Presentations and explanations

Citizens on the jury meet with the facilitator(s) to learn about the exercise process and meet one another. Each participant is asked to briefly introduce themselves to others. This is also an opportunity for the facilitator to provide them with information on the topic (3-4 hours).

2. Hearings

Expert witnesses present various perspectives to the jury so that they can form an opinion. At this stage, the citizen members of the jury are encouraged to ask questions and interact with the witnesses (variable time - one or two days).

3. Jury deliberation

Following discussion with the experts, the jury members summarize the discussions to identify results and proposals. Deliberation continues until a consensus is achieved (variable time - one or two days).

4. Conclusion

The jury presents their conclusions in a final report, fully approved by each of them and sent to the initiating organization. A spokesperson for the citizens presents the results publicly (variable time - one or two days to write the report and present it).

AFTER THE ACTIVITY

After the citizens' jury is held, the organizing committee expects to receive a final report containing jurors' recommendations. The initiating organization must respond to the report by implementing the recommendations or by explaining its reasons for not doing so. The report can also be released, for example at a press conference.

Jurors and witnesses can evaluate the exercise using an evaluation form. This will help identify the strengths and weaknesses of this approach and determine its impartiality.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Choosing too broad a topic or one with little disagreement;
- Choosing a too technical topic;
- Establishing too tight a time frame;
- Holding meetings that are too spaced out.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

STRATEGIC PLANNING EXERCISE FOR COMMUNITIES ON THE ACADIAN PENINSULA

An adapted version of the “citizen jury” was used in 2011 to support the communities of Shippagan, Le Goulet and Bas-Caraquet, New Brunswick, in a land-use planning exercise aimed at limiting flood and erosion risk stemming from sea-level rise induced by climate change. The organizers’ goal was to support three working groups of community representatives in a reflective exercise designed to generate recommendations for their respective municipal councils. The purpose of the project was to develop planning and decision-support tools enabling municipalities to deal with issues of coastal flooding and erosion more effectively. The tools were used to produce maps illustrating the areas at risk of flooding or erosion in future in each participating community. The working groups examined and validated the tools and chose scenarios for land-use planning and identified zones at risk.

The organizers first met with the municipal councils to present the context and objectives of the exercise, as well as the approach, which involved working with small groups of typical community representatives. Three working groups were put together with one per participating community. The working group members were recruited by a municipal employee or elected official, in accordance with the following guidelines: the group had to consist of eight persons if possible, including:

- a municipal representative
- a young person between 20 and 30 years of age and/or
- a teacher and/or
- a business person and/or
- a retired person and/or
- a mother and/or
- a lawyer or notary and/or
- a naturalist or environmentalist and/or
- a scientist.

The working groups’ role was to represent the public, become familiar with the issues surrounding climate change, understand the uses of the decision-support tools that were developed and make recommendations to their respective municipal councils as regards land-use planning for the benefit of the entire community.

The Coastal Zones Research Institute and the Acadian Peninsula District Planning Commissioner acted as facilitators for this exercise. In addition to organizing the exercise, these organizations were also required to act as “expert witnesses.” They were responsible for translating the scientific and technical information provided by the other project managers into everyday language for the municipal councils and administrators, and for the members of the working groups. They also had to gather and disseminate to the groups information on adaptation options related to land use and to organize, conduct and oversee the working groups’ meetings.

The working groups met four times in fall 2011 (Figure 1). The members had to understand the approach used for the flood and erosion scenarios in order to discuss their relevance for planning and land-use purposes. They then had to identify zones at risk according to the scenarios and make recommendations to their respective councils concerning zoning, conditions for land use in the zones at risk, as well as any other recommendations deemed relevant by the group in terms of climate change adaptation.

Figure 1: Calendar used for the strategic planning exercise of communities on the Acadian Peninsula

	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Municipal councils	Project presentation			Presentation of preliminary results			Presentation of results and recommendations
Working groups		Forming groups	Forming groups	Presentation of preliminary results	Working meeting (2)	Validation meeting	

As Figure 1 shows, a seven-month calendar was developed for the project.

- First meeting: the participants became familiar with the flood and erosion scenarios and the information to be discussed during the planning exercise.

PRACTICAL
EXAMPLE

CONTINUATION

- Second meeting: The groups reviewed maps illustrating the flood and erosion scenarios and discussed the relevance of each scenario for land-planning purposes. The aim of planning was to minimize material damage, human impact and the costs to society of flooding and erosion, for everyone's benefit over the long term.
- Third meeting: The groups reviewed a map depicting the scenarios that were chosen and the infrastructure at risk according to the flood scenario in order to identify zones at risk.
- Fourth meeting: The groups validated an intermediate version of the maps and confirmed their choice of scenarios, zones and land-use conditions. They prepared final recommendations for their respective municipal councils. The recommendations concerned zones at risk, land-use conditions to minimize risk, protective structures, emergency planning, education, knowledge transfer and citizen participation.

Following this exercise, the organizers also met with the three municipal councils to discuss progress and present the preliminary results of efforts to develop scenarios and the risk analysis.

Lastly, a report was drafted for each community, outlining the recommendations put forward by their working group, which were presented to the municipal councils in February 2012.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

CCC-CURA, <http://www.defisdescommunautescotieres.org/>.

Fondation Nicolas Hulot, 2013. Démocratie participative : guide des outils pour agir. Available online in French only at http://think-tank.fnh.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/publication_etat_deslieaux_democratie_participative.pdf. Health Canada, 2000. Policies and toolbox concerning public participation in decision-making.

King Baudouin Foundation 2006, "Participatory Methods Toolkit: A Practitioner's Manual." Available online at <http://www.kbs-frb.be/publication.aspx?id=294864&langtype=1033>.

Mélanie Aubé and Benjamin Kocyla, 2012. Climate Change Adaptation: Land-Use Planning in Shippagan, Le Goulet and Bas-Caraquet.

ROBVQ, Boîte à outils sur la participation citoyenne. Available online in French only at https://www.robvq.qc.ca/guides/consultation_publique.

The Coastal Communities Challenges—Community-University Research Alliance (CCC-CURA) comprises a group of partners and researchers concerned with issues pertaining to resilience and governance for coastal and riverside communities in the context of climate change.

The Regroupement des organismes de bassins versants du Québec (ROBVQ) comprises some 40 watershed organizations operating in Quebec. It is a key partner of the Quebec government in the development of watershed management measures.



ALLIANCE DE RECHERCHE UNIVERSITÉS-COMMUNAUTÉS
Défis des Communautés Côtières
www.defisdescommunautescotieres.org



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada