



HOW TO ORGANISE A **DELIBERATIVE** **CONSULTATIONS:** A PRACTICAL GUIDE



**INNOVATION
FOR POLICY
FOUNDATION**



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I. A guide to the guide

This guide offers an overview of Deliberative Consultations, including what they entail, how they operate, their suitability for specific policy-making processes, and who is involved in the process. It also provides a step-by-step approach to explain how to carry out Deliberative Consultation processes.

Its objective is to better equip organisations, local governments, or policymakers with the necessary information to envision Deliberative Consultation as an additional tool to support and empower citizens to co-create effective policies. It's equally valuable for activists and citizens eager to understand how these consultations operate and bring fellow community members into the co-creation of policies.

II. What is this guide about?

a. What are Deliberative Consultations?

A Deliberative Consultation is a structured process for engaging diverse groups in deliberations on specific issues or policies to gather informed opinions and feedback, fostering a more democratically engaged society through active stakeholder participation. It's designed to promote participant's in-depth understanding of the topic, open a space for discussion of various aspects of the policy issue at hand, and to gather informed opinions and feedback from participants. This approach, which stimulates engagement and informed dialogues, is relevant for crafting policies that resonate and effectively address the needs of different stakeholders at multiple levels - be it global, national, regional, or local.

b. How do Deliberative Consultations work?

Deliberative Consultations are informed, facilitated discussions that combine elements from lectures, focus groups, and surveys, leading to an in-depth understanding of the topic and to more relevant feedback. They are not meant for reaching consensus, but rather to deepen and broaden participants' perspectives on the topics and questions being discussed.

Participants start the process with **learning more about the topic** by hearing different people share their perspectives. Then participants take time to **digest the content by deliberating** about the topic in small groups. Finally, participants have the chance to individually **share their feedback** about the topic through de-identified private forms.

Deliberative Consultations increase community engagement by promoting awareness and participation and nurturing a sense of ownership amongst community members. They also enhance reach and range by accommodating multiple engagement formats within the same consultation process. This includes analog, live interactions in workshops, virtual participation in the events, as well as inputs not restricted by time or location, such as surveys and feedback forms.

Finally, if increased diversity and participant breadth are needed, the consultations can take a decentralised approach, which we refer to as Decentralised Distributed Deliberative

Consultations (3D Consultations)¹. 3D Consultations involve training local actors to conduct Deliberative Consultations independently, often supported by microgrants conceded to these entities.

c. Why Deliberative Consultations?

Deliberative Consultations incorporate a wide array of informed opinions, through the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders, aiming to bring together various perspectives to address complex policy challenges. Taking that into consideration, Deliberative Consultations are particularly appropriate in the following contexts:

- **Centralised decision-making.** When policies or decisions are determined centrally by a select few, but there is a need to incorporate diverse viewpoints into the decision-making process, Deliberative Consultations serve as a bridge between central decision-makers and a broader range of stakeholders. This ensures that final decisions are well-rounded and consider multiple perspectives.
- **Complex policy issues.** In scenarios where the issues at hand are complex and multifaceted, the decision making process benefits significantly from inputs from a range of informed opinions. The structured nature of Deliberative Consultations allows for a deep dive into the complexities of the issues, ensuring that all angles are thoroughly explored and understood.
- **Open and accessible policy development.** In situations that demand wide representation, particularly when dealing with issues impacting diverse demographic groups, Deliberative Consultations play a pivotal role in ensuring that the voices of all affected parties are heard, thereby contributing to the creation of policies that are equitable and reflective of the needs of the entire community.
- **Availability of resources.** Representing a potential shortcoming when deciding whether it is a suitable method, the nature of Deliberative Consultations, with their emphasis on inclusivity and depth, often means they are resource-intensive. These consultations are appropriate where dedicated resources are available for organising, facilitating, and analysing the consultations to ensure their efficient and effective conduction and the attainment of their expected outcomes.

d. When to host Deliberative Consultations?

Deciding whether to host a Deliberative Consultation requires careful consideration of several key factors, ensuring that it is both effective and appropriate for the context at hand, which will be explored in the next sessions.

Centralised Deliberative Consultations are generally organised by central bodies, and are often focused on high level, global or national level policy issues. Therefore, Centralised Deliberative Consultations are appropriate in the following contexts:

Broad policy issues. The unified and centralised structure of these discussions typically involves gathering stakeholders originating from diverse localities, each with their own realities and circumstances in a unified setting. This diverse

¹ For more information on 3D Consultations, please consult [The 3D Consultation Guide](#)

composition often allows for a focus on wide-ranging, overarching policy matters. While local specificities may be mentioned, they are usually not explored in detail.

Structured engagement. In situations where a controlled and organised discussion environment is necessary to ensure targeted deliberation on specific topics or issues, this structured approach helps in maintaining focus and achieving depth in discussions, which is often crucial for effective policy-making.

e. Who is involved in Deliberative Consultations?

Finally, before providing guidance on how to carry out a Deliberative Consultations, it is necessary to identify the key roles involved in the process:

Organisers:

The entity/organisation that is responsible for planning, executing, and managing the Deliberative Consultation process.

Facilitators:

Trusted and trained individuals responsible for guiding and managing the Deliberative Consultation activities, ensuring smooth communication and active participation among participants.

Speakers:

Designated persons who will share perspectives to further elaborate on the Consultative Session.

Participants:

The stakeholders who participate and contribute their ideas and insights to the process.

III. The Deliberative Consultation Process Step by Step

This section of the Guide will provide suggestions for activities to be carried out during Deliberative Consultation processes. Policymakers should bear in mind that there is no one formula for the activities that organisers and facilitators should carry out and that Deliberative Consultations should take the most adequate form to the specific policy-making process. Therefore, the decision ultimately rests in the organisers' and facilitators' hands. All activities should be goal-oriented and suitable to address the topic(s) at hand.

a. Planning a Deliberative Consultation

As any other tool, Deliberative Consultations require following certain preparatory steps, in order to identify the relevant policy issues and objectives of the event, delineate the current stage of the policy-making process, map stakeholders and identify which relevant actors are currently included and excluded from the policy-making process, as well as assess resource availability, define resource allocation, and choose an adequate venue,

including the definition of whether the event will take place in person, online, or in a hybrid setting.

b. Executing the Plan

A Deliberative Consultation event can occur in varied timeframes, yet preparations for the event commence several weeks in advance, including, for example, raising awareness about the event.

i. Who and how to invite?

The composition of participants depends on the objective of the consultation. In general, it should be as diverse as possible, to foster a richer dialogue and more comprehensive understanding of different stakeholder's needs. Diversity encompasses various dimensions, including age, ethnicity, gender, job roles, among others, as well as different levels of experience with the topic at hand (for instance, including people whose jobs or day to day life are likely to be heavily impacted by the topic).

By carefully curating the participant list, meaningful engagement, depth in discussions, and ultimately, more impactful outcomes can be fostered from the consultation. Including individuals from different walks of life, especially those from marginalised or vulnerable communities, enriches the dialogue, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of stakeholder needs.

A hybrid approach can be employed to recruit consultation participants, gradually combining methods and integrating multiple tactics to ensure broader representation, inclusivity, and engagement in the process. The hybrid approach goes from open-for-all invitations, consisting of sending general invites and spreading the word to reach as many people as possible, to personalised invites to specific individuals that would provide relevant insights to the consultation.

ii. Getting ready

Preparing for Deliberative Consultations requires an early engagement with stakeholders, before the consultations themselves take place.

Pre-consultation engagement serves as a foundational phase, where stakeholders begin to build their understanding and interest in the topics that will be discussed. This phase is pivotal as it prepares participants, both mentally and contextually, for the upcoming consultation, leading to more enriched and engaged discussions. Proper engagement prior to the consultation not only boosts the participants' investment in the process but also enhances the quality of their contributions.

Step by Step:

1. Prepare and share pre-event surveys and discussions to gauge and shape participant understanding and expectations
2. Organise preliminary activities like workshops or online forums to stimulate further interest and readiness for the consultation.
3. At this stage, participants could also be asked to complete a pre-event registration form capturing demographic information, perspectives and relevant data sharing agreements.

Following these steps can lead to a more productive and insightful consultation experience for all involved.

iii. Holding the consultation

The Deliberative Consultation event unfolds in the three distinct phases (Introduction, Consultation Session, and Closing) described in detail below, each playing a crucial role in the overall engagement.

Introduction Phase

The initial phase is the Introduction, where the groundwork is laid for the discussions that follow. This stage sets the tone, outlines the objectives, and familiarises participants with the consultation's structure.

Step by Step:

1. Welcome and introduce participants to the Deliberative Consultation, provide them with the context of the overall process, and an overview of the agenda.
2. Provide participants with relevant information regarding how their participation is expected to contribute to the process and how their data, inputs, and feedback may be used/shared.
3. Establish some ground rules for small group discussions, to create a safe and productive environment where all participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and emphasise the dynamic roles of leading and facilitating, which are active responsibilities for everyone in the group, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued.

Time Management: Allow a maximum of 30 minutes in total for this introductory session.

Note: The Chatham House Rule² are recommended as ground rules for this session, as it allows freedom to use shared information while maintaining confidentiality.

Consultative Session

Following the introduction, we transition into the heart of the process, the Consultative Sessions. Here, participants engage in deliberative discussions, addressing defined questions, exploring open responses, and delving into participant-defined inquiries in open space sessions. These sessions provide the platform for diverse perspectives to be shared, fostering a rich exchange of ideas.

² For further details on the fundamentals of the Chatham House Rules, see <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule>

Each Deliberative Consultation has at least one consultative session. At the consultation session, participants engage in deliberative discussions regarding two or three different questions, during which one of three types of approaches are used:

- **Closed Questions:** defined questions with a set of clearly defined potential answers.
- **Open Response Questions:** defined questions with no predetermined potential answers.
- **Open Space Questions:** questions and responses that are defined by participants themselves. This format allows questions to emerge from the perspective of those affected.

Regardless of the type of questions chosen for a Deliberative Consultation, participants are led through three steps: Learning, Deliberating, and Sharing.

Step by Step:

2. Learning. The learning journey is the step during which participants gain a deeper understanding of the question.

- **Closed Question.** There are three activities within a Closed Question learning journey: (i) the question is explained; (ii) participants are introduced to the different potential answers (or “perspectives”) by speakers invited by the organisers; and (iii) participants are able to cross-examine the speakers, interrogating the perspectives, to gain a deeper collective understanding.
- **Open Response Question.** There are two activities within the learning journey of an Open Response Question: (i) the question is explained in plenary, (ii) participants are invited to consider the question, develop and then share their views in plenary, developing some potential answers.
- **Open Space Question.** In an Open Space Question learning journey, participants suggest questions and topics that they would like to explore with others. If a participant suggests a question, then they also signal their willingness to host a small group deliberation about the question. If one or more of the participant-defined questions are similar, then these may also be grouped together.

3. Deliberating. The purpose of the deliberation is to explore the question together, deepen the shared understanding of options, and to elevate the “unforced force of the better argument”. There is no pressure for participants to arrive at a consensus or to agree with each other.

- **Closed Question and Open Response Question.** Small group of 4-6 randomly assigned participants discuss the proposed questions, comparing the different

perspectives elevated, exploring additional options, sharing their experiences and views, and weighing each other's arguments.

- **Open Space Question.** Participants are invited to form small groups based on their interest to contribute to a discussion on one of the suggested questions. The small groups first start by sharing their understanding of the question, then participants share their perspectives, experiences and views about the question, and weigh each other's arguments.

4. Sharing. The final step of each consultative session is that feedback is provided by participants privately through a "de-identified" survey form.

Time management: The duration of the consultative session depends on the number and type(s) of questions. The approximate time per question is:

- **Closed Question:** Approximately 1:30 to 2 hours, including explanation of the question, introduction to different perspectives by invited speakers, and a session for participants to interrogate these perspectives.
- **Open Response Question:** Approximately 1 to 1:30 hours.
- **Open Space Question:** Since the participants are responsible for defining the scope, the time needed for these questions could vary significantly, depending on the needs of the group and the number of topics raised.

Note: For in-person sessions, it is recommended to invite around 20 participants to allow for suitably sized discussion groups. This number helps maintain a balance between the quantity and quality of discussions. If the session will be held online, a larger number of participants can be accommodated due to the feasibility of breakout rooms in online settings.

Closing Phase

Finally, the process culminates in the Closing phase, where the outcomes are summarised, key takeaways are highlighted, and participants are offered a reflective conclusion to the consultation.

Step by Step:

1. Summarise takeaways and inform participants about next steps following the consultation. This helps maintain transparency and continued engagement, for morale and credibility if ever your organisation wants to host another consultation.
2. Clearly communicate how and when they will be informed about the outcomes and any resulting actions from their contributions. This can be achieved through regular updates via email, social media, or dedicated digital platforms, thereby keeping the participants connected to the process and aware of the tangible impact of their participation.

Time management: Allow a total of 15 minutes for the closing session.

These three phases collectively form a comprehensive framework that guides the flow and success of the deliberative consultation.

c. Wrapping Up the Process

Deliberative Consultations do not end with the event. As is the case with any other tool, it is important to take steps to guarantee the dissemination of its results, as well as its continuous refinement, reflecting on outcomes and lessons learnt, to enhance the effectiveness of future Deliberative Consultations through feedback and evaluation of the process and outcomes.