

**A SHORT
GUIDE TO**

**DELIBERATIVE
ENGAGEMENT
FOR VICTORIAN
COUNCILS**



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INTRODUCTION

The Local Government Act Victoria (2020) states in section 55 that councils must adopt a community engagement policy that includes deliberative engagement practices that are capable of being applied to the development of the Community Vision, the Council Plan, the Financial Plan and the Asset Plan.

This guide steps councils through what they need to know about deliberative practices as they work to implement the new provisions of the Act. Some councils are well advanced and have significant experience with deliberative engagement. Many of these councils have worked in partnership with MosaicLab. Others may be new to this approach. This guide draws on knowledge we have gained through the design and facilitation of 25 deliberative processes since 2014.

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY – A DEFINITION

Deliberation is a long and careful consideration or discussion. Public deliberation, when used with the term 'democracy' describes a group of everyday people considering relevant facts from multiple points of view, identifying options, and coming to a group decision. The deliberative group is randomly selected through an independent process that ensures they are descriptively representative of the demographics of the general population.

Deliberative democracy or public deliberation is all about placing people (citizens, residents, affected individuals) closer to the affairs of government. It is being used in many countries to complement representative democracy; to provide elected representatives with well-informed advice on complex issues.

Public deliberation is one form of 'high influence' community engagement. The expectation is that the convening organisation will implement the recommendations to the greatest extent possible. However, it does not replace or take away from the decision-making powers of elected representatives.

EMBEDDING DELIBERATIVE PRACTICE

When we refer to 'deliberative practices', we are describing ways in which decision-makers and officers can embed the elements and principles of deliberative democracy into their everyday work. Embedding deliberative practice does not necessarily mean delivering a full, long-form deliberative engagement process such as a citizens' jury (although it could). Instead, this could mean that council's engagement includes some of the core principles important for ensuring 'deliberation by the people impacted' occurs. Local government can achieve better outcomes for their projects by integrating these practices.

A REWARDING INVESTMENT

Deliberative engagement approaches bring with them greater transparency, inclusivity and fairness when it comes to solving local issues and often create new solutions to old problems.

Through collaboration and a shared approach to problem solving, difficult local issues can be navigated together, and new solutions can be identified. Decision makers can also gain clarity. Deliberative engagement informs their role and allows them to make and stand behind public decisions that are more likely to be trusted or accepted by the broader community.

(DELIBERATIVE PROCESSES) ALLOW YOU TO PUT FORWARD A PROBLEM, EXPLAIN THE POSSIBLE OPTIONS, PRESENT RESEARCH AND DIFFERENT OPINIONS ON ALL THE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES AND ALLOW (THE COMMUNITY) TO COME TO YOU WITH WELL RESEARCHED AND REASONED RECOMMENDATIONS.

LIAM, JUROR,
Geelong Citizens' Jury

BENEFITS OF DELIBERATION

SUPPORTED DECISIONS

Deliberation allows you to hear from and know what your residents really think. Councils and councillors often only hear from the articulate, the passionate, and the disaffected. The random, stratified recruitment approach used in a deliberative process ensures you are hearing from a cross-section of your community – overwhelmingly, that means people you have never heard from before. People that are more likely to be representative of the breadth of perspectives and voices in the broader community. You can be more confident that your decision will reflect community sentiment, even if some individuals or interest groups don't get the outcome they prefer.

DECISIONS ON DIFFICULT ISSUES

Deliberation allows you to 'unstick' a sticky issue; to make a decision on matters you haven't been able to solve because you would be heavily criticised no matter which path you choose. Councils put some big issues on hold because it's a 'no-win' situation or because interest groups block progress and hamper resolution.

Deliberation brings in diverse people from all walks of life. These people become well-informed and consider all sides of an issue before determining a way forward.

This allows councils to make decisions with more confidence. While there may be criticism from some interest groups or passionate people who don't like the end result, the decision is backed by good process - a well-informed group of everyday people who have weighed up options and come to an agreed position.

BUILDING TRUST

As with all engagement approaches, token efforts, processes without influence, or outputs that are not largely accepted or implemented result in a decline in trust. If undertaken genuinely, and if deliberative principles are followed, deliberation can lead to an increase in trust between an organisation and its community. Truly deliberative approaches have integrity and are highly transparent. They engender trust in outcomes, because your community can see the decision was influenced by 'people like me'.

DELIBERATION WORKS

There are now many examples in Victoria and Australia (and hundreds more around the world) that show that deliberation works.

WHAT DOES DELIBERATION LOOK LIKE?

Deliberation is a principles-based approach to community engagement. Meeting the principles is more important than any specific method or format.

The most common form of deliberation practiced in Australia is a citizens' jury. Other methods include deliberative polls, planning cells and 21st century town hall meetings. Open space technology, study circles and participatory budgeting, while not being deliberative processes as such, can be designed to have deliberative elements. Information on all these forms of deliberation can be easily found online.

Citizens' juries are also called community panels, people's panels or citizens' assemblies. They can comprise any number of people, and examples around the world vary from 12 to 1,000 participants. Currently in Australia the deliberative group often consists of 30 to 45 people.

The convening organisation usually chooses the name of the group, which can vary. The City of Melbourne chose 'people's panel' for its 43-person Ten Year Financial Plan project and Local Government Victoria chose 'citizens' jury' for the Democracy in Geelong project. In this guide, we use the terminology panel, deliberating group, or group.

The key elements of a deliberation are:

- ▀ There is a complex problem or issue to be solved, often called a remit.
- ▀ A deliberating group is selected using a random and stratified recruitment method.
- ▀ Information from diverse sources and covering different sides of the issue, such as background reports and expert speakers, is provided.
- ▀ The group is given 4-6 full days of deliberation time.
- ▀ The process is designed and facilitated by independent skilled facilitators.
- ▀ The group considers information, identifies options, comes to judgement, writes their own recommendations/report, and presents it to the elected council.

Each of these elements is based on the principles of deliberation that are explained in the next section.

Videos of public deliberations can be found [here](#).

PRINCIPLES OF DELIBERATION

Deliberative principles are well documented and are the basis of deliberative processes practiced both in Australia and overseas. Bringing a representative group together with the promise of being influential, access to a high level of information, and time to weigh up options and come to judgement (deliberative), is what makes deliberation very different to more standard engagement activities.

The Local Government Act 2020 contains five principles for community engagement; very sound principles based on the internationally accepted IAP2 core values.

Five of the deliberative principles below directly match the principles for community engagement set out in the Local Government Act 2020, though takes them to the next level in terms of the expectation of how they are implemented.

For example, the principles in the Act require that engagement be informed; deliberation expects that you not only provide information but also a range of expert speakers. The Act requires that people are supported; deliberation expects that you pay people to ensure the cost of their participation is covered. The Act requires that participants are informed of the level of influence; deliberation requires that the process is highly influential. MosaicLab works with ten principles for deliberation.

INFLUENTIAL

Deliberation requires decision makers to give weight to and implement the outcomes to the greatest extent possible. This forms a foundation for building trust with your community.

Deliberation isn't about asking people their opinion and then disregarding their views, which significantly reduces trust and results in poorly supported outcomes.



DELIBERATIVE

Deliberation goes beyond conversation and dialogue. It requires those deliberating to weigh up options and come to judgement on a problem.

Deliberation isn't about people giving you a wish list or a list of ideas. It results in clear direction for council decision makers.





INFORMATIVE

Deliberation requires that people have detailed, in-depth, and balanced information before they come to judgement. This includes hearing different perspectives, including the views of experts and interest groups.

Deliberation isn't about asking people for uninformed views. It allows you as council decision makers to know that the recommendations being provided to you are based on evidence and have consider all sides of the issue.

REPRESENTATIVE

Deliberation requires that the deliberating group is representative of the whole community. The group is usually selected using an independently conducted, random, stratified process.

Deliberation isn't about allowing anyone to turn up and people to 'self-select', like the participants at a public meeting. It allows you as council decision makers to have a high level of comfort, because you know what everyday people who are broadly representative of your community think is reasonable (once they are informed). This is more valuable than knowing only what interest groups and highly articulate and invested people are lobbying for.



TIME

Deliberation requires that the deliberating group is given sufficient time to become informed about the issues, weigh up options and come to judgement. Long form processes are usually 4-6 full days. An online (equivalent) process or a short process can be held over 2-3 days, if you are scaling down. See the scaling deliberation section below.

Deliberation isn't about holding a short workshop or evening meeting.

BLANK PAGE REPORT

Deliberation requires that participants respond to the remit by writing their own report. Starting with a blank page, they refine and agree on their final recommendations, then present their report directly to decision makers for consideration.

Deliberation isn't about providing options or a draft report. Nor does the organisation gather feedback to their own report. It allows the council to hear directly from their community without any interpretation from consultants or council officers.



CLEAR REMIT

Deliberation is about the deliberating group responding to a remit – or primary question - that goes to the core of the issue, shares the dilemma, and promotes open discussion. The remit question is super clear.

Deliberation isn't about responding to easy issues. It allows council to receive solutions to complex problems.



TRANSPARENT

Deliberation is a public process that is seeking to build trust in democratic decision making and as such all aspects should be made public, unless there are extenuating circumstances. Members of the public should be able to observe the deliberating group in action and the report of the group should be made public immediately after it is handed to the key decision maker. All information considered by the group should be considered public and be on the project website. Videoring the proceedings and/or participant vox pops are other ways to increase the transparency of the deliberation.

Deliberation isn't about working behind closed doors. It allows the public to see that it has been a fair process.





INDEPENDENT FACILITATION

Deliberation is designed and facilitated by an independent professional facilitator with experience in deliberation. Facilitation enables individuals to work through a designed set of activities (conversations) to collectively and productively produce an outcome (recommendations). Facilitators ensure that all group members are given equal opportunity to participate.

Deliberation isn't about the group being led to a predetermined result.

INCLUSIVE

Deliberation requires that barriers to participation are removed so that anyone feels they could participate in a deliberation. Some barriers are easily managed, for example, paying people an honorarium to cover the costs of their participation (travel, childcare etc). Also, support can be provided to people living with poor sight or hearing and meetings can be held in accessible venues. Other barriers, such as people not having the time or considering that 'this is not for them' are harder to remove.

Deliberation isn't about excluding people and it ensures that council hears from a true cross section of its community.



THEY ACTUALLY INVITED THEIR CRITICS TO JOIN THE PANEL AND GIVE THEIR OPINION AND HELP THEM MAKE NEW POLICIES. WOW. I WAS IMPRESSED.

**STUART, PANELLIST,
Barwon Water Price Submission Community Panel**

DELIBERATION PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

There are a number of key decisions to be made by a council in planning a deliberative process as listed below. Some of these decisions require councillor input and agreement, such as the remit and the level of influence being offered to the deliberating group. Other decisions may be made by senior staff or a project team.

A co-design workshop early in the process is highly valuable. It is held between the process designers/facilitators and the council's project team, executive team, and possibly councillors. It has the benefit of ensuring all key players have the same expectations and understanding of the deliberation.

KEY DECISIONS

Deciding whether to deliberate

Is deliberation the appropriate (or required) engagement process for this topic or problem?

Choosing a deliberation process designer, facilitator, and recruiter

The process designer and the facilitators are often the same person/group.

Deciding on the key macro design elements with the process designer

- Remit - the core problem or dilemma.
- The level of influence you are offering to the deliberating group (assumed to be collaborate or above on the IAP2 spectrum) and the related promise being made to the group.
- The structure of the output – is it a list of recommendations, a vision, set of strategies or similar.

Achieving a representative group

- The size of the deliberating group and the area they are being drawn from (usually the whole municipality).
- The demographic makeup of the group, that is, the stratification targets. These are based on key demographics such as gender, age, geographic spread or socio-economic status. Targets set usually reflect demographic statistics for your municipality e.g. if 20% of your municipality lives in one suburb or town, then you will select 20% of the group from that suburb or town.
- Recruitment method - will you recruit via a postal invitation or some other method.

Choosing the form of deliberation

- Format of the deliberation – e.g. a community panel (citizens' jury), deliberative poll or other deliberative process.
- Other engagement work required to support the deliberation - often deliberative processes are preceded by a broad scale (wider) engagement phase that allows any member of the public to provide input or offer their view. This might be done via a range of methods such as surveys, pop-up events, open workshops, or discussion groups. Targeted discussion groups are often held with those people who may be less likely to take part in these activities or less likely to express interest in being on the deliberative group.
- Number of days/hours of deliberation to ensure enough time for the group to hear information, weigh up options, and come to judgement.

**SOME OF THE BEST IDEAS
CAN COME FROM PEOPLE
YOU WOULDN'T EXPECT
THEM TO COME FROM.**

**ERIKA, PANELLIST,
Kingston Customer Service
Charter Community Panel**

Deciding on the information you will provide to the deliberating group

- The suite of written information inputs and the categories of speakers (council speakers, independent technical experts, interest group representatives, and speakers decided upon by the deliberating group). The intent is to ensure that the group is provided with a balanced and full range of evidence and views, including from people they trust to provide accurate information.

Deciding the logistics

- Setting the dates.
- Booking a suitable venue – generally with a lot of floor space for different activities and wall space for displaying data.
- Resourcing the process internally.
- If operating online, deciding on the most suitable online meeting platform and how to mitigate any internet connection issues for group members.

SCALING DELIBERATION

The more deliberative principles (deliberative practices) you integrate into a process, the more 'deliberative' in nature the approach becomes.

By understanding and evolving your engagement approach to include different forms of these deliberative principles, you can mature your practice over time.

The following table outlines some examples of how each principle can be applied at a 'higher level' or 'large scale' and at a 'lower level' or 'small scale'. Both low- and high-level approaches will achieve reasonable outcomes. However, they will differ in terms of intensity of effort and the level of ownership over or acceptance of the final outcome that can be achieved.

**IT FELT LIKE WE
REALLY COUNTED,
LIKE OUR OPINION
REALLY COUNTED,
IT WASN'T JUST
SOMETHING THEY
WERE DOING TO
TICK A BOX.**

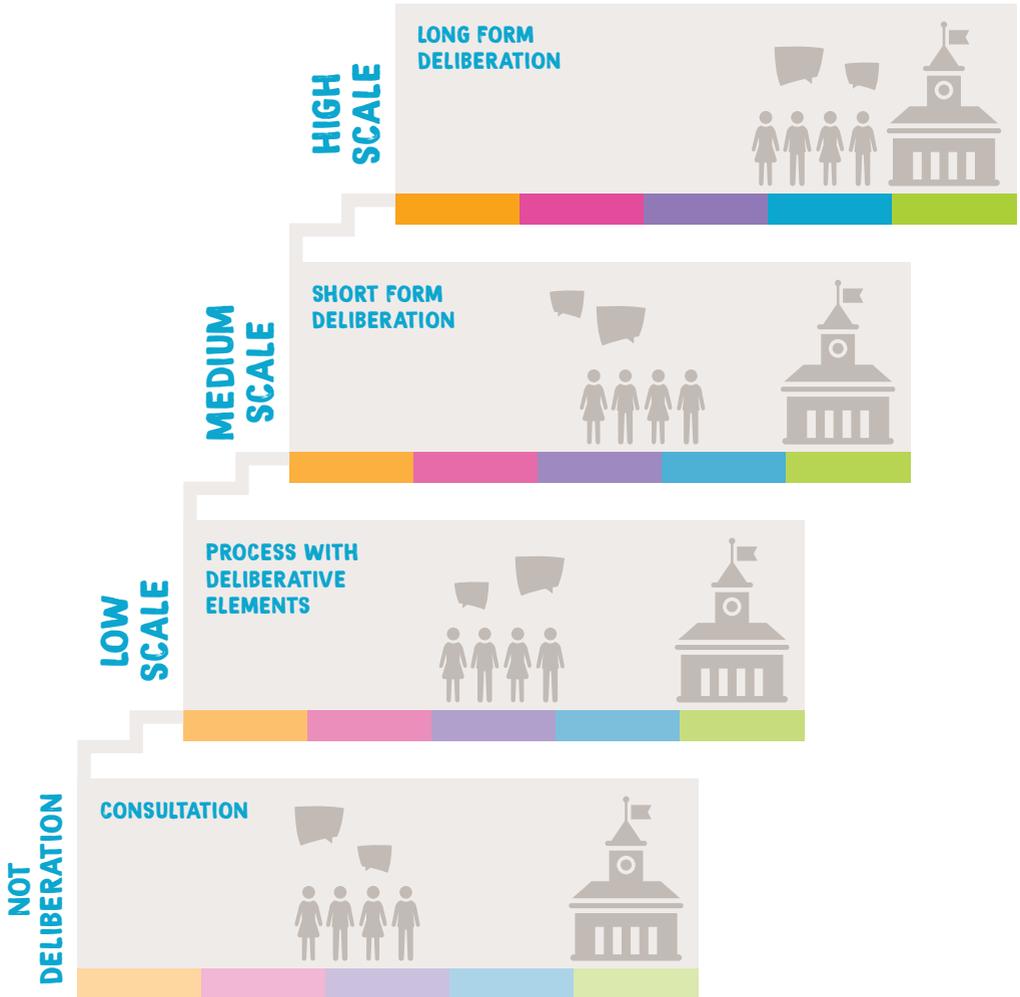
**VERONICA, PANELLIST,
Barwon Water Price
Submission Community
Panel**

Whether you apply a principle at a 'higher' or 'lower' level is determined during the engagement planning (co-design) process and depends on key factors such as the level of:

- ▀ community interest in the project
- ▀ community impact of the project
- ▀ political interest in the issue
- ▀ media interest in the issue
- ▀ complexity associated with the project (how hard it is to find a good middle ground or the best resolution to the problem, whether there is a clear answer to the issue or if there is 'no right answer').
- ▀ current outrage or polarisation around the issue.

It is also possible to mix and match the different levels for each principle in a way that best matches your project needs and constraints. This table presents high to low scale deliberative practices based on the five most important principles in terms of scaling.

The level of **involvement and trust** between community and decision makers, is shaped by the level of deliberative principles embedded in the process.



- Influential
- Deliberative
- Informative
- Representative
- Time

HIGH SCALE

LONG FORM DELIBERATION

If all principles are enacted at a high scale, the process would be considered a **long-form deliberation**, and would be **collaborate** on the IAP2 spectrum.

INFLUENTIAL



The Mayor, Councillors, and CEO publicly commit to the level of influence the group will have and what they will do with the recommendations (the promise).

The deliberative group presents their recommendations directly to the Mayor and CEO.

Following the deliberation, the Council responds, clearly outlining what recommendations the organisation will implement and what they won't, and why.

DELIBERATIVE



The participants identify their own ideas, consider all information available, weigh up the options and trade-offs, and come to judgement on the best way forward. They prepare their own recommendations in response to the remit or challenge.

During the process, the Council prepares a 'response' to the group's draft recommendations, seeking clarity where needed. The group considers this response before finalising their recommendations.

The group's level of agreement on each recommendation are sought to determine which have super majority (80%) support.

INFORMATIVE



Extensive information is provided to and considered by the group. This includes a background document, responses to fact checks, questions answered throughout process, organisational speakers, curated external speakers with diverse and opposing views and speakers nominated by the deliberative group.

TIME



More time (4-6 days) provided face-to-face or between sessions to weigh up options, consider trade-offs, and find common ground before coming to agreement on recommendations.

REPRESENTATIVE



Fully randomised and stratified sample of the impacted community.

Selected through an independent recruitment process.

Stratified to match key demographics or other targets which are chosen to ensure the group represents the community affected by a decision.

MEDIUM SCALE

SHORT FORM DELIBERATION

If all principles are enacted at a medium scale (or the process includes only one or two high level approaches) it would be considered a **short-form deliberation** and be **involve/collaborate** on the IAP2 spectrum.

INFLUENTIAL



The Mayor, Councillors, and CEO publicly commit to the level of influence the group will have and what they will do with the recommendations (the promise).

Senior decision maker/s receive the group's recommendations.

Following the deliberation, the Council responds, clearly outlining what recommendations the organisation will implement and what they won't, and why.

DELIBERATIVE



Participants prepare their own ideas/options and levels of agreement are identified. Some level of consensus is sought, however, the group has reduced ability to negotiate together.

The process may (or may not) include some level of organisational response to the group's draft recommendations during the process.

INFORMATIVE



A background document is prepared and the organisation responds to the group's questions throughout process.

The group hears from curated speakers organised by the host organisation (a set of speakers with diverse and opposing views), however, the group does not select its own speakers.



REPRESENTATIVE

Fully or partly randomised group of participants. The deliberative group possibly includes some targeted participants.

A randomised group of people might also be asked to consider an issue and their input compared alongside those not randomised.



TIME

Deliberation occurs over less time (2-3 days). Participants may also be asked to undertake their own local conversations using e.g. a deliberative style conversation kit. There is time for people to become better informed and engage in dialogue together. There is less time for reflection and grappling with trade-offs before coming to agreement on recommendations. The 80% super majority may be harder to attain in this shorter timeframe.

LOW SCALE

PROCESS WITH DELIBERATIVE ELEMENTS

If all principles are enacted at a low scale, or only some principles were enacted, it would be considered a **process with deliberative elements** and would be **involve-consult** on the IAP2 spectrum.

INFLUENTIAL



No promise made.

There is no presentation of the output to the Council decision makers rather all input gathered through the engagement activities is summarised usually by council officers or a consultant.

The organisation responds (or not) to the input with a 'response document' outlining what they have done with the ideas collated.

Senior decision-makers are not involved in the process.

DELIBERATIVE



Organisation presents options and participants share their thinking but no shared ideas or levels of agreement are sought.

INFORMATIVE



Clear background materials (simpler in style) are provided. The organisations responds to the group's questions during the workshop.

REPRESENTATIVE



Self-selected participants, invited stakeholders, and, where possible, some randomly recruited participants.

TIME



Participants may be asked to deliberate in different ways, not always face-to-face or synchronous online processes. This might include a values based survey/poll, a deliberative online asynchronous conversation. There is little time for dialogue and no time for resolving the different of views of participants in workshops of one day or less.

NOT DELIBERATION

CONSULTATION

If no deliberative principles are enacted, then this is **not considered deliberative practice** and would be **consult** on the IAP2 spectrum.

INFLUENTIAL



These activities are usually low influence, for example: survey, drop-in, or submission process.

No promise made.

All input gathered through the engagement activities is summarised usually by council officers or a consultant.

Senior decision-makers are not involved in the process.

DELIBERATIVE



Participants identify ideas in response to a set of questions or a pre-prepared document/options. Views expressed are an immediate reaction, and based on personal experiences, offering only a very broad sense of public opinion.

Often participants produce a list of possible ideas that the council will need to assess and decide upon.

INFORMATIVE



Limited or no information provided, or the information provided is simple and doesn't delve into the complexities and trade-offs around an issue.

REPRESENTATIVE



Completely self-selected participants – often those most likely to take part are people with a high interest or stake in the issue such as members of interest groups or people with more time available to get involved.

TIME



No time to think. Immediate opinions or responses are received from people who are usually involved in council engagement activities and who have shared their thoughts with council previously.

No effort is made to bring people together and hence find common ground amongst people with different views.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Deliberative processes, like any authentic engagement approach, require clarity about roles and responsibilities.

COUNCILLORS

- Sign-off on key design elements: the remit, scope, and promise.
- Support the process.
- Trust that everyday people can do this work.
- Receive the panel's recommendations.
- Make the final decision.

COUNCIL STAFF - EXECUTIVE AND PROJECT TEAM

- Spend time planning and preparing to engage - a codesign session is valuable.
- Agree on all design elements with the process designer.
- Decide and create information to support the panel.
- Undertake communications to support the recruitment of the panel.
- Be available to present to the panel and answer their questions.
- Support the process, provide briefings, and manage expectations within the council.
- Brief stakeholder and interest groups.

- Provide a continuous flow of communications to the public to ensure transparency of the process.

STAKEHOLDERS & INTEREST GROUPS

- Be briefed about the deliberation process.
- Take part in the codesign process, if appropriate and invited.
- Nominate speakers for the panel, given their in depth knowledge of the topic, and ensure interest group views are put to the panel (optional).
- Observe the panel process.

PROCESS DESIGNER

- Work with the council's project team to agree on the key settings for the deliberation:
 - Remit, scope, and promise
 - Size and demographic make-up of the panel
 - Recruitment method
 - Format of the deliberation and number of days
- In most processes your chosen facilitator will work with the council to design the process. In some cases, where organisations like the newDemocracy Foundation (nDF) are involved, that organisation will be the primary process designer.

FACILITATORS

- Bring a specialist skill in both designing and facilitating a deliberative process.
- Independent and neutral.
- Uphold the principles of deliberation in both the design and facilitation of the panel.
- Design the overall roadmap for the process and the detail of each panel sitting day.
- Manage the panel and the process on sitting days - moving the group through a set of steps that enables them to complete their work, managing the time and energy of the group and ensuring that everyone gets to participate equally.

INDEPENDENT STEERING COMMITTEE OR INTEGRITY OFFICER

- Some high-profile deliberations have an independent integrity officer or steering committee appointed to oversee the integrity of the process (ensuring that it's fair and that deliberation principles are met).
- In some cases, a steering committee also develops and agrees on the information that will be presented to the panel.

RECRUITER

- Brings a specialist skill
- Independent of the council to ensure that council cannot be accused of 'hand-picking' the panel to ensure a particular outcome.
- Develops the recruitment strategy including the filters e.g. gender, age, location.
- Provides advice on recruitment methods.
- Manages the expression of interest process.
- Stratifies the list of people registered via the expression of interest process against the targets identified and selects the final deliberative group.
- Advises people of their selection or non-selection.
- Communicates with the participants as needed, managing the RSVP process for each sitting day.

DELIBERATING ONLINE

Even though most deliberations are held in face to face sessions, it has proven possible to deliberate online. This is an option that councils need to consider to ensure their work continues throughout this period of social distancing due to Covid-19. Several deliberative processes, both in Australia and overseas, have made the transition to online deliberation. Like any deliberation, however, the move online needs careful planning.

Most councils have an online engagement platform in place. They use it to provide information about engagement activities and seek the public's input through surveys, discussion threads, and other online tools. These platforms are ideal for asynchronous activities, allowing individuals to respond at any time. They are also useful support tools for a deliberation as they allow a private portal to be established for the deliberative group's own use (i.e. for discussions between meetings and providing an online library of information and outputs).

A deliberative process needs participants to come together as a group at the same time (synchronous activity) to discuss information, identify and weigh up options and come to agreement. Currently, MosaicLab is using the Zoom meeting platform because it enables people to talk in small groups in 'breakout rooms'.

Some tips for moving online include:

Meeting platform

Use an online meeting platform that allows breakout rooms (so work can be done in small groups)

Time

Consider shorter sessions and longer breaks as being online and sitting in one place can be tiring.

Panel format

Consider alternative methods like deliberative polls to shorten the time online or 'planning cells' that have people coming together in smaller groups.

Offline work between meetings

Move some of the group's work to an offline environment to reduce time online. These could be individual or small group activities. The offline commitment of time would need to be made clear to the panel when being recruited. Some offline tasks could be:

- Individual assessment and feedback on draft recommendations or proposals.
- Video presentations viewed between sessions followed by an online discussion of what was heard.
- Delegating some tasks to small, representative groups such as theming data or wordsmithing draft work (e.g. vision statements).

Some of the questions that need to be considered and are still being grappled with in relation to online deliberation include:

- Will it have an impact on recruiting a panel, that is, will more or less people be attracted to an online process?
- Will online panels allow an increase or decrease in the inclusion of groups who typically do not participate? Or will different groups be included/excluded?
- Will we be able to build relationships within the group to enable them to move from individual positions to a whole group position?
- Will the depth of the dialogue and deliberation be affected?
- Will panel members find the online environment as deeply satisfying and transformative?

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT THIS PROCESS IS, THERE'S NO RANK, NO HIERARCHY, NO ONE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANYONE ELSE, NO ONES VOICE CAN BE LOUDER THAN ANYONE ELSE'S.

MICK, PANELLIST,
Kingston Customer Service Charter Community Panel

DELIBERATING ON MULTIPLE PROJECTS

Councils are required to use deliberative practices for the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan, and Asset Plan. They may also choose to use them to address other complex issues.

Recruitment of panels is not easy, and can be expensive. Given that councils will need to have a deliberative group in place for multiple projects, it is worth considering alternatives to recruiting new groups for each topic, and methods to make recruitment easier.

STANDING PANEL

Recruit one panel and have them consider all topics for one year. This panel may need to be larger, say 60 people to allow for drop off or division over time. For example, the whole group could work on the community vision and then half the group on the council plan and the other half on the financial plan.

COMMUNITY DELIBERATORS POOL

Recruit a large group of people, say 1,000, who are prepared to be on a panel sometime over the next four years. For each deliberative process, people are randomly selected from the 1,000-person pool to create a panel or group that is descriptively representative. This pool could be recruited on a continuous basis or reconstituted every four years so that the council is not hearing from the same people over time. The larger pool could also be offered opportunities to participate in standard engagement activities, such as surveys.

LARGE SCALE PUBLICITY

In Australia, recruitment expression of interest response rates are low compared to some other countries. This may be affected by a number of factors. However, the satisfaction levels of those who participate in a deliberative process is high; most community members find the experience rewarding and often transformative. More effort is needed to educate local communities about this type of engagement, so more people say yes when they receive an invitation.

COMMUNICATING THE STORY

Communication efforts are essential to the success of a deliberative process. The community needs to know about the opportunity being offered during the recruitment phase. Once the deliberative group is operating, the community also needs to know that they are being represented, what the group is doing, and the results of their work.

Investment in a planned, comprehensive communications approach that leverages multiple channels will help to increase the numbers of people who express interest in participating in a deliberative process. Getting large numbers to say yes (register interest) is essential in ensuring the randomness and representativeness of the final group.

The community is more likely to support a decision influenced by the deliberative group's recommendations because they see that 'people like them' have considered all the issues, taken part in a transparent process, and done the work on their behalf. So, the community needs to 'see' the panel and be aware of not only what recommendations were made, but how the council has responded to them. A range of communication methods can be used, such as publishing regular bulletins about the group's work, conducting vox pop interviews with participants, and publishing video footage and images that provide an insight into the process.

**IT WAS REALLY GOOD THAT MY OPINION,
MY BIASES, COULD BE SWAYED – BASED
ON TALKING TO OTHERS IN THE GROUP
AN HEARING THEIR VIEWS.**

PAUL, JUROR,
Yarra Valley Water Citizens Jury 2017

WHEN TO USE AND NOT USE DELIBERATION

Deliberative processes are one of many techniques that exist for undertaking community engagement. It is not always the best technique for a particular situation. It is ideal to use when:

- It is a complex issue that requires considered debate.
- The problem can be clearly stated.
- There is no right answer.
- It is a political 'hot potato' and best left for local community members to decide.
- Creative or acceptable options are needed.
- Staff and decision makers are enthusiastic about the process.
- Decision makers/organisations are prepared to accept the recommendations to the maximum extent possible.
- There is a desire to hear from a diverse range of everyday people and move beyond the usual interest groups and people who typically take part in engagement activities.
- Council wants to know what an informed general public would want on the issue.

It is not wise to use it when:

- A group of experts could provide the answer.
- It is a simple issue and a survey or similar would suffice.
- The decision has in effect already been made or no decision is pending.
- Decision makers/organisations are not prepared to accept the recommendations.
- Organisations are being pressured to include stakeholders with 'an agenda' or just taking those who turn up (that is, no random selection).
- There is not enough time nor an independent facilitator available.
- There is large scale outrage about the issue – in this case, work will need to be done to address the outrage prior to moving into a deliberation.

TIPS FOR NEW STARTERS

- ▶ Start as soon as you can – planning takes time.
- ▶ Get the right skills involved early – draw on the resources of people who have experience.
- ▶ Ensure decision makers are on board.
- ▶ Co-design the process. Get everyone aligned internally and access input from external (community/ stakeholders) if you can.
- ▶ Keep internal and external stakeholders well briefed during the process.
- ▶ Be prepared for internal 'push back'. When you change the way you do things some people feel uncertain and unsure of their role and whether it will work. Treat this like an 'internal change process' and help people along the journey.

- ▶ Doing deliberation for the first time is like learning a new language – especially if your organisation has not done a lot of engagement before now. Take the time to do it right the first time and it will get easier.
- ▶ When there is pressure to change/adapt the process fall back to the principle of transparency.
- ▶ Where there is outrage, more time will be needed in dialogue so that people truly understand each other's views.
- ▶ Make sure roles are clear, and that there are lines of protection around the facilitators and the project team (particularly if you are using internal facilitators) this ensures a sense of independence and transparency around the process.

ABOUT MOSAICLAB

MosaicLab is a Melbourne based consultancy that specialises in designing and facilitating deliberative engagement.

Since 2014 MosaicLab has facilitated 11 long and 14 short form deliberations plus numerous projects with deliberative elements.

Long form panels (4 days or more) include:

- ▀ City of Melbourne, Ten Year Financial Plan.*
- ▀ DELWP, Local Government Victoria, Democracy in Geelong.*
- ▀ Yarra Valley Water, Price Submission.*
- ▀ Barwon Water, Price Submission.
- ▀ Melbourne Water & Western Water - Sunbury Integrated Water Management Planning.
- ▀ Fraser Coast Regional Council, Hervey Bay Esplanade Planning.

Short form panels (2-3 days) include:

- ▀ Bayside City Council, Bayside 2050 Community Plan.
- ▀ Melton City Council Engagement Framework.
- ▀ City of Melbourne, Queen Victoria Market.
- ▀ Hobsons Bay City Council, Hobsons Bays 2030 Community Vision.
- ▀ Western Water, Tariff Structure Review.
- ▀ Surf Coast Shire, Spring Creek Structure Plan.

** Panels delivered in association with the newDemocracy Foundation*

For more information and resources:
www.mosaiclab.com.au

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN
EXPLORING HOW DELIBERATION
COULD WORK FOR YOU AND
YOUR COUNCIL, PLEASE **CLICK
HERE** TO BOOK A SHORT 20 MIN
DISCOVERY CALL WITH ONE OF
THE MOSAICLAB DIRECTORS**

