



INCLUDING THE UNDER- REPRESENTED

FIDE - POLICY RESEARCH 02

-FIDE
FEDERATION FOR INNOVATION
IN DEMOCRACY - EUROPE

FIDE is an international non-profit organization dedicated to the participation of every day citizens in policy-making.

This paper draws on FIDE's expertise designing deliberative processes across Europe.

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01

WHO ARE THE UNDER-REPRESENTED

Deliberative democracy is based on the premise that all voices matter and that we can equally participate in decision-making. However, structural inequalities might prevent certain groups from being recruited for deliberation, skewing the process towards the socially privileged. Those structural inequalities are also present in the deliberation room, which can lead to unconscious (or conscious) biases that hinder certain voices while amplifying others. This causes particular perspectives to influence decision-making unequally.

This paper presents different methods and strategies applied in previous processes to increase the inclusion of underrepresented groups. We distinguish strategies for the two critical phases of the deliberative process: recruitment and deliberation.

It is important to acknowledge that the comprehensive range of strategies and measures outlined in this document may appear daunting to certain readers, particularly those employed in smaller municipalities or with limited resources regarding budget and staff. We recommend a careful review of the document to assess how maximum inclusivity can be achieved within the available means.

In deliberative democracy, underrepresented populations are those that face bigger barriers to be recruited or engaged by using solely democratic lotteries.

These groups may include people disadvantaged by race, ethnicity, gender identity, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, citizenship status, socioeconomic background, parental status, limited language proficiency, rural origin, renters, homeless, impoverished people, or other identities and lived experiences.



02



INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT

Deliberative democracy uses civic lotteries¹ to recruit participants that will be part of the decision-making process. The democratic lottery aims to ensure that nearly every person has an equal chance of being invited to participate. It can potentially bring mixed and diverse groups of people, including underrepresented voices, into the room. However, **a democratic lottery alone does not guarantee equity of access.** Some of the reasons these groups might find themselves excluded are: the data list used to select participants is incomplete or biased, there is a lack of time and space to participate, or the participant feels unprepared to express their opinions. Adding more targeted selection methods can offer more significant political equity for groups in a situation of vulnerability.

The first step is to identify those underrepresented groups within a given community. Once these have been detected, some of the possible strategies to increase inclusion are:



**COMBINE DIFFERENT
OUTREACH AND
ENGAGEMENT METHODS**



**PROVIDE RESOURCES
AND SUPPORT**



**PARTNER WITH ORGANISATIONS
THAT WORK WITH
UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS**



**FOLLOW-UP AFTER
THE RECRUITMENT**

1. For a general introduction to civic lotteries see: [Alonso, I. & Dejaeghere, Y., \(2022\) "Organising a democratic lottery", Federation for Innovation in Democracy - Europe](#)



COMBINE DIFFERENT OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT METHODS

OVERSAMPLING

If some specific groups are less likely to take part, increasing their quota can have positive results. This compensates for their lower participation rates and can ensure they are well-represented in the assembly. Such groups often include those with lower educational attainment, ethnic minorities, the homeless and the youngest.

One way to do this is by sending a bigger number of invitation letters to areas with a higher proportion of the target group.

The [Climate Assembly of the UK](#) selected 80% of the participants from a random selection of the UK household address in the Royal Mail's Postcode Address file, whereas 20% were randomly selected from identified strategic areas. Groups such as those coming from Northern Ireland were thus over-sampled (also by reserving more seats for them) to guarantee their participation.

OUTREACH RANDOM SELECTION METHOD

An intense follow-up to engage those who have not responded to the invitation to participate (e.g. by calling them) can increase their participation. Direct contact with the invitee will help the organiser understand how to cover their needs to encourage participation.

USING A MORE PERSONAL APPROACH

Knocking on people's doors or recruiting people in the street can be more effective than letters to reach out to marginalised community members and engage them. This can help to build trust in the process and convey the importance of their voices being represented. It is also a good opportunity to provide extra information and help these individuals to get involved. However, **it is crucial to ensure that these outreach efforts are carried out in a respectful and non-intrusive manner.** One must be aware of the potential challenges or barriers individuals in these communities may face. It is, therefore, helpful to work with community organisations or leaders to identify the most effective ways to reach out to and engage with these communities. These outreach efforts can be resource-intensive and require careful planning and trained recruiters that ensure a certain level of randomness.

The German organisation [Es geht LOS](#) uses a combination of [targeted outreach](#) and follow-up to encourage participation in their deliberative processes.

To have 100 people participating, they first randomly select and invite around 120 people. Those who do not respond are personally invited at their doorstep and asked what they need to participate. By taking this step, they convince a lot more people to join the assembly, and also gain insight into the reasons why people do not initially respond.

It's important to consider the possible effects of this approach. Some individuals who are selected but don't respond may simply not be interested, so it's crucial to respect their decision. Additionally, the follow-up efforts should be carried out in a non-intrusive manner, as some people may not want to be approached at their doorstep.



PROVIDE RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

Socioeconomic challenges can restrict the ability to participate in a deliberative process. Ensuring resources and support are available to all individuals needing them will foster inclusivity and equity among participants. **They should be explicitly mentioned in the invitation letter.** Most of the time, not all barriers are identified ahead of the process by the organisers. It is, therefore, important that participants can communicate their specific needs to them.

There are several different forms that compensation and incentives for participating can take:

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

Many deliberative processes include a fixed sum or honorarium to stimulate participation. The organising team should ensure that the monetary compensation does not interfere with social provisions the participant might receive. Other financial incentives include the reimbursement of travel and accommodation.

In the Brussels parliament, for example, the members are paid on a volunteer basis which does not cause any interference with other public financial aid.

In Germany, a process called “planning cells” used a procedure in which the individual compensation matches the loss of earnings, but this involves calculating the specific allowance from person to person.

NON-FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

Providing non-financial assistance has proven to contribute to a higher response rate among participants, improving their inclusion. This assistance can take the shape of support and resources, including the organisation of transportation in specific cases (for persons with disabilities, elderly people...), providing child care, or language interpretation to help individuals overcome barriers to participation. If particular members request this, the organisers can see if it is within their means to provide very specific needs. For example, providing sign-language translation might be straightforward in a national process but not as easy for a small rural community with a limited budget.





PARTNER WITH ORGANISATIONS THAT WORK WITH UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

Charities, NGOs, and communities of identity, such as LGBTQ+ groups or minority associations, will likely have strong relationships with those facing inequalities. These organisations and partners can provide valuable insights and perspectives on the needs and concerns of the underrepresented or marginalised². To collaborate in inclusive recruitment with the different organisations:

Ask community leaders and ‘ambassadors’ to communicate about the deliberative process. Before the [Climate Assembly of Tartu](#) (Estonia), the organising team contacted young social media influencers to help build bridges with the youngsters and inform their audience about the process.

ORGANISATIONS WORKING ON THE GROUND

Collaborate with organisations that work with specific vulnerable groups, such as homeless people, disabled persons, or those with mental health issues. These organisations can help to facilitate their participation in the process by helping to randomly select participants with these backgrounds³. Similarly, collaborating with organisations that work with elderly populations, such as retirement homes or assisted living facilities, can help to ensure that the voices and perspectives of older individuals are included in the process. Any requests for help with these organisations should be seen as mutually beneficial.



FOLLOW-UP AFTER THE RECRUITMENT

Maintaining communication with participants between the recruitment and the start of the meetings is an important way to ensure their willingness to participate and builds trust in the process. It will help to keep them informed and address any concerns or questions they may have.

2. For a detailed account see: Lightbody, R. (2017) *‘Hard to reach’ or ‘easy to ignore’? Promoting equality in community engagement*, Edinburgh: What Works Scotland.

3. It should be avoided to designate spoke-persons or staff from these organisations as participants.



03

INCLUSIVE DELIBERATION

Designing an inclusive, deliberative process requires rethinking the recruitment phase to overcome structural inequalities and focusing on the ‘internal exclusion’ in the room where the selected participants deliberate. Deliberative democracy is a process that prioritises fair and open communication and reasoned dialogue, where all participants have, ideally, equal opportunities to contribute. However, not all of us are similarly proficient or comfortable as speakers in a group and the uptake of our reflections is not always equally considered by others.

**EQUALISING ACCESS
DOES NOT MEAN THAT
THE CONVERSATION EQUALISES**

Groups facing structural inequalities are affected by thresholds in different ways

1 Deliberative democracy is mostly based on a specific speaking style that is not natural for everyone, especially for some underrepresented groups. It assumes speakers have had the same level of education and training. Certain professions involve skills like public speaking and group conversations, while others never require them. If deliberation is not balanced, those with more experience and education in these areas will have an advantage over those who do not. This can lead to certain groups being unable to influence others or have their voices heard equally. Relying solely on reason-giving and argumentation for deliberation might silence or devalue the voices of participants who struggle to express themselves in those terms.

2 Persistent inequalities based on race, class or gender can prevent certain participants from being heard or considered equally. These inequalities can impact how participants are perceived and treated by others during the deliberative process. For instance, unconscious biases can lead some participants to dismiss the ideas of women or those without formal education due to social prejudices.

To ensure that those who typically speak less are heard and that those who usually dominate the exchange consider the views of others, some possible strategies are:



Getting people to participate



Ensure that the dynamics of the deliberation are fair



GETTING PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE

The setting of the deliberation can impact the inclusivity of the process; there are several ways to address this:

I. Choose an appropriate space: The space where deliberation takes place can influence the dynamics of the process. Formal spaces, such as parliament chambers, may induce a sense of legitimacy but also hierarchy and deference. Familiar spaces may contribute to the comfort of citizens and the horizontality among them. Round tables are much better places to encourage dialogue than other arrangements, such as lecture halls.

II. Consider accessibility: Aim for accessible spaces for those with disabilities, including those with hearing or sight impairments.

III. Ensure that all participants understand the information being presented

- Provide interpretation and translation services in the languages used in the deliberative process.

- Provide all documents in multiple languages if possible, including presentations from experts.

- Use plain language. Communications written in simple language, avoiding jargon or unnecessary technical expressions, ensure that all participants understand the presented information.

- If possible, get presentations from experts in advance, so there is time to simplify slides if necessary.

IV. Use technology, such as video conferencing or online tools, to facilitate the deliberative process and make it more accessible to a broader range of participants. Also, be aware of the technical skills the participants have, as they might need extra support.

The [Brussels' deliberative committees](#), a model of deliberation comprising members of the Brussels parliament as well as random selected citizens, have placed special emphasis on addressing the needs of four marginalised groups: young people, individuals living in poverty, persons with disabilities and people with children.

In order to enhance accessibility for young people, a preparatory meeting is conducted prior to the start of the committee, and these participants can be accompanied throughout the meetings for a better comprehension and engagement with the information.

Moreover, the deliberative committees of Brussels ensure that the assembly buildings are accessible to persons with reduced mobility and assistance is provided to participants with hearing, speech or visual impairments upon request. Invitations are issued in the two major languages of the Region (French & Dutch), and are also available in five additional languages online (which is mentioned in those languages in the invitation letter). For those who face literacy issues the letters and basic information are also available in audio format. Furthermore, the committees endeavor to accommodate other languages during the deliberation within the available resources, including the option for individuals to bring a designated 'buddy' who can translate or assist them during the proceedings.



ENSURE THAT THE DYNAMICS OF THE DELIBERATION ARE FAIR

- I. Make this a separate element in facilitation training: A well-run deliberative process must, ideally, include well-trained facilitators who play a crucial role in driving, shaping and supporting the deliberation in a way that promotes equal participation from all group members. The role of the facilitators is crucial in balancing the unfamiliarity of the specific language used and the setting for certain groups in the room, avoiding their exclusion from the deliberative exchange due to the use of 'privileged language'. Facilitators need to be aware of societal biases that will value the credibility of the speaker's arguments differently.
 - II. Establish ground rules: Establishing clear rules at the beginning of the deliberation helps create a respectful and inclusive environment. These rules should include guidelines for respectful communication, such as active listening, finding common ground and ensuring that all voices are heard.
-
- III. Be aware of any power imbalances within the group and take steps to address them. This might involve:
 - Encouraging equal participation from all group members. Take steps to ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak and contribute. This might involve methods such as the "go-around", in which each participant can speak. Facilitators should observe if some members are less active or often stay silent and act on it. The role of the note-taker facilitates this by keeping track of who has spoken.
 - Encouraging active listening: Encourage everyone to listen actively to one another and to value diverse perspectives. This can help to create a more inclusive and respectful environment.
 - Using inclusive language: Use inclusive and respectful language for all individuals, regardless of their background or identity. Avoid jargon, technical terms or culturally specific references that may be inaccessible to some individuals. In many cases, facilitators may possess a higher level of educational attainment, which may cause them to inadvertently use unfamiliar or exclusionary vocabulary to certain individuals. Merely announcing that participants can flag such language may not suffice. Some participants may be reluctant to do so, given the high degree of shame attached to admitting they do not understand certain terms.

- IV.** Consider different learning styles so individuals with diverse backgrounds, abilities, and preferences can better access and understand shared information. Various communication methods such as argumentation, visual aids or storytelling help to ensure an accessible and inclusive process. Moreover, including a diverse panel of experts and lived experiences of ordinary people with different backgrounds will benefit the learning process.
- V.** Emotions are critical for inclusive deliberation: Emotions can shape individuals' values, priorities, and beliefs and affect their ability to engage in rational and critical thinking. In a deliberative process, using emotions ensures that diverse perspectives and experiences are taken into account and that decisions are made with a complete understanding of the potential consequences and impacts on different groups of people. Additionally, using emotions to communicate can help to create a sense of community and solidarity among individuals with different values and beliefs.

In the Irish Constitutional Convention on marriage equality, the voice of the children of gay parents was key to building empathy among the deliberating citizens.

During the Irish Citizen Assembly on abortion, those with lived experience of difficult pregnancies allowed members to engage with the issue in a far less abstract way than merely listening to the voices of experts.



04

NEXT STEPS

The following points are FIDE's recommendations to enable a further inclusion in deliberative processes.

1.

Regulate the remuneration received by assembly members to not interfere with other social provisions

In most assemblies, citizens receive compensation for their contribution to the community. Paradoxically, this compensation can hinder the participation of underrepresented groups if it is perceived as income that could affect their eligibility for social benefits. In several countries, an income threshold exists beyond which one may no longer be entitled to social provisions. Consequently, some have resorted to the creative use of 'volunteer status' or other forms of reimbursements that fall outside the 'income' scope. Establishing clear guidelines and a legal framework addressing this would ensure that all citizens, regardless of their socio-economic status, can participate in assemblies without fear of losing access to social benefits.

2.

Provide a legal basis for a 'civic leave' status recognising participation in a deliberative process as a form of civic duty

Implement a basis for a 'civic leave' status to facilitate greater participation. This is particularly relevant for low-income individuals who are more likely to work non-standard schedules that make it challenging to attend deliberative processes, typically held on weekends. Introducing an official 'civic leave' status that would allow individuals to be excused from work or education to attend these processes could make organising weekday meetings possible, thereby improving accessibility. Forms of 'civic leave' exist in many countries for other types of civic duty, such as jury duty. Therefore, it would be possible to extend this concept to deliberative processes.

3.

Provide services to support the inclusion of underrepresented groups within deliberative processes.

Smaller municipalities with limited resources may find providing services that facilitate inclusion, such as a body-sign-language interpretation, challenging. However, the ability to promote inclusion should not be contingent upon the availability of resources in a given community. Higher-level authorities often have access to a broader range of resources, including translation services and facilitators, which can be shared with smaller municipalities to enhance equity.

4.

Standardise deliberative processes and make sure the methodology includes an inclusion strategy

To convey a fair and inclusive deliberative process, it is essential to standardise the principles practitioners should follow. An important aspect of this standardisation is the inclusion strategy, which should ensure diversity and representation among participants. A deliberative process cannot claim to be representative if it does not embrace an inclusion strategy.

Inclusion is an ongoing process that requires continuous work, attention and adaptation. There is no single solution to address the challenge of including underrepresented groups. Instead, it requires a sustained commitment to evaluating and improving the deliberative process to ensure that it remains inclusive and fair for all participants.

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Imprint:

April 2023 FIDE

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This research paper presents an overview of possible strategies to facilitate an inclusive recruitment and deliberation in a deliberative process.

Citation:

Alonso, I. & Dejaeghere, Y., (2023) "Including the underrepresented"
Federation for Innovation in Democracy - Europe



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