

DELIBERATIVE ENGAGEMENT

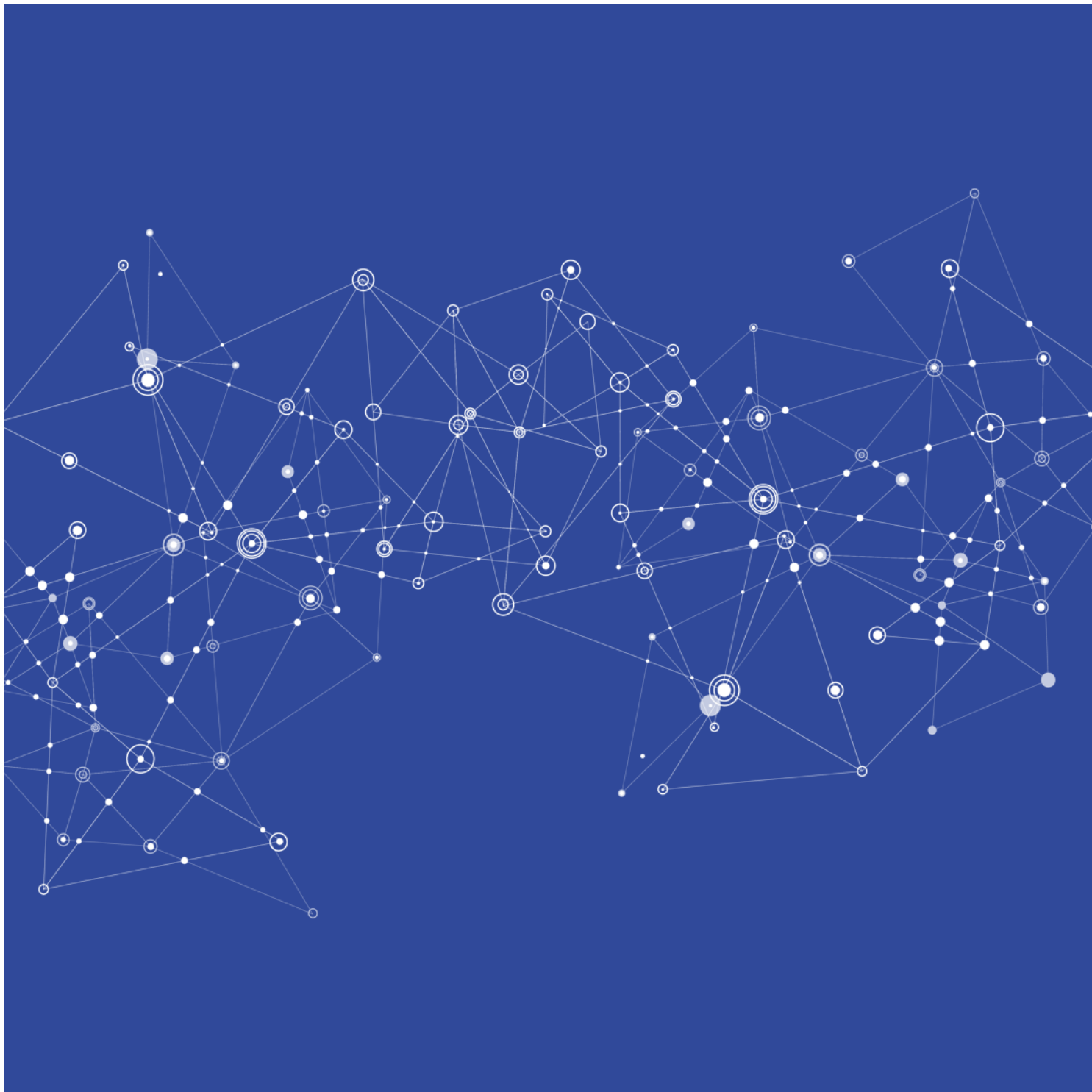
BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

Ipsos MORI's Qualitative Research and Engagement Centre comprises experts in qualitative methods, dialogue and engagement, specialising in bringing the public voice into policy making

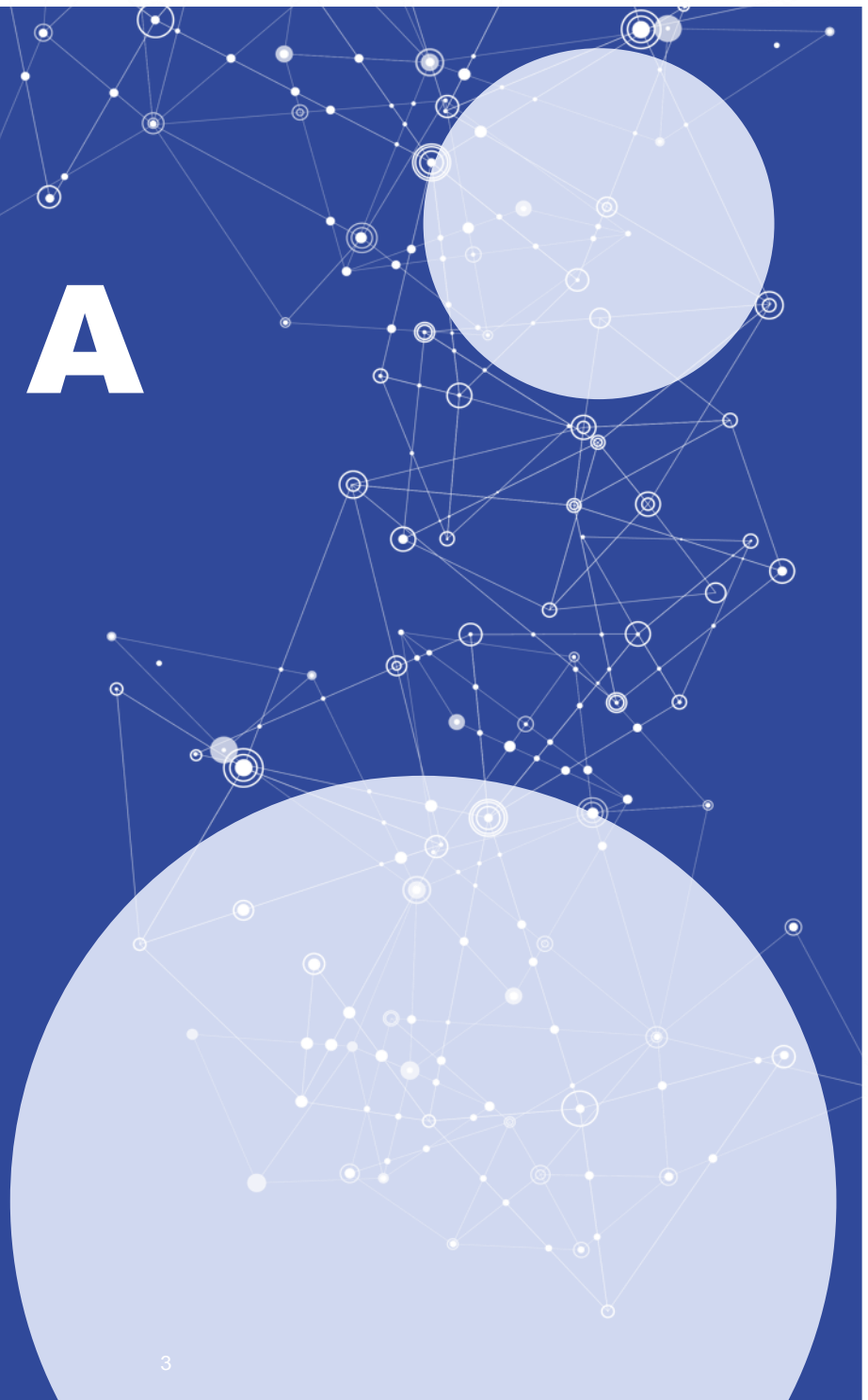
03 RESEARCH METHODS TOOLKIT

Ipsos MORI





PART A



INTRODUCTION

The first section of this guide provides an introduction to deliberative engagement: what it is, when and why you might use it, what it involves and some of the important considerations.

What is deliberative engagement?

Deliberative engagement is about putting people – through informed discussions, involving diverse perspectives, and understanding lived experiences – at the heart of decision making. It differs from other forms of engagement in that it allows those involved to spend time considering and discussing an issue at length before they come to a considered view.

Deliberative democracy is not a new concept. Rooted in Athenian democracy, this school of thought in political theory claims that political decisions should be the product of fair and reasonable discussion and debate among citizens.

The current political context is dominated by polarisation, mistrust in government and politicians, misinformation and a perception of a lack of transparency around how decisions are made. Thus bringing together citizens from across society to deliberate on complex societal issues has become appealing to policy and decision makers.

Deliberation involves dialogue and debate and has four key features:

1. It weighs the consequences of each option for action, and the views of others
2. It requires accurate and relevant information which reflects diverse perspectives
3. There is a broadly shared evaluative criteria about reaching decisions which takes into account the views of others
4. Participants use these criteria to propose solutions, weigh up trade-offs and find common ground to reach a decision.

When and why might you use it?

Deliberative engagement tends to be used to address complex societal problems that impact on everyone. These can be national issues such as climate change ¹, what the UK's post-Brexit relations with the European Union should be ², assisted dying ³ or abortion ⁴. Regional bodies and local authorities have used these approaches as well to address local issues such as reducing congestion, improving air quality and providing better transport⁵ and the use of health and care data.⁶

Though deliberative engagement is commonly used 'upstream' in the policy cycle, it can be used at any stage:

- Agenda setting (what should we focus on in the future?)
- Policy formulation (what are the policy options?)
- Policy adoption (which policy option should we choose?)
- Implementation (how/where/for who should this policy be?)
- Evaluation (how do we measure how well this policy is working?)

This form of engagement can lead to more trustworthy decisions, which should help build trust and relationships between government and official bodies and citizens.

What does it involve?

Deliberative engagement processes involve three main elements:

- **Learning:** Participants learn from each other, hearing the views and experiences of others who bring different perspectives to the table. Participants also hear from experts, learn about the evidence and facts and about the different viewpoints there are on the topic. Participants can also be encouraged to learn outside of the workshops, for example by being provided with additional reading material or video content.
- **Deliberation:** Participants start to tackle the issues together, as citizens. They try and understand the positions of each other, as well as those who are not represented in the room, and collectively consider the dilemmas and associated trade-offs that must be weighed up.
- **Decision-making:** Participants move towards drawing collective conclusions. Reaching consensus might be explored but is not necessarily the goal. Participants are usually encouraged to make recommendations or statements of expectations, and these can be prioritised and even voted on.

Deliberative engagement can be carried out at any scale. The process can involve 10-20 participants (for example a Citizens' Jury ⁷ or a Citizens' Advisory Group ⁸), a group of around 50-100 (for example a Citizens' Assembly ⁹) or hundreds and even thousands (Deliberative Polling ¹⁰).



<https://www.onelondon.online/>

What are the important considerations?

There are a number of important considerations that need to be thought through before embarking on a deliberative engagement process.

- **Which method to chose:** Certain forms of deliberative engagement adhere to strict rules or processes to ensure a set of consistent principles are followed in practice. For example, a defining feature of a Citizens' Assembly is the random selection known as sortition ¹¹.
- **Cost:** Deliberative engagement processes can be costly, due to the large design and running costs. Contrary to the perception that running deliberative engagement online might save money, in fact it usually ends up about the same. The money saved on venues and travel is replaced with the need to facilitate smaller groups, break down longer sessions into smaller chunks and have extra staff on the platform to assist with the technology and to support participants.
- **Time:** The process of running a deliberative engagement is intensive and can take months to design, deliver and report on the findings. This said, and there are several recent examples that show that this work can be delivered at pace to feed into live decisions, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic ¹²
¹³.
- **Jeopardy:** There is a degree of risk involved. From opening the policy area up to interrogation, through to the reality that you might not get the decisions those commissioning the process are hoping for.



PART B



GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGNING DELIBERATIVE ENGAGEMENT

The following ten principles for designing deliberative engagement are based on our own experience at Ipsos MORI – which we have finessed through working with engagement partners¹⁴ – and the broader participatory democracy literature.

Principle 1

Define a clear question

Principle 3

Ensure stakeholder buy-in

Principle 5

Provide balanced information

Principle 2

Engage at the right time, with enough time

Principle 4

Commit resources and accountability

Principle 6

Scrutinise the project from start to finish

Principle 8

Put inclusivity at the heart of the method

Principle 10

Represent the public accurately

Principle 7

Reflect the diversity of views

Principle 9

Transparency of the process, privacy for participants

Principle 1

Define a clear question

A clearly defined social challenge which is translated into a question – or set of questions – benefits everyone. Practitioners can then design focused engagement materials, the public will be motivated by knowing how their views will be used, and policy and decision makers will have a clear set of actions to take forward. The question should involve genuine dilemmas or trade-offs for the public to work through during informed discussions.

Take time at the start of the process to identify what is on and off the table. What can the public's input influence? What is immovable? You need to know the answer to both of these questions to make the best use of time and manage expectations around the deliberation's impact.

You should also work backwards from your desired outputs when refining your question. Are you generating options or choosing between existing alternatives? Are you seeking consensus or welcoming a variety of different ways forward? Do you want high-level principles or detailed recommendations?

Clear questions also ensure that every party involved in the design, delivery, and evaluation of the deliberation are on the same page. Clarification activities can include:

- Co-design meetings with commissioners, engagement practitioners and stakeholders
- Evidence reviews of previous research and deliberative engagement
- Expert interviews (not only with academics, but also representatives of affected groups)
- Pilot research, mini-deliberations or polling to 'test the water' on key issues

Commissioners should usually try and attempt some of this process ahead of procurement to ensure the engagement process is realistic, cost-effective, and impactful ([Principle 4](#)).

Principle 2

Engage at the right time, with enough time

Whichever stage of the policy cycle you choose to engage the public, the deliberation must be at an early enough point that the answer is not already decided. Otherwise, ensuring stakeholder buy-in becomes challenging (see [Principle 3](#)). And without the public having the opportunity to truly influence the outcome, this risks undermining trust in the decision-making process.

There also needs to be enough time to plan, deliver, disseminate, and evaluate. Work backwards from key policy and political deadlines, creating a detailed project plan. Cutting corners is a false economy. It is better to choose a realistic process that can be done with integrity, than to rush.

Take account of the everyday commitments of the public, from working hours and caring responsibilities, to Bank Holidays, school holidays, and religious festivals – all of these should be taken seriously in project planning. This will ensure that you don't exclude people because of poor planning (see [Principle 7](#) and [Principle 8](#)).

The exact amount of engagement time varies from method to method, but there should always be enough space for participants to learn, understand the depth of the issue, weigh up the evidence, for everyone to deliberate and provide their views, and for the group to make informed suggestions or recommendations.

This usually equates to somewhere between 15-30 hours (between 2 and 4 days of engagement). Online, this will need to be broken up into smaller (2-3 hour) sessions to avoid participant and facilitator burnout.

Provide time between sessions whenever feasible. This provides participants the space to do individual learning and to reflect on the issues.

There is no need to limit the engagement to live workshops. Asynchronous deliberative engagement (e.g. online communities) can be extremely valuable for allowing participants to dip in and out of deliberations and provide non-verbal input (e.g. photos, videos).

Principle 3

Ensure stakeholder buy-in

By involving your stakeholders throughout, they can be assured that the process is a valuable use of public funds and will have a meaningful impact on the policy development process.

Map your stakeholders, both in terms of 'inputs' (e.g. political sponsors, rate payers, data subjects) and 'outputs' (e.g. policymakers, affected communities, future generations) and include them wherever is feasible and appropriate. For example during:

- scoping (e.g. as part of expert interviews, see [Principle 1](#))
- procurement (e.g. as part of a tender review panel)
- delivery (e.g. as experts or observers)
- evaluation (see [Principle 6](#)).

As deliberative engagement is often about complex and sometimes controversial issues, it can elicit strong reactions from different groups. This can be exacerbated in processes where the sponsor is seen to be preferential to one point of view. It may be tempting to discount stakeholders with dissenting views as extreme or disruptive, but these are exactly the people you need in the room to help ensure the process is balanced (see [Principle 5](#)). Advocates from the most affected groups can flag potential barriers early on, both in terms of the policy being discussed and the engagement process itself (see [Principle 7](#)).



Principle 4

Commit resources and accountability

Deliberative engagement processes are intensive for all involved, including on the part of the commissioning body. The more you put into the process however, the more you will get out. It is important to provide enough resource to help those designing the process to develop complete and engaging stimulus materials to inform, inspire, and enable participants to contribute as effectively as they can. As well as defining a clear question (see [Principle 1](#)), it will also be necessary for commissioners to provide as much detail as possible on the sub-questions or themes of interest so that these are incorporated into the design of the process.

It should be clear to those taking part what the scope is for making a difference to the policy decision and ideally this should be stated at the start of the process. It should also be clear which areas, or decisions, cannot be influenced as a result of the process. This will help manage the expectations of stakeholders and of the public who are involved.

There should be a firm commitment provided by the commissioner that participants' views will be considered and responded to in a timely manner. Whether or not participants' suggestions are accepted and acted on in full, the commissioning body should explain what it has done, as these engagements are as much about building trust and a new relationship with the public as they are about the policymaking itself.



Principle 5

Provide balanced information

It is important to ensure that the information provided to participants is balanced, enabling those involved to arrive at informed decisions after considering pros and cons, benefits and risks.

This involves presenting opposing views and can be achieved by involving the right stakeholders in the process (see [Principle 3](#)). It can also be useful to have materials externally reviewed, for example by the project advisory board (see [Principle 6](#)), to ensure that they provide balanced ‘for and against’ arguments.

Participants should be provided with a range of accurate, up-to-date, and accessible information. They should hear from experts and be given the opportunity to ask questions. Care should be taken to brief experts to provide facts rather than their opinions. And where experts do offer their opinion – for example when they are directly asked for this by participants – they should state that this is their opinion and that there are others who hold different views.



Principle 6

Scrutinise the project from start to finish

A robust project plan, clear question, buy-in, and commitment together give you an excellent starting position – but best laid plans can go awry without careful scrutiny during implementation.

Independent oversight can be achieved through an advisory board. The advisory board should consist of subject and methodological experts, who ideally represent different viewpoints. As well as representation from the project sponsor or commissioner and/or those responsible for implementing the findings. It may also be important to include other voices too, for example representatives from business, local communities and local authorities depending on the topic.

The remit of the advisory group should be to provide constructive challenge, to inform the process, and to help publicise the findings. You will need to think about the number of individuals who make up the advisory group, how often the board meets and whether you publicise the meeting minutes and advice provided by members (see [Principle 8](#)).

Oversight and evaluation can also be achieved by involving wider stakeholders in the process (see [Principle 3](#)), as well as the public. Participants will be uniquely qualified in having first-hand experience of the deliberation. You should actively and formally seek feedback from the public on how well the process is going. Do they know why they're being asked the questions? Are the materials engaging? Did they get enough time to give their views? Ideally, you should ask these questions between deliberation exercises, but at the very least you should ask them at the end of the process. Beware of engagement fatigue when deciding how often and when you should ask them to evaluate the process and avoid combining this with the administration of the financial honorarium as this may skew the feedback.

Principle 7

Reflect the diversity of views

Efforts should be made to recruit a sample – or mini public – which is reflective of the range and diversity within the wider population of interest. In essence a microcosm of that larger population. A reflective sample mirrors the composition of the wider public, providing legitimacy for those not involved in the deliberation. Where appropriate, this should include people of different ages, genders, social grades, ethnic groups, and geographies. It may be that additional variables are appropriate to the subject as well – for example attitudes towards issues related to the central theme or question.

Some engagement practitioners have recently suggested a move towards combining reflective sampling with purposive over-sampling of minority groups¹⁵. In a society where the effects of change are felt unequally by the population, it is logical to pay special attention to those most affected. Practically, this might also mean diversifying your recruitment methodology. With certain populations excluded from postal address databases and electoral registers (e.g. travellers, undocumented migrants, the homeless) it may be helpful to engage with advocacy groups (see [Principle 8](#)).



Principle 8

Put inclusivity at the heart of the method

As well as recruiting minority groups into the process (see [Principle 7](#)), you should also consider how best to involve the underrepresented or marginalised community voices. This can be achieved by working with advocates or representative bodies – both to inform the materials and to collect the views of those who do not have a voice in the main sessions.

Early in the process, you should consider the needs of all of those who will be involved and how you will make the process accessible and inclusive. Do you need to print materials in large font so that everyone can read them? Do you need to work with interpreters? These are just some of the areas you will need to think through.

In most cases it will be essential to remunerate participants with a financial honorarium. Depending on the circumstances, it may also be necessary to cover childcare costs and other expenses too. Build this in from the start.

You should also consider the impact of engaging offline and online. Both mediums exclude different groups. Online methods can exclude people who lack digital literacy, stable internet connections, and sufficient privacy. Offline methods, on the other hand, can exclude people with disabilities or long-term conditions, people in remote locations and people with caring responsibilities. As far as is feasible, you should do everything you can do mitigate these barriers, from posting mobile internet devices to choosing accessible venues.



Principle 9

Transparency of the process, privacy for participants

If you do not open up your process, the wider public and interested stakeholders will inevitably ask 'what do they have to hide?' Wherever possible, all information should be made available to the wider public, publicising its funding, procurement, the process, and its outcomes. In its simplest form, documents can be hosted by the commissioners or on a dedicated website. With developments in digital technology, deliberative engagement is going further with the potential for live-streaming events for the wider public to watch.

Whichever way you open up your process, you must balance this with the public's right to privacy. Plan your publication process before you begin recruitment so that you can let participants opt in for photo or video appearances.

There are ethical considerations to take account for in planning the engagement.

- **Informed consent** is essential, both legally and for maintaining public trust.
- **Confidentiality and anonymity:** There is a responsibility to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants at all stages.
- **Avoidance of harm:** There is a need to consider the potential for the engagement process to cause harm, and how to avoid it. For example, it is advisable to develop a safeguarding policy.



Principle 10

Represent the public accurately

As part of designing the deliberation with the output in mind, you should think carefully about how you are going to analyse and report on what the public say. The approach you take will depend on your chosen method:

For **recommendations-focused reports** (e.g. Citizens' Assemblies) you should draft, edit and sign-off these statements with the public, either live at an event or through a collaborative asynchronous method (for example an online community). Your report should focus on providing an outline of the methodology, the agreed recommendations, and the rationale behind them. The sessions should be audio recorded, but this is primarily for checking the accuracy of what was agreed, noting down the comments of the dissenting minority and having a transparent record of what was said.

Process-focused reports, on the other hand, follow the participant journey through the stages of learning, deliberating, and deciding. To do this method justice you need accurate notes, preferably through live notetakers or transcripts. Removing note-taking responsibilities from the facilitators allows them both to manage the conversations more effectively and also guards against biased impressions of which statements seem important at the time. With detailed transcripts you can produce a report filled with compelling quotes and deep qualitative insights into the issues.

Whichever analysis and reporting you choose, ensure that you are representing the public accurately. Where feasible, you can test this by allowing the public to review the report themselves as an added layer of scrutiny (see [Principle 6](#)).

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14. Ipsos MORI has a formal deliberative partnership with Imperial College Health Partners and has also worked with other organisations such as Involve to deliver deliberative public engagement studies.

15. <https://delibdemjournal.org/article/id/626/>

ABOUT IPSOS MORI`

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