

Encouraging Participation: Mini-Publics

Mini-publics

A mini-public is a forum in which residents are selected at random, to reflect the diversity of the community in which they live. The forum is brought together (with support) to form opinions, or make judgements on the issues presented to them.

Traditional consultations typically require people to choose to get involved, so it is limited to those who have the time or interest. A mini-public gets a representative sample of a community through random selection and offering a reward or incentive to encourage their involvement.

A mini-public is normally led by a neutral chairperson, who should be skilled in leading discussions and debates. Evidence is offered from a range of sources in order to inform the discussion and debate. The chairperson guides discussion and debate in order to reach a consensus on a particular issue.

Sometimes mini-publics are used to inform a decision to be taken by another body; in others the mini-public itself is tasked with making a decision. Mini-publics are sometimes known as “citizens’ panels” and used to settle disputes between two differing viewpoints.

There are a number of points to consider when organising a mini-public:

- **Representation** – the membership of the mini-public should reflect the demographics of the affected community
- **Information** – detailed and robust information will be required from a variety of sources to inform the discussion and debate
- **Outcome** – it is important to have a clear outcome for the mini-public, are they making a decision or a recommendation? All participants need to be clear on this and what will happen as a result of their involvement
- **Accessibility** – given the mix of people involved, it will be important to ensure that the process is open and accessible. Consider expenses, travel, other commitments, disabilities, language and culture.