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Communicating Climate Assemblies: Enabling Pathways to Impact

Executive Summary

This KNOCA Guidance makes a clear case to assembly organisers: communication should be treated as a core part of an assembly design and delivery, not as a secondary task.

If communication remains an afterthought, even a well-run assembly can struggle to be perceived as legitimate, generate public debate, secure political buy-in or resonate with the broader citizenry. In other words, to have impact.

If it is planned early and sustained over time, communications can help an assembly become visible, credible, harder for decision-makers to ignore, and generate public debate.

The practical implication is straightforward: communication should be built in from the start, with clear roles, sufficient time, and dedicated resources. For organisers, this means treating communication as part of their impact strategy.

The Guidance offers a 12-step approach to building a communication strategy:

Communicating Climate Assemblies: Enabling Pathways to Impact

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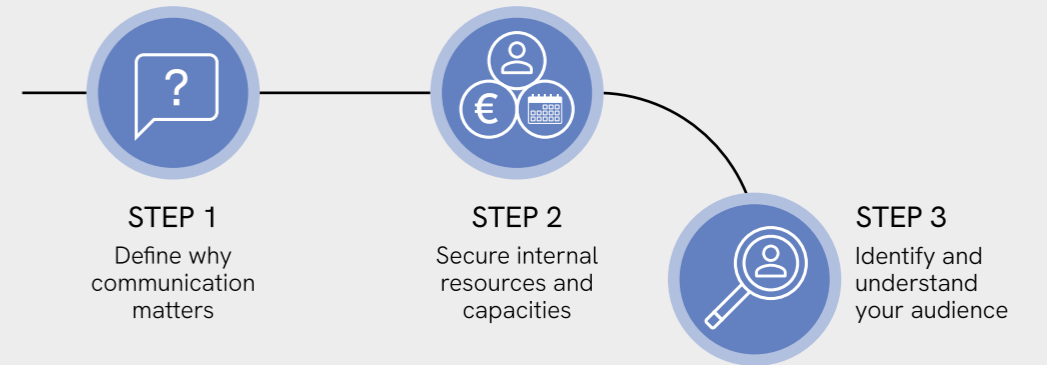
KNOCA is a European-based network that aims to improve the commissioning, design, implementation, impact and evaluation of climate assemblies, using evidence, knowledge exchange and dialogue. KNOCA documents climate assembly practice, identifies and disseminates best practice for impact and shapes future trends.

You can find us and join KNOCA at knoqa.eu.

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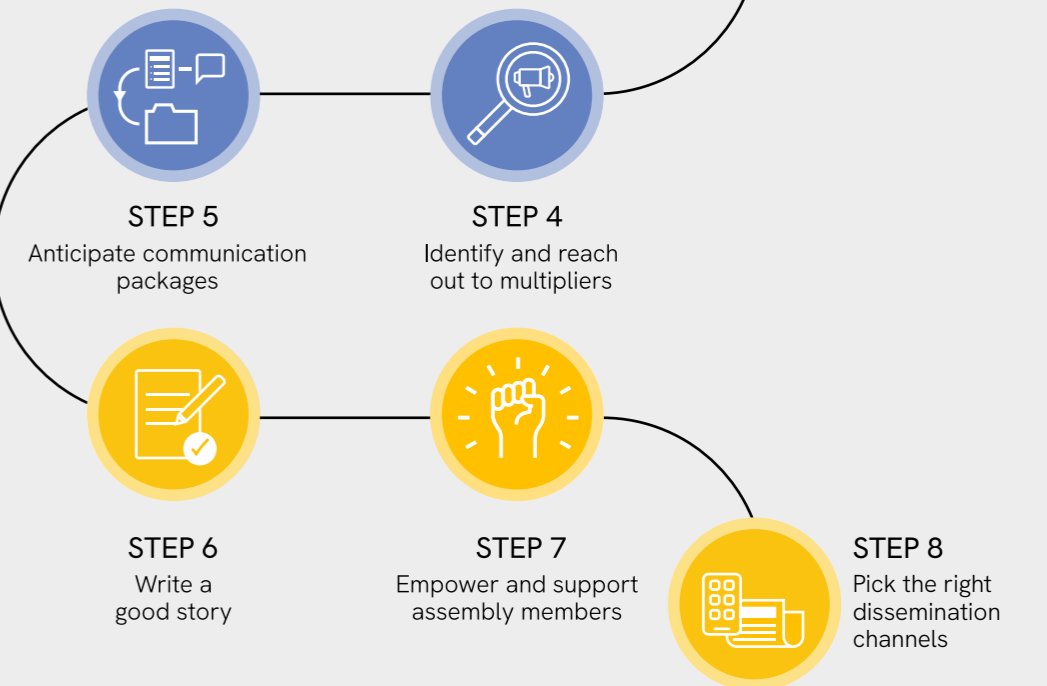
BEFORE

Integrating communication from the start



DURING

Getting the right message out



AFTER

Keeping the narrative alive

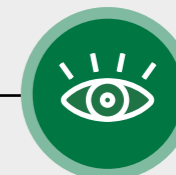
STEP 10
Plan a high visibility handover



STEP 9
Establish safeguards



STEP 11
Continue supporting members



STEP 12
Maintain visibility after handover

Introduction

The increase in the commissioning of climate assemblies – and citizens’ assemblies more generally – has not been matched by an increase in their visibility and resonance among broader publics and key stakeholders. This is problematic because communication is widely recognised as a [key enabler of impact](#) for climate assemblies. The [legitimacy and resonance of climate assemblies](#) rests on their visibility to publics and stakeholders. Yet in practice, communication is still too often an afterthought: not prioritised, limited budgets and timelines, weak capacity, and a reactive approach that rarely fits the news cycle.

The result is predictable: many assemblies operate in relative obscurity and struggle to leave a legacy even when the process is strong. Developing and implementing a robust, inclusive communications strategy needs to be a priority for climate assemblies, but in many ways, we are still at the foothills of understanding how to do this effectively. This KNOCA guidance takes a first step towards a more comprehensive approach to communication, pulling together the diverse experiences of assembly practitioners and organisers who have direct experience of the opportunities and challenges involved.



Official handover, Brussels Climate Assembly
Photo: © Bryapro Photography

Communicating climate assemblies in polarised times

Getting communication right becomes even more important as polarisation and pushback against climate action has become an increasingly unwelcome feature of the political context in which climate assemblies operate. Yet this is not an entirely new phenomenon. And it is not unsurmountable.

Resistance to climate policies perceived as unfair or poorly distributed and directed by uncaring elites has always been present, and while the extent of backlash against the sustainability agenda is increasing, public support for climate action remains high. In this context, how climate assemblies are framed and communicated is crucial. For example, presenting them as democratic innovations that bring together a diverse and representative group of everyday people who weigh evidence can help depolarise the political debate. Evidence suggests that there is widespread support for this type of innovation across the political spectrum.

Getting the framing and message right is even more important as assemblies are increasingly championed by civil society and environmental organisations. This is a welcome development in mainstreaming these processes and diffusing a deliberative culture, but in a polarised environment, it also comes with sharper communication challenges.

What do we mean by ‘communication’?

This guidance focuses on **external communication**: public-facing outreach about the assembly targeting members of the public, journalists, policymakers and stakeholders. Its purpose is to build visibility, understanding, trust and meaningful engagement with the broader society.

Internal communication is outside the scope of the guidance: information flows within the process, between organisers, facilitators, experts and participants, to ensure smooth delivery and inclusion.

About this guide

The good news is that there is now a substantial amount of experience, positive and negative, to learn from. We have clearer evidence of what can go wrong, and how proactive communication can pre-empt some problems. Getting communication right is no longer optional.

We offer this KNOCA Guidance as a practical toolkit for designing a communication strategy, acknowledging that each climate assembly is unique and answers to its own set of context-based challenges. It follows the assembly's lifecycle - before, during and after - through a series of 12 steps, helping communicators connect their objectives to the larger question of impact and translate them into a coherent strategy.

1

Before: Integrating communication from the start

Why communicate? How to plan in advance of the assembly? This first section makes explicit the link between communication and an assembly's impact to better design a communication strategy. It offers a five-step roadmap on what to focus on before an assembly starts, from team set up to identifying audiences and allies, and preparing communication packages.

2

During: Getting the right message out

What and how to communicate while the members do their work? This section shares best practices from previous assemblies on how to communicate in the heat of an assembly. What makes a good story? How to empower assembly members as communicators? Which dissemination tools to choose in the digital age? When to communicate (and not to)?

3

After: Keeping the narrative alive

How to sustain momentum and secure policy follow-up? This section focuses on what comes after the assembly ends, stressing that communication work does not end with a high-visibility handover. Supporting assembly members, closing the feedback loop, and keeping channels open remain key to securing long-term impact.

6

7

1

Before the assembly: Integrating communication from the start

Before the assembly even begins, communication needs to be front and centre of early design work. Too often, it is precisely this pre-assembly step that is underestimated, or even worse, ignored. Yet this is when budgets are allocated, a team created, communication services mobilised, alliances and partnerships negotiated, and key communication assets prepared. Start with deciding why communication matters and asking yourself what you are trying to achieve by means of communication (step 1). Once that is done, it is critical to secure internal resources for communication (step 2), identify your audience (step 3), and secure support among key intermediaries who can amplify your messages (step 4). Finally, this is the moment to prepare what you will need later (step 5): namely, communication packages, clearly defined roles, and a basic crisis response, so you are not improvising under pressure.



STEP 1

Define why communication matters to you



STEP 2

Secure internal resources and capacities



STEP 3

Understand your audience



STEP 4

Identify and reach out to multipliers



STEP 5

Anticipate communication packages

STEP 1

Define why communication matters to you



The first question for assembly organisers is what impact you are trying to achieve, and therefore why you are communicating. The [KNOCA Impact Evaluation Framework](#) is a useful heuristic to help consider the variety of possible impacts. Impact is not one thing. The KNOCA Framework distinguishes three areas of impact - instrumental, capacity-building, and conceptual - showing how these impacts play out across state actors, non-state actors, and wider systems and structures. Communication helps enable these impacts, so defining early the main impact you are after is not optional. It shapes the whole communications strategy and helps focus scarce resources.

Which impacts matter most to commissioners and organisers? Is it to change policy? Politicising an issue? Altering the way that a public body works? Creating public debate and pressure for action? Too often, organisers jump into tactics without a clear objective, wasting effort or muddling the message. The choice of impact objectives also affects who needs to be part of the communications team - different communication skills relate to different pathways to impact.

In practice, most communication objectives fall under four goals, all of which relate to impact in different ways:

- transparency
- political buy-in
- public debate
- inclusion

Objective 1: Guaranteeing transparency

Transparency is a basic requirement for the legitimacy of a climate assembly. Who commissioned the assembly? Who is running it? How were assembly members selected? Who is overseeing the process? What information is being presented? What are the assembly's recommendations? If this basic information is not available and communicated, it is difficult to build trust and understanding amongst decision makers, stakeholders and broader publics. If an assembly remains a 'black box' it is much easier for misinformation to gain a footing. Having this information available, makes it much easier to challenge misrepresentations in social or traditional media.

The black box in Luxembourg

The website of the national [Climate Citizens Council](#) only provided details of the launch event of the assembly, but was not updated to include information on recruitment, governance or the knowledge that was presented. This did not seem to affect the impact of the assembly on government policy, but while the assembly was taking place, it did lead to criticism within civil society. The website is no longer available and has been replaced with the final report of the assembly. Even then, within the report the details of how the assembly operated are still rather opaque.

In practice, transparency mostly calls for 'passive' communication: making core information easy to find and easy to verify, typically via a public website. At a minimum, this should include:

- The mandate and composition of the assembly.
- Recordings/materials of expert and stakeholder inputs.
- Neutral summaries of each meeting.

Objective 2: Increasing chances of political buy-in

Beyond running a sound process, communication is pivotal for impact on commissioners. In most cases this is public authorities. Impact here is most obviously taking up recommendations in policy but can also be shifts in how state actors understand climate action and the extent to which they embrace further public engagement. Lawmakers are likely to take a climate assembly more seriously if there is good media coverage. Public attention raises the political stakes. Especially for assemblies established without a mandate from political authorities, communication is an essential part of a strategy to create political leverage: building alliances, shaping the narrative, and keeping leaders accountable for follow-up.

If increasing chances of political buy-in is the key objective of a communication strategy, it requires more proactive action than transparency alone. Good practice includes:

- Early and ongoing engagement with elected officials and stakeholders through briefings and structured opportunities to observe or interact with assembly members, demystify the process and reduce suspicion.
- Cross-partisan outreach, towards media outlets and public figures from different political camps, to pre-empt accusations of bias.
- A high-profile handover, with a well-publicised final report delivered to senior decision-makers, signalling that the ball is now in their court and that a response is expected.

Mind the political context

A delicate dance is often needed in figuring out how political support from commissioners might affect public perceptions. Too many political promises can undermine the process – as can perceptions of too much political influence.

The [French Citizens' Convention for the Climate](#) is a well-known example of this communication paradox. The Convention received high visibility from the patronage of the French Presidency. The promise to follow-up 'without filters' boosted its publicity, which in turn increased the pressure on decision-makers of all political colours. However, when political will evaporated, the extent and publicity of the promises backfired by breeding cynicism about the process as a whole.

In some instances, having ministers or agencies co-publicize the assembly can give a boost to visibility and legitimacy. However, it can also blur the image of independence. In the case of [Finland's Citizens' Jury on Climate Actions](#), when the environment minister announced the launch of the jury on social media, it sparked scepticism that the process would be 'full of leftist green supporters'. [Austria's National Climate Assembly](#) suffered a similar fate as it became too associated with the Green Minister who had commissioned the assembly on behalf of the government.

The lesson is that leveraging official communications can be valuable for impact but requires careful messaging to avoid perceptions of overpromising and /or political capture that in both cases can have negative effects.

Objective 3: Generating public debate

How to make the assembly, and the climate choices it surfaces, part of everyday public and political discussion, in a way that avoids reducing the topic to niche or partisan 'climate talk'?

Many organisers worry that assemblies too often 'live in the shadows'. When they do become visible, they can function as powerful awareness raising tool: not only showing that there are other ways to do politics, but that climate action is a legitimate topic of everyday politics. For many assemblies commissioned by civil-society organisations, reframing public discourse is a fundamental ambition: creating broad visibility and support that pressures officeholders to respond while also inviting citizens to reflect on and change their own attitudes and behaviours.

In practice, generating public debate among the broader public requires:

- Credible door-openers to help the process break through, such as a high profile and respected chair, well-known advocates and high-level sponsorship.
- A dual narrative that covers both process and recommendations, otherwise debate can get hijacked by a few controversial headlines (e.g., reducing meat consumption or flying), crowding out how citizens reached conclusions and why trade-offs matter.
- Bridges from the assembly to broader publics: participation channels (online platforms, local debates), timed media pushes (press and social media), and early partnerships with civil society and stakeholder groups to amplify through their networks.



Objective 4: Enhancing inclusion

Transparency lets people see the assembly; public debate is about bringing it into the wider public sphere. Inclusion requires the creation of meaningful ways for more people to engage, so participation does not stop at the door of the assembly. A common critique of assemblies is that 'only a few are deciding for the many'. By widening the participatory offer beyond the selected members, others can observe, submit inputs, join local dialogues, or act as community ambassadors. The aim of communication here is dual: strengthen legitimacy and build wider capacity to engage in climate deliberation and action.

Even before the assembly starts, communication for inclusion matters for recruitment. Clear, trusted, and targeted outreach can help organisers meet quotas, especially for overlooked social groups, by increasing response rates, reducing suspicion, and explaining time, support, and safeguards in plain language.

If the core objective is inclusion, communications must turn transparency and visibility into participation and representation. Patterns from previous assemblies include:

- Open at least one structured pathway for broader publics to participate: for example, online submissions/feedback, neighbourhood dialogues linked to agenda items, etc.
- Work through trusted community intermediaries (youth groups, trade unions, civil society organisations) to convene parallel deliberations within their communities and relay inputs to the assembly. Such deliberations can also happen after the assembly to enable wider reflection on recommendations.
- Lower barriers via plain-language, multilingual materials and visual supports.

If transparency is a default, non-negotiable communication goal of any climate assembly, political buy-in, public debate, and inclusion are strategic choices. They happen only if organisers decide early on what sorts of impacts matter more, and resource them accordingly, including ensuring relevant expertise within the communications team.

Because communication is often poorly budgeted, prioritisation is unavoidable. It starts with a simple question: why do we want to communicate, and for what impact? Start with a purpose linked to the mandate and the social and political context, and the rest follows: audiences, channels, stories, and timing.

Building routes for wider participation in the assembly

A number of assemblies have attempted to engage wider publics in helping to frame the work of the assembly before it begins. The most impressive pre-assembly engagement is arguably the National Conversation that took place before the [People's Plan for Nature](#) in the UK. Over a four-week period, organisers received 30,000 submissions on people's relationship with nature and how it could be protected. Thoughts and ideas were shared online and at events across the UK, including arts centres, National Trust properties, schools and football clubs. These were presented in creative formats to members of the People's Assembly for Nature to help inform their deliberations.

The national Climate Assembly in Austria [experimented with the online platform Pol.is](#), which has distinctive features. It allows participants to vote on statements (agree, disagree, unsure) and to add their own statements for review by others. Based on this engagement, the platform provides insights into where broad consensus and dissensus can be found on the statements. Midway through the assembly process, Pol.is was seeded with 200 emerging ideas from the members. Over 5,000 people beyond the assembly participated by voting and/or submitting their own statements: 5,761 statements were submitted and around 833,000 votes registered on the statements. Pol.is helped highlight those areas that attracted consensus, but also where contention existed. For example, around vegetarian/vegan diets, food affordability and road pricing.

STEP 2

Secure internal resources and capacities

Before you communicate outwards, secure an internal base of resources. This pre-stage is easily forgotten as project teams naturally jump ahead into mandate design, recruitment logistics, and deliberation planning. In practice, resourcing communication comes down to three things: budget, people and time.

€ Budget

There is no universal right budget for communication: it depends on assembly mandate, scale, and institutional channels. The range is wide: from €1m to €20k. But whatever the amount, it should fund a distinct kind of work: not generic campaigning, but specialised assembly communication.

In all cases, remember to:

- add a communications budget line early
- fund what you can realistically sustain, rather than spreading too thin
- budget not only for outputs, but for specialist skills: authentic member support, broadcaster/media relationship-building, and creative short-form content
- reserve contingency for unexpected needs
- plan some resource for post-assembly communications

👤 People

An internal communications lead who can coordinate day-to-day decisions, media handling, and consistency across outputs is essential. The key risk is 'everyone owns comms / no one owns comms'. But an assembly communications team should not be built like a standard NGO or campaign team: it must communicate both the issue and a different democratic process, across political divides.

Think about your ideal team:

- communication lead for strategy and coordination
- press media relations
- digital content and social media
- support and training for assembly members
- community & stakeholder liaison

Use an external agency only if it truly understands assemblies and their specific communication needs.

📅 Time

Time is often an under-estimated resource, and most assemblies end up running after it. They typically underestimate the importance of communication before, during and after an assembly. Upfront time spent on strategy pays back.

Remember to:

- start planning your communication strategy at least 3 months before recruitment begins
- put the full communications team in place early
- use that time to build media relationships and prepare tailored pitches
- keep channels running until members have received feedback and/or to support member action afterwards
- expect post-assembly communication to continue for months, sometimes years



STEP 3

Understand your audience



Once the team is in place, the question to ask yourself is simple: who do we want to talk to? The answer depends on the impact pathway you are prioritising and on the topic of the assembly. A useful first cut is to distinguish between audiences you want to influence directly (e.g., policymakers, specific citizen groups, key stakeholders) and audiences who influence whether your results travel and land well (e.g., media, experts, intermediary organisations).

This is also where a bit of homework pays off. Start first by mapping relays of influences and opinions (who are the most powerful actors on the issue, who cares about what, what do they fear, what they might gain?), and drawing on existing data where possible (polling, prior consultations, power mapping, media landscape scans). To do so helps you avoid treating your audience as one undifferentiated block and identify those groups your communication strategy might want to focus on.

General public

The non-participating population – the broader citizenry – are often a core audience. For those assemblies aiming at political buy-in, public pressure on politicians can be extremely valuable. But ‘citizens’ should almost never be treated as a single, undifferentiated target group. In practice, the relevant public varies with the topic under discussion and the kinds of recommendations that may emerge, and it is usually a defined part of the population: people in a specific territory, people in a sectoral group (youth, older people, workers), or groups directly experiencing a specific issue. This is not only a budget reality, but also a communications reality. When messaging is too general, it becomes easy to ignore and hard to share.

On climate issues in particular, ‘the public’ is not equally reachable through the same channels, especially in today’s fragmented media environment. Some groups tend to be harder to engage through standard formats (e.g., rural communities, people with lower educational background, and highly sceptical audiences). Some practitioners argue that breaking into closed information bubbles can be difficult; others still try, but with tailored messengers and trusted intermediaries. Either way, the strategic point is to make an explicit choice: who you prioritise, who you may not reach well, and what you will do about it (e.g., in step 4, through partnerships with key stakeholders or media).

Policymakers

Policymakers are often the priority audience when your key objective is political buy-in. Beyond formal authority, policymakers are also influential messengers: they help define what is legitimate, shape public debate, and attract media attention. Too often, however, climate assemblies engage only the commissioning body (usually a particular ministry or department) and neglect the wider ecosystem of parties, committees, ministries, and local authorities that shape whether process and recommendations are heard.

For this audience, the obstacle is not only access but competition. Policymakers receive many messages every day and rarely act on a cold email. What helps is a short, usable narrative that combines: (1) the problem and why it matters now, (2) why the assembly adds democratic value and, (3) when the assembly has finished its work, what citizens concluded and why (including trade-offs and reasoning). The most effective hook to get policymakers on board is usually the public problem and the political opportunity to respond: those are elements that you should work on, and present in a briefing before the Assembly starts.

Several cases show that early political anchoring makes later communication easier. In practical terms, before an assembly starts, this means agreeing on key communication milestones with policymakers: when they can offer public endorsement, when they will be present at key assembly moments, and how recommendations will be received (formats, timelines, expectations of response). Early anchoring is also strengthened by direct dialogue formats for policymakers, such as hearings, committee briefings, seminars or targeted meetings, in closed-door settings if needed. Plan those ahead of time.



The Austrian Citizens’ Climate
Photo: © BMK - Karo Pernegger

Stakeholders

Stakeholders are not only multipliers to engage later on; they are also a priority audience in their own right. As [KNOCA’s Briefing on Stakeholder Involvement](#) underlines, stakeholder mapping before an assembly begins helps clarify the key actors on the issue and the balance of power and influence around it. Stakeholders are typically organised interests, NGOs, unions, businesses, professional organisations and other affected groups that can bring practical and political knowledge but also shape whether the process is seen as legitimate, whether recommendations are considered feasible, and whether they later move into implementation. In other words, they are often both audiences you need to understand and actors who can influence what happens next. This is why it is useful, at this stage, to identify not only who has the loudest voice, but also who is directly affected, who may support or resist the process, who can act on recommendations themselves, and which less visible interests risk being left out.

Bringing in stakeholders early

In [Austria’s Climate Assembly](#), organisers set up a dedicated stakeholder board bringing together 12 representatives from unions, chambers, NGOs, the climate referendum, industry and the energy sector. This board met regularly in facilitated sessions, produced briefing documents, and met citizens during the assembly to exchange perspectives. The aim was not only to inform the process, but also to create ownership and support for the results.

The organisers of [Ireland’s Citizens’ Assembly on Biodiversity Loss](#) treated stakeholder communication as an up-front legitimacy task, not just end-of-process dissemination. They held a dedicated stakeholder engagement event at the outset so that organised interests could understand the process and how to contribute. They also used face-to-face outreach to groups expected to be sceptical, notably at the National Ploughing Championships, which helped bring farmer representative organisations into the process. Organisers saw this early inclusion as a way to reduce pushback later in the process. Resistance was still expected (and did come!), but it would have been stronger had these voices not been engaged from the start.

STEP 4

Identify and reach out to multipliers



Once your priority audiences are clear, the next question is: who can help your messages travel? Multipliers are many. They include journalists, but also specialised media ecosystems, experts, professional networks, civil society and community organisations, and later on, once the assembly has started, assembly members themselves.

The media

The media is a key multiplier because it constantly connects and relays messages between other audiences (politicians, stakeholders and citizens). Once your story enters the wider information ecosystem, it travels further and faster than through your own channels. This is why media work should be understood broadly from the start: not only legacy outlets, but also social media ecosystems (platform news accounts, newsletters, podcasts, YouTube explainers) and influencers/creators, some of whom now reach far larger audiences than traditional press.

For climate assemblies, it helps to distinguish between generalist news media (such as national/regional newspapers, TV, radio and their digital editions) which are useful for broad salience and institutional signalling, and topic-specialist ecosystems (digital outlets, newsletters, podcasts, YouTube explainers, climate/energy accounts) useful for depth, continuity and large platform-native audiences. It is a common mistake of many assemblies to only engage with generalist outlets, while there is, on climate and environmental issues, an extremely rich specialized media ecosystem with very large outreach.

One nuance: no media is neutral. Different ecosystems speak to different publics, incentives and frames. Influencers, for example, can bridge to publics outside 'climate circles', especially when they connect the assembly to everyday topics (food, travel, housing, health).

Finally, be realistic about what travels. Deliberation and consensus do not always 'sell' on their own. Attention often follows tension, consequences, and relatable human narratives. The good news is that democratic lottery generates some of that tension: after all, it brings a diverse group of people into the room. Members' experiences can become the breakthrough story.

Before the assembly starts, make sure to map key media actors, and to brief them, share reliable sources, and support formats or story ideas. This takes time as many lifestyle creators and journalists are supportive yet hesitant to speak on climate.

Best practices in building media partnerships

The [German Citizens' Assembly on Nutrition](#) shows how to turn a national process into many local stories. Organisers briefed local media as soon as the selection of assembly members through democratic lottery had been concluded, inviting outlets to interview participants from their town or region before sessions even began. They deliberately matched regional journalists to local members (sometimes following one person across the whole process). This local anchoring was reinforced by a steady stream of Bundestag-hosted documentation (session news items, photos/videos, short films, press releases), coordinated through the Bundestag press structures.

The [Bourgogne-Franche-Comté Climate Assembly](#) illustrates the opposite but complementary tactic: an ultra-transparent bet on the value of an embedded journalist from France 3, granted total freedom and introduced from the first session. Over time she attended small-group work and shared meals and accommodation with participants, becoming a familiar presence and building trust.

The shared lesson is that media debate rarely happens by accident. It is built through planned local press-member links and presence of embedded reporting. But always with clear ground rules to protect members.

Stakeholders (again!)

Media are not the only group that can help your communication messages travel. Once stakeholders have been identified as a key audience, some of them can also become important multipliers. They differ widely but share three features that matter for communication: (1) like policymakers, some stakeholders are direct recipients of recommendations and can change their own practices to accommodate, or resist outcomes; (2) many are already professional communicators with established channels to policymakers and the media that can multiply your messages; and (3) it is often better to have them working with you than against you. This last point comes up repeatedly amongst experienced assembly organisers: stakeholder engagement is not only about disseminating results at the end or recruiting experts for your knowledge phase. Securing partnerships with them before can be a condition for acceptance during and after the process.

In practice, this starts with identifying your key stakeholders early, setting up bilateral calls to discuss how to offer structured ownership and insight without capture. Use different role allocation (e.g., observers, panellists) and/or advisory structures (e.g., a stakeholder board) so key stakeholders understand the process and are less likely to attack it later.

Experts sit naturally within this stakeholder ecosystem. They are not only delivering inputs during the knowledge phase; they can also become high-leverage multipliers for dissemination through their credibility and institutional networks, such as advisory boards, councils, professional communities, and teaching responsibilities.

Using stakeholder networks to extend reach

In [Scotland's Climate Assembly](#), stakeholders were not treated only as witnesses or consultees. A Stewarding Group bringing together 22 major political, social, economic and environmental interests helped shape the assembly's remit and advise on its structure and content. Crucially, it remained in place for nine months after the assembly reported, using stakeholders' own networks to raise awareness of the recommendations and keep pressure on government to respond. This is a useful example of stakeholders not only informing a process but also helping the results travel.

STEP 5

Anticipate communication packages



With resources secured, your key audiences mapped, and partners on board, the next step is to lock in the basic materials and routines that prevent improvised, inconsistent communication. First: communication packages. A simple way to think about them is to link them to your priority audiences and your multipliers. Do not produce one generic kit and hope it fits everyone. Instead, build one core pack as a single definitive summary (what the assembly is and is not, mandate and timeline, how members are selected, 3-5 key messages, and basic FAQs). Its purpose is to aid coordination: it keeps partners, internal teams, and trusted messengers aligned and makes content easy to reuse.

Then create a few light, tailored versions for the groups you want to reach: a short public explainer for the public; a brief, practical note for policymakers (problem framing, decision points, how to engage); and a stakeholder/expert brief (how to contribute, boundaries, and how outputs may be used).

Second, prepare a press kit for your multipliers. It should draw on the same core information but serve a different purpose: enabling journalists and content creators to understand the assembly quickly and cover it accurately. Update it once the assembly starts, with clear story angles and media-ready assets (quotes, photos, short explainers).

Put two cross-cutting foundations in place early. First, a light visual identity (logo use, colours, templates) so materials stay coherent across channels and producers. Second, a simple crisis protocol: who responds, who clears messages, the escalation path, and guiding principles for predictable issues (misinformation, controversy, process criticism, member exposure, privacy). The aim is not to script every scenario, but to avoid confusion under pressure.

Finally, translate this into a simple media calendar built around low-risk, naturally reportable milestones (recruitment, opening session, expert hearings, field visits, voting moments), so updates can be planned (newsletter, bulletin, social thread) rather than improvised.

Anticipating crisis communication

Several assembly organisers learned the hard way that a climate assembly can be hit by 'bad buzz' that is not really about the recommendations, but about legitimacy. Accusations of bias, manipulated experts, costs, accusation of citizen washing or lack of impact ('nothing will happen'). This can come from different sources, including climate activists.

The [Dutch National Citizens' Assembly on Climate](#) shows that crisis communication is not an optional add-on, but needs to be part of assembly design from the start. The assembly unfolded in a difficult political context in which climate was a highly polarising issue. The assembly faced recurring attacks on social media and traditional outlets: the assembly was an expensive 'left hobby', members were green activists, had been selected unfairly, were being brainwashed, or the process was simply undemocratic.

To a degree, organisers were prepared, with a communication strategy combining several layers in order to speak to as many people as possible and avoid the trap of being perceived as 'elitist'. This included trying to generate media coverage, running their own channels, and a paid communication campaign. To support that wider reach, organisers also designed their own communications to be easier to access and easier to identify with: they tested materials in advance, used simpler language and clear visuals. The aim was not only to simplify the message, but to make the assembly more legible and credible to people who do not usually follow government communication closely, including groups that are often harder to reach.

Yet, that did not prevent criticisms from disturbing the process. When attacks intensified, organisers did not try to clamp down on criticism or over-control the narrative. Instead, they increased transparency: they made the representativeness of the assembly more visible through participant portraits and infographics, emphasised that the knowledge phase drew on a wide range of experts and that participants could choose whom they wanted to hear from, actively invited politicians to observe meetings, published short Q&As on the main criticisms and recurring questions they were seeing, both on the website and on social media, and worked day-to-day on monitoring what people were saying on the assembly digital channels and responding to them.

During the assembly: Getting the right message out

When the assembly is doing its work, communication shifts from planning to delivery: what do we communicate, how, and when, so the process remains credible and the work travels and excites beyond the room. This section shares practical lessons from previous climate assemblies on the questions communicators face in the heat of an assembly: what makes a good story (step 6), how to support assembly members as communicators (step 7), which tools to use in the digital age (step 8), and when to communicate (step 9).



STEP 6
**Write a
good story**



STEP 7
**Empower
and support
assembly
members
to act as
communicators**



STEP 8
**Pick the right
dissemination
channels**



STEP 9
**Establish
safeguards**

STEP 6

Write a good story

Citizens' assemblies do not automatically travel into the wider public sphere. They circulate through stories: the frames journalists choose, the examples that spread on social media, and the narratives that stakeholders and policymakers pick up. In a politically polarised climate debate, an assembly can easily fall into three predictable narrative traps: being framed as 'activist', oscillating between doom and wishful optimism, or sounding abstract and technocratic. To make a compelling story, attractive to both your audiences and multipliers, you need to avoid all three.

Trap no.1: Reinforcing biases against environmental initiatives

Climate-related initiatives often face preconceived biases. A climate assembly may be dismissed as a 'green elite' project, driven by urban activists or environmental actors, rather than a democratic exercise. Others may suspect partisan motives. These frames can weaken buy-in before recommendations leave the room, or even before the process starts (see earlier crisis communication box). A good story will seek to pre-empt predictable hostile narratives.

Organisers have found several framing strategies successful:

- Do not assume one narrative fits all (again!). In practice, you often need to communicate about two objects: the process and the issue. For mainstream audiences, the process story is often the entry point (legitimacy, representativeness, people like me). Specialists and sectoral communities focus more on trade-offs and content. Segment deliberately, audience by audience.
- Underscore diversity and cross-partisan signals. Spotlight the range of voices and opinions in the room (members, advisory structures, experts) and, where possible, visible support from more than one political camp.
- Be deliberate with language. Wording can either trigger identity-based rejection or open space for listening. Avoid jargon and moralising cues: use everyday language anchored in the lexical fields of fairness, affordability, jobs, health. Lead with potential social benefits, where they exist.



Trap no.2: Failing to balance realism and hope

Communicating about a climate assembly often means walking a tightrope between apocalyptic messages and utopian promises. Framing the story as either a dire crisis or a rosy triumph is a false dichotomy that only a few would buy. Yet many assemblies still fall into this trap. The challenge is to blend honesty about constraints with credible reasons to engage. In a context where many citizens are tired of climate talk and cynical about politics, messages should not be paralysing (doom) nor naïve (denying trade-offs). The aim is a mobilising narrative: grounded, concrete, and oriented toward collective agency.

A good story should:

- Be upfront about the scope of the problem and the limits we face: economic impacts, lifestyle adjustments, political hurdles. Audiences are wary of narratives that sound too easy or ignore trade-offs, so naming constraints builds integrity. But do not dwell on doom: show that the assembly recognises the gravity of the crisis and is weighing workable options rather than being paralysed by it.

Trap no.3: Talking in terms of abstract, long-term and technocratic climate goals

Climate assemblies often deal with big-picture, long-term goals: carbon neutrality by 2050, adaptation to future risks, large-scale transitions. While these goals are critical, they can feel abstract, distant, and overwhelming to the wider public. Technical language and far-off targets rarely connect with people's daily lives. The risk is that the assembly's work sounds remote from immediate concerns. A core communications task is translation: answering the audience's unspoken question, 'What does this mean for me, for my family, for my community, now?'

A good translation should:

- Ground communication in tangible outcomes: bills, comfort, health, safety, jobs, mobility, local quality of life. Localise the problem (for example, recent floods, heatwaves, wildfire smoke, rising costs) and highlight near-term milestones people can picture. For media, stakeholders and policymakers alike, a focused, place-based framing (how do we prepare our city for flooding?) is often more compelling, and reportable, than a broad agenda about fighting climate change.

- Define an inspiring but realistic horizon (e.g., a cleaner, healthier, more affordable city) and show that ordinary people can move towards it. Media often gravitates to the story of everyday people: diverse citizens with different lifestyles and perspectives learning, disagreeing, and converging. That journey, from doubt to engagement, is compelling. Use concrete anecdotes when appropriate, for example, someone rethinking a strongly held belief or habit after hearing others' experiences. Such stories make collective change feel imaginable.
- Manage expectations. Nothing breeds cynicism faster than broken promises. Do not communicate as if impact will be immediate and guaranteed. Explain what the assembly is achieving beyond policy shifts, for example building networks, generating new ideas, bringing together often polarised people, showing how we can do democracy differently, and signaling where society may be willing to go.

- Narrate and visualise the assembly. Facts travel further when they are told as a journey or dilemma and when they are seen. Use clear charts, maps, icons, timelines, and 'what this means for you' explainers. Many organisers highlight the value of graphic recording, simple infographics, short videos, and creative formats (posters, comics, journal-style pieces) rather than written reports to capture both key facts and the deliberative experience, without dumbing down.
- Use members' voices to humanise both the topic complexity and the human adventure that is a climate assembly. The stories of people like ourselves are often the most powerful way to make abstract issues tangible. Assembly members are some of your most impactful allies. This is precisely why the next step focuses on empowering them as communicators.

Beyond words: visual, cinematic and artistic formats that travel

Organisers repeatedly find that technical content and the experience of deliberation spreads further when translated into story-led, visual formats rather than long reports. Many assemblies have invested in short films and YouTube formats.

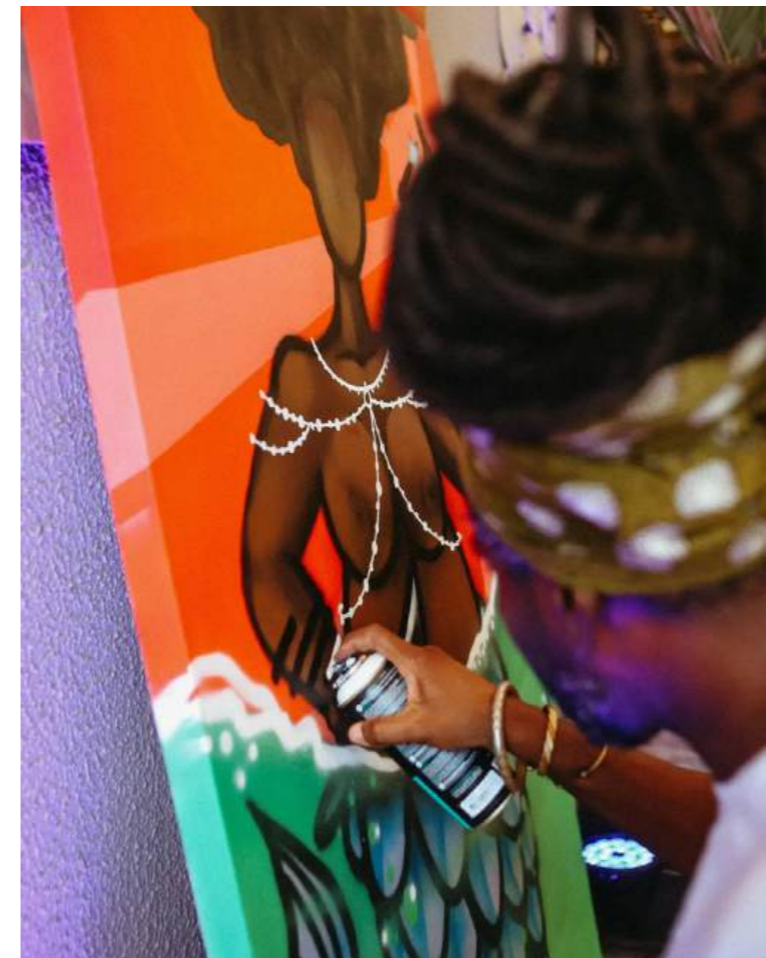
In Germany, organisers produced a [5-minute film](#) early in the process and [published short videos of expert inputs](#) on the website.

In Austria, they created a dedicated [YouTube channel](#) with short videos after each weekend and a longer (~40-minute) film of the whole process.

In Poland's [Citizens' Assembly on Energy Savings](#), they produced a 'one-person journey' film about a member travelling from a village to Warsaw, which even won a local prize.

Multilingual transnational initiatives have done it too. The first Global Assembly produced [short videos](#) centered on members' stories at home, while the European Citizens Panel on Energy Efficiency [followed three members](#) from Brussels to their homes in Germany, Italy and Ireland. The recent Young Citizens Assembly on Pollinators organised by the EU is being documented by filmmaker Cyril Dion, with the aim of reaching movie theatres in a few years.

Graphic and street-level formats are also powerful. In Brazil's [Salvador](#) and [Bojara Climate Assemblies](#), organisers worked with street art and posters across Salvador (including bus stops) to invite people into the topic and the process. In France, the artist JR installed [150 giant portraits](#) of the Climate Convention members on the Léna Palace.



Street Art actions during the Salvador Climate Assembly
Photos: © Delibera Brasil (instagram)

STEP 7

Empower and support assembly members to act as communicators

Assembly members' voices are one of the most underused communication assets of climate assemblies and, in a moment of low salience for climate action, often the best way to break through. Their strength lies not in polish, but in recognisability: they can cut through in ways that politicians, activists and experts often cannot, precisely because they sound like 'people like me'. When assembly members explain what they have learned, what surprised them, and how they weighed trade-offs, they can defuse familiar lines of attack and avoid narrative traps. Personal stories also travel better through the multipliers identified earlier: journalists are more likely to cover people than procedures, and stakeholders and policymakers often listen differently when messages are carried by assembly members rather than organisers. This is why the role of assembly members in communication should not be treated as an optional extra, but as a critical component of your strategy.

This only works if you provide support for it to happen. Asking assembly members to speak publicly creates uneven burdens and real risks: online aggression, unwanted exposure, pressure to become 'the face' of the process, or expectations that they turn into campaigners. Your job is not to turn them into professional spokespeople. It is to make public engagement safe, voluntary, lightly supported and sustainable, while ensuring a diversity of voices so that the same confident few do not become 'the assembly' in public.

- Make consent and safeguarding the default. Participation in communication should be opt-in, reversible over time, and supported by clear on-site rules (including do-not-film signals, quiet zones, and anonymisation when needed).
- Prepare members without removing their authenticity. Standard NGO or campaign-style media training can be counterproductive here. The aim is not to produce polished, over-confident, well-groomed 'message carriers', but to help assembly members speak in their own voice. What gives these interventions their force is precisely that they remain recognisably raw: hesitant at times, vulnerable at other points, passionate in ways that feel real. Light-touch support, including mock interviews, practical tips, and simple guidance on what should not be shared during deliberation (if anything), can build confidence without turning people into politicians.
- Build peer support, not just individual support. Public facing assembly members should not be left to carry this alone. Help willing participants set up mutually supportive networks of their own: buddy systems, WhatsApp (or other platform) groups, phone trees, shared debriefs after appearances, and simple guidance on how to back each other up online and offline. This matters not only emotionally, but communicatively: when one member speaks publicly, others can help amplify, defend and reinforce that voice.
- Reduce the burden by structuring media contact rather than leaving participants alone. A human buffer helps: someone who matches requests across a wider pool of willing participants, accompanies interviewees when asked, ensures rotation of opportunities so the same few do not become over-exposed, and checks in afterwards to ensure people feel safe and respected.
- Build duty-of-care for backlash. Online aggression is now a common risk of public visibility. Be explicit about it, agree contact points and escalation routes in advance, and think through what support is needed if the worst happens, including moderation, reporting, emotional support, and practical help if harassment spills offline.



When assembly members' voices break through

The strongest examples are not those where assembly members are turned into polished advocates, but those where their own voices, relationships and public encounters carry the story.

In the Europe-wide [Young Citizens Assembly on Pollinators](#), a communication task force made of volunteers was set up. Composed of roughly a dozen Assembly members, they were supported by a professional communication agency and senior facilitator to launch their own social media channels, write their own newsletter, and create communication materials, notably a press release, newspaper articles, videos, stickers and pictures.

In Ireland, [the story of Finbarr O'Brien and Chris Lyons from the Constitutional Convention](#) has become a striking illustration of what member-to-member encounters can do. Their unlikely friendship, and Finbarr's unscripted testimony during deliberations on same-sex marriage, has become emblematic of how deliberation can shift perspectives and create publicly resonant narratives.

The lesson is not that every assembly should push members into advocacy. It is that authentic member voices can travel far when they are supported well. What tends to resonate is not a polished line, but a credible human encounter: people seeing themselves, their doubts, their contradictions and their values reflected back at them. The communication task is therefore to create the conditions in which assembly members can step forward safely, voluntarily and in their own voice, and to make sure they never have to do it alone.

STEP 8

Pick the right dissemination channels



Channel choice is not a tactical afterthought: it determines whether your story reaches the audiences you prioritised, and whether it is picked up (or distorted) by the multipliers you mapped earlier. Today, this requires an explicit answer to a recurring question: how central should social media be to your strategy? In most contexts, it needs to be central, because news and public debate increasingly happen on digital platforms and in social video, especially for younger groups. A practical starting point is to match channels to your objective. If your goal is public debate, prioritise channels that create repeated exposure and discussion (social video, local debates, radio/TV formats, community networks), not the written press. If your goal is political buy-in, prioritise briefings, targeted newsletters, committee-level engagements, stakeholder networks, and media moments that raise the political cost of inaction.

It is also useful to think beyond a simple traditional versus social media binary and instead combine owned, earned, shared and paid channels. For example, a dedicated website and newsletter to support transparency and continuity, live broadcasts, short expert videos, infographics and explainers to support pedagogy, interactive formats such as Instagram/Twitch lives or quizzes to widen participation and partnerships, publicity campaigns or paid ads when the objective is visibility and reach. Channel selection

should follow both the objective and the existing habits. Assemblies should communicate in spaces where their target communities are already active.

Platforms like Instagram and TikTok can be worth treating as their own media ecosystem, especially if your goal includes reaching younger or less politically engaged citizens. Social media influencers can then act as powerful multipliers because they bring you into feeds where people are not actively looking for climate or democratic innovation content. But they are rarely a plug-and-play solution. Experiences with influencers so far suggest that impact is modest unless you invest real capacity: a dedicated team member with the necessary skills tasked with identifying the right creators, briefing them, following up, and sustained repetition over time, otherwise one-off posts fade quickly. When they do work well, it is through specialist creators who already cover climate/democracy topics or trusted local ambassadors who can translate the process credibly in their communities. Big generalist influencers can be riskier for message drift and legitimacy. In the [Young Citizens' Assembly on Pollinators](#), it is assembly members themselves who became influencers, after setting up a communications task force, opening the assembly's Instagram and TikTok channels and producing content.

Timing is (almost) everything

Timing matters as much as channel choice. Communications for citizens' assemblies should be planned as a timeline, not as a steady drip of content, because attention clusters around key moments. Comparing five national climate assemblies in Austria, France, Scotland, Spain and the UK, [KNOCA research](#) shows a clear common pattern: the largest peak of attention usually comes when recommendations are published or presented. But the study also shows that the size and number of peaks vary, and that this is linked, at least in part, to how actively organisers create public moments rather than waiting for attention to appear on its own.

Austria is a good example of this causal link. Organisers added an online Pol.is consultation between weekends 4 and 5, open to the wider public, with around 6,000 participants, and also ran public webinars. This generated an additional rise in media attention, including coverage from Austria's most popular radio station. The mechanism is straightforward: by creating a new, outward-facing, participatory moment, organisers generated a novel news hook, and coverage rose accordingly.

France shows the same dynamic at a much larger scale. The French Convention attracted significantly more media attention overall than the other four assemblies. That cannot be reduced to communication strategy alone, but the case strongly suggests that strategy mattered. Organisers combined an unusually open communication model – media and observers attending sessions, strong social media activity, live commentary, and access for film crews – with a series of highly visible political moments. In other words, the Convention did not just have important moments; it was communicated in ways that made those moments highly reportable.



Civic collage

Photo: © Nantes Citizens Assembly on Post-Crisis

STEP 9

Establish safeguards

Once the assembly is underway, communication becomes a balancing act between two legitimate needs: enough transparency for the public to follow and trust the process, and enough protected space for members to deliberate freely without external pressure or premature scrutiny. The point is not to choose between 'open' and 'closed', but to design staged visibility: strategic moments of access and explanation that build legitimacy. A clear narrative rhythm, anchored in milestones, helps maintain attention without overexposing unfinished work. Safeguards should therefore be treated not as restrictions on communication, but as confidence-building measures that protect both the integrity of deliberation and the credibility of the process.



Balancing transparency and members' right to privacy

Climate assemblies are usually expected to be transparent, whether because those commissioned by public authorities carry formal obligations to openness, or because civil society organisers choose transparency strategically to build credibility. But transparency does not require opening every part of the process in the same way. Most organisers still face the same tension: how to make the assembly visible and trustworthy without undermining the protected space that members need in order to deliberate freely. This is particularly challenging in contexts of broader political conflict.

In practice, assemblies have drawn this line very differently. The [French Citizens' Convention for Climate](#) sat at the open end of the spectrum: journalists could witness deliberation and organisers were relatively permissive about access to members, which helped make the process far more visible in the wider public sphere.

[Germany's Citizens' Assembly on Nutrition](#) was more managed: organisers drew up a list of members willing to do public relations and only they could be filmed or interviewed. It was forbidden to record small-group discussions, though journalists could take limited images and speak to willing members afterwards.

[Ireland's Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss](#) followed a now familiar middle path: plenary sessions, expert presentations and questions from members were live-streamed, while roundtable discussions were kept off camera so members could speak more freely and, where needed, draw on personal experience.



The Austrian Citizens' Climate Assembly
Photo: © BMK - Karo Pernegger

In practice, staged transparency means balancing between your initial communications planning, which focuses on moments that are naturally reportable and low-risk, and more organic communications opportunities that might arise as the assembly unfolds. The plan gives you rhythm and safeguards, but rigidity can be a mistake too. Once journalists, stakeholders, or online communities start paying attention, unexpected windows open – a member's story that resonates, a topical news hook, a high-interest expert hearing – and you need the capacity to respond quickly while staying within clear boundaries. The craft is to use those moments without letting them dictate the process: adapt the narrative and assets, not the deliberation itself. In case an external crisis or domestic political shock changes the context, you may need ad hoc communication to retain control of the narrative: restate the mandate, clarify what the assembly can and cannot do in response, and explain any adjustments to schedule, inputs, or follow-up. In these moments, active media monitoring helps you spot misreadings early. Communications strategy can never be fully planned in advance. Some things can be anticipated, others cannot, so you need to stay reactive and keep an eye on both media and the wider mood around the assembly.

But always remember that boundaries are essential. Too much sharing can backfire in predictable ways: it freezes deliberation with participants self-censoring, creates confusion as tentative ideas might be reported as decisions, and fuels misinterpretation. Many climate assemblies therefore brief both assembly members and multipliers on what is reportable during as against after the assembly, sometimes using 'non-talking points': a short list of things not to share. At a minimum, safeguards should cover five practical points:

- a strong support system for participants, with media requests going through the communications team
- communications briefings or even trainings, especially in early sessions
- anonymity protections where appropriate
- a clearly managed pool of journalists
- embargo rules on decisions still under consideration, so debates and hearings can be reported without presenting unfinished positions as outcomes.

3

After the assembly: Keeping the narrative alive

The end of deliberation is not the end of the story: it is the moment when the story becomes more contestable. And unfortunately, the moment when communication efforts too often weaken. Media attention typically peaks at the publication of recommendations and then rapidly drops, leaving space for cynicism, hostile framing, or simple forgetting. A strong post-assembly communication strategy therefore does two things at once: it **stages** the recommendations as a public event (so they land), and it **extends** the process into a visible follow-up period (so people can track what happens next).



STEP 10
Plan a high visibility handover



STEP 11
Continue supporting assembly members



STEP 12
Maintain visibility after handover



STEP 10

Plan a high visibility handover

This is the moment where communications shift decisively from process credibility to what citizens decided. In many assemblies, media attention peaks precisely when recommendations are finalised and made public. So, exploit that peak, not simply experience it. As a default, publish recommendations immediately and communicate clearly that an official response will follow on a defined timeline. That allows the public to see, right away, what citizens concluded, rather than waiting for policymakers to frame the story first. This means having your final press package ready before the final handover event, with clear and simple messages from the recommendations, without altering their meaning. Do not hesitate to add a short executive summary, and a one-page 'top recommendations' adapted to each media outlet (generalist, or specialised), with clean, downloadable visuals and pictures. Outlets will summarise themselves, so why not help them with a more favourable framing!

But timing is strategic, not automatic. If the political context is exceptionally noisy, for example, an election campaign or coalition negotiations, immediate publication can bury the recommendations rather than amplify them. This was the situation in the Netherlands where the assembly recommendations would have been lost in the noise of an election and so release was delayed for months. In such cases, delay can be the right choice, provided it is intentional and disciplined. If you postpone release, do not circulate the recommendations early, including to policymakers, and set a clear publication point when they can shape the next phase of political discussion.

Second, make the handover a real public event, not an administrative transfer. Some assemblies have planned two linked moments: the formal handover, where recommendations are placed directly in the hands of decision-makers, and a distinct public-facing media moment designed for visibility, emotion and recall. Others have successfully combined the two. The higher profile and more publicly recognisable the recipient, the better: it signals political seriousness while attracting media attention. For both, remember to put members at the centre, safely. Assembly members remain the most compelling messengers of their own outcomes. But this works best if you prepare them: arrange a structured briefing and short training before the handover.

But visibility is not only about who receives the report; it is also about what the moment looks like. Strong, relevant images are irresistible to media across TV, print and social platforms. So think carefully about venue, staging and visual symbolism: an unexpected but issue-relevant setting, or a well-designed visual action, can dramatically increase pickup - as long as it is clearly connected to the topic and not just decorative.



Press conference & Garden reception, French Climate Convention
Photo: © Elysée

From formal handover to public moment

In France, the organisers of the [Citizens' Convention for the Climate](#) structured two distinct but complementary moments to maximise publicity and visibility. At the final Convention session (19-21 June 2020) at the CESE/Palais d'Iéna, the report was formally handed to the environment minister, anchoring responsibility for follow-up. Days later, a separate, more symbolic, high-visibility event. On 29 June 2020, Convention members were officially received at the Élysée Palace by the President, with the Prime Minister in attendance, in a staged garden reception and press conference. This two-step design mattered. The first moment established institutional seriousness; the second translated the handover into a national media event. The venue, the Elysée gardens, is highly symbolic. Not only are they part of the political imaginary of French citizens but also make a perfect background for media pictures and videos.

STEP 11

Continue supporting assembly members

If members are your strongest communicators during the assembly and are centre stage for a high visibility handover event, they are also the most credible advocates for both the recommendations and the process after it has finished. But post-assembly participation can become unbalanced and risky if left to individual energy and free time. The most confident and resource rich members will tend to dominate.

Build light but meaningful infrastructure to empower the diversity of assembly members to engage. At minimum, a named contact point, a small post-assembly communication pack including, for example, short explanations of key recommendations, and advice on how to address different media and local actors. At best, resources will have been earmarked to support member engagement (including ongoing payments) and partnerships established with organisations willing to support and coach former members who want to continue with media or public engagement.

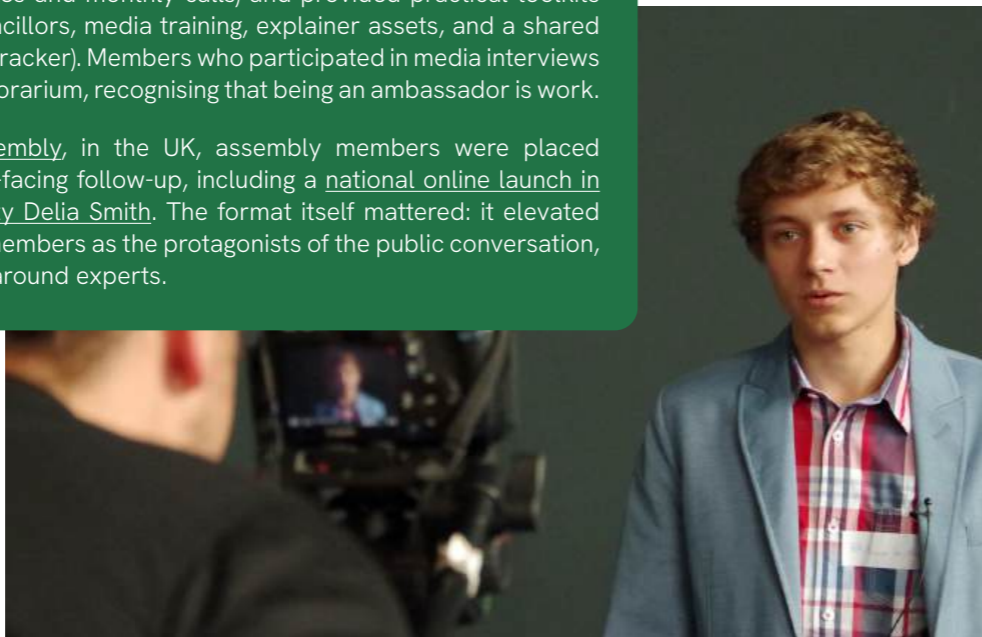
The KNOCA Guidance [Supporting Members After the Climate Assembly Ends: How to Nurture Action](#) provides insights and examples on how to plan and implement post-assembly engagement for members.



Supporting participants to become ambassadors

After the [People's Plan for Nature](#) was launched in the UK, partner organisations did not leave members to self-organise. They built a structured support programme to help former members advocate, speak publicly, and act locally, without letting momentum concentrate only among the most confident or well-connected. Support included a series of online workshops (e.g., confidence to act, community change, advocacy, using personal social media), with sessions scheduled for accessibility and recorded. Members were offered light 1:1 mentoring with local staff who helped them map opportunities and shape a plan of action. The programme also maintained regular contact (weekly updates and monthly calls) and provided practical toolkits (guides for engaging MPs/councillors, media training, explainer assets, and a shared resource drive with an impact tracker). Members who participated in media interviews or events received a small honorarium, recognising that being an ambassador is work.

In the [Cumbria Climate Assembly](#), in the UK, assembly members were placed visibly at the centre of public-facing follow-up, including a national online launch in conversation with the [celebrity Delia Smith](#). The format itself mattered: it elevated everyday voices and treated members as the protagonists of the public conversation, not as supporting characters around experts.



Participant's portrait
Photo: © Jess Grinneiser

STEP 12

Maintain visibility after handover

This is the stage where the impact of many assemblies is quietly lost: after the handover, when the policy afterlife becomes slow and technical, and organisers run out of steam and resources. Yet, providing regular updates on progress to sustain engagement and prevent disillusionment is essential.

A simple but high-impact practice is to provide regular, predictable updates on what is happening in response to the recommendations, especially to assembly members themselves. Members invest substantial time and energy, and in return the minimum assembly organisers should offer is visibility on how their work is being used: what has been discussed, by whom, what is being assessed, what has been adopted, and what has been delayed or dropped (and why). But the audience should not be limited to members alone: wider public updates also matter, because they show that the assembly was not a one-off participatory exercise but part of an ongoing democratic and political process.

In some assemblies, an oversight group consisting of assembly members will be formed. That role should not necessarily end once government has issued its formal response. In some cases, oversight can and should continue beyond that point: not only to receive feedback, but to monitor whether commitments are actually being implemented, to keep pressure on commissioners and decision-makers, and to make visible any gap between promise and follow-through. This is where former members can become a powerful vehicle for communication in their own right: not just witnesses to the process, but credible public messengers of what is – or is not – happening next.

This matters because expectations tend to be higher than policy reality. If members do not hear anything, they will often fill the silence with the most plausible interpretation: nothing is happening. That is where disillusionment replaces agency, and where the public story can tip into cynicism. Early planning helps. Agree a cadence (e.g., monthly or quarterly, bi-annually), and identify who owns the update (commissioner, secretariat, or joint). Even when progress is slow, steady communication reassures members that the process is still alive and gives them credible material to keep explaining the work. Use formats that make progress visible and easy to reuse: short member updates, public newsletters, implementation trackers, dashboards, hearings, or anniversary moments that bring the assembly back into public view.

Tracking progress between political cycles

The permanent [Climate Assembly in Brussels](#) shows why follow-up needs time. Its first cycle took place February to April 2023. Not only did the organisers have to do feasibility studies and impact assessments of the recommendations while organizing a second and third cycle, but amid the post-May 2024 regional election negotiations, they ended up without any government to ensure political follow-up. To avoid silence and maintain trust, the Assembly Secretariat created a dedicated monitoring platform. Every six months, it checks in with relevant experts in the regional administration responsible for implementation, records what has (or has not) progressed, and documents the reasons why. The Secretariat then turned these updates into a public progress report, with the first one [published in February 2026](#). The purpose is straightforward: transparency and accountability, to the members who invested their time, and to the wider publics and institutions involved in Brussels' climate transition.



Conclusion

The main message of this KNOCA Guidance is simple: communication is not an add-on to a citizens' assembly, but a critical part of its infrastructure for impact. It shapes whether the process is understood, trusted, seen as legitimate, and remembered beyond the room. To work, communication needs to be planned early, resourced properly, and sustained across the full life of the assembly, including after recommendations are handed over. Above all, organisers should treat communication not as promotion, but as part of how assemblies connect to the wider public sphere and to political decision-making.

This Guidance also points to several areas that deserve deeper exploration. We still know too little about how different contexts shape which communication strategies help assemblies gain visibility without distorting deliberation, how members can best be supported as communicators, and what forms of post-assembly communication are most effective in sustaining pressure and follow-through. Just as importantly, the skills, labour, and internal practices that make good communication possible remain underexamined. These are all areas for future KNOCA investigation.

But we know enough to know that communications must be central to any climate assembly if we want that assembly to have impact.



Young Citizens Assembly on Pollinators
Photo: © Olivia Charles

Acknowledgements

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