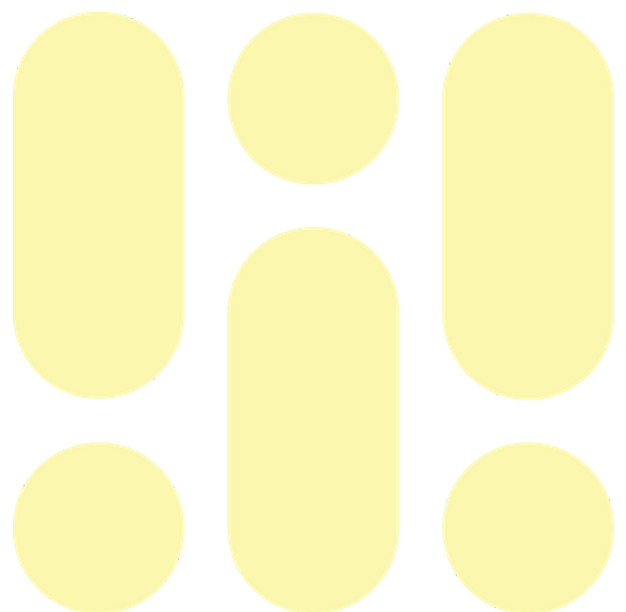


## Recruiting Assembly Members by Democratic Lottery





# Why is this an issue?

The distinctive feature of a climate assembly is that it brings together a diverse group of people selected by democratic lottery to learn, deliberate and come to recommendations. Everyone should have a chance to be included and as such assembly members should resemble the wider population from which they are drawn. This gives climate assemblies legitimacy. Anyone looking at the assembly should see someone like themselves in the room, not the usual vocal minority, politically confident or those with a strong political interest. This diversity of assembly members is also important for making good proposals. Too often political decisions are made by small groups of people with very similar backgrounds and outlooks that fail to account for the lived experience of other social groups, particularly the most vulnerable. In contrast, citizens' assemblies draw on diverse views, knowledge and experience.



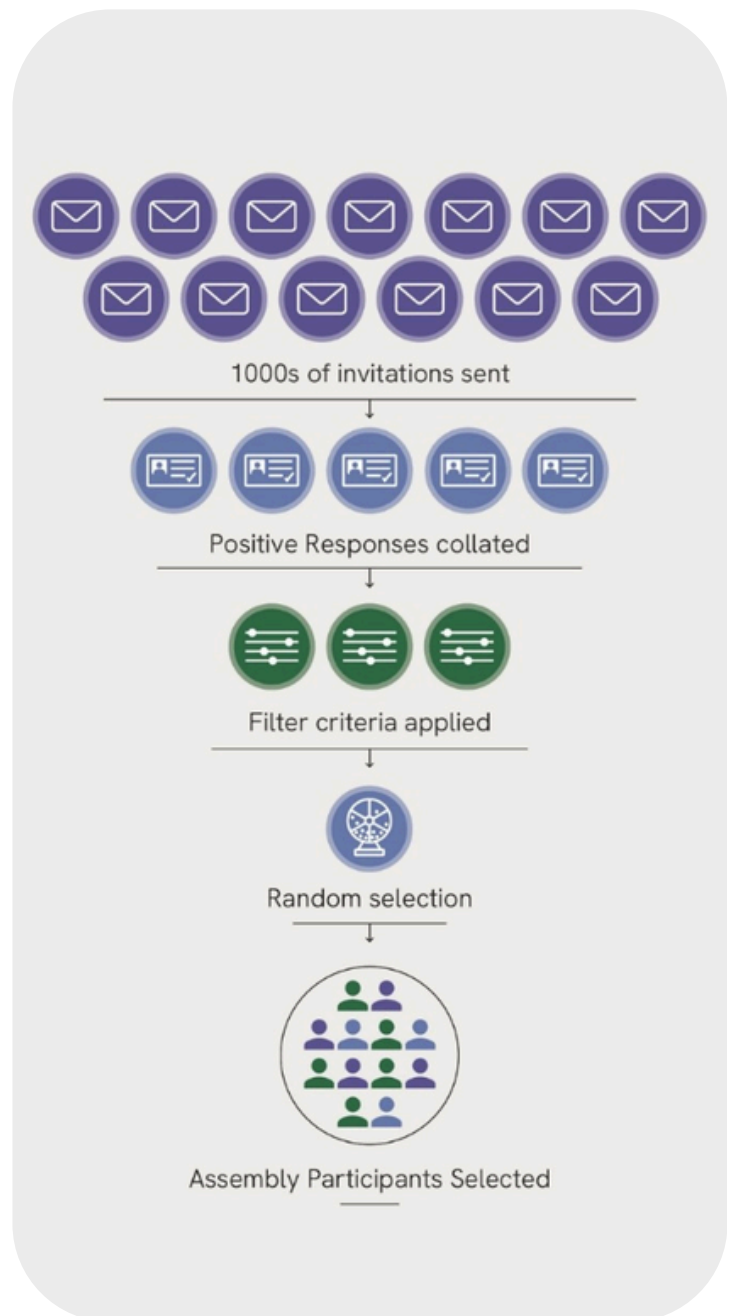


# What have we learned from previous assemblies?

A common misconception of assemblies is that they are full of climate activists. Getting recruitment right - and telling people about it - is important to defend against misunderstandings and, at times, calculated political attacks. But it takes resources, care and attention. Cutting corners in recruitment can undermine the process.

The accepted standard procedure for selection is a two-stage democratic lottery. In the first stage, thousands of invitations are sent out to randomly selected addresses or phone numbers. In the second stage, members are randomly selected from the pool of volunteers using targets to ensure that the final assembly members resemble the wider population in relation to selected characteristics. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the lottery process. The recruitment process is often carried out by a specialist organisation (on occasion a government statistics agency), although open-access software is available to enable the application of selection criteria.

Once assembly members have been selected, resources are needed to ensure that they turn up on the day and stay committed to the process.



**Figure 1:** Two-stage democratic lottery



# Stage 1. Invitation by lottery

Thousands of invitations are sent out, typically by letter to randomly selected households, although the French Convention used randomly generated phone numbers (landlines and mobiles) and the Danish national Climate Assembly used e-Boks, Denmark's official digital mailbox, used by public authorities to communicate with all citizens. Written invitations will often be in an official envelope and/or on headed paper to increase the chance that respondents take the invitation seriously. The letter will include the following information:

- The assembly question
- Commissioning organisation
- Expected outcomes
- Incentive to participate, including childcare and other caring support
- When and where
- Available support, including translation
- How to register
- Deadline for application

Those who are interested in participating are asked to provide consent to be included in the selection pool, along with personal details.

## Response Rates

Many people will not open the letter. Some will read it and think it a scam. Some won't be interested. And some won't be available on the required dates.

Generally, around 5 to 10 percent of invitees will accept the invitation because they are excited about the opportunity to participate or they are being offered money or the opportunity to stay in a nice hotel. In the French Convention, for example, members received €84 per day (the same daily allowance as for jury service), a hotel room in Paris, plus specific benefits for childcare and lost income.

An honorarium and caring support widen the pool of backgrounds and experiences amongst assembly members and recognise the service they are providing. Payment helps ensure it is not only those motivated by civic duty, committed to climate action or with financial resources that participate. Care support ensures that the pool of volunteers is not just those with free time and no responsibilities.



## Targeted Outreach

Some social groups tend to be less responsive to invitations – especially those who feel underrepresented or have had negative experiences with official institutions, often in poorer and minoritised communities. Extra invitations are often sent to areas of higher deprivation to boost the number of volunteers. At times this is complemented by door-to-door knocking or working through trusted intermediary bodies to raise the number of responses from those social groups more reticent to respond.

Young people can be difficult to contact. Some experimentation, with mixed results, has taken place using text messages to increase their engagement. The Canadian Youth Climate Assembly generated a wide pool of 18-25-year-old volunteers through a targeted social media campaign.

## Don't Cut Corners!

Be wary of market research companies offering recruitment on the cheap through their existing survey panels or on-street recruiters.

The Luxembourg and Spanish national climate assemblies did not follow generally accepted standards. They drew all (Spain) or part (Luxembourg) of their members from survey company panels, undermining the principle that every resident should have an equal opportunity to be selected to participate.

The early citizens' assemblies in Ireland used market research companies to recruit potential participants through door-to-door and on-street techniques. A couple of neighbours and relatives appeared in the same assemblies as private canvassers took short cuts to recruit people quickly. The Irish have now reverted to sending letters. In contrast, the German organisation Es geht LOS applies more systematic door-to-door recruitment as a way of directly enthusing potential participants, with impressively high response rates.



# Stage 2. Selection by lottery – with targets

Those who volunteer to be part of the assembly in Stage 1 will not be well balanced: respondents will tend to skew towards people with higher education and income and those who are slightly older, with less from minority ethnic and poorer communities or from families with young children.

To ensure a balanced group of assembly members, targets are applied so that members mirror the wider population across salient criteria. That is why volunteers are asked to provide information about themselves when responding to the invitation. Target criteria vary, but most assemblies include some combination of socio-demographic criteria:

- age
- gender
- education (often also used as a proxy of social class)
- geography
- ethnicity
- disability



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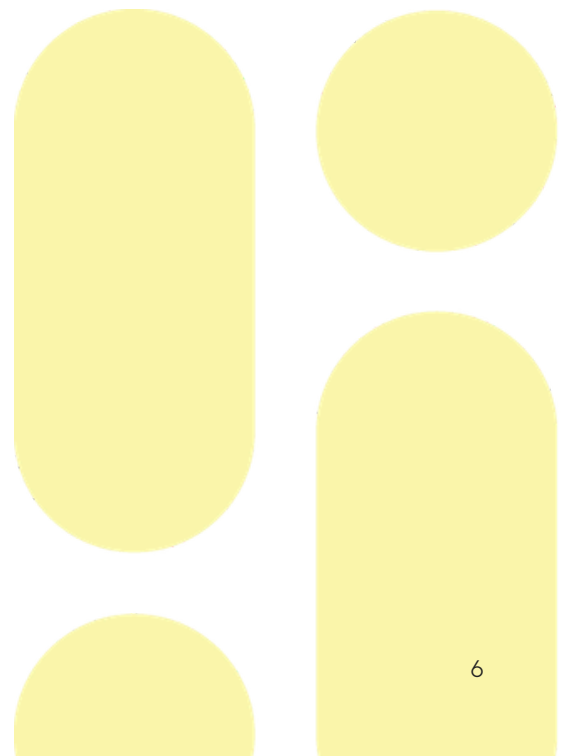
Beyond those demographic criteria, others may be specific to the remit of the assembly. If the topic is transport, for example, organisers may add criteria for the different modes used across the population (public transport, car, bike, walking) and/or where the person lives (city centre, suburbs, rural area), so that salient differences in experience are present within the assembly. This is best done when reliable statistics are available on the composition of these characteristics in the wider population.

Some climate assemblies have also applied attitudinal criteria: generally, a measure of level of concern about climate change (or the specific topic of the assembly) which can be compared to national statistics. This is a way of explicitly defending against the criticism that the assembly is full of climate activists. Where such a criterion has not been applied, members have tended to be more concerned about climate change than the wider population, which opens the assembly up to accusations of bias and illegitimacy from the start. Where statistics on demographic criteria are often readily available, statistics on attitudes can be harder to come by.

In places marked by high levels of political polarisation, such as the United States, voting intentions have also been added as a filter criterion to ensure that the assembly straddles political divides, although this is a less stable criterion.

Some assembly advocates argue that climate justice requires that minority groups – especially those with direct experience or under direct threat of climate change – have increased representation in climate assemblies to ensure that their voice is heard. This is in tension with the argument that the legitimacy of an assembly rests on its resemblance with the wider population. There is no right answer. This will be a political judgement on the part of organisers and will need to be documented.

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# Stage 3. Getting people through the door

While democratic lottery has two stages, a third element is critical. We need to make sure selected members attend – and then stay for the duration of the assembly. Member support is needed from the moment recruitment starts to the end of the assembly – and arguably beyond.

None of the assembly members will likely ever have been asked to do anything like this before. For some, that will be exciting and increase their motivation to participate. For others, the approaching start date of the assembly generates anxiety. Attendance at an assembly can be daunting – practically and emotionally. Organisers should develop a supportive relationship with members, often ensuring that transport is arranged along with any care that is needed for family members (including children).

## Varying retention rates

Scotland's Climate Assembly selected 105 members applying the following criteria: age, gender, household income, ethnicity, geography, rurality, disability, and attitude towards climate change. All residents over sixteen were eligible. Seven replacements were added before the second weekend to cover for no-shows, and 102 citizens completed the seventh weekend. That is impressive retention.

Occasionally assemblies have retention problems. Out of the 99 members of the national Danish climate assembly, in the first phase, only 59 voted at the end of the first stage of the process. This may well relate to the limited resources available to support members compared to better resourced processes.



For those assemblies that take place partly or fully online (more common during and since the pandemic), member support can involve providing Wi-Fi and hardware for those without the necessary technology and capacity building for those unfamiliar with relevant software. Stories have been shared of organisers standing outside a participant's front window during the pandemic making sure that they are comfortable and confident in using new equipment and online platforms!

Anyone who drops out between being selected and the start of the process can be replaced, using the remaining pool of people who have not yet been selected.

Climate assemblies often provide access to psychological support for members during the assembly - some will never have considered the existential effect of climate change - and as part of aftercare, although in practice this is rarely used.

If done right, democratic lottery *plus* ongoing member support has impressive impact on retention rates.





# Recommendations

- Democratic lotteries require resources, time and care. It is an investment that cannot be overstated, otherwise the legitimacy of the assembly will be undermined.
- Make sure that details of how the assembly was selected is publicly available. It will be useful for countering criticisms of the assembly, like accusations that the assembly is made up of activists.
- Use a two-stage democratic lottery. In the first stage send invitations to randomly selected individuals, households or phone numbers. In the second stage randomly select from the pool of volunteers, using salient targets. Open access software is available to support both stages - or the whole process can be subcontracted to a specialist organisation.
- Consider supplementing socio-demographic criteria - such as gender, age, ethnicity, education and geographic location - with criteria related to relevant behaviours and climate attitudes. This works best if robust, recent population data is available for comparison.
- Consider targeted outreach in communities that tend not to respond to invitations and tailor the outreach method to fit the context in question.
- Consider over-sampling structural minorities to increase their presence in the assembly and to guard against drop-out.
- Providing an honorarium and care support helps increase the diversity of people putting themselves forward and staying with the process.
- Building a personal relationship with members before and during the assembly will help ensure attendance and retention. This requires resources.

