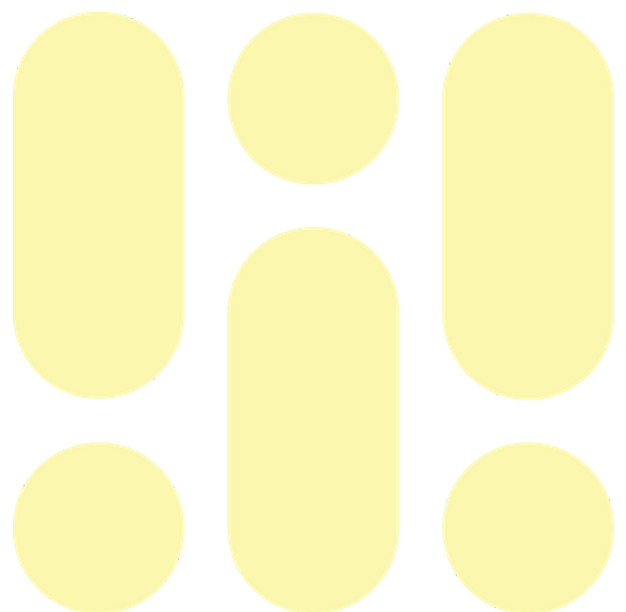


KNOCA

Knowledge
Network
On
Climate
Assemblies

Engaging Stakeholders in Climate Assemblies





Why is this an issue?

Stakeholders are organised interests like civil society organisations, businesses, trade unions and universities. They can be vital to the success of climate assemblies for a number of reasons. They have information and knowledge that can be critical for assembly members to make good decisions. Their support for an assembly can increase its legitimacy and reach. They are often the object of recommendations and so are necessary for implementation. They can put pressure on other actors (including government) to implement recommendations. The challenge is to involve and motivate stakeholders without compromising the integrity of the assembly process.



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What have we learned from previous assemblies?

Standard approaches to stakeholder engagement

The main strategy to facilitate stakeholder engagement adopted by assembly organisers is to integrate key organisations from the very start of the process in the governance bodies of the assembly and/or for them to act as witnesses, providing evidence when relevant. As with public officials, seeing citizens in action can change the perspective of stakeholders.

Stakeholder advisory bodies not only help to ensure balance across different interests but also tie those who are likely to be affected by recommendations into the process. They can be ambassadors, multiplying knowledge, interest and support for the assembly and its recommendations.

Stakeholders can be sceptical or even hostile to assemblies. Climate organisations have been known to perceive climate assemblies as reducing their influence on policy. Often scepticism is unfounded, but it can require outreach work to help them understand the value of assemblies.

Eva Saldaña, Director of Greenpeace Spain has recounted how she was sceptical of assemblies until she took part in the governance body for the national climate assembly. Through direct experience of the deliberations, she became an active champion of the process and its proposals. The organisers of the Austrian Citizens' Climate Council employed two civil society engagement officers who developed more in-depth communication to engage organised interests.

The stakeholder Stewarding Group of **Scotland's Climate Assembly** remained in place after the report had been delivered, ensuring that key actors continued to engage with the assembly during the follow-up process. The Secretariat drew on the networks around these stakeholders to promote the assembly's report and to invite stakeholders beyond the Stewarding Group to sign a Civic Charter in support of the assembly's calls for action.

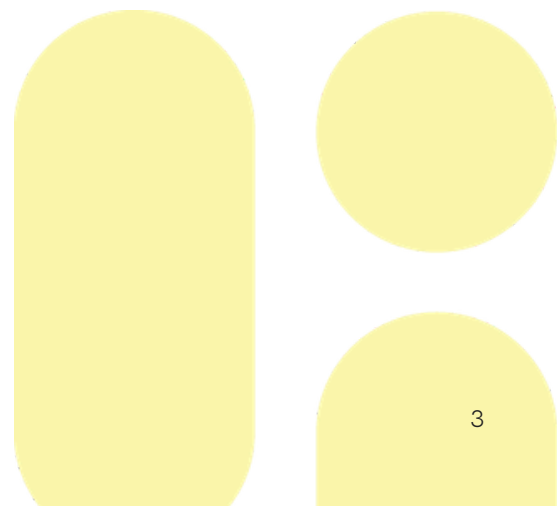
Stakeholders can also strengthen the evidence base of an assembly. Depending on the type of stakeholder, they can bring knowledge of the lived realities and experiences of particular groups and organisations directly affected by the assembly's remit. They can bring practical insights into potential challenges and solutions that can help shape more robust recommendations.

For both governance and evidence, organisers need to have an active engagement strategy. If they only rely on engaging the most visible organisations, it will be those with resources and existing influence that dominate proceedings. This may have a detrimental effect on the legitimacy of the assembly. Organisers will need to map the range of organised interests and make decisions about which organisations are most important to involve to ensure balanced representation. Marcin Gerwin, the founder of [Center for Blue Democracy](#) in Poland, has made the case for bringing organised interests together to decide amongst themselves on who should represent them and speak to the assembly.

Supporting development of recommendations

A number of climate assemblies have taken stakeholder engagement a step-further by involving them in the development of recommendations. Direct involvement of stakeholders recognises their significant knowledge and experience as well as strong interests in codesigning policy proposals. Stakeholders bring vital knowledge and experience into the room, but care needs to be taken that they do not unduly influence assembly members.

The French Citizens' Convention for the Climate is somewhat rare in the field for having a more open relationship with stakeholders: a number of the Convention proposals were co-constructed between assembly members and stakeholders. Other assemblies have formalised opportunities for stakeholders to work directly with assembly members. A particular moment (or moments) for engagement is created. In the end though, the stakeholders leave the room, and the recommendations are decided by the assembly members themselves.





The **German city of Erlangen** created a sequenced process involving a local research institute, a stakeholder forum and a citizens' assembly. The role of the institute was initially to scope the range of policies that would be needed for the city to become carbon neutral. These proposals were reviewed by the stakeholder forum and then its response was considered by the assembly. The cycle repeated: technical experts to stakeholders to citizens. Having gone through this cycle three times, the assembly produced a final set of recommendations. Stakeholders were then invited to sign a City Declaration committing to work towards the agreed goals. Buy-in was arguably more extensive because the stakeholders had a much more active and creative part to play in the overall process.

In **Austria**, the members of the Stakeholder Advisory Board of the **Citizens' Climate Council** were invited to share position papers with the assembly and a dedicated session mid-way through the work programme was designed so that stakeholders and assembly members could exchange ideas. The organisers noticed variations in the level of commitment to the process, with the Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Austrian Industries less engaged than the unions and environmental representatives.

The **regional Citizens' Convention for Climate and Biodiversity in Burgundy-Franche-Comté** organised in 2023-4 brought stakeholders into the first day of the final two weekends of the assembly at the point where members were developing their recommendations. The first two weekends were members only, as they developed their knowledge and understanding of the climate and ecological crisis and its impact on the region, as well as their confidence and collective agency. As in other assemblies, it is the citizens who made the final decisions.



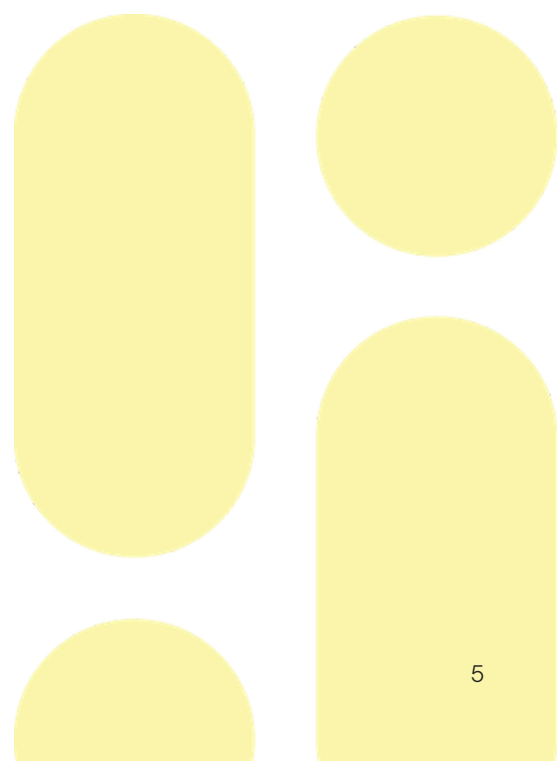
Taking an oversight role

Stakeholders have also been formally tied into the oversight and monitoring of the official response to assembly reports. The Stewarding Group of Scotland's Climate Assembly (see first box above) continued its role in part to put pressure on government to take the assembly's recommendations seriously. In Austria, it is common practice for organisers of citizens' councils (a smaller deliberative process similar to a citizens' assembly) to create a responder group that involves both members of the citizens' council and representatives of stakeholder organisations to track the response to and implementation of recommendations.

Stakeholders as members of assemblies

A more radical approach is for stakeholders to be part of the assembly in the same way as citizens. This is the methodology of G1000 in the Netherlands (not to be confused with the original organisation of the same name in Belgium). G1000 Netherlands aims to create 'the system in one room' by using democratic lottery to not only select a large body of everyday people but also political actors and stakeholders of different types, including public officials, civic activists and business leaders.

While everyday people outnumber the other participants, the protective space for citizens is fundamentally rethought, with citizens and stakeholders working together from the very start of the process. A number of Dutch municipalities have commissioned G1000 assemblies. A comparison between their functionalities and those of more traditional climate assemblies has yet to be undertaken.





Recommendations

- Create opportunities for stakeholders to engage with the assembly process. At minimum, this should be in the form of a stakeholder advisory board.
- Ensure that stakeholder perspectives are a part of the evidence base of the assembly
- Consider creating opportunities for stakeholders to exchange and collaborate with members in the development and design of policy proposals and to provide feedback on draft proposals.
- Consider how stakeholders might be involved in the monitoring and oversight of the response of commissioners to recommendations.
- Stakeholders can be sceptical or even hostile to assemblies. This can include climate organisations. Outreach work is often needed to help them understand the value of assemblies.
- Don't just engage those stakeholders that are already influential and have a high profile. Or just those that are positive towards climate action. This risks undermining the legitimacy of the assembly.
- Recognising power differentials among stakeholders and between stakeholders and assembly members is critical in supporting constructive interactions.
- Design with care and never forget to keep the citizens in your assembly at the centre of your work.

