

# ► *The Year in Deliberation 2025*

*Democracy R&D's annual report on key trends and  
developments in deliberative democracy and the network*



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# About Democracy R&D



With 110 organizations and 106 individual members across 58 countries, involving more than 300 people, [Democracy R&D](#) is the largest global network dedicated to deliberative democracy and democratic innovation. We support public authorities, civil society, and other decision makers to tackle complex issues and strengthen public trust by collaboratively designing, implementing, and promoting citizens' assemblies and other deliberative processes, from the local to the global level.



110

**Organisational members worldwide**



106

**Individual members in the network**



58

**Countries represented across six continents**



300+

**People involved in the network**

# About This Report



*The Year in Deliberation 2025* is Democracy R&D's annual state of the field report, offering a snapshot of key trends, innovations, and challenges in deliberative democracy. Designed for network members and the wider field, it tracks the evolution of deliberative processes and highlights where the field is heading. This report is the second edition of the Year in Deliberation series. You can find the 2024 report [here](#).

As the global movement for deliberative democracy continues to grow—with dozens of new assemblies and juries emerging worldwide, alongside evolving trends and challenges—the Democracy R&D network is committed to maintaining an annual record of the field's evolution. This report aims to track how the practice and thinking around deliberative democracy and citizens' assemblies are developing. Rather than providing an exhaustive overview, this report highlights notable cases and key issues that have shaped the past year, offering insights into the field's ongoing transformations. Given the rapid pace of change, staying up to date can be challenging, and we hope this annual report will serve as a valuable resource.

The report begins by highlighting notable trends in the field in 2025. The *Field-Advancing Assemblies and Juries* section illustrates these trends through selected case studies of deliberative processes that took place in new countries, introduced new design elements, expanded representation, addressed challenging issues, achieved exceptional impact, and introduced representative deliberation to contexts beyond government. The *New Publications and Resources* section takes stock of new books, guides, and papers that network members published in 2025. *The Democracy R&D Network in 2025* section provides a summary of how the network has evolved. *What's next?* reflects on what deliberative processes, projects, and challenges await in 2026 including the Democracy R&D Annual Meeting, ongoing network projects such as the Consolidating Deliberative Practices in the Global South initiative and the Constitutions & Charters Interest Group.

# Methodology



The five trends highlighted here reflect the priorities identified collectively by Democracy R&D network members at the 2025 Annual Conference. An interactive poll was set up where network members could vote for and suggest new trends. 171 votes were received. These five trends received the most votes and are explored in more depth via interviews.

The case studies and new publications were collected using an open submission form, open to all network members. 32 assembly case studies were received, out of which 16 were selected to be featured in more depth based on the six categories of field advancing assemblies: happening in new places, testing new design elements, expanding representation, addressing especially challenging topics, achieving exceptional impact, and going beyond government. The full list of submissions is available in [Annex A](#).



171

Votes



32

Case study submissions



16

Cases featured

# Acknowledgements



This report was written based on desk research, network member submissions, and member interviews. The network's governance bodies were consulted to identify key trends and case studies. Input was gathered from the broader network, inviting members to suggest notable cases, and relevant resources, and vote on emerging trends.

The report was written by Ieva Česnulaitytė, Felipe Rey, Santiago Niño-Aguilar, Paula Pérez, and Pablo Trujillo. It was reviewed by David Schecter and Indira Latorre. We are grateful to all interviewees for their valuable contributions, and Kyle Redman and Miguel González for a summary of the annual R&D conference.

We extend our special thanks to Geert Vanden Wijngaert, who joined us at the 2025 Annual Conference in Brussels and whose photographs, capturing the spirit of the network, are featured throughout this report.

We also want to thank the National Endowment for Democracy, the Robert Bosch Foundation, and the Salvia Foundation for supporting the network and helping us complete this project.

While this report reflects extensive contributions from the network, it is not intended to represent the views of every individual member.

# 01



# Trends

**The** deliberative democracy field is evolving, shaped by technological shifts, changing political realities, and experimentation beyond traditional arenas. The five trends highlighted here reflect the priorities identified collectively by Democracy R&D network members at the 2025 annual conference. Each trend is explored through interviews with practitioners and researchers working directly on these questions, capturing the diversity of perspectives within the field.

*These conversations have been edited for length and clarity. Interviews for Trends 1-4 were prepared and conducted by Ieva Česnulaityte; interviews for Trend 5 by Paula Pérez.*

**Trend 1** → *AI in the Room*

**Trend 2** → *Deliberation and democratic resilience*

**Trend 3** → *Expanding representation: who gets to speak for the future?*

**Trend 4** → *Deliberation beyond government*

**Trend 5** → *Funding sustainability for deliberation in an age of cuts*

Trend 1

# AI in the Room



*In the past year, artificial intelligence has piqued curiosity in deliberative democracy circles. AI tools have begun to appear in the design and delivery of citizens' assemblies. While some practitioners are experimenting with these technologies, others are taking a more cautious approach. In this series of interviews, three researchers and practitioners discuss the growing role of AI in deliberation, offering insight into how the field is responding.*

## The AI in deliberation dilemma



 **Sammy McKinney**

*Sammy is a deliberative democracy researcher at the University of Cambridge and a practitioner working at the intersection of AI and democratic innovation. He reflects on the promise of AI for deliberation, while warning that its political economy and power dynamics demand careful scrutiny.*

*Has the thinking and practice around AI for deliberation evolved since last year?*

### Sammy McKinney:

Definitely. I'd say there are four main developments: relating to research, practice, new products/services, and field-building. We've seen many new academic papers, both on how AI works in deliberative settings, and on what it means politically, socially, culturally. In terms of practice, we've seen lots of experimentation this year, particularly using AI for information processing. When it comes to new applications, there has been a proliferation and consolidation in the number of different platforms, it's hard to keep track even if you try. We've also seen the emergence of AI and deliberation networks, which shows that field-building is intensifying.

*What would you say is at the core of the tension many of us are grappling with when it comes to using AI in deliberative processes?*

### Sammy McKinney:

It's the fundamental politics of AI. It's not a neutral, unbiased tool. It transforms power dynamics in both subtle and obvious ways. There are socio-technical limitations to these models: the bias within them, the inaccuracies of what they'll produce, their limited transparency. No wonder there is a hesitancy around whether this is the type of instrument that is appropriate within a deliberative or democratic context. These are technologies that are owned by big tech corporations, an industry that's in itself in tension with democratic norms and values. Even if AI can bring value to small scale deliberative practices, we need to view AI integration within this wider context.

*Should we still try to make the most of these tools as democracy practitioners, or should this moral dilemma prohibit us from it?*

### Sammy McKinney:

I'm still trying to work this out, to be honest. But my thinking here is threefold.

If we look at the effects of AI at the process level, we can reflect on the extent to which using AI for summarising information, identifying missing perspectives, simplifying learning materials,

or supporting translation helps us enrich the quality of a mini-public compared to if we didn't have these applications. Here we see AI integration opens up a lot of new opportunities, but also significant risks. For example, it creates new possibilities for inclusion, but it can also lead to digital divides.

Thinking structurally about the political economy of AI, I'm definitely concerned about a number of things. The AI industry as a whole is highly extractive and highly exploitative. What does it mean if our democratic infrastructure is owned privately by corporations? If we use AI tools within deliberative processes, we risk turning a blind eye to problematic path dependencies that may emerge.

This leaves me thinking about what it would mean to actually use technologies like AI in a way that does align with foundational democratic values and principles. For example, there is interesting work happening in open sourcing, interoperability, data commons, and decolonial AI that I believe the field should tap into more.

Ultimately, I don't think it's realistic, and probably not even desirable, to never use these technologies. We do use Google Docs and other software owned by those same big tech companies all the time. There are useful things that AI applications can do if used thoughtfully, but in exploring this positive potential we shouldn't turn a blind eye to more structural considerations.

*Zooming in on the process level, could you share what has been tested over this past year?*

**Sammy McKinney:**

I think the main way that practitioners are interested in using these tools is information processing.

*When running a deliberative process it becomes very difficult for practitioners to analyse, process, and feedback to assembly members - what are the main themes, main points that have been made, what has been missed. Dembrane and deliberAIde are designed to do that.*

I have a sense that practitioners are using these tools throughout the preparations for a deliberative process too: to think through the assembly topic, to go over the learning materials, and to support translation. But overall the take-up of AI is perhaps slower than one might expect, which is quite fascinating, because it shows the way technological uptake is not inevitable but shaped by various social, political and relational factors.

*Are there emerging innovations or tools that are worth keeping an eye on?*

**Sammy McKinney:**

There's a promise that AI will allow us to aggregate and distill inputs from the wider public and feed them into the assembly, which can help increase the legitimacy of the process. It could help us map out the opinion space better so that we can actually engage in deeper kinds of deliberation.

Translation is a high impact, promising development, as models become more capable in translating between languages of all sorts. It will be able to support transnational and global deliberation much better.

But as we follow any new developments, it's important to not let AI capture our attention too much. As captivating as it might be, shifting our efforts towards this new space can retract from other important work our community is doing.

**Keeping deliberation human**



**Peter MacLeod**

*Peter, principal of MASS LBP, brings nearly two decades of experience designing and facilitating citizens assemblies to the question of where, and whether, AI belongs in deliberative practice.*

*From your perspective as a long-term practitioner, how do you view the recent interest in AI-enhanced citizens' assemblies? Where does it come from?*

**Peter MacLeod:**

Obviously, AI is a major technological achievement. Given that the deliberative wave has been underway for more than a decade, I think it strikes some people as ripe for reinvention or renewal. This is why reaching for AI, or for technology more broadly, feels intuitively right.

That said, I have yet to meet a client who has asked us to incorporate AI into our work. This is of course different from those who, over the past year, have suggested running assemblies about the implications of AI on society, which I think is entirely appropriate. Given the magnitude of AI's impact, it makes sense for citizens to deliberate on it as a topic.

*Do you personally use AI in your work?*

**Peter MacLeod:**

Yes, I use AI constantly. We use it to make administrative processes more efficient, to research, and to rephrase and summarise text. Deliberative processes are incredibly text-intensive, and when you're working in two languages (English and French) the translation burden is significant. We use AI translation tools, both audio and text-based. We also use AI to develop and refine learning materials.

But we are not using AI to analyse transcripts of small-group discussions in order to surface latent perspectives, which is of great interest to some organizations in the field. We're also not using it to reach people outside the assembly.

*Why draw the line there?*

**Peter MacLeod:**

It's less a line than an ethos. My interest in this work has always been about creating a better relationship between citizens and the state. A deliberative process is already a form of mediation. I don't want to introduce an additional intermediary into that relationship. What I'm trying to create is a rich, interpersonal experience that fosters intimacy and trust.

My preference is to prioritise the involvement of facilitators, guest speakers and other humans rather than reach for technologies. We've long used markers and large sheets of paper, and I believe that creating text in an embodied, awkward, iterative and messy way has real pedagogical and relational benefits.

We trust our facilitators. We work with a high ratio of facilitators to participants, which gives us a great deal of situational awareness. Fortunately, we haven't yet had a moment where something went seriously wrong because we weren't aware of something under the surface.

I tend to think about this work in terms of what psychologists call 'holding environments'. People need to be met where they

are, recognised as well as represented. That kind of recognition, and the possibility of transformation that comes with it, requires real human presence. You need to be heard by another person for it to happen.

*Some argue that AI could reduce human bias or prevent important perspectives from being missed. How do you respond to that?*

**Peter MacLeod:**

I think it's a fair concern — one that animates much of our approach — but it can also mask a belief in the perfectability of politics: the idea that deliberation can be optimised, cleaned up, perfected.

*I worry that people can be drawn to these technologies because they don't feel particularly comfortable with the messiness of human interaction. They are looking for a neutral arbiter to ensure that ideas compete more completely and equitably in a discursive space. But deliberation is messy. Being human is messy. Reasoning together should make room for this messiness.*

I think it's helpful to apply what I call the politician test. Would any elected politician accept being prompted by a bot to express their feelings on a bill? Absolutely not. If it's not acceptable for elected representatives, why would it be preferable for selected representatives?

*So where do you see a responsible role for AI in assemblies?*

**Peter MacLeod:**

Using AI for mundane, preparatory and follow-up tasks makes sense. Summarising inputs, preparing materials, translation — that's all fine.

There is a continuum here. On one end, using AI to support the work around an assembly. In the middle, a grey zone, which I prefer to avoid, where AI is used to prompt people towards agreement or disagreement. And then there is the extreme end: the so-called "public-on-a-chip" that is weighted in such a way that predicts people's opinions — an idea that is patently undemocratic and should be avoided if not banned.

Ultimately, our work is about creating democratic legitimacy for difficult decisions. It's about showing that a high degree of consensus is possible when people are given time, information and

space to understand an issue thoroughly. That is what politicians can then use to enact change.

*What should we be putting our efforts towards if the assembly model itself does not need innovation and reinvention?*

**Peter MacLeod:**

I think the model, broadly defined, is highly adaptive and sound. But innovation is required to embed this model within existing political and institutional spaces — to make the model part of what we think of as core to the democratic experience. This is, at minimum, a 30- to 50-year project which is why I think our energies need to be directed here.

## Careful experimentation with AI for deliberation



 **Matt Byrne**

*Matt is Senior Director of Deliberation at Unify America, where he designs both in-person and digital citizens' assemblies. Matt argues that the key question is no longer whether to use AI, but how.*

*Over the past year, how have you incorporated AI into your deliberative work?*

**Matt Byrne:**

I tend to think about AI use in two broad buckets.

The first is the synthesis of large data sets. That includes idea generation with a wider “maxi-public,” post-session surveys from larger assemblies, or any situation where you’re trying to make sense of hundreds of inputs. The task is to summarise, synthesise, and reflect that information back to the people who produced it.

The second bucket is improving the quality of learning materials. We still work closely with expert and stakeholder groups to

develop balanced materials, but AI has been useful in interrogating those drafts, for instance, flagging where minority viewpoints within a field may be underrepresented or where claims might need further contextualisation.

*So AI is mainly used in preparation and between sessions, rather than during live deliberation?*

**Matt Byrne:**

Mostly, yes, but we do also use it between deliberative sessions. After a session on a particular proposal, we’ll gather survey data capturing key questions, perceived benefits, and trade-offs. We then aggregate and synthesise that data and report it back to the full plenary at the next session. The long-term dream is to be able to do this reliably and responsibly in near real time. It’s an area we’re watching closely.

*What do you see as the main benefits of using AI in these ways?*

**Matt Byrne:**

It’s worth grounding this in how labour-intensive these tasks are without AI. Going through hundreds of survey responses and trying to summarise them manually is extremely time-consuming. That time translates directly into cost.

The benefits here are efficiency, reduced costs for clients, and, with proper safeguards, quality. As long as you have a human in the loop checking for accuracy and fairness, the outputs can be just as good as, and sometimes better than, what you’d get from a single researcher or even a team of coders.

For learning materials, the benefit is depth and rigour. My experience of many assembly reports is that the research is often not especially nuanced. Key claims are presented without much transparency about how robust the evidence is, or whether a view is widely accepted or contested within a field.

*And what about challenges or risks? Have you encountered any downsides?*

**Matt Byrne:**

AI does hallucinate if you’re not careful. That’s why we rely on a set of core principles, which really function as harm-reduction measures.

There are three: First, document and disclose every use of AI, including what it was used for and how it was prompted. Second, subject all AI-generated outputs to explicit human review for accuracy, completeness, and fair representation before they go back to participants. Third, return syntheses to the people who produced the original inputs so they can validate, challenge, or correct them.

If you follow those principles, most of the risks people worry about are dramatically reduced.

*Some practitioners remain hesitant, whether due to lack of confidence or ethical concerns. How do you see these debates?*

**Matt Byrne:**

As a general rule, people fear what they understand the least. You do have to get your hands dirty and start experimenting.

There are obviously much bigger questions around regulation and the political economy of AI, but setting that aside for a moment, I think the real dividing line will be whether or not these mitigation principles were applied.



*You've compared AI to other facilitation tools that already involve trade-offs. Can you say more about that?*

**Matt Byrne:**

Every method we use has risks. Take dot voting. We know it introduces conformity effects and groupthink. As facilitators, we mitigate that through anonymity, follow-up questions, and careful sequencing, making sure aggregation isn't the final step. Yet very few people are anxious about dot voting. I'd frame AI the same way. All tools and approaches have benefits and trade-offs that need to be managed through design. AI may be especially powerful, but it's not categorically different.

*Are there particular technologies or innovations you're excited about?*


**Matt Byrne:**

We're especially interested in open-source tools, particularly for online deliberation.

One example is *Frankly*, an open-source platform that integrates agenda guidance directly into the video interface, alongside deliberative tools like surveys and collaborative exercises. It also includes features like talk timers, which privately prompt participants if they're speaking too much or too little, encouraging balanced participation.

There's emerging research suggesting that, in highly structured agendas, this kind of automated moderation can produce conversation quality comparable to trained facilitators. That's exciting, especially for scaling deliberation. Frankly also uses algorithmic breakout rooms to maximise diversity, reducing

**Dig deeper:**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <a href="#">AI &amp; Democracy Foundation</a>                             |  |
| <a href="#">DelibTech network</a>   |  |
| <a href="#">AI has a democracy problem. Citizens' assemblies can help</a> |  |

the likelihood that like-minded participants end up talking only to each other.

*How do participants respond when they learn AI has been used in a process?*

**Matt Byrne:**

As long as we're transparent, we've received very little pushback.

*My sense is that this will soon feel as unremarkable as asking whether someone used a computer or a keyboard. Especially for younger participants, these tools are already part of everyday life.*

*What advice would you give to practitioners who are considering experimenting with AI?*




**Matt Byrne:**

If there's one takeaway, it's this: keep those principles in mind and start practicing.

You're not beholden to these tools. If you try them and find problems, you can stop. But if you never practice, AI remains a black box, something you don't have the competence to assess or apply skillfully.

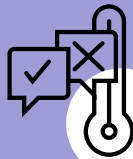
What you absolutely shouldn't do is replace group judgment with unchecked AI outputs, for example, feeding assembly inputs into a model and letting it generate a final report without review or validation. That's a categorically different and unacceptable use.

So: be transparent, keep humans in the loop, return outputs to participants, and learn by doing.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <a href="#">Integrating Artificial Intelligence into Citizens' Assemblies: Benefits, Concerns and Future Pathways</a>  |  |
| <a href="#">DeliberAide Platform</a>   |  |
| <a href="#">Artificial Intelligence in deliberation: The AI penalty and the emergence of a new deliberative divide</a> |  |

Trend 2

# Deliberation and democratic resilience



*What role can deliberative processes play in strengthening democratic resilience at a time of growing political pressures and increasingly complex governance challenges?*



Jane Mansbridge and Felipe Rey

*Political theorist Prof. Jane Mansbridge, Adams Professor of Political Leadership and Democratic Values at Harvard Kennedy School, has spent decades examining democratic legitimacy, representation, and the role of deliberation in modern governance. Her work has been central to the development of deliberative democratic theory.*

*Felipe Rey, professor at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana and a founding partner of iDeemos Foundation, has studied democratic representation extensively and implemented deliberative processes in Bogotá, Colombia. In this conversation, they reflect on how citizens' assemblies and panels may contribute to democratic resilience.*

*When we talk about democratic resilience today, legitimacy often becomes a central concern. How can deliberative processes help strengthen the legitimacy of public decisions?*

## Jane Mansbridge:

As human beings become increasingly interdependent, we need more and more regulation to manage that interdependence.

That means more state involvement and, to some degree, more state coercion. It is therefore not surprising that we see a great deal of anti-state sentiment today. But if we are going to live in a world with increasing regulation, we also need better ways of legitimising it.

*Our democratic institutions were largely designed in the eighteenth century, and they are not always well suited to legitimising the kinds of governance that modern societies require. This is one reason why I place so much hope in institutions such as citizens' assemblies and panels.*

*Resilience also has a more relational dimension, and citizens' assemblies and panels are spaces where different forms of political relationships can emerge. How do you see their role in this regard?*

## Felipe Rey:

I think this connects with Jenny's distinction between adversarial politics and what she once called unitary democracy. Citizens' assemblies can function as institutions of what we might call democracy as friendship.

When people take part in deliberative processes, they are reminded that they are capable of relating to one another not simply as political opponents but as fellow citizens working together. In the current political climate this is extremely important. Social networks often amplify adversarial dynamics, whereas assemblies can create spaces where relationships are formed and common ground becomes visible.

## Jane Mansbridge:

People who have worked with citizens' assemblies are often struck by how quickly small groups come together. Participants who begin the process with very different political views often end up developing strong respect for one another.

I recently looked at a deliberative poll where, by the end of the process, a right-wing participant who strongly identified with "Make America Great Again" was hugging a woman from New York whose politics were very liberal. Those kinds of moments illustrate how relationships can shift during deliberation.

But our main challenge is not how to create those dynamics inside the assembly. We have learned quite a lot about how to do that. The real challenge is how to convey that experience to the many citizens who were not there.

*Capacity for empathy seems to play an important role too. How does it operate in deliberative settings?*

## Jane Mansbridge:

Human beings have strong capacities for empathy. Even very young children show signs of it. But we also have strong capacities for hatred and division. Citizens' assemblies can create conditions in which empathy becomes more likely. Participants meet face-to-face and enter the process with an understanding that they are trying to do something together for the collective good. There are also norms governing how people interact, which encourage listening and mutual respect. Under those conditions, people who might normally see each other as adversaries begin to listen and understand one another in ways that rarely occur in everyday political life.

## Felipe Rey:

I think empathy operates on at least two levels in deliberative processes. The first is empathy among assembly members themselves. People who might never understand each other on social media suddenly find themselves listening carefully to one another and recognising aspects of their own experiences in other people's perspectives. The second level is empathy between the members of the assembly and the wider public. Participants often think about how other citizens might feel about a particular issue. In that sense they are not only expressing their own views but also considering the broader citizenry.

## Jane Mansbridge:

There is also another moment when empathy may become important, and that is after the assembly has finished. The wider public needs some way of understanding what happened during the deliberation. One possibility would be to highlight participants who changed their minds and ask them to explain why. If people watching can identify with those participants (if they feel that the person speaking is someone like them) then they may become more open to reconsidering their own views as well.

*Do these benefits travel from context to context? What happens as deliberative practices spread from one setting to another?*

## Felipe Rey:

We have been exploring this through the concept of democratic transposition. The term comes from music theory. When a melody is transposed into a different key, it changes slightly in the process. Something similar happens when democratic innovations move from one place to another. Sometimes there is a risk that institutions are simply copied without sufficient attention to local contexts. Some scholars describe this as democratic colonisation.

But there is another possibility.

*The process of introducing a deliberative innovation can itself be deliberative. That means dialogue between practitioners and the communities where the process will take place. We suggest three criteria for this: receptiveness, generativity, and sensitivity to context.*

Another observation is that many processes spreading internationally resemble citizens' panels rather than large-scale assemblies with very strong representative claims. Both formats are important, but they play different roles in democratic systems.

## Jane Mansbridge:

Smaller panels can be convened more easily and sometimes allow for a great deal of creativity. Large citizens' assemblies are extremely valuable, but they are also expensive and cannot be organised frequently. Smaller deliberative forums can therefore complement the larger ones.

*Especially in these moments of global democratic decline, practitioners increasingly face questions about impact. How should the field respond?*

**Jane Mansbridge:**

I think the growing attention to impact is positive. When you are involved in a citizens' assembly, it is very easy to become absorbed in what happens inside the room because the experience can be so powerful. But we also need to think about what happens before the assembly and what happens afterwards. Impact depends not only on the deliberation itself but also on how the process is connected to public decision-making. One of the most effective ways for a deliberative process to have influence is when they are commissioned by a public authority that genuinely wants to understand a difficult problem.

**Felipe Rey:**

The question of impact is important, and we should not avoid it. At the same time, impact should be understood broadly. Citizens' assemblies can influence policy, but they can also have

symbolic and civic effects. They can strengthen relationships between citizens and democratic institutions.

Another important point is that deliberative processes should ideally be problem-driven. Sometimes we begin with the intention of organising an assembly and then look for a topic. Ideally it should be the other way around. First, we identify a real societal problem, and then we ask whether a deliberative process might help address it.

In the longer term, funding will also be important for impact. Many assemblies have been supported by philanthropic organisations or international cooperation. But if these processes are to become a stable part of democratic systems, states will eventually need to invest in them more.

**Dig deeper:**

[Representation, legitimacy, and innovation](#)



[Assemblies Across Borders: The Democratic Transposition of Citizens' Assemblies in Latin America](#)



Trend 3

# Expanding representation: who gets to speak for the future?



*Over the past year, the deliberative community continued to question and redraw its boundaries of who is represented. Children are being invited into deliberations. Indigenous and original communities are shaping processes on their own terms. Representation of more-than-human in deliberation is being explored. Researchers and practitioners working at these frontiers help us better understand these developments.*

## Children taking their rightful place at the decision-making table



 **Katie Reid**

*Children have often been positioned as future beneficiaries of democracy rather than present participants. Katie Reid works on supporting children's right to participate in decisions that affect them. She argues that the deliberative democracy community is opening its eyes to the potential of intergenerational deliberation and the importance of respecting children's right to participate, particularly in the context of the climate crisis.*

*How do you see the recent interest in children's and youth assemblies?*

**Katie Reid:**

This is not a new phenomenon for those of us working in children's participation. Children have been participating, whether formally or informally, for decades. It's just not always

recognised, and it's often been fringe or not institutionalised. What feels different now is a fusion between the democratic innovation space and children's participation. I find that really exciting.

There is a growing recognition that children are rights-holders, and that they have limited opportunities to have a say in decision-making. This surge reflects a broader acknowledgement that children's views are valid and deserve space.

The climate crisis has also been a major catalyst. Children have been very clear that decisions made today will directly affect their futures. They have refused to wait to be invited in. They have gone on strike, taken to the streets, and used social media to make their voices heard. In many ways, they have forced adults to confront the question of intergenerational justice.

*How are assemblies that involve children and young people designed?*

**Katie Reid:**

There are a wide variety of models. Some are assemblies exclusively for children and young people. Others are parallel processes, where children deliberate separately from adults and then come together. In Ireland and Scotland, for example, children's assemblies ran alongside adult processes, creating opportunities for exchange.

*Looking ahead, intergenerational assemblies with adults and children in the same room that genuinely reflect the whole population, including very young children, may become more common.*

*What does good design look like when children or young adults are involved?*

**Katie Reid:**

The design should be informed by the views and ideas of children themselves. A co-design approach, where children work with adults to design and even co-facilitate the process, ensures it remains child-centered. Children tell us these processes need to be fun, creative, and paced differently. You need movement, breaks, and a variety of activities. Information should be presented in multiple formats, and children should be supported to choose how they wish to engage. It's also important that the space does not feel like school, as not all children associate school with positive experiences.

Safeguarding and child protection are crucial and must be embedded throughout the process. This includes clear protocols, risk assessments, and trained facilitators. It's a core part of responsible design.

*Are children's contributions taken seriously by decision-makers?*

**Katie Reid:**

It depends heavily on whether decision-makers are involved from the outset. Ireland's Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss is a strong example. The commissioning minister received the recommendations in person, met the children a year later at an in-person reunion to report on progress, and later presented alongside two of the child participants to the UN. He spoke to children at their level and did not patronise them. That made a real difference.

At the same time, children often tell us that adults praise their participation without engaging meaningfully with the substance of what they say. Policy timelines are slow, and many children do not see outcomes before they age out of the process.

*Are there particular methods you have found especially effective?*

**Katie Reid:**

Family groups work well. These are small, age-based groups that meet regularly to reflect together. The children of all ages

work in thematic groups and then come back to age-based groups to cross pollinate what they learned about the different themes, but in a language that is relevant to their age group.

Creative methods are also powerful. Art, murals co-created together, and role-play allow children to express ideas in ways that might otherwise be lost. Visual outputs can carry insights forward long after the assembly ends.

*What can we expect in 2026?*

**Katie Reid:**

We are launching a community of practice focused on children and deliberative democracy for the Democracy R&D network, and others interested in this area. There are climate assemblies involving children planned in Mexico and Kenya, and we are also exploring possibilities of piloting an intergenerational assembly.

Together with Pro Futuris based in Switzerland, we are supporting a global group of young assembly members who are passionate about advocating for children and young people's involvement in deliberative processes, and who are actively shaping the future of these processes too.



*Image by: Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss*

# Assemblies evolving to include indigenous and original communities



 **Marcella Nery**

*In Brazil, questions of representation intersect with environmental rights. Indigenous and original communities became central to deliberative processes in the Amazon. Marcella Nery is a facilitator and consultant at Delibera Brasil, who works on participatory processes and was closely involved in the design and delivery of the Amazon Climate Assemblies.*

*How did you come to work with deliberation and indigenous communities?*

## Marcella Nery:

With Delibera Brasil we had an opportunity to organise three climate assemblies in the Amazon. During one of them, in Bujaru, we worked closely with indigenous and original communities to co-design and implement the assembly.

In Brazil, original communities are a constitutional category. This includes over 400 tribes of Indigenous peoples, but also riverine communities, fishers, and many others, around 27 different types of communities in total. In Bujaru, for example, there were eight of these types present in the territory.

In the Amazon, these communities have a fundamentally different relationship with land and nature. For many, the river is not a resource; it is a family member. They are already mobilised and politically active. They are not beneficiaries of environmental solutions; they are part of the solution. Working with them on the climate assembly was crucial to its success and legitimacy.

*How did you lay the groundwork and build the trust for this collaboration?*

## Marcella Nery:

We spent three months before the assembly co-creating the process with the original communities. We visited them, explained what a Citizens' Assembly is, and asked under what conditions participation would feel acceptable. We did not arrive with a fixed design.

We worked with a local organiser who already had relationships, and helped resolve misunderstandings, which was extremely helpful.

We stayed in the region for weeks, participating in the daily life of assembly members in between assembly sessions. People invited us to see their gardens and homes, and we took every opportunity to accept this gesture of trust.

*What did the design of the assembly end up looking like?*

## Marcella Nery:

Original community leaders were granted representation on the advisory committee and helped shape the agenda, selection of speakers, and co-design. These leaders had a crucial role of clarifying misunderstandings, mobilising people, making sure that members of the assembly from their communities were showing up.

Some leaders were uncomfortable with full random selection, so the assembly invited only those original community members who are already in some way involved in associative life. There was a debate raised about whether remuneration should go to individuals or to original communities, since they represent the community, but eventually it was agreed that assembly participants who miss a day of work should be compensated. Logistics were also complex. Participants travelled long distances by boat and motorbike. Logistical infrastructure had to be created to make participation possible across the vast territory.

*Did the presence of original community members shape the nature of deliberation?*

**Marcella Nery:**

Yes, very much so.

➤ *People expressed themselves through song, poetry, and storytelling. They constantly brought the conversation back to lived experience, to land, gardens, and everyday life.*

That grounded the deliberation in a way that is often missing. It was truly special.



Image by: Michel Ribeiro

*Interest in more-than-human representation in deliberation seems to be growing. How do you see this shift?*

**Lucy Parry:**

➤ *Not long ago, it felt innovative simply to suggest that ordinary citizens could deliberate on complex issues. Now there is growing acceptance that other species and ecological systems should be considered. For many, this is becoming a democratic as well as a moral imperative.*

**Melanie Challenger:**

I collaborate extensively with scientists internationally, and I had picked up that there was a deliberative gap. The status quo, in which expertise on the lives of other species was considered sufficient for their inclusion and representation, was clearly not effective in practice.

We came together in our informal group of interested and engaged individuals to form *Animals in the Room*. Since then, in those six years, everything has shifted. We've seen the mainstreaming of deliberation broadly and the interest in including future generations, other species, and more-than-human entities.

*The term more-than-human is used frequently. Is that a problem?*

**Melanie Challenger:**

It can be, if we are not clear. Some people use more-than-human to refer broadly to all entities with causal agency, both living and non-living. Others use it as shorthand for non-human species or biological communities. Those meanings should not be conflated.

# Opening up deliberation to the more-than human



**Lucy Parry and Melanie Challenger**

*More-than-human representation is concerned with thinking about it beyond the human altogether. Lucy Parry is a research fellow at the University of Edinburgh in participatory and deliberative democracy. Melanie Challenger is a writer and bioethicist, deputy co-chair of a Nuffield council on bioethics. As co-founders of Animals in the Room, Lucy and Melanie have been working on ethical representation beyond the human long before it entered mainstream deliberative debates.*



*What does it actually mean to represent more-than-human interests?*

**Lucy Parry:**

There are very diverse interpretations of what representation in this context means, both theoretically and practically. We've kicked off a new project to map various experiments that will lay out some of these dimensions and parameters.

To illustrate one way of understanding it, an example I really like is the work of [Anne van Veen](#), who co-hosted the workshop we ran at the Democracy R&D annual conference. Her work is around cows. She used a methodology where participants are invited to write biographies for dairy cows. There were scientific articles about the lives and preferences of dairy cows shared. The voices of cows in different emotional states were played. She provided images of different cows and invited people to think of a name for them and write short autobiographies. That is just a snippet of a much more involved performative experiment that Anne's done called De-Moooo-crazy! The biographies people wrote were really moving.

**Melanie Challenger:**

There's an ethical risk and concern with what we take representation to mean, though, because it's deeply abstract to most people. Two possibilities emerge:

First, *presencing*, making other species present in a deliberative context, representing in a way that's really about sensitisation, getting humans to empathise. This is where the experimentation is happening now.

Second, *substantive political representation*, which is going to be much more onerous. I don't believe there is a single example of what I would call substantive representation that exists yet. The work we have on the horizon with *Animals in the Room* is working towards substantive representation. It's slow and expensive to do it properly, so there isn't a quick way of doing this.

*Are we still at a stage where it's more of an exploratory, symbolic gesture?*

**Lucy Parry:**

There are constitutional or legal infrastructures that recognise, for example, personhood of non-human entities or rights of nature within various national constitutions. Those are formal, official mechanisms that do exist. But then how that is implemented or held accountable is a different question.

**Melanie Challenger:**

Legal mechanisms for changing the way that systems and institutions function are a little further along, and rights of nature would be a good example of that.

But the biggest concern I have at the moment is where sometimes people are claiming representation as though it were substantive political representation. If what we're doing doesn't reach a certain quality control, you wouldn't then be making that kind of substantive representation claim. There's an accountability to the animals themselves that needs to be inherent.

*What would you advise to someone who is interested in including a more-than-human element in their assembly project?*

**Melanie Challenger:**

I would say it's great. I don't see an ethical problem if you're very clear about what you're doing and why. The more experiments there are, the better.

*But just be honest about what it is that you're doing and what you hope to achieve - helping human participants think about the more-than-human world is not the same as representing non-human interests.*

We have to be very aware that there are no ethical and legal guardrails for non-human entities, whereas there are for human beings.

**Lucy Parry:**

As with any tool or method we use within deliberative processes, some people are always going to be turned off by it. You need to lay the groundwork for human participants on what you're trying to do, what the aims are, and what that might look and feel like, to support people through this process, which can be quite intense. It can feel deeply personal and emotional.

**Dig deeper:**

Children: [Children and Young People's Participation in Climate Assemblies](#)



More-than-human: [Our democratic nature? Reflections on more-than-human agency and connection](#)



Indigenous and original communities: [Amazonian Climate Deliberation Insights from Three Citizen Assemblies](#)



Image by: Eric Welch in Unsplash



Trend 4

# Deliberation beyond government



**Citizens' assemblies travel well beyond government.**

Principles of sortition, deliberation, and collective decision-making are being adapted to workplaces, universities, and cultural institutions. From cooperative governance to university strategy and museum missions, assemblies function in contexts shaped by different power relations. Three practitioners working at these edges of the field share what deliberation looks like beyond the state.

## Deliberation in Cooperative Governance



**Ione Ardaiz**

*Workplaces are rarely seen as sites of democratic innovation. Ione Ardaiz is the projects lead at Arantzazulab, a democracy innovation lab located in the Basque Country. One of the contributions to deepen democracy that the lab is doing in the region is institutionalising deliberative democracy. Within these efforts they are exploring how the principles of deliberation and sortition can be adapted to cooperative governance, working with MONDRAGON - a corporation and federation of worker cooperatives based in the Basque region of Spain.*

*What motivated you and your partners, including MONDRAGON, to explore the principles of sortition and deliberation within cooperative governance and workplace decision-making?*

**Ione Ardaiz:**

MONDRAGON already has a deeply democratic governance structure, and historically there has been strong awareness that participation at work is closely linked to civic engagement more broadly. There's research showing that when people are more involved in workplace decision-making, they're also more engaged as citizens.

Within that ongoing reflection, MONDRAGON<sup>1</sup> recognised a need to continuously enrich and renew its governance structures, principles, and practices. Through Arantzazulab's work with public institutions and deliberative processes over recent years, they saw an opportunity to explore whether deliberative democracy principles, such as deliberation, sortition, and rotation, could strengthen cooperative governance and engage members more meaningfully.

*What kinds of challenges in cooperative governance do deliberative methods seem particularly well suited to address?*

**Ione Ardaiz:**

Many of the challenges are surprisingly familiar. As in civic participation, certain profiles tend to dominate conversation, deliberation, and decision-making spaces. Even though cooperatives formally operate on a one-member-one-vote basis, not everyone engages equally.

Often, voting happens without much deliberation. Some members invest time in understanding the issues, while others

1. MONDRAGON is a federation of 81 worker-owned cooperatives based in the Basque Country in Spain, including cooperatives in the manufacturing, finance, retail, and education sectors.

rely on informal cues. Similarly, although anyone can theoretically participate in governance bodies within the structure of each cooperative and in the structures shared between cooperatives, in practice only certain people are willing to commit their time to these spaces, or feel able or confident enough to step forward.

This is where sortition and rotation could be valuable: broadening who participates, diversifying perspectives.

*What makes applying deliberation in a workplace context different from a Citizens' Assembly in a public setting?*

### Ione Ardaiz:

The workplace introduces very specific dynamics. People have defined roles, hierarchical relationships, and ongoing working relationships that don't disappear when deliberation begins. While power dynamics exist in any assembly, here they're shaped by employment structures. Also, cooperatives operate with different structures and procedures than public institutions. This means that the framing of initial questions, the organisation of deliberative sessions, and the way recommendations are addressed all need to be reconsidered.

This means the model can't simply be copied. We're still in a hypothesis stage, but we're actively reflecting on what needs to be adapted.

For example, how should information be provided? Do we need an independent content commission, or is internal expertise sufficient? How should recommendations be followed up, given that cooperatives already have established decision-making mechanisms? How intensive does deliberation need to be? Do we always need 50 hours, as a standard assembly would, or can duration vary by topic and context?

*How are you thinking about sortition criteria in this context?*

### Ione Ardaiz:

Traditional demographic stratification would be important, but may not be the unique criteria that we consider. In this context, we will also need to incorporate other elements, such as, years of membership, role within the cooperative, type of cooperative membership. These are the kinds of adjustments we're exploring.

*Where is this work happening in practice right now?*

### Ione Ardaiz:

We're currently starting a deliberative process with MONDRAGON University<sup>2</sup>, where there's more openness to experimentation and research. Alongside that, we're exploring possibilities with other cooperatives in diverse sectors such as retail or finance.

*What might this experimentation outside government bring back to the conventional citizens' assemblies?*

### Ione Ardaiz:

That's a really important question, and one we haven't fully answered yet.

*But my intuition is that the process of adapting deliberation to cooperatives will force us to reflect on what elements of citizens' assemblies are essential, and which can be rethought.*

Questions about scale, duration, governance structures, and multi-level coordination may well feed back into public-sector deliberation. Cooperatives, like governments, often operate across multiple levels, which creates parallels worth exploring.



2. MONDRAGON University is a cooperative private university based in the Basque Country (Spain), formally part of the MONDRAGON Corporation and rooted in its network of educational cooperatives.

# Deliberation in cultural institutions: citizens' assemblies in museums



 **Lucy Reid**

*Public engagement is central to many museums' missions, but this rarely extends to giving citizens a meaningful role in shaping institutional decisions. Lucy Reid, chief strategy and creative officer at DemocracyNext, has been working to test what happens when deliberative democracy principles are applied to museums, including the UK's first museum-based citizens' jury commissioned by Birmingham Museums Trust.*

*Museums are already used to participatory practices. What changes when they adopt a Citizens' Assembly model?*

## Lucy Reid:

One of the key differences is the shift in power. Museums often programme using models of co-curation, and integrate participatory practices into their work, but this usually involves working with one group at a time, often people who are already engaged, interested, or who are perhaps a targeted underserved audience group. What was striking about the museum assemblies was bringing together a *representative* group of citizens in one room. That almost never happens in museum contexts.

In Birmingham, that was a real moment of realisation for the leadership team. They could see, very tangibly, what it means to hear from people who don't necessarily visit museums, who don't identify as "museum people", but who are nonetheless citizens with a stake in what these institutions are for.

*How did this play out in practice at Birmingham Museums Trust citizens' jury?*

## Lucy Reid:

Birmingham Museums Trust was willing to ask genuinely difficult questions at a critical moment: what do the people of Birmingham need and want from their museums? And how should limited resources be prioritised when the organisation itself is under real financial pressure?

The Trust has built the citizens' recommendations into its new business plan, is continuing to work with the jurors for a defined period of time, and has committed to exploring how deliberative principles could be embedded more systematically into future decision-making and governance. The recommendations have already tangibly shifted thinking around exhibitions - for instance, bringing more of the city's musical heritage to the fore, which was one of the jury's recommendations. There will also be a future exhibition on the jury itself - this work urgently needs more and better public storytelling, so this is great to see.

*Is there something distinctive about museums as deliberative spaces compared to government assemblies?*

## Lucy Reid:

Museums are cultural and creative organisations, and they have a very direct, physical relationship with the public; they are also important civic spaces.

*Jurors weren't just sitting in meeting rooms. They were moving through museum spaces, meeting curators, speaking with staff, encountering visitors, and seeing how the institution works from the inside.*

There's also something important about where in the democratic process museums sit. This jury was less about making public policy directly, but more about shaping values, missions, and priorities, the cultural environment that later informs policy decisions elsewhere. In that sense, museum assemblies can intervene earlier, at a more foundational level.

*What can government-led citizens' assemblies learn from this kind of experimentation?*

## Lucy Reid:

Two things stand out. First, the importance of working upfront with commissioners and leadership teams on what power-sharing actually means, and what happens after the assembly ends. The technical design matters, but so does the institutional follow-through. The leadership team at the museum have understood this at a deep level, and have run with it. Gold stars all round for this.

Second, the representative nature of assemblies can be transformative in contexts that are used to narrower forms of participation. Seeing a genuinely representative group grapple with complexity challenges assumptions about who is capable of making decisions, and that lesson travels well beyond museums.

*How might museum assemblies help promote deliberative democracy more widely?*

## Lucy Reid:

Museums are relatively trusted institutions, especially compared to many political bodies. That gives them both an opportunity and a responsibility to model democratic decision-making.

When a museum shows that randomly selected citizens can produce such thoughtful recommendations, it pushes back against scepticism about deliberation more broadly.

# Citizens' assemblies in universities



 Emilie Frenkiel

*Can universities be the sites of democratic experimentation? Emilie Frenkiel, associate professor at Université Paris-Est Créteil (UPEC), has been organising citizens' assemblies within the university. As a political scientist and coordinator of the Deliberative Universities*

*Network, she sees universities as living laboratories for deliberative democracy.*

*Have you seen increased interest from universities in adopting deliberative practices?*

## Emilie Frenkiel:

Yes, very clearly. When we started our first UPEC student assembly five years ago, very few universities were doing this. Not long afterwards, the University of Lausanne organised a staff and student assembly using sortition, with significant influence and strong institutional backing.

These different models (Lausanne's and ours) inspired other universities by showing that there isn't a single template. In France alone, more than a dozen universities have organised assemblies, often linked to environmental and climate strategies, especially as universities were required to collectively draft sustainability plans.

More recently, there's been a second wave: assemblies focused on implementing these strategies, translating commitments into action - in the Netherlands, the UK, and France.

*Do the university assemblies you organise use sortition, in the same way as citizens' assemblies?*

## Emilie Frenkiel:

Yes, but not in the standard way. Our context matters a lot. We're an underfunded public university with very diverse students. Many among them work long hours, live far away, and face significant financial constraints. In this setting, classic sortition tends to result in self-selection: the same already-engaged students show up.

So we made a very deliberate choice: participation is compulsory and embedded in the curriculum. Assemblies are organised as part of their courses. This allows us to involve a much more diverse group of students, including those who are not politically interested, not committed, and sometimes openly resistant.

That choice has major consequences. We usually involve around 500 students per yearly assembly. It's very demanding, and it's done with limited resources, but it's also what makes the process genuinely inclusive.

We still use sortition internally: to assign students to small groups, to distribute responsibilities such as fact-checking, or to

designate roles like representing future generations. Sortition is also used to allocate topics and working groups.

*Are these assemblies mainly pedagogical, or do they influence real university decisions?*

**Emilie Frenkiel:**

They are definitely not simulations. At the same time, their impact is constrained by existing governance structures, which are largely set by the ministry and difficult to change.

What we do is contribute to the drafting of the university's five-year strategic plans on issues such as sustainability or student life. This creates both motivation and frustration. Some recommendations are implemented quickly; others take years. Sometimes students graduate before seeing concrete outcomes. But the process is intentionally transformative and simultaneously pedagogical, political, and scientific.

*How do students and staff react to these assemblies?*

**Emilie Frenkiel:**

Reactions are mixed, and that's one of the most interesting aspects. Students are generally difficult to mobilise. In assemblies based on voluntary participation, we mostly see already-committed activists. In our compulsory model, there is sometimes strong resistance at first.

*But by the end, evaluations are largely positive. Students appreciate the opportunity to deliberate seriously, access diverse information, meet others, and revise their views. They recognise that they are developing skills, such as deliberation and collaboration. At the end of the process, they are asking for more.*

Among staff and student representatives, just as we observe in public institutions, reactions can be more polarised. Some feel threatened, seeing deliberation as a challenge to existing representative roles. Others become committed, devoting significant energy to making the process work and ensuring recommendations are followed up.

*Working only with students must pose specific challenges. How do you address them?*

**Emilie Frenkiel:**

Students are a very heterogeneous group, with often contradictory expectations. Some want strong engagement from experts and decision-makers; others reject their presence entirely. Some support mandatory participation; others oppose it.

The only way we've found to hold this diversity together is by using various methodologies, such as small-group deliberation, theatre and forum theatre, artistic performances, learning walks, varied facilitation styles, rotating group compositions.

*What might university assemblies contribute back to citizens' assemblies in government?*

**Emilie Frenkiel:**

I think the academic context is specific, but not unique. Many of the conclusions converge with what we already know from deliberative democracy research. Where universities may offer particular insight is on the pedagogical and epistemological dimensions of assemblies: how informed opinions are formed, how people learn collectively to be active citizens, and what skills participants develop over long processes.

**Dig deeper:**

Deliberation in cooperatives: [MONDRAGON collaboration with Arantzazulab, DemocracyNext and MIT](#)



Museum assemblies: [Can museums really give power to the people? How UK Museums are embracing citizens' assemblies to help frame their futures](#)



Deliberative Universities Network: [website](#) [Network of Deliberative](#)



and [wiki page](#)



Trend 5

# Funding sustainability for deliberation in an age of cuts: Navigating the funding landscape



*Over the past few years, funding has declined significantly, and this trend intensified sharply in the early months of 2025. According to Global Democracy, 86% of USAID awards and 41% of State Department awards were terminated, amounting to roughly USD 80.5 billion in cancelled funding. These cuts affected dozens of organisations, including NGOs, health facilities, and journalists, with inevitable consequences for everyone working to advance deliberative democracy.*

*In this interview series, a funding organization, a field practitioner, and a civil society leader reflect on shifts in today's funding landscape, share resilience strategies from across the field, and explore two cross-cutting questions: how organisations are demonstrating impact, and what new approaches to financing democracy work are emerging.*

## Navigating the funding landscape



**Enrique Bravo Escobar**

*Enrique Bravo Escobar is a Senior Program Officer at the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), where he works on democratic governance and elections. He is a democracy and public affairs specialist with more than 20 years of experience across government, political risk consulting, and grantmaking. His work has focused on governance, public policy, and democratic institutions, with extensive experience supporting civil society and democratic innovation across different regions.*

*How is the current global context shaping grant-based funding for democracy and development?*

### Enrique Bravo:

I would not say the grant-based model itself has fundamentally changed. Philanthropy and donor organizations continue to operate, and grantmaking remains a critical tool for supporting democracy and development. What has changed significantly is the availability of resources. Public funding for international development has declined, significantly affecting the broader development ecosystem, including democracy, governance, and human rights.

At the same time, donor countries are also adjusting their priorities in response to current global pressures. It is not just the U.S. In Europe, for example, governments are balancing multiple urgent commitments, which affects the amount of funding available for democracy and governance work. So the main shift is not that funding mechanisms have disappeared, but that organizations now have to operate in a context with fewer resources and competing priorities vying for support. This means civil society and democracy practitioners are expected to do more with less, and that is a real challenge.

*During a recent Democracy R&D learning call, you mentioned something that stood out: that organizations working in democracy need to be aware of their own perspectives when applying for funding and designing programs. Why do you think that kind of self-awareness matters?*

## Enrique Bravo:

I think diversity in civil society is a strength. Overall, the landscape of civil society organizations should reflect the plurality of the societies where they exist; this means they will naturally have different perspectives, priorities, and issue areas, and there is nothing wrong with that. Those of us working in democracy and governance need to welcome this plurality of viewpoints if our focus is precisely on ensuring fair and open participation for everyone.

And how do we support the natural diversity of opinions? By focusing on the rules of the game that allow them to exist (inclusion) and to compete in the market of ideas (contestation). Democracy-strengthening work is fundamentally about reinforcing the rules of the game and the institutional conditions that allow everyone to participate. The goal is not to tilt the field in one direction or another, but to ensure the field is open, stable, and fair enough for different views to compete and for citizens to decide. That is why I think those of us who support democratic institutions need to be especially careful to maintain neutrality regarding policy preferences when designing democratic mechanisms.

Organizations can absolutely have thematic agendas, and that is valid. But when the focus is on democratic institutions themselves, the priority should be to ensure those institutions work for everyone. If we blur that line too much, we risk introducing unintended bias into the very mechanisms we are trying to strengthen.

*What role should networks like Democracy R&D play in today's context of democratic pressure and shrinking funding for deliberative democracy?*

## Enrique Bravo:

One thing I really value about this community is the real sense of shared purpose. There is strong alignment among members on the kinds of practices they want to build, and a genuine concern for doing this work well: how to improve assemblies, better facilitate them, and strengthen the overall methodology. All of that is a major strength. What is sometimes missing, though, is a more political way of thinking about the work.

By that I mean that we cannot assume that all political and institutional environments are equally receptive to deliberative democracy. In some contexts, there is openness; in others, there is more hesitation, or simply different priorities. Networks need to help members think not only about how to improve

methods, but also about positioning deliberative democracy in today's context, making it viable, and connecting it to the concerns of decision-makers and communities.

For me, that is a key role for networks: to help translate the value of these practices across different settings, support members in framing them, and strengthen the bridge between methodological excellence and practical adoption. The technical conversation is essential, but it cannot be the only conversation.

*In the current funding context, how are funders viewing deliberative democracy and citizens' assemblies, and what kind of impact are they expecting from these processes?*

## Enrique Bravo:

Deliberative democracy and citizens' assemblies are valuable because they offer a different way to bring meaningful participation into public decision-making. I do not see them as a replacement for representative democracy. I see them as a way to help democratic systems function better, especially when traditional institutions struggle to respond to public concerns.

This is also why I believe these mechanisms should not be purely consultative. Consultation without consequences can become frustrating for participants. If citizens give their time and energy to participate, it is because they expect their time to lead to something, so at the very least, there should be some form of follow-up. For me, meaningful participation is participation with consequences. The more we can design assemblies in which recommendations have some level of commitment for implementation, an adoption pathway, or institutional linkage, the more credible and useful they will become.

In terms of impact, I believe funders are increasingly looking for evidence that these mechanisms actually shape public decisions and become part of regular institutional practice. It is not only about running a good process once. It is about whether the process contributes to better policy and whether it becomes a recurring feature of the democratic system. If citizens' assemblies become institutionalized and used consistently as part of the public governance toolkit, that would have a very significant impact.

One final point I would emphasize is that organizations often report on what they can control, such as publishing a report, holding a workshop, or delivering training. Of course, those things matter, but the harder question and the more important one is what happened because of that work. Who read the report? What changed after the workshop? What decisions were influenced? What action was taken?

*How do you see the funding landscape for Global South organizations working on deliberative democracy?*

**Enrique Bravo:**

NED's focus is precisely on places where democratic systems face greater challenges and where support is most needed, so my perspective starts there. I think many of the same principles apply across contexts, but of course the practical realities are different. Organizations in the Global South often work with fewer resources, weaker institutional frameworks, and more operational constraints, and that affects what is feasible.

At the same time, there is a great deal of creativity and adaptive capacity in these contexts. The key is not to abandon high standards, but to think more flexibly about implementation.

I often use a cooking analogy: if a recipe calls for ingredients available only in one country and you do not have them where you are, that does not mean you cannot cook the dish. It means you need to understand each ingredient's role in the recipe and find suitable substitutes. Your dish, like your deliberative process, will be good and similar to the textbook version, yet different, based on your circumstances.

Deliberative democracy needs that same mindset. We should focus on the function of the method, not only on a single ideal one-size-fits-all format.

*How can organizations engage private funding without compromising independence?*

**Enrique Bravo:**

There is always a risk of influence, and that risk needs to be managed through clear rules, strong autonomy, and transparency. In that sense, this is not entirely different from philanthropy or newsrooms. Any organization receiving external support needs to maintain decisional independence and be clear about the boundaries of donor influence.

The key is to set those boundaries from the beginning. Organizations need to be very clear about what they will and will not do, what remains within their control, and what is non-negotiable. Not every funding source will be appropriate, and not every relationship will make sense, but it is possible to establish funding relationships that protect integrity.

*What makes an organization more likely to receive a grant?*

**Enrique Bravo:**

There is no universal formula because every donor has different priorities and profiles, but some core elements matter almost everywhere. Donors want to see that an organization has clearly identified a relevant problem, that it has a realistic and credible way to address it, and that it understands the context in which it operates.

They also want to see that the organization has the capacity to deliver. A strong idea is not enough on its own. The organization needs to show why it is well placed to implement the work, what it can realistically achieve, and how it will know whether it is making progress. In other words, donors are looking for a combination of clarity, relevance, feasibility, and institutional capability.

The specific balance may vary from one donor to another, but those elements usually matter. A well-written proposal helps, of course, but what really matters is whether it reflects a real understanding of a relevant problem and a credible path to impact.

*What helps organizations build long-term relationships with donors?*

**Enrique Bravo:**

Proactive communication and trust-building are two of the most important considerations for building long-term donor relationships. Organizations should keep supporters informed not only about successes but also about setbacks and what they learned from them. That kind of communication builds trust and demonstrates transparency and a genuine commitment to learning.

Different donors will prioritize different things. Some focus on organizational growth and capacity, while others prioritize program outcomes and impact. In both cases, what matters is staying in communication so they understand what is happening, what is working, and what is evolving.

Over time, consistent updates and even small wins help tell a clear story of progress. That story often sustains the relationship. My practical advice is simple: keep your supporters informed and help them see the direction of the work.

# Funding models for deliberative democracy



 **Mauricio Mejía**

*Mauricio Mejía is an independent consultant based in Mexico City, with nearly eight years of experience working at the intersection of deliberation, democracy, and citizen participation. He spent six years at the OECD, where he worked with Latin American governments on open government and later led the citizen participation team, with deliberative processes as one of its core pillars. Before that, he worked in the French Parliament, and he is currently a member of the governance committee of *Démocratie Ouverte* in France. He also supports participatory and deliberative processes in Latin America through *People Powered*, including a climate assembly process in Jalisco, Mexico.*

*How is international funding for democracy and citizen participation changing today compared to previous years?*

## Mauricio Mejía:

I think the field has gone through very clear cycles. When I started working on these issues, the priority was around open government, especially transparency, anti-corruption, and government effectiveness. There was strong momentum, and funding followed that agenda. Later, as deliberative democracy gained visibility through high-profile assemblies like those in Ireland and France, funding also shifted toward deliberation as a way of responding to the democratic crisis.

Today, however, I see a notable contraction in funding for assemblies because there has been a gradual decline in funding overall, and in that context of reduced resources, assemblies are often seen as expensive and as having limited impact.

There has also been a shift in priorities, with funding moving toward artificial intelligence and toward more foundational parts of participation, such as training, capacity building, and the underlying structures that make these processes possible. In that same shift, at least from what I have seen in Mexico and in Europe, in the countries where I have worked, there is also a return to the basics. We have collectively realized, and maybe not only funders, that it is not enough to fund a Citizens' Assembly on its own. These processes depend on a broader sociopolitical and institutional ecosystem that can sustain them.

*What funding models should organizations look to as references in this new context?*

## Mauricio Mejía:

I think the most resilient path is a hybrid model that combines public funding with third-party support. In my opinion, governments should always be a part of the financing equation, even if only partially, because this arrangement creates ownership and prevents participatory processes from being seen as external donor-driven projects. Public institutions can contribute logistics, venues, operational support, or direct funding, and they need to have some stake in the process so it is not treated as a one-off donation.

*At the same time, we urgently need to unlock more private and philanthropic funding, especially in Latin America. Many private foundations in the region still focus on education, health, or social welfare, while democracy and governance remain underfunded.*

One of our biggest challenges is to show local and regional philanthropic actors that democratic innovation and governance are also worth funding. For me, the more diversified the funding portfolio is, the more sustainable the process becomes, because no single donor carries the full burden or defines the agenda. In that sense, mixed and shared financing is not only a sustainability strategy, but also a way to strengthen legitimacy and resilience across the ecosystem.

*Based on what we are seeing in Latin America, what funding pathways are currently making deliberative processes possible, and how would you describe the main models that are emerging in the region?*

### Mauricio Mejía:

From what I see, there are several funding models emerging in Latin America. One is when a university or academic institution works in partnership with the public sector, as in Uruguay during the [DeciAgua assemblies](#). Another is when political will becomes the main driver for mobilizing funding, as in the [Bogotá assemblies](#).

There are also models that depend more on external funding. One is through pilot initiatives, such as the climate assembly in Chile's Los Lagos region, which was implemented through People Powered which has also provided seed funding for other pilots in the region. Another alternative is through regional or transregional consortia, such as Resurgentes or [Demo.Reset](#). A third one is by aligning with multilateral agendas, as in the case of Delibera in Brazil with [COP30 and the Amazon assemblies](#).

*What roles should different actors play in the ecosystem, especially academia and political parties?*

### Mauricio Mejía:

I see academia as essential, especially in evaluation, documentation, and learning. Our field has a lot of intellectual and methodological knowledge, but we still struggle to build stronger bridges between academic work and practical implementation. Academia can help us produce more credible evidence, improve how we measure impact, and translate complex knowledge into tools and narratives that are actually useful for practitioners, governments, and funders.

When it comes to political parties, I do think they are important actors, but not as funders. I see their role more in normalization and institutional adoption. If we want deliberative processes to become part of democratic life, parties need to understand them and be willing to use them. Organizations should work with parties through education, advocacy, and dialogue so assemblies are understood across the political spectrum. At the same time, this requires very clear boundaries, because the risk of politicisation or capture is real.

*What kind of impact do funders expect, and how should it be measured and communicated?*

### Mauricio Mejía:

One of the main challenges in this field is how impact is defined. Organizations are often asked to show changes in public policy, institutions, or social trust, but those outcomes usually take time and rarely depend on a single participatory process. This creates a gap between what can be demonstrated in the short term and what funders are often expecting.

That is why it makes sense to rethink the indicators and give more weight to short and medium-term outcomes that are both measurable and strategically relevant. Public awareness, media visibility, institutional recognition, and the dissemination of the method are all meaningful indicators. In some contexts, making assemblies part of the political vocabulary is already an important result. The Climate Assembly in France is a useful example: many people in the field see it as having limited policy impact because not all recommendations were implemented, but today a large part of the public in France knows what a Citizens' Assembly is. That, in itself, is a meaningful form of impact.

It also helps to be more intentional about the topics chosen for assemblies. In some cases, the focus has been on issues that are easier to advance, but that can limit visibility and reduce the public value associated with these processes. There is a strong case for working on more politically relevant and contested issues, because they can generate greater public attention and better demonstrate the democratic and cognitive value of deliberation, even when the process is not immediately binding.



# A diversified approach to democracy funding



**David Núñez Amórtegui**

*David Núñez Amórtegui is the co-founder and Project Director of Extitudo Política Abierta, a Colombia-based non-governmental organization that also operates in several countries across Latin America and Africa. As a multi-party platform, it promotes political innovation and supports a more open, inclusive, and diverse approach to governance.*

*What measures has Extitudo adopted to remain resilient in light of the changing dynamics of international cooperation and reduced support for civil society?*

## David Núñez:

At Extitudo, several years ago we made the decision to reconfigure our funding strategy, understanding that in order to be sustainable, we could not rely on a single donor or a single type of funding, as was traditionally the case with international cooperation funds. This process required us to understand which actors are part of the democracy ecosystem, what roles they play, and why they might be interested in contributing to its strengthening. To do so, it is essential to remain open and willing to work with a diverse range of actors.

Through this analysis, we identified both the private and public sectors as key actors in supporting the sustainability of this democratic ecosystem.

*You've argued that public resources are also democratic resources. How do you reconcile working with public funding while preserving civil society independence?*

## David Núñez:

We must recognize that working with the public sector does not necessarily mean compromising our independence, and that the strengthening of democracy should not depend on the government of the day.

*Public funding, in this sense, should be understood as a democratic resource. It should not be seen as a strategy to serve temporary political interests, but rather as part of a long-term, collective commitment to building and sustaining democracy.*

*How can we encourage greater private sector investment in democratic processes, especially in deliberative processes, without compromising their legitimacy or independence?*

## David Núñez:

To encourage greater private sector investment in democratic processes, especially deliberative ones, it is important to recognise that all actors, public, private, and philanthropic, have their own interests.

The private sector usually approaches these processes through a business logic, and philanthropy, while important in this ecosystem, also finances according to its own priorities and goals. Governments, which often lead these processes and manage public resources, also have interests, even when guided by democratic principles and rights.

In the Global South, the challenge lies not only in figuring out how to involve private actors and what motivates them, but also in conveying that an innovative, responsive, and legitimate democratic system can advance their own interests as well. In some cases, private actors are motivated by a genuine belief in democracy and the desire to contribute to a better society beyond their own business goals.

In other cases, the value lies in the benefits that come from strong institutions and a stable democratic and legal environment, which create favourable conditions for business

development and long-term growth. At the same time, it is necessary to define clear boundaries to ensure that private participation does not become a way to promote or protect particular agendas within these democratic and deliberative processes.

*The Bogotá Itinerant Citizens' Assembly brought together private philanthropy (Fundación Corona), civil society, and a public institution in a shared funding model. How did that collaboration work in practice—and what made the partnership possible?*

**David Núñez:**

Our first experience was in 2019, around the Bogotá City Council election. We worked with 20 candidates from different political parties, and 10 were elected in a council of 45. With those council members and others who joined the initiative, we created Demolab—the innovation lab within the Bogotá City Council—where different initiatives started with an approach of innovation and experimentation.

Demolab was unique in its governance: a mixed model where civil society organisations, the private sector, and the public sector were always present. At that time, the public institution was the Bogotá City Council. In a horizontal relationship, they made decisions and governed Demolab together—and within Demolab, The Bogotá Itinerant Citizens' Assembly.

This reflects how we understand public innovation and democracy: the public is not only the state or government; it belongs to everyone, and the private sector is also part of public life.

*When you develop your funding strategy, do you define targets for each funding source or is the focus primarily on building the right alliances as opportunities emerge?*

**David Núñez:**

Setting targets can be useful, but it's not simple to achieve them because funding availability has its own structure. The key is clarity and openness: understanding what financing is available, staying open to working with different actors, and being strategic about how to engage them.



# 02



# Field Advancing Assemblies and Juries

*This year* has seen a wealth of deliberative processes organised across all levels of governance and various regions of the world. Below we highlight some of them that stood out by advancing the field - such as assemblies happening in new places, testing new methods, addressing especially challenging topics, and achieving exceptional impact. This list is by no means exhaustive - you can find a list of all cases received in [Annex A](#).

All deliberative processes below were composed of people selected by lottery. All of these processes included stages of learning about a particular policy issue, careful deliberation, and development of recommendations.

- New Countries*

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- New Design Elements*

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- Expanding Representation*

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- Challenging Issues*

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- Exceptional Impact*

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- Beyond Government*

Field Advancing Assemblies and Juries

# New Countries

**New Countries** **1**

## Vilnius Assembly on Mobility / Lithuania

*Image by: Paulina Janusaite***📍 Country and city:**

Lithuania, Vilnius

**🔄 Organised by:**

Vilnius Municipality, DemocracyNext

**🗨️ Question tackled:**

How can we ensure that Vilnius residents are more likely to take public transport, walk or cycle - no matter where they live in the city?

**👤 Number of Assembly Members: 39****📅 Number of days of deliberation: 5**

The Vilnius Citizens' Assembly is the first Citizens' Assembly held in Lithuania, addressing the issue of mobility in a city that relies on cars. The Citizens' Assembly offered an opportunity for everyday citizens to decide together how Vilnius can achieve its climate-neutrality goals while creating a city that is accessible to everyone, no matter where they live. The assembly brought together 39 randomly selected citizens from diverse backgrounds to deliberate and craft actionable recommendations targeting public transport and city planning. This first assembly marks a milestone for inclusive decision-making and sets an inspiring precedent for tackling mobility challenges in the region.

[More details](#)

New Countries **2**

# Climate Assembly / The Gambia



Image by: Natty Production

**Country and city:**  
The Gambia, Kerewan

**Organised by:**  
DemocracyNext, Civic, and Great Green Wall Frontline

**Question tackled:**  
How can we restore our lands and natural habitats, while creating better livelihoods, and economic empowerment?

**Number of Assembly Members:** **30**

**Number of days of deliberation:** **4**

[More details](#)

The Kerewan Citizens' Assembly represented The Gambia's first experience with a deliberative democratic process, held in the North Bank Region's capital. The assembly focused on two interconnected priorities: environmental restoration and the fortification of local livelihoods against climate instability. This dual mandate is crucial for grounding the abstract goals of international projects, like the Great Green Wall, in the tangible economic needs of the region's agricultural communities.

Operating within a governance structure traditionally dominated by established hierarchies, the initiative sought to broaden civic participation by elevating the perspectives of everyday residents. A randomly selected group of 30 participants from more than 20 villages in the North Bank Region, carried out deliberations in the native Wolof and Malinka languages. A defining outcome was their recommendation to formally embed assembly members within District Climate Resilience Committees, thereby securing a lasting mandate for citizen input in local climate strategy.



Field Advancing Assemblies and Juries

# New Design Elements

## New Design Elements **3**

### Debagoiena Citizens' Assembly on Energy Transition / Spain

Public-Private Multi-actor Mandating Body



Image by: Argitzen

**Country and city:**  
Spain, Debagoiena

**Organised by:**  
18 public, private and community-based organizations, incl. the Municipality of Aramaio, the Municipality of Arrasate and the Municipality of Antzuola, and Deliberativa

**Question tackled:**  
What actions or changes should local agents in Debagoiena develop to reduce energy consumption and promote renewable energy?

**Number of Assembly Members:** 50

**Number of days of deliberation:** 5

[More details](#)

The Citizens' Assembly on the energy transition in Debagoiena brought together 48 randomly selected residents and was conducted over five sessions held in autumn 2025. The Assembly addressed issues related to reducing energy consumption and advancing renewable energy development in a nine-municipality region characterized by high energy demand associated with its industrial base and living conditions.

The project's main innovation lay in the establishment of the governance arrangement that commissioned and supported the Assembly. This *Multi-actor Mandating Body*<sup>3</sup> was composed of 18 public, private, and community actors and provided a framework for coordination across the nine municipalities, enabling the Assembly to operate at a regional rather than a municipal scale. The *Multi-actor Mandating Body* also established a shared commitment to respond to the Assembly's outcomes, supporting their consideration and follow-up by the relevant institutions.



3. *Multi-actor Mandating Body*” is used as a translation of the Spanish term “Grupo Motor”. It refers to a body composed of multiple stakeholders that jointly mandates the Citizens' Assembly and commits to responding to its outcomes.

New Design Elements **4**

# Sarajevo Climate Citizens' Assembly / Bosnia and Herzegovina

Multiple levels of government convening one Citizens' Assembly



Image by: NTU International and Energetski Portal

**Country and city:**  
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo

**Organised by:**  
NTU International, leaders of the City of Sarajevo, the City of East Sarajevo, and the Canton of Sarajevo, with the support of the European Union

**Question tackled:**  
What fair measures are needed to reduce pollution and achieve climate neutrality by 2030?

**Number of Assembly Members:** **75**

**Number of days of deliberation:** **6**

[More details](#)

The Sarajevo Metropolitan Area Citizens' Forum on climate issues took place in May 2025 and brought together 75 randomly selected citizens from across the Sarajevo urban area, which spans multiple municipal jurisdictions, over three weekends. The process aimed to formulate fair recommendations to reduce pollution and advance climate neutrality by 2030, focusing on mobility, heating and cooling, green spaces, and industry. The initiative formed part of the European Mission "100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030" and received financial support from the European Union.

The project introduced a design innovation related to intergovernmental coordination. The Citizens' Forum was jointly initiated by the Sarajevo Canton, the City of Sarajevo, and the City of East Sarajevo, bringing together authorities operating at different administrative levels within a single deliberative process in a multi-municipality urban area.

The three authorities operated as a single Sarajevo Functional Urban Area for the purposes of the process, with citizens selected to represent communities across all three jurisdictions. The assembly's recommendations were directly integrated into the area's Climate City Contract, a joint strategic document submitted to the European Commission in June 2025 marking one of the first instances in which a Citizens' Assembly fed directly into a binding intergovernmental commitment at the EU level.



New Design Elements **5**

# Porirua Assembly on Climate / New Zealand

A multi-chamber Citizens' Assembly



Image by: The Post.co.nz

**Country and city:**  
New Zealand, Porirua

**Organised by:**  
The People Speak and Ngāti Toa Rangatira Tribe

**Question tackled:**  
Learning to live with Porirua's changing world together: how do we connect and respond as our climate changes?

**Number of Assembly Members:**  
**100** people in two chambers, plus a **20**-people youth chamber

**Number of days of deliberation:** **4**

[More details](#)

The Porirua Assembly on Climate introduced a novel *multi-chamber* design to citizens' assemblies based on indigenous knowledge. Organized by Ngāti Toa Rangatira Tribe and The People Speak, the process was designed to honor both indigenous sovereignty and intergenerational justice. It comprised three distinct *rōpū* (groups or chambers) totaling 120 participants: one chamber composed of 50 indigenous people, one conformed by 50 randomly selected residents, and a dedicated chamber for 20 children and young people who took part on a day of deliberation plus school workshops and dedicated activities. The chambers carried out deliberations both separately and jointly, producing a single set of recommendations.

This methodological innovation enabled the design of an assembly grounded in traditional Māori values and knowledge, ensuring genuine indigenous participation in climate change debates alongside contributions from the wider Porirua public and from young people. The assembly compelled significant institutional responsiveness: the Greater Wellington Regional Council and Porirua City Council committed to a formal workshop review for adopting recommendations.



Field Advancing Assemblies and Juries

# Expanding Representation

Expanding Representation **6**

## Democracy for young people / Denmark



Image by: We Do Democracy

**Country and city:**  
Denmark, Nyborg, Vejle, Herning,  
Guldborgsund, and Greve Municipalities

**Organised by:**  
We Do Democracy

**Question tackled:**  
We need your help to create a vibrant youth  
democracy so that more young people  
have a say in their everyday lives and the  
communities they are part of

**Number of Assembly Members:**  
**60** people from 15 to 24 years of age

**Number of days of deliberation:**  
**6** deliberation days, three online activities,  
one democracy camp

[More details](#) 

Organized by We Do Democracy with the support of five Danish municipalities, this initiative convened a youth Citizens' Assembly explicitly tasked with designing the framework for future youth participation. Young Influence represents a methodological breakthrough in youth engagement, shifting young people from passive participants to active participants in the design of democratic processes. Besides in-person deliberation, this initiative incorporated online activities, a democracy camp for participants, and training participants in democratic participation skills such as self-confidence.

The assembly employed a meta-deliberative approach: 55 people between 15 and 24 years of age were selected by sortition to deliberate not on a specific policy issue, but on the mechanisms of youth democratic involvement itself. Their mandate was to create recommendations for school associations and local democracy in order to make them more attractive for young participation and formulate a methodology for broad iteration of Citizens' Assemblies in other Danish Municipalities.



Denmark

Expanding Representation **7**

# Young Citizens' Assembly on Pollinators / EU

A multi-chamber Citizens' Assembly



Image by: European Commission

**Country and city:**  
27 EU Member States

**Organised by:**  
The European Commission, ifok, and Missions Publiques

**Question tackled:**  
What must we do today to reverse the decline of pollinators? And what role should young Europeans play in biodiversity governance to best support these actions?

**Number of Assembly Members:**  
**100** people ages 18 to 29

**Number of days of deliberation:** **9**

[More details](#)

The European Commission launched a Young Citizens' Assembly on the decline of pollinators as part of its biodiversity agenda. The process brings together 100 young people aged 18 to 29, randomly selected from across the

27 EU Member States, and is being conducted over three in-person sessions in Brussels between September 2025 and March 2026, complemented by online activities between sessions. The Assembly has already completed two sessions, combining knowledge-building, stakeholder engagement, and deliberation, with a mandate to develop recommendations to address pollinator decline and to reflect on the role of young people in EU-level biodiversity governance.

The Assembly is implemented within the European Parliament pilot project "Youth for pollinators – fostering youth engagement and participatory governance in pollinator conservation". As a pilot, it is designed to assess the feasibility and added value of establishing a permanent mechanism for youth participation in EU-level governance on pollinator conservation. The process is accompanied by a structured evaluation, coordinated by the European Commission's Competence Centre, with the objective of supporting institutional learning on youth engagement. In parallel, the Assembly incorporates structured co-design elements, through which participants contribute not only policy recommendations but also proposals on the mandate, design, and functioning of a potential permanent Young Citizens' Assembly in this policy field.



● EU - wide

Expanding Representation **8****Women's Citizens' Assemblies in Budapest / Hungary**

Image by: Dem Net

**Country and districts:**

Hungary, Buda and Terézváros districts of Budapest

**Organised by:**

DemNet

**Question tackled:**

How do women experience local public spaces, and how can these be improved to enhance quality of life and feelings of security?

**Number of Assembly Members:**

A total of **92** women served as assembly members, with **46** selected in each district

**Number of days of deliberation:**

**5** days

[More details](#)



The *Women's Citizens' Assemblies* in Budapest were the first citizens' assemblies to be composed entirely of women. They were held simultaneously in two districts: Buda (District II) and Terézváros (District VI). The assemblies focused on two core themes: *women's experiences of public spaces and safety, and how these can be improved.*

This focus is particularly relevant given women's frequent role as key intermediaries between households and municipal services. Women are often responsible for childcare, eldercare and accessing healthcare, while also participating in public life as residents, workers and students. As a result, women's perspectives reflect not only individual needs but also broader patterns related to urban safety, mobility, and access to local services.

Also, in a context where Hungary ranked near the bottom of the EU Gender Equality Index (26th out of 27), the assemblies aimed to amplify women's voices in local decision-making and make public policies more inclusive and responsive. In each district, 46 members were selected by sortition. Beyond mapping everyday experiences and risks, the assemblies produced concrete recommendations on lighting, public transport, the design and maintenance of parks and other public spaces, and the availability of care-related services, which local authorities committed to take into account in urban planning and budgeting.



Field Advancing Assemblies and Juries

# Challenging Issues and Contexts



Challenging Issues and Contexts **9**

## Barcarena and Magalhães Barata Climate Assemblies / Brazil



Image by: Delibera Brasil, and IDEA

**Country and city:**  
Brazil, Barcarena

Brazil, Magalhães Barata

**Organised by:**  
Delibera Brasil

Delibera Brasil

**Question tackled:**  
Which climate needs does Barcarena have and require funding for? How and under what conditions can the municipality access climate finance?

How can climate finance help Magalhães Barata generate income for the local population, protect its waterways, develop sustainable tourism and address the impacts of climate change?

**Number of Assembly Members:** 29

29

**Number of days of deliberation:** 8

4

The Barcarena Climate Assembly examined climate finance in a mining and industrial municipality with environmental damage and unresolved compensation demands from past disasters. Citizens discussed establishing a multi-layer climate fund to support conservation and production needs, meeting global requirements for protection and sustainable production.

The Magalhães Barata Climate Assembly took place in a rural municipality within a marine extractive reserve managed by traditional communities. Discussions focused on conservation governance and how to allocate green taxes collected in environmental reserve areas to meet local needs. Climate finance can better respond to territorial needs through coordinated action across local and national levels. This requires revising its architecture, indicators, and fund allocation mechanisms to prioritise municipalities that are currently underserved by existing frameworks.



[More details](#)

Challenging Issues and Contexts **10**

# Local Citizens' Assemblies / Israel



Image by: Democracy 3.0

**Country local authorities:**

Israel, held across six local authorities: Jatt, Eilat, Beit Jan (Bayt Jann), Ra'anana, Kfar Saba, and the Bnei Shimon Regional Council



**Organised by:**

Democracy 3.0



**Question tackled:**

- Eilat: climate preparedness
- Ra'anana: living together in a diverse city
- Kfar Saba: local identity and cohesion
- Jatt and Beit Jann: shared responsibility for public spaces
- Bnei Shimon: an educational vision



**Number of Assembly Members:**

**255** members (between 45 and 60 residents per local assembly)



**Number of days of deliberation:**

**6** days

Local citizens' assemblies were convened across six Israeli local authorities (Jatt, Eilat, Beit Jan, Ra'anana, Kfar Saba, and the Bnei Shimon Regional Council). In each location, between 45 and 60 randomly selected residents met over six sessions to deliberate and produce practical recommendations, with 255 participants in total across all six assemblies. The initiative aims to scale citizens' assemblies across diverse Arab and Jewish localities and, in the future, mixed municipalities, with proceedings conducted in both Arabic and Hebrew to support inclusion.

[More details](#)



Field Advancing Assemblies and Juries

# Exceptional Impact



Exceptional Impact **11**

## Hughes Civic Assembly / US



Image by: NOCO Magazine

**Country and city:**  
United States, Fort Collins

**Organised by:**  
Healthy Democracy, the City of Fort Collins, the Center for Public Deliberation, American Public Trust, and Local Policy Lab

**Question tackled:**  
Informed by the diverse needs of our community, what use of the Hughes site will contribute most effectively to Fort Collins' long-term vitality and meet the requirements outlined in the 2021 ballot measure?

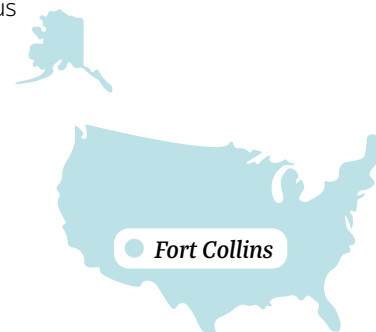
**Number of Assembly Members:** **20**

**Number of days of deliberation:** **4**

[More details](#)

The Citizens' Assembly on the future of the Hughes Stadium site in Fort Collins had a direct and verifiable impact on a major public decision. After several years of consultation without political consensus, the City Council decided in 2024 to commission a Citizens' Assembly to determine the future use of a 165-acre site acquired by the city and protected by a voter mandate. The Assembly took place in spring 2025 and formulated recommendations on the use of the site.

These recommendations were incorporated into Ballot Proposition 2H and approved by voters in November 2025. The outcome defined land use priorities, including environmental conservation, recreational uses, environmental education, and the allocation of land for Indigenous cultural purposes. The case illustrates how a Citizens' Assembly can contribute to resolving a stalled decision-making process and translate deliberative outcomes into a binding public vote.



Exceptional Impact **12**

# Climate Meets Local Government (Klima trifft Kommune)

/ Germany



Image by: Björn Obmann

**Country and city:**  
Germany, Osterburg and Berlin-Marzahn Hellersdorf District

**Organised by:**  
Mehr Demokratie and Gesellschaft für Klima und Demokratie

**Question tackled:**  
(1) Where is cycling infrastructure expansion most urgent? (2) What traffic regulations should apply to Breite Straße? (3) Where should street renovation/ expansion investments be prioritized first? (Osterburg) and how to effectively and appropriately allocate financial resources for climate-adapted heat protection measures in the Marzahn-Nord neighborhood? (Berlin Marzahn Hellersdorf).

**Number of Assembly Members:** **30**

**Number of days of deliberation:** **6** (Osterburg) and **3** (Berlin-Marzahn Hellersdorf)

[More details](#)

Klima Trifft Kommune (*Climate Meets Local Government*) pioneers a model that merges deliberative and direct democracy, addressing a critical weakness in standard assemblies: the lack of enforcement mechanisms for recommendations. Developed by Gesellschaft für Klima und Demokratie and Mehr Demokratie with funding from the Robert Bosch Foundation, the methodology looks to achieve binding outcomes through a two-stage process. The first stage centers on a traditional deliberation conducted in a mini-public, while the second stage involves a municipal referendum where all eligible residents can vote on the proposed measures.

In 2025, two municipalities launched processes under this framework. Osterburg (Saxony-Anhalt) became Germany's first to implement the combined model, convening 30 randomly selected residents across six sessions beginning in August to deliberate on mobility and cycling infrastructure, with a binding referendum scheduled for September 2026. Berlin's Marzahn-Hellersdorf district followed in November, establishing a Citizens' Assembly on heat protection for its residents in two sessions in November 2025. The deliberations will be followed by a *Citizen's Café* between the months of January and February 2026, where the general population can learn about, discuss and respond to the assembly's proposals prior to the referendum. At a later time, a binding municipal referendum on the citizens' assembly's recommendations will be voted. The vote will take place on September 6th, 2026 for Osterburg and no later than April 2026 for Marzahn-Nord.



Exceptional Impact **13**

# Citizens' Convention on Children's Time and the Youth Panel

/ France



Image by: Convention Citoyenne Cese

**Country and city:**  
France, Paris

**Organised by:**  
The Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE)

**Question tackled:**  
How can we better structure the different parts of children's daily lives so that they are more conducive to their learning, development, and health?

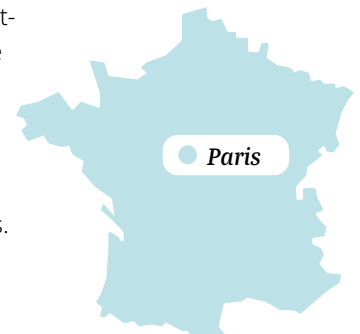
**The Citizens' Convention:**  
**133** randomly selected citizens, meeting across **7** sessions between June and November 2025.

**The Youth Panel:**  
**20** young people aged 12-17, meeting across **6** dedicated sessions, who presented their conclusions directly to the Citizens' Convention.  
[More details about the Youth Panel](#)

[More details](#)

The Citizens' Convention on Children's Time was organised by the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) at the request of the French Prime Minister. It took place between June and November 2025 and brought together 133 randomly selected citizens across seven working sessions. The process aimed to formulate proposals for the Government on the organisation of school time, extracurricular activities, and rest for children and adolescents.

The Convention included a dedicated panel of 20 young people aged 12 to 17, who met in separate sessions and presented their conclusions directly to the adult participants. It represents the third national citizens' convention convened in France, following earlier conventions on climate change (2020) and on end of life (2023). The outcomes of the process were formally transmitted to the Government in November 2025, with the intention of informing public decision-making from 2026 onwards.



Field Advancing Assemblies and Juries

# Beyond Government



Beyond Government **14**

## School assemblies / Netherlands

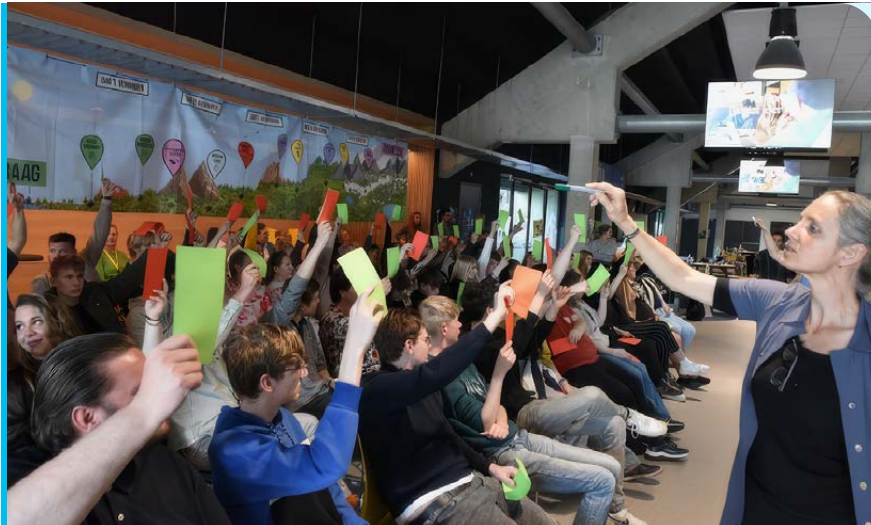


Image by: Bureau Burgerbaad

School Assemblies in the Netherlands (Schoolberaad) pioneered the application of sortition-based deliberative democracy within educational institutions, moving beyond traditional government structures to embed civic practice directly into school governance. Developed by Bureau Burgerberaad in partnership with JOBmbo, the model transforms students from passive stakeholders into active decision-makers through randomly selected assemblies that mirror school demographics.

During the 2024-2025 academic year, three Dutch vocational schools completed inaugural assemblies: Firda (Friesland) deliberated on mobile phone policies, Herman Brood Academie (Utrecht) addressed student engagement beyond class hours, and Cibap (Zwolle) focused on recommendations for the integration of first-year students. Each five-day process generated recommendations, adopted by school leadership if they remained within agreed parameters; while simultaneously fulfilling national civic education (*burgerschap*) requirements.

**Country and city:**  
The Netherlands (Friesland, Utrecht, Zwolle)

**Organised by:**  
Bureau Burgerberaad and JOBmbo

**Question tackled:**  
Mobile device policies in classrooms, Creating space students want to occupy beyond class time, First academic year structure and design

**Number of Assembly Members:**  
90 (Friesland),  
34 (Utrecht) and  
34 (Zwolle)

**Number of days of deliberation:** 5 full days

[More details](#)



Beyond Government **15**

# VU Sustainable University Assembly / Netherlands



Image by: G1000.nu foundation

**Country (and city):**  
The Netherlands, Amsterdam

**Organised by:**  
VU Amsterdam and G1000.nu foundation

**Question tackled:**  
How do we become a sustainable university?

**Number of Assembly Members:** **130**

**Number of days of deliberation:** **5**

[More details](#) 

The Sustainability University Assembly at VU Amsterdam was a university-wide, citizens' assembly-style process focused on tackling one question: how can VU become a sustainable university? Over two months, around 130 students and staff came together in a series of structured meetings to develop proposals through dialogue and collaborative work. Participants were chosen through random selection (sortition). Participants shaped their ideas into 13 proposals and voted on specific decision points at the final University Convention, adopting 53 of them into a shared Sustainability Agreement.



Beyond Government **16**

# Birmingham Museums Citizens' Jury / UK



Image by: Birmingham Museums

**Country and city:**  
United Kingdom, Birmingham

**Organised by:**  
Birmingham Museums Trust, Shared Future, and DemocracyNext

**Question tackled:**  
What does Birmingham need and want from its museums, now and in the future; and what should Birmingham Museums Trust do to make these things happen?

**Number of Assembly Members:** **26**

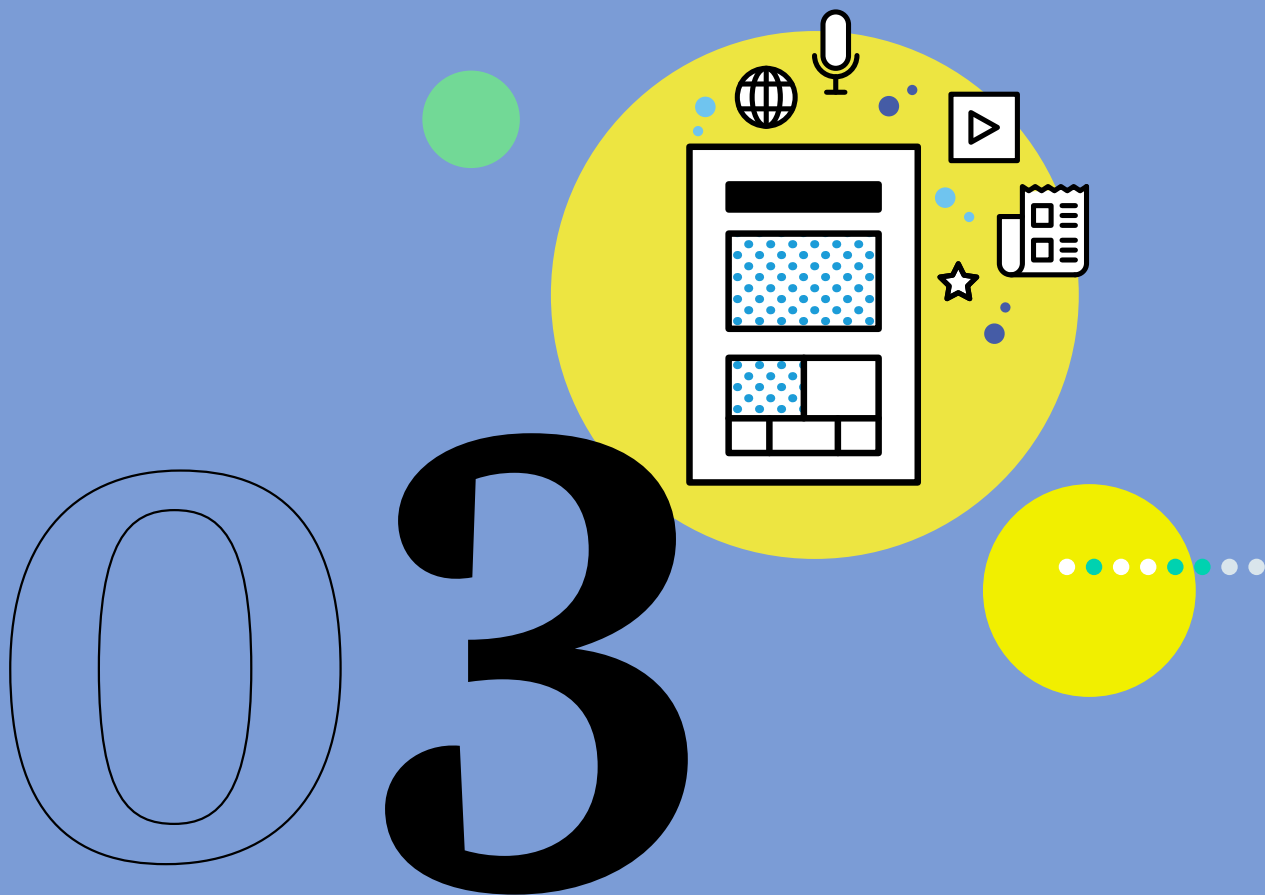
**Number of days of deliberation:** **6**

[More details](#)

The Birmingham Museums Citizens' Jury was a deliberative process conducted between late 2024 and early 2025. It was organised by Birmingham Museums Trust, making it the first citizens' jury in the United Kingdom to be convened and led by a museum. Twenty-six Birmingham residents deliberated for 30 hours on what the city expects from its museums and on potential directions for institutional change.

The recommendations were publicly presented in January 2025 at Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum, and the final report was published later that year. The impact of the process lies in its use by a cultural institution outside the executive sphere to convene a citizens' jury, generate recommendations, and draw on them to inform strategic and organisational decisions.





# New Publications and Resources

*In 2025,* network members and the broader ecosystem have published a range of new resources and expanded the knowledge the field holds. This body of literature adds to the [extensive list of resources](#) we have accumulated over the years.

**Books and Chapters**

**Principles, Guides, Guidelines, Methodologies**

**Databases**

**Papers and Articles**

**Reports**

**Videos**

New Publications and Resources

# 1 Books and Chapters



## Why We Can't Leave Politics Only to Politicians. Call for a People's Parliament

Eva Rovers



### Plea for a Third Chamber

The climate crisis, the housing shortage, the nitrogen problem, digital security: our biggest societal issues simply remain unresolved. Meanwhile, dissatisfaction with politics is growing and autocrats are gaining ever more ground. As a result, trust in democracy is slowly but surely disappearing.

The solution? Not less, but more democracy.

You will find more democracy in the Third Chamber: an extra parliament consisting of the residents themselves. There, randomly selected citizens from all walks of life collaborate on new laws. This way, they do not have a say just once every four years, when they get to tick a box, but on a structural basis.

Because democracy is too important to leave solely to politicians.

**Edited by Oliver Escobar and Stephen Elstub**  
[Climate Assemblies: New Civic Institutions for a Climate-Changed World](#)

- Stephen Elstub**  
[Coupling Mini-Publics with Legislatures: A Solution to Parliamentary Decline?](#)
- Terry Bouricius**  
[Democracy Without Politicians: Government By the People](#)
- Graham Smith and David Owen**  
[Rotation, task Definition and an Increased Membership: An Alternative Imaginary for a Permanent ECA](#)

## Should a Citizens' Assembly complement the European Parliament?

Rainer Bauböck and Kalypso Nicolaidis



In this GLOBALCIT forum debate, Kalypso Nicolaidis proposes a plan to create a European Citizens' Assembly (ECA) with some major innovative features: the assembly should be permanent with rotating membership rather than devoted to a single issue for a limited period of time; it should be itinerant rather than located in Brussels, Strasbourg or Luxembourg; and it should have agenda-setting powers for the European Parliament that go beyond the consultative role of most national-level citizens' assemblies.

New Publications and Resources

## 2 Principles, Guides, Guidelines, and Methodologies



### Responding to recommendations from a Citizens' Assembly

Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue



This Discussion Starter explores why it is important for a commissioning authority to respond to the recommendations from a Citizens' Assembly and proposes strategies for how to structure an effective response illustrated with examples from real-world deliberative processes.

This guidance can also be helpful for developing formal responses to public recommendations surfacing from other forms of citizen or stakeholder participation in order to enhance transparency and accountability.



Selen A. Ercan, Jordan McSwiney, Lucy Parry, Nicole Curato, Hans Asenbaum, Adele Webb, Emanuela Savini, Justin McCaul



[Guidebook for Deliberative Engagement: Key Features and Practical Insights](#)



Damir Kapidžić



[How to Organise a Deliberative Process at the Local Level?](#)



KNOCA



[Impact Evaluation Framework for Climate Assemblies](#)



Graham Smith, Morten Friis, Peter Bryant



[Supporting Members After the Climate Assembly Ends: How to Nurture Action](#)

New Publications and Resources

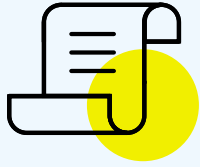
## 3 Databases



The Citizens' Councils Database offers the opportunity to learn about individual cases and the development of randomly selected citizens' assemblies in Germany, and to participate in recording new cases. The database is developed and operated in cooperation between the Institute for Democracy and Participation Research and Mehr Demokratie e.V.

[German Citizens' Assembly Database](#)





New Publications and Resources

# 4 Papers and Articles

**Ieva Cesnulaityte**

→ [Bridging Divides Through Deliberation](#)

**Claudia Chwalisz and Sammy McKinney**

→ [Five Dimensions of Scaling Democratic Deliberation: With and Beyond AI](#)

**Democracy 3.0**

→ [In a Nation Divided, Citizens' Assemblies Are Reimagining Democracy in Israel](#)

**David Farrell**

→ [Democratic innovation without political parties should be unthinkable](#)

**Jakob Jespersen**

→ [The Diffuse Demos](#)

**Bruno Leipold**

→ [Constituency Juries: Holding Elected Representatives Accountable through Sortition](#)

**Joe Matthews**

→ [Deliberative Democracy in a Digital Age](#)

**Gustav Kjær Vad Nielsen and James MacDonald-Nelson**

→ [Spaces for deliberation: Eight spatial qualities for designing deliberative assemblies](#)

**Aviv Ovadya, Kyle Redman, Luke Thorburn, Quan Ze Chen, Oliver Smith, Flynn Devine, Andrew Konya, Smitha Milli, Manon Revel, K. J. Kevin Feng, Amy X. Zhang, Bilva Chandra, Michiel A. Bakker, Atoosa Kasirzadeh**

→ [The Democracy Levels Framework](#)

→ [Democratic AI is Possible. The Democracy Levels Framework Shows How It Might Work](#)

**Paulina Pospieszna, Magni Szymaniak-Arnesen, Daniel Oross, Gabriella Kiss**

→ [Diverse roles and perceptions of public officials and NGOs in local citizens' assemblies – A comparative analysis of the cases of Poland and Hungary](#)

**Rosalma Zubizarreta-Ada**

→ [Listening Across Differences: Facilitators' Perspectives from Austrian Mini-Publics](#)

**Emilien Paulis, Paulina Pospieszna**

→ [Deliberative mini-publics as learning schools for democracy? Examining deliberation impact on dissatisfied and radical participants of a Citizens' Assembly in Poland](#)

**Paulina Pospieszna, Marta Hoffmann**

→ [Institutionalizing Democratic Innovations in Poland: Mapping the Evolution of Citizens' Assemblies Through Rules of Procedure](#)

**Graham Smith, Rodrigo Ramis-Moyano, Ernesto Ganuza, Thamy Pogrebinski**

→ [Mini-Publics and Party Ideology: Who Commissioned the Deliberative Wave in Europe?](#)

**Jelle Turkenburg**

→ [In the Eye of the Beholder: Explaining the Effects of Local Participatory Budgeting on General Public Political Support](#)

**Nick Vlahos, David Schecter and Linn Davis**

→ [Chartering Change: Transforming City Charter Processes Through Democratic Innovation](#)

New Publications and Resources

# 5 Reports



Climate Assemblies: Emerging Trends, Challenges and Opportunities  
A Report of the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies

## Climate Assemblies: Emerging Trends, Challenges and Opportunities

**Graham Smith**

The Current Trends report was first published in April 2023. This is the third annual update. The report is designed to be read as a standalone document, so broadly follows the structure of earlier iterations with a focus on updating the key elements.

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.

### Atl Castro Asmussen, Marjan Ehsassi

→ [Voice Insecurity Mapping the Consequences of Institutional Exclusion & Charting a Path to Democratic Renewal with Citizens' Assemblies](#)



### Marjan Ehsassi, Cole Speidel

→ [Citizens' Assembly learning series. Case Study 2: Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly on Amalgamation](#)



### FIDE - North America

→ [What is a Citizens' Assembly? Making the case for a democratic innovation](#)



### Eliot Higgins, Natalie Martin

→ [Verification, Deliberation, Accountability: A New Framework For Tackling Epistemic Collapse and Renewing Democracy](#)



### Marcella Nery and Anoukh de Soysa

→ [Amazonian Climate Deliberation - Insights from Three Citizen Assemblies on Climate Finance Held Ahead of COP30](#)



### Lucy J. Parry, Nicole Curato

→ [Deliberative Integrity: Risks and Responses in Mini-Public Governance](#)



### Che Wagner and Rafael Widmer

→ [The Future Council U24- What Can We Learn From The First Swiss Youth Citizens' Assembly](#)

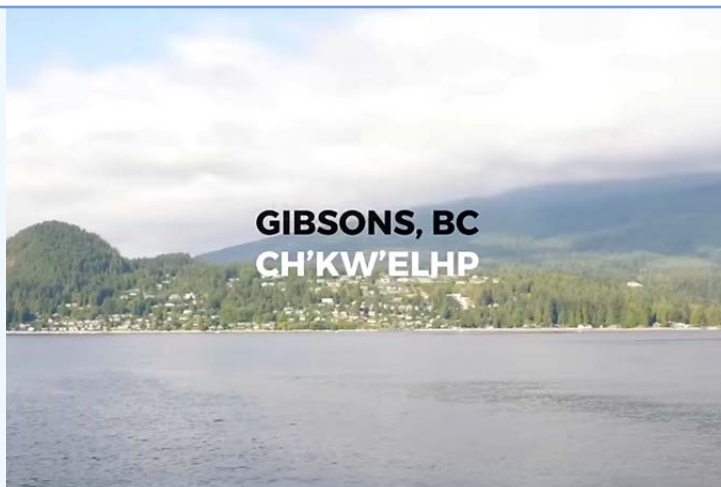


New Publications and Resources

# 6 Videos

## Voices of Gibsons Residents

by Giampietro Balia for the Renovate the Public Hearing Initiative at Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue



# 04



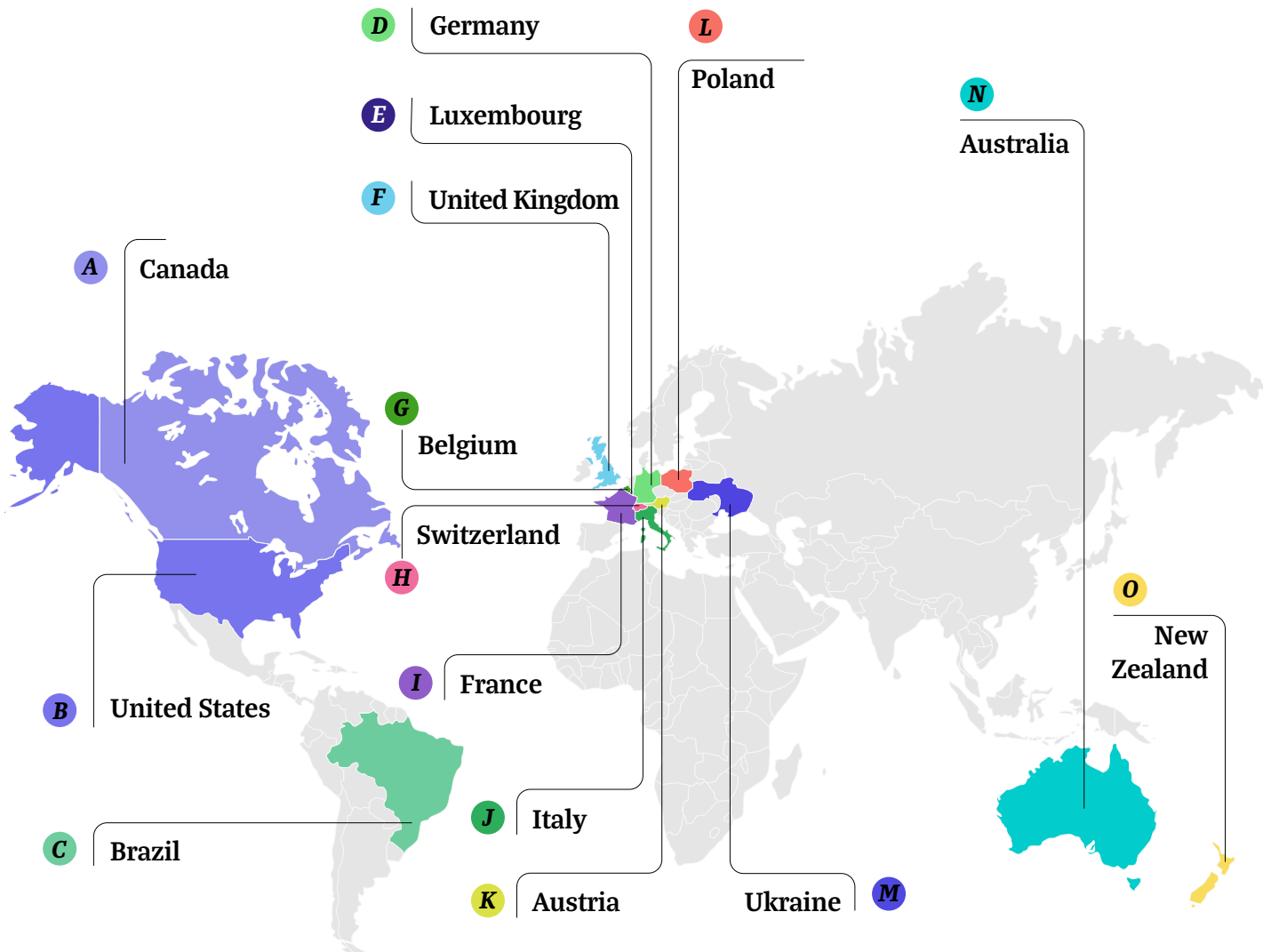
## The Democracy R&D Network in 2025

*This chapter* presents the main activities and results of Democracy R&D during the year. It includes information on membership growth, the Annual Meeting, Learning Calls, and Workshops. The report also documents progress in the *Consolidation of Deliberative Practices in the Global South Project* to strengthen deliberative practices in the Global South, the consolidation of the *Newsletter* as a communication platform, and the outcomes of Regional Meetings that supported collaboration on local issues.

- Network Membership Overview 2025**
- Annual Meeting**
- Collaborative Learning Across the Network**
- Consolidating Deliberative Practices in the Global South**
- The Democracy R&D Community Newsletter**
- Regional Meetings**

The Democracy R&D Network in 2025

# 1 Network Membership Overview 2025



In 2025, the Network expanded with the addition of 14 individual members and 12 organizational members from different regions. The new individual members include practitioners and researchers from North America, Europe, and Oceania.

This year's new members introduce a broader set of capabilities into the Network, strengthening both its analytical reach and practical know-how. Their contributions include piloting citizens' assemblies in crisis and post-conflict contexts (Kyiv School of Economics), running long-term national deliberations on

education (Montag Stiftung Denkwerkstatt), advancing youth- and climate-focused processes (Rede Conhecimento Social, Children's Rights International Network), communicating about deliberation through popular culture (One World or None) and deepening the connection between academic research and practice (Democratic Innovations Research Unit, Goethe University). Together, they expand the Network's expertise in designing complex assemblies, integrating underrepresented groups, and linking deliberation more effectively to policymaking systems.

**A**  
**Canada**



**Sara McPhee-Knowles**

Academic

→ Associate Professor, Business Administration at Yukon University.



**Daniel Fusca**

Civil servant

→ Manager of Public Consultation at Toronto's Parks and Recreation Division.



**Jonathan Rose**

Practitioner

→ Professor and Head of the Department of Political Studies at Queen's University.

**B**  
**United States**



**Benjamin Solotaire**

Advocate

→ Civic Engagement Commission Senior Advisor.



**Micah Weinberg**

Practitioner

→ Nonresident scholar at Carnegie California and Senior Strategic Advisor to the Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley.

**Child Rights International Network**

Advocate



→ Child Rights International Network (CRIN) supports the meaningful involvement of under-18s in deliberative processes and leads work on children's participation in environmental and climate governance. Its experience includes Scotland's Climate Assembly and Ireland's Children and Young People's Biodiversity Loss Assembly, and it is advancing debate on children's voting rights through the upcoming report Too Young to Vote?.

**C**  
**Brazil**



**Rede Conhecimento Social**

Advocate

→ Rede Conhecimento Social (ReCoS) has co-designed major citizens' assemblies in Brazil on selective waste collection in Belém, internet access in Niterói, full-time education in Fortaleza, and youth-led climate priorities in Recife, following its support to Delibera Brasil's first mini-publics in Ilhéus and São Paulo.

**D**  
**Germany**



**Democratic Innovations Research Unit at Goethe University**

Academic

→ The Democratic Innovations Research Unit (Goethe University Frankfurt) has studied deliberative and participatory processes for nearly 15 years, including the permanent Citizens' Assembly in Aachen. It leads the i4i project on the political integration of assemblies and is a partner in the EU INSPIRE project on inclusive and resilient participation.



**Dialoggestalter**

Practitioner

→ Dialoggestalter has designed and facilitated citizen forums and assemblies at national, state, regional, and city levels in Germany, including the Bertelsmann Foundation's nationwide forum on diversity and cohesion and multiple forums for the German Environmental Ministry since 2015. It also supports long-term innovations such as the five-year citizens' assembly on Germany's education system.



**Klimamitbestimmung**

Practitioner

→ Klimamitbestimmung e.V. has supported key deliberative processes in Germany, including the national Citizens' Assembly on Nutrition and Berlin's Citizens' Assembly on Climate Action. It has also produced research and advisory work on deliberation and is currently assessing options for institutionalizing citizens' assemblies within national climate governance.



**Montag Stiftung Denkwerkstatt**

Advocate

→ Montag Stiftung Denkwerkstatt established the independent Citizens' Assembly on Education and Learning in Germany in 2020, involving 700 randomly selected participants over five years to develop recommendations for a more sustainable education system, including children and young people aged 9-16. Its latest proposals (2025) and the #besserlernen campaign amplify students' voices in national education reform.

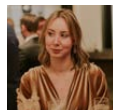
**E**  
**Luxembourg**



**Gustav Nielszen**

Academic

→ Doctoral Researcher at University of Luxembourg and researcher and writer on "Spaces for Deliberation" at Democracy Next



**Lisa Verhasselt**

Academic

→ Research Associate at Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) and PhD in Political Science at the University of Luxembourg

**F**  
**United Kingdom**



**Luke Thorburn**

Academic

→ PhD student at King's College London and research fellow at the AI & Democracy Foundation.



**One World or None**

Advocate

→ One World or None (OWON) has facilitated over 200 participatory democracy assemblies and contributed to the creation of the 2021 Global Assembly, leading its cultural wave and communications. It has also produced practical manuals for grassroots use to support the wider uptake of deliberative practices.

**F**  
**United Kingdom**



**Participation and Communities Team (PACT)**

Practitioner

→ The Participation and Communities Team (PACT) of the Scottish Parliament delivers the annual People's Panel, a citizen-jury-style process with 25 randomly selected residents reporting to a parliamentary committee. It is expanding the use of deliberative approaches such as lived experience panels and is developing a blueprint to further institutionalize deliberative democracy in the next parliamentary session.

**G**  
**Belgium**



**Jonathan Moskovic**

Practitioner

→ Research Lead at European University Institute and Senior Advisor at Democracy Next.



**21 Solutions**

Practitioner

→ 21 Solutions is a Belgian organization with more than 15 years of experience in citizen participation. It has designed and implemented deliberative processes such as the Brussels Citizens' Climate Assembly, Bruxelles Takes Care, T'as le Seum, and the Move NohW urban-planning panel.

**H**  
**Switzerland**



**Demoscan**

Practitioner

→ Demoscan has supported more than 15 deliberative mini-public projects in Switzerland over the past six years through consulting, facilitation, and evaluation. It also serves as a national network hub connecting actors in democratic innovation and explores how citizen deliberation interacts with Switzerland's system of direct democracy.

**I**  
**France**



**Cornelia Perle**

Civil servant

→ Policy Advisor DemNet Hungary (Foundation for Development of Democratic Rights).

**J**  
**Italy**

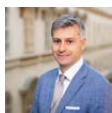


**Ascolto Attivo**

Practitioner

→ Ascolto Attivo has led major deliberative processes, including the public debate on drinking water in Île-de-France, the Convention Citoyenne sur la fin de vie in France, and deliberations on new hospitals in Livorno and the Avisio valleys. It is currently designing a multi-regional Citizens' Assembly on water in Italy.

**K Austria**



**Stefan Sindelar**

Advocate

→ CEO at the European Capital of Democracy.

**L Poland**



**Paulina Pospieszna**

Academic

→ Associate Professor at Adam Mickiewicz University.

**M Ukraine**



**Kyiv School of Economics**

Academic

→ Kyiv School of Economics (KSE) is piloting one of Ukraine's first local citizens' assemblies on recovery and reconstruction within the EU Horizon BRIDGE project. It also conducts policy labs with TU Berlin to introduce citizens' assemblies and panels into decision-making across different levels of government during an ongoing interstate war.

**N Australia**



**Nicholas Gruen**

Advocate

→ CEO, Lateral Economics.



**Ron Levy**

Academic

→ Professor at The Australian National University.

**O New Zealand**



**Complex Conversations Lab**

Practitioner

→ Complex Conversations Lab has delivered citizens' assemblies and mini-publics for local councils and led nationwide online deliberative engagements using tools such as Pol.is. It is building a national deliberative democracy network in New Zealand, with a focus on Indigenous engagement under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, as well as youth participation and future generations.



**Trust Democracy**

Practitioner

→ Trust Democracy promotes and participates in deliberative democracy experiments in New Zealand, contributing expertise on Indigenous engagement shaped by Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The Democracy R&D Network in 2025

# 2 Annual Meeting



Kyle Redman and Miguel González Vaz

In October, Brussels hosted the largest and most diverse DR&D Conference yet. Brussels is a fitting home for the conference. It is a place where democratic innovations have long moved from pilots to practice. 1 in 5 residents have received an invitation to take part in one of the many deliberative processes organised to shape the future of the city.

Over the course of two days, more than 150 network members gathered, including 24 who were able to travel thanks to support from Robert Bosch Stiftung and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). We also welcomed the fresh perspectives of 80 non-network members to the conference, and in total, had participants from 50 different countries.

The event began with an inspiring speech by Fatima Zibouh. She painted a vivid and colourful picture of Brussels and introduced the concept of “radical inclusion,” which emphasises a deeper, more meaningful way of including the full diversity of society in democratic processes.

The conference’s theme, “Deliberative Democracy at a Crossroads,” was explored from all different angles across the 30 workshops, 5 double-length deep dive workshops and 4 plenary sessions. One highlight included the ‘Deliberation, A House of Cards? The Way Forward between Money, Politics & Critics’ plenary session, which put the spotlight on emerging obstacles to the growth and scaling of deliberative processes.





Those undercurrents were felt throughout the conference; you could pluck these key phrases from whispered side conversations to emergent group discussions to entire workshops: “theory of change”, “secure and sustainable funding”, “measurable impact”, “institutional culture”, “capacity building”. These are signs of a field quickly maturing and rising to meet a moment where the insecure foundations of many democracies are being exposed to the elements.

**Conference website:**

[drd2025.org](http://drd2025.org)



**Organising members:**

[FIDE - Europe](#), [G1000](#), [Missions Publiques](#), [Democratic Society](#)



The Democracy R&D Network in 2025

# Participation



|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Members</i><br/><b>132</b></p> <hr/> <p><i>Non-members</i><br/><b>74</b></p> | <p><i>Paying Participants</i><br/><b>206</b></p>      |
| <p><i>Members</i> <b>24</b></p> <hr/> <p><i>Non-members</i> <b>6</b></p>           | <p><i>Funded Participants</i><br/><b>30</b></p>       |
| <p><i>Registered Participants</i><br/><b>249</b></p>                               | <p><i>Organising Partners Staff</i><br/><b>27</b></p> |



**Total 276**

# Resources for Democracy R&D members

- [Recordings playlist](#)
- [Pictures](#)
- [Contact List](#)
- [Conference program](#)
- [Slides & Posters](#)
- [Notetaking platform](#)



# Programme



**30**

Workshops



**5**

Deep dive workshops



**4**

Plenary Sessions

## Pre-programme & Post-programme

October 14th  
Permanent Assemblies in Belgium

 [Program](#)

 [Recording](#)

October 14th  
European Democracy at a Crossroads

 [Program](#)

October 17th  
Raising the Bar: Advancing Deliberative Facilitation

 [Program](#)

By WeDoDemocracy & MASS LBP

October 17th  
How to Build a Strong Media Strategy

By FINN agency & G1000



## Network Station

At the Annual Meeting, members used the Network Station to share feedback on the network's priorities across four Focus Areas: the points below present five of the 94 messages shared by participants.

- > "We need standards of practice. And when the standard cannot be met then clearly measure & descriptions."
- > "We need storytelling and democratic narratives to flourish to keep pushing the cultural agenda. This is not just procedural design but rethinking what it means to work in our field."
- > "Collective metrics for everyone to track so we can tell a huge story about the impact of all the projects within the network."
- > "Better problem analysis and thinking of why we use different methods and models within the broader scope of deliberative democracy."
- > "I would love it if the network could foster more unity behind the banner of deliberation rather than the competition for resources that is so prevalent."



The Democracy R&D Network in 2025

# 3 Collaborative Learning Across the Network



In 2025, Democracy R&D scaled up collaborative learning across its global network through Learning Calls, Field-Building Meetings, and thematic working groups—core spaces for peer exchange and applied learning.

The network delivered **10 Learning Calls** and **5 Field-Building Meetings**. Learning Calls covered cases such as the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (Canada), Youth and Children's Deliberation (Scotland and Australia), the Forum Against Fakes (Germany), Citizens' Assemblies on Education and Learning (Germany), the Swiss Future Council, and Citizens' Assemblies on Popular Culture (England).

The Field-Building Program, launched in early 2025, anchored cross-regional coordination. It introduced *Hard Conversations*: structured dialogues focused on complex issues in deliberative democracy practice, including representation, legitimacy, and power. The first session—*Lotteries in the Global South*—examined the operational limits of sortition in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

In parallel, the Field-Building Interest Group developed a shared field-building roadmap. Using the Field-Building Theory of Change, members set a system goal, defined outcomes, assessed constraints and strengths, and prioritised collective actions.

## Learning Calls (2025)

- › **Topic:** Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

› **Presenter:** Sara McPhee-Knowles

› **Date:** January 25, 2025

› **Link:** Learning call: [Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform](#)

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- › **Topic:** Youth and children's deliberation

› **Presenters:** Katie Reid, Sonia Randhawa

› **Date:** February 18, 2025

› **Link:** [Youth and Children's Deliberation](#)

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- › **Topic:** Forum Against Fakes

› **Presenter:** Christian Heusmann

› **Date:** March 17, 2025

› **Link:** [Forum Against Fakes](#)

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- › **Topic:** CA on Education and Learning (Germany)

› **Presenter:** Gerhard Wolf

› **Date:** July 17, 2025

› **Link:** [Citizens' Assembly on Education and Learning](#)

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- › **Topic:** Swiss Future Council

› **Presenter:** Che Wagner and Katie Reid

› **Date:** September 23, 2025

› **Link:** [Swiss Future Council](#)

## The network delivered



- **Topic:** Constitutional change at Federal State level in Germany (Mehr Demokratie)
- **Presenter:** Florian Wieczorek
- **Date:** November 10, 2025
- **Link:** [Constitutional change at Federal State](#)

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- **Topic:** Citizens' Assembly on Los Angeles City Charter
- **Presenter:** Joe Mathews
- **Date:** November 18, 2025
- **Link:** [Citizens' Assembly on Los Angeles City Charter](#)

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- **Topic:** Citizens' Assembly Schools - FIDE
- **Presenter:** Miguel González Vaz
- **Date:** November 27, 2025
- **Link:** [Citizens' Assembly Schools](#)

- **Topic:** DRD mini-workshop - Duty to Deliberate Before Armed Conflict
- **Presenter:** Ron Levy
- **Date:** December 1, 2025
- **Link:** [Duty to Deliberate Before Armed Conflict](#)

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- **Topic:** Communicating Citizens' Assemblies Through Popular Culture - One World or None
- **Presenter:** Jamie Kelsey
- **Date:** December 11, 2025
- **Link:** [Citizens' Assemblies Through Popular Culture](#)

### Field-Building Interest Group's Draft Outcomes & Strengths

People from all walks of life benefit from more inclusive, fair and informed decision-making on tough, politically-gridlocked issues because lottery-selected deliberations are a go-to decision-making method (institutionalised or not)

| System Goal                   | People from all walks of life benefit from more inclusive, fair and informed decision-making on tough, politically-gridlocked issues because lottery-selected deliberations are a go-to decision-making method (institutionalised or not)   |  |   |  |
|-------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Required System Outcomes      | 1. Because the process is better KNOWN  | 2. Because convenors are less likely to REJECT the process   | 3. Because convenors are more likely to EMBRACE the process   | 4. Because the process is more EFFECTIVE and CREDIBLE  |
|                               | 1A. Because the process is better promoted<br>1B. Because more people are experiencing the process as part of their culture (e.g. as participant, contributor or distant observer)  | 2A. Because they are less concerned about the threat to their power<br>2B. Because they are less concerned about democratic processes evolving   | 3A. Because they are convinced the process is necessary, as it is more effective and credible than status quo methods.<br>3B. Because they see the value of greater public participation (i.e. beyond voting)<br>3C. Because they are under public pressure to embrace them (e.g. via popular movement)   | 4A. Because convenors have the required internal capability, capacity, funds and other resources<br>4B. Because convenors have access to the required external capability, capacity and resources<br>4C. Because convenors are committed to addressing recommendations   |
| Our Unique Strengths & Assets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We have the technical expertise and client/community relationships to run highly-visible real or mock processes so convenors, stakeholders and the public can experience them</li> <li>We produce the Global South and North case studies that can be used in promotions</li> <li>Our Network has experienced government and non-government advocates</li> <li>Our Network has the capacity to reach for global convenors</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government actors within our Network can act as ambassadors for their peers in other jurisdictions</li> <li>We can formally develop a network of other ambassadors made up of satisfied convenors and stakeholders from past processes we've run</li> <li>We can leverage our international standards and recommendations to reassure convenors</li> <li>We have experience framing problems/needs that convenors can buy into</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We have experience promoting processes and have learned what messaging and data is most convincing for convenors, stakeholders and the public</li> <li>We can formally develop a network of other ambassadors made up of satisfied participants from past processes we've run</li> <li>We can formally celebrate past convenors of our processes</li> <li>We can use our skills to mobilise communities and movements, to apply public pressure</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We can establish standards and share data/learnings, to ensure our processes are effective and credible</li> <li>We can share our expertise to build the capabilities of others</li> <li>We can formally connect convenors of our past processes with new convenors for peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing</li> <li>We can vouch for the quality of each other's processes</li> </ul> |



## Field Building Meetings (2025)

- **Field Building Global Launch: [Strategy & Goals](#)** – February 19, 2025 (Europe, Africa, South Asia & Americas)

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- **Field Building Global Launch: [Ways of Working & Key Interests](#)** – February 27, 2025 (Australia, East Asia & Americas)

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- **Field Building Co-Design Workshop: [Action Planning](#)** – September 10, 2025. Facilitated by Scott Lappan-Newton
- **Field Building Co-Design Workshop: [Aligning on Workstreams & Next Steps](#)** – October 1, 2025. Facilitated by Scott Lappan-Newton
- **Field Building Co-Design Workshop: [Action Planning](#)** – November 10, 2025. Facilitated by Scott Lappan-Newton

## Hard Conversations

- **[Lotteries in the Global South](#)** – May 14, 2025. Presentations by Silvia Cervellini (Delibera Brasil) and Sanskriti Menon (CEE India)

## Constitutions & Charters Interest Group

The Constitutions & Charters Interest Group brings together members interested in how constitutions, city charters, and other foundational governance frameworks – and the processes of amending them – can integrate deliberative ideas from deliberative democracy. Since its creation, the group has convened four sessions—including exchanges with Assemble America, Pro Futuris, Mehr Demokratie, Rewrite Los Angeles, and Ron Levy, and an in-person meeting in Brussels that outlined next steps for collaboration.

Participation has grown to around 75 members from multiple regions, reflecting increasing interest in connecting deliberative democracy with constitutional design. Six new sessions are planned for 2026, including contributions from the ECI Campaign and the Max Planck [Project ICCAL Lab](#). The group is also developing a collaborative database to document people, organisations, and projects working in this emerging field.

If you'd like to organize a Learning Call, join one of these working groups, or collaborate on upcoming sessions, please reach out to us at [team@democracyrd.org](mailto:team@democracyrd.org).



The Democracy R&D Network in 2025

# 4 Consolidating Deliberative Practices in the Global South

*Consolidating Deliberative Practices in the Global South is the second phase of Democracy R&D's New Frontiers project, supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). This phase builds on earlier work by strengthening collaboration among partners, expanding regional participation, and consolidating deliberative innovations developed in Global South contexts.*

This phase builds on earlier work by strengthening collaboration among partners, expanding regional participation, and consolidating deliberative innovations developed in Global South contexts.

This phase has two objectives: **(1)** supporting the adaptation and institutionalisation of deliberative democracy practices in the Global South, and **(2)** strengthening the capacity of practitioners, advocates, and public officials involved.



Implementation under this phase takes place through **Deliberative Action Groups (DAGs)**—coalitions of organisations that design, test, and disseminate deliberative innovations through **Hard Conversations, Method Calls,** and **Actionable Resources.**

Three Deliberative Action Groups are currently active under this phase:

1

### Centre for Environment Education (India)

Advancing field-building by linking India's participatory traditions with global deliberative frameworks.



2

### Tribu (Chile)

Developing participatory models for agenda-setting and governance of deliberative processes.



3

### Delibera Brasil (Brazil)

Adapting sortition and recruitment methods to the social and political contexts of the Global South, in partnership with organisations in India and Africa.



The Democracy R&D Network in 2025

# 5 The Democracy R&D Community Newsletter

*In 2025, Democracy R&D launched its official Community Newsletter, a channel designed to connect members, share information, and highlight ongoing work across the network. The newsletter functions as a collective publication built from the contributions and updates of members, providing an overview of current activities, collaborations, and emerging practices in deliberative democracy.*

Each edition includes five core sections:

- > **Democracy R&D Events** – Highlights from Network meetings and learning activities.
- > **Program Updates** – Progress within the four main programmes: Field Building, Collaborative Learning, Democracy Redesign, and Community Building.
- > **Members' Projects** – Case studies and reflections from member organisations.
- > **Global South** – A focus on deliberative initiatives and innovations emerging from the Global South.
- > **Network Updates** – New members, publications, and shared resources.

Two editions have been published to date, with contributions from **more than 40 network members** across all continents. Together, these editions report on **24 network activities**, highlight **25 books, guides, and other resources**, introduce all new members, and share announcements of grants and calls to support collective work on future projects.

We invite all members and collaborators to read the editions and subscribe to receive future newsletters at:

[Democracy R&D Newsletter – First Edition](#) 

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[Democracy R&D Newsletter – Second Edition](#) 



The Democracy R&D Network in 2025

# 6 Regional Chapters

*Democracy R&D fosters collaboration globally while recognising that effective cooperation often begins at the regional level. Regional meetings provide spaces for members in the same area to exchange experiences, discuss shared challenges, and coordinate initiatives adapted to their local contexts.*



In 2025, several regional chapters were reactivated and began meeting regularly, strengthening the link between local practice and global learning within the network. They also enable members to present their projects, share innovations, and establish partnerships that contribute to broader collective efforts.

The network currently has active chapters in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and Asia. Each chapter meets approximately once a month, and participation continues to expand as new members engage in these exchanges.



*All members from a given region are encouraged to participate and contribute. To join or learn more about regional meetings, please contact [team@democracyrd.org](mailto:team@democracyrd.org).*

# 05



## What's Next?

### Democracy R&D

began with an initial idea from Lyn Carson, funding from the New Democracy Foundation, and a small group of advocates of deliberative democracy and democratic innovation, mostly based in Europe and Australia, who met for the first time in Madrid in 2018. Since then, the network has grown to 230 members—both organizations and individuals—across 61 countries on six continents in only eight years. Today, the network involves more than 300 individuals, including academics, practitioners, journalists, advocates, civil servants, and funders. It is a vibrant community of practice and thought at the frontline of democratic renewal in a world where many are asking: *what can we do?* Democracy R&D exists to seek those answers and to test them in the real world.

Since then, the network has successfully organized eight annual meetings, all but one of them in person. The most recent took place in Brussels and brought together more than 300 participants. We would like to thank FIDE-Europe, G1000, Mission Publiques, and Democratic Society for providing such an outstanding venue. The network has also hosted or

directly developed dozens of programs, projects, and initiatives aimed at promoting learning and improving practice within the community. These include the writing and publication of annual reports, newsletters, and [living guidebooks](#); support for projects in countries such as Nigeria, India, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, and Bosnia to promote local knowledge and practice that can then spread across the network; and the organization of hundreds of virtual meetings to share knowledge on deliberative democracy and democratic innovation. These meetings have ranged from learning calls and methods calls to “hard conversations” and working group meetings on key issues such as institutionalization, field-building, the development of regional chapters within the network in Africa and Latin America, and the drafting of constitutions and charters, among others.

In 2026, the network will continue many of these efforts while also launching new ones.

#### Program Development

Following a process initiated in 2025, we are refining the network's core programs. Our four programs include *Democracy Redesign*

Support, Community Building, Communications and Advocacy, and Knowledge Production. The Knowledge production program, for example, will focus on supporting the collective development of community standards within the network. Under this program, the network is committed over the next three years to convening task forces with members to develop standards on pressing issues such as the use of AI, online deliberation, and random recruitment. A guide on the public regulation of minipublics, detailing different approaches across jurisdictions, is also currently under development.

### Learning from Field-Building

In the coming months, the network will share a systematization of the field-building work carried out between 2024 and 2025, including the main findings from the Democracy R&D plenary at the Annual Meeting in Brussels.

### Strengthening Dialogue and Community Learning

The network will host its next Global Meeting in 2027. For the first time, the network is running an open process to select the conference host. A protocol has been developed for this purpose, and we expect to announce the selected host very soon. The network will also continue running its *Constitutions and Charters group*, which has already held more than a dozen meetings. *Hard Conversations* is a new webinar series that we want to prioritize this year. Through this series, we aim to foster key discussions in the field on issues where there is still little consensus. Together with International IDEA, the network is also hosting a series of mutual learning conversations on impact in climate deliberation, with meetings focused on Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific. We are also planning a new series called "Academics Talk to Practitioners and Practitioners Talk to Academics" to bring these two communities into conversation around issues such as enclave deliberation, representativeness, the supplement-versus-replacement debate, minipublic-maxipublic connections, the categorization of minipublics, and criteria for deliberation.

## Mapping the Field and Building Connections

The network is also developing a new visualization platform that will map members' projects and joint activities. This platform will help members locate themselves within the broader field, identify opportunities for collaboration, and detect clusters of work across the network. The platform is expected to launch in the second semester of 2026.

## Advancing Democratic Innovation in the Global South

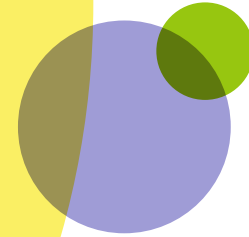
[The New Frontiers Project](#) is the network's program specifically conceived to promote deliberative democracy and democratic innovation in the Global South, and it will continue supporting mutual learning across different countries and contexts. Currently, *Deliberative Action Groups* with members from countries such as Chile, Brazil, India, South Africa, and Nigeria are preparing work on sortition methods, field-building, and relations with stakeholders that will be shared with the broader network in the coming months.

This is the second report in a series that began in [2024](#) and aims to become the main source reporting on the evolution of the field. Each year, the report documents emerging trends, groundbreaking cases of democratic innovation from around the world, yearly publications, and other developments both within the network and across the field. We would like to thank Ieva Česnulaitytė for leading the team that made this possible, as well as the 23 network members who contributed to it. We would also like to express our deep gratitude to the National Endowment for Democracy, the Salvia Foundation, and the Robert Bosch Foundation for supporting the network's work.

With appreciation,

*David, Indira, and Felipe*





# Annex A

## Other deliberative processes submitted to the open call



- > **Australia**  
[Water Future Community Advisory Panel](#)
- > **Canada**  
[Canadian Youth Climate Assembly](#)
- > **Denmark**  
[Citizens Panel about the drinking water in the future](#)
- > **EU**  
[European Citizens' Panel on Intergenerational Fairness](#)
- > **Finland**  
[Youth Citizens' Assembly on Food](#)
- > **Finland**  
[Deliberative Resident Panel on Treatment Continuity](#)
- > **Finland**  
[Citizens' Panel on Improving the State of Nature](#)
- > **Finland**  
[Citizens' Panel for the City Strategy Update](#)
- > **France**  
[Citizens' Consultation on Mathematics in Society](#)
- > **Germany**  
[Citizens' Debate on Fair Taxes and Finances](#)
- > **Netherlands**  
[Assembly on the Fusing of Two Municipalities](#)
- > **Netherlands**  
[Mobility in Wageningen](#)
- > **UK**  
[Violence Against Women and Girls](#)
- > **UK**  
[Cumbria Climate Assembly](#)
- > **US**  
[Los Angeles Charter Reform Mini-Assembly](#)
- > **US**  
[Engaged California Deliberative Platform](#)



Democracy R&D



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