

CENTER FOR BLUE DEMOCRACY

A Guide for Assembly Members

The Art of Decision-Making



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1. Introduction

Congratulations on becoming part of this citizens' assembly! You are about to participate in something remarkable - a process where ordinary citizens come together to make important decisions for their community.

You might be wondering what exactly your role is and how you should approach it. The answer might surprise you: your most important task is to be yourself. You weren't chosen because you're an expert on the topic (though you may indeed have knowledge about it). You weren't chosen to represent any particular group. You were chosen by random selection to bring your authentic perspective, life experience, and inner wisdom to this process.

In the coming meetings, you will:

- Get to know your fellow assembly members
- Learn about the topic from various experts and stakeholders
- Discuss what you're learning with other assembly members
- Consider possible solutions
- Make decisions about recommendations

Here's what makes citizens' assemblies special: you're encouraged to make decisions based on what genuinely feels right to you, not what you think you "should" support. Your honest responses - including your emotions, doubts, and excitement - are valuable guides in this process. These individual insights contribute to something larger. When each assembly member shares genuinely from their own perspective, it creates a more complete picture of the issue at hand. Think of it like this - your unique perspective, combined with others' individual perspectives, helps create a collective wisdom that is richer and more comprehensive than any single viewpoint could be. This is why staying true to your genuine responses is important - they are your contribution to the assembly's shared understanding.

This guide will help you prepare for your role as a decision-maker. It offers practical tools and approaches to help you stay connected to your authentic perspective while engaging with new information and ideas. There's no "right" way to be an assembly member. The best contribution you can make is to be genuinely yourself.

2. The Learning Phase Begins

Over the course of the citizens' assembly, you'll hear from experts, stakeholders, and other assembly members. You'll learn about different aspects of the topic, some of which might be complex or technical. This chapter will help you stay grounded in your authentic perspective while engaging with all this new information.

During the learning phase, experts will share their knowledge while you bring your own life experience and wisdom. Both of these perspectives are valuable. Think of it like cooking a soup – experts provide ingredients and cooking techniques, but you decide whether the taste is right for you. Remember that you are in the driver's seat here.

It's perfectly normal to feel overwhelmed sometimes by all the new information. You may wish to make notes in whatever way works for you – you don't need to memorize everything. Just focus on understanding the main points and don't hesitate to ask questions when things aren't clear.

When experts disagree – which is normal and expected in complex topics – you don't need to decide who is "right." Instead, notice how different perspectives feel to you and trust your ability to sense what rings true. Your role is to make sense of it for yourself.

While learning, notice your natural reactions to new information. Pay attention to what sparks your interest and be aware of when you feel resistance. Let yourself be curious about your responses – they're all valid parts of your learning process.

When forming your views, give yourself time to digest information. Notice what stays with you after sessions and pay attention to insights that come during quiet moments. Trust that your understanding will develop naturally.

Whenever you need more information, it's perfectly okay to ask for clarification, request additional information, or sleep on complex topics. Take time to let things settle. Trust that you can work with complex information while staying true to yourself.

3. Coming together as a group for deliberation

The citizens' assembly brings together various perspectives, experiences, and viewpoints. This diversity is valuable, but it may be challenging at times, so it's good to be prepared for it. This chapter will help you stay true to yourself while engaging effectively with others.

Your perspective is unique and valuable because no one else has lived your exact experience. The assembly needs your authentic voice. Keep in mind that agreement isn't always the goal. Different views allow us to see more aspects of the issue and may lead to more thoughtful solutions. And if we don't reach agreement, that's perfectly okay too.

When others have strong views, notice if you feel pressure to agree. Remember that it's okay to see things differently – you don't need to defend your perspective. When you have a different opinion, you may share it as your personal perspective by starting with "For me..." You don't need to convince others. Different views are natural given the diversity of people in the room!

Sharing thoughts from your own experience using "I" statements helps create an open atmosphere where everyone feels more comfortable to express their view. For example, you might say "I feel excited about this idea" or "I think this could work well because..." or "In my experience..." Share what feels true for you and remember that it's perfectly okay to express both positive responses and concerns.

When listening to others, approach their perspectives with curiosity and notice what resonates with you. Stay open to new perspectives – you don't need to agree or disagree. Sometimes simply listening is enough.

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When tension or strong disagreement arises:

- Start by taking a few deep breaths.
 - Welcome whatever you are feeling. You don't need to resist or push down negative feelings. Just allow yourself to feel them and notice that after a while they will start to dissipate on their own.
 - You may remind yourself that it's normal for people to have different views on the same issue because everyone is looking at it from their own unique perspective.
 - Let go of the urge to judge others.
 - There is no need to impose your views on others.
 - Let go of wanting to be “right” and making others “wrong”.
 - It's about sharing your perspective and reflections rather than winning the argument.
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During the discussions, feel free to ask questions when you're curious or need clarification. It's good to keep your contributions reasonably concise so that everyone has an opportunity to express themselves.

If you change your mind during discussions, that's perfectly fine – it shows you're engaging authentically with the process. You might say something like "After hearing that, I see it differently..." This may help others feel more comfortable about shifting their views too. Group decision-making works best when each person stays true to their authentic perspective while remaining open to learning from others.

4. Ways to Find Clarity

Imagine stirring a glass of water with sand in it. The water becomes cloudy, and it's hard to see through. But if you let it rest, the sand slowly settles, and the water becomes clear again. Our minds work in a similar way.

When facing important decisions, our minds can become like that stirred-up glass – full of thoughts, opinions, worries, and "shoulds." This is completely normal. But just as muddy water can't reflect things clearly, a busy mind might not give us clear guidance.

Finding clarity means letting your mind settle naturally, so you can better sense what feels right to you. Here are some practices that can help your mind settle:

a) Taking a walk in nature

Even a brief stroll can help clear your mind. As you walk, let yourself notice the trees, sky, or birds around you – this natural awareness has a way of quieting mental chatter

all by itself. You don't need to actively think about the decisions while walking; in fact, some of our best insights often arrive when we're not trying to force them.

b) Breathing moments

Taking a few conscious breaths before making decisions is a simple but powerful practice. You can do this even right at the assembly meetings – it's quick and no one needs to notice. Simply pay attention to your breath moving in and out. This gentle awareness helps bring you back to the present moment.

c) Morning reflection

Our minds are often clearest in the morning. Take a few minutes after waking up to check in with yourself and notice how you feel about the topics being discussed. You don't need to come to any conclusions – just notice what's there.

d) Creating quiet moments

Create small pockets of quiet in your day – it might be during a cup of tea, or while sitting in your garden. Turn off notifications on your phone during these times. Let yourself just be, without needing to figure anything out.

Taking time to find clarity isn't extra or a luxury – it's the basis for making decisions. As you move through the citizens' assembly process, taking time to let your mind settle is part of your role.

5. Practical Methods for Decision-Making

Making decisions in a citizens' assembly is an art. This chapter offers practical methods to help make decisions that feel genuinely right to you. These methods, however, might be new to you and may require some practice. It may be helpful to try them out in your everyday life first. What is important to keep in mind is that these tools only work when you are relaxed and in a place of feeling good. If you're feeling angry or upset, this is not the right time to use them. Instead, you may choose to try the methods for clarifying your mind from chapter 4.

When making decisions, your emotional guidance system is one of your most reliable tools. While your intellect can analyze and compare options, your emotions give you direct feedback about what is truly right for you. This isn't just about likes and dislikes – your emotional responses come from a place of a deeper wisdom. They help you recognize what aligns with your authentic self.

Think of your emotions as an internal compass. Just as a compass reliably points north, your emotions consistently signal whether something is right for you or not. When a decision feels expansive – bringing a sense of openness or lightness – it indicates alignment with your authentic self. On the other hand, when you feel a sense of contraction or weakness in your body, it is a sign of misalignment. These emotional responses arise naturally, without the need for intellectual analysis.

Your intellectual mind can be influenced by what you think you "should" decide or what others might expect. But your emotional guidance system responds to something else – to what's genuinely true for you. It's immediate, clear, and comes from a place of inner knowing. This is why paying attention to how different options make you feel, rather than just thinking about them, helps you make decisions that will be truly on point.

Here is a set of methods you can use to support your decision-making process:

a) Scale of joy

When considering a proposal, ask yourself:

- On a scale of 0-10, how much joy do I feel about this?

This is a very simple method where 10 indicates absolute joy and 0 represents something that feels horrible. The key insight here is that good decisions feel good – just as what you truly want feels good, and what you don't want gives you a negative feeling response. Notice this consistent pattern: positive feelings always match what you want, and vice versa. You don't need to justify your rating with regards to the joy scale – your authentic response is what matters.

b) Three questions

When considering a decision, ask yourself:

- Does it feel true to who I am?
- Does it make me feel excited and alive?
- Does it bring a natural smile to my face?

Take your time exploring each question. Each one helps you approach the issue from a slightly different angle. The key for success is to be honest with yourself.

c) Checking your decision source

Ask yourself:

- Am I deciding from fear or from a sense of alignment with my authentic self, deep down in my heart?
- Does this decision feel like upstream (pushing) or downstream (flowing)?
- Does it come from "I want to," "I should," or "I must"?
- Am I trying to please others or being true to myself?
- Does this feel like expansion or contraction?

These questions will help you clarify where your responses are coming from and will give you a better understanding of which option is more in alignment with being authentic. Take your time to explore them.

d) Sleep on it

Before making a decision:

- Sleep on it if possible
- Notice your first morning thoughts
- For some people, valuable insights may come in the form of a dream

- Check how you feel about it in the fresh light of day

Sometimes the best insights come after a good night's sleep when your mind is clear and fresh. This method gives you the benefit of processing things overnight.

These methods are here to support you. Try them out and see which ones work best for you. The most helpful will be those that resonate with you the most. It could be all of them!

6. Voting on the recommendations

The voting method used in a citizens' assembly to assess proposals for recommendation gives you six options to choose from:

- 1) This is exactly what I want
- 2) This is what I want
- 3) This is more or less what I want
- 4) I have many doubts
- 5) This is rather not what I want
- 6) This is not what I want at all

This voting method goes beyond simple "yes" or "no" answers, because the aim here is to capture accurately what the preferences of the assembly members are. The question that is posed to the assembly with regards to proposals for recommendations is: "Is this what you want?" rather than "Do you agree with it?". The reason for this is that "wanting" something connects you with your authentic response, while "agreeing" might lead you to analyze and rationalize instead of checking how you truly feel about it. And the aim of the citizens' assembly is to achieve high quality, thoroughly considered decisions that will contribute to the quality of life in your community or a country.

You may wish to practice this in your everyday life so that you get familiar with this approach.

7. Common challenges and how to address them

Even with all the preparation and tools available, you might encounter some challenges during your time as an assembly member. This is completely normal. Here's how to address common situations:

a) Pressure to agree with others

You might feel pressure to agree when many people support an idea, when someone presents very convincing arguments, when there's enthusiasm in the room, or when time feels limited. In these moments, remind yourself that your authentic response is valuable, even if it differs from others. You don't need to explain or justify your feelings. It's appropriate to take time to check with yourself, and remember – different views may lead to better solutions after all.

b) When you feel uncertain

It's natural to sometimes feel unsure about a decision. When this happens, check if you have enough information, need more time, or would benefit from more discussion. Notice if you're trying to force a decision – pushing rarely helps with achieving clarity. On the contrary, clarity may come when you let go of the push.

Mixed emotions are completely normal when you are learning new things. It is okay to take your time to integrate new perspectives. Just as muddy water needs time to settle before becoming clear, your mind may need time to digest new insights. While your intellect may want immediate answers, clarity often emerges more slowly, like a flower gradually opening.

You don't need to look at uncertainty as a problem to be solved, because it is often a natural part of the growth process. Clarity will emerge on its own, once you have an intention that you want it. Notice that your best responses may come when you allow yourself to remain in that space of "not knowing" without rushing to conclusions based on what you think you "should" decide.

It's perfectly okay to express your uncertainty and ask for what you need, whether that's more information, time, or discussion. Trust that clarity will come in its own time. And if it doesn't, you can always choose option 'I have many doubts' when voting, which is entirely okay. The aim is to do your best, not to be perfect.

c) When you feel there isn't enough time

Sometimes you might feel there isn't enough time to thoroughly consider everything you have learned throughout the citizens' assembly. This might happen during discussion sessions when there are many aspects to cover, or during voting when there are multiple options to consider. In the first case, you can suggest focusing on the most important aspects or request an additional discussion session. When voting, if you haven't had enough time to carefully consider all options, remember you can use the "I have many doubts" option – it's there for situations like this.

d) Encountering an unexamined belief

During the assembly process, you might hear perspectives that challenge beliefs you've held for a long time. This can feel uncomfortable – you might notice yourself having a strong reaction or wanting to immediately defend your viewpoint. This is completely normal. Our reactions often come from beliefs we've acquired through education, upbringing, or society. And some of these beliefs may not be true at all.

When this happens, treat it as an opportunity for deeper understanding. Rather than immediately defending your position or dismissing the challenging perspective, notice your reaction without judging it. Next, when the emotions have cooled down, examine your belief. You can do it simply by asking yourself: "Is this true?". Then listen within and see what comes up. When you discover that what you believed in was not true, whether it was something big or small, give yourself time to integrate the new perspective.

As you navigate these challenges, it helps to know what a good decision feels like. A decision that feels right brings a sense of harmony, makes your energy flow more

freely, creates a feeling of spaciousness inside, and comes with a natural sense of "yes." These positive feelings can help confirm you're on the right track.

8. Your journey as an assembly member

As you participate in this citizens' assembly, remember that your role is valuable because you bring your unique perspective and inner wisdom to the group. Being authentic contributes to the collective wisdom and helps create better decisions. Trust in your ability to contribute to this process. It's supposed to be easy and fun – an exciting adventure. Don't make it too hard on yourself.

Clearing your mind, paying attention to your emotions, and working with complex information – all of this becomes easier with practice. Your presence and genuine engagement are gifts to this process.

You have support along the way. There are tools and practices you can use, facilitators are there to help, and you can always ask for what you need. Facing challenges is a normal part of the process, and they are manageable.

The basics are simple: check if decisions feel good, stay true to yourself, and take time when needed. You don't need to be perfect – just make the best out of it.

This guide offers suggestions and tools based on experience with many citizens' assemblies, but ultimately you're free to find your own way of making decisions. Just as each person's perspective is unique, your approach to decision-making should feel right for you. You might resonate with all the methods described here, or you might develop your own way that works better for you. What matters most is that you feel comfortable and confident in how you arrive at your choices. Trust yourself to find the approach that best suits you while fulfilling your role as an assembly member. You may refer back to this guide whenever you need a reminder or encouragement.