

Citizen Committees

Engagement range	Partnership /Delegation/Control depending on the terms of reference
Difficulty level	Medium to hard
Cost	Medium to high (\$1,000 - \$10,000)
When might you use it	To discover community issues To develop community capacity To develop action plan To communicate an issue To build alliances, consensus
Number of people required to help to organise	Depends on the audience size and level of complexity but generally will need two-three people to organise and help run.
Size of audience	Medium 11–30 people Large more than 30 people
Timeframe	Organising it can take time depending on scope, audience numbers, and location. Allow six weeks to six months.
Issues/resources to think about	Venue; Catering; Staffing; Moderator/facilitator; Overhead projectors; Data projectors and screen; Props for working in groups (pens, paper, pins, etc.); Children’s requirements
Innovation level	Medium

Description

Also known as public advisory committees and public liaison committees, citizen committees consist of a group of representatives from a particular community or set of interests appointed to provide comments and advice on an issue.

Generally, relevant community groups and agencies are invited to nominate as members of the committee, although people with specific skills may also be asked.

Members meet regularly to provide ongoing input and advice over the duration of the project. These generally have an agreed life span and are normally organised at the local level to address a specific issue.

Objective

- To provide broad-based input into planning and decision-making from a range of groups and agencies that are affected by a proposal or issue.

Desired Outcome

Depending on the level of delegation/responsibility:

- have ownership of a project or issue and take responsibility for following through with the agreed actions
- development of plans or solutions based on better information and where a wider range of issues has been scoped as a result of this broad-based and extensive consultation.

Uses/Strengths

- Allows the involvement and input of a range of people (e.g. fishers and surfers as well as relevant government departments).
- Allows development of consensus (where achievable) or directions for action on complex issues that affect the broad community.
- Effectively disseminates detailed information and decisions to members of the organisations or community sectors represented on the committee.
- Provides opportunities for exploring alternative strategies and building on commonalities and alliances.
- Provides for a detailed analysis of project issues, timelines and deliverables and a focus on the outcomes.
- Participants gain an understanding of other perspectives leading toward an agreed, integrated outcome.

Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- Participant selection is a major consideration:
- The range of interests must be broad enough to represent all those affected, and those with relevant interests and skills
- Community members must be willing to work together on a common challenge
- Organisers must be aware of potential conflicts
- The original terms of reference need to be agreed upfront and recorded.
- Contact should be maintained with the committee to ensure that it does not take on a life of its own.

- Members' comments to the media may not coincide with the sponsor's policy. A set of principles can be developed to avoid this happening.
- The general public may not embrace committee recommendations.
- Members may not achieve consensus (although consensus may not be the goal).
- The sponsoring agency or agencies must accept the need to give and take.
- May be time and labour intensive if the issue is significant.

Step by Step Guide

1. Consider the demographic profile of the community to ensure most of those groups that will be affected by an issue or proposal are represented.
2. Consider special interest groups.
3. Consider groups most affected by the issue.
4. Conduct stakeholder analysis prior to inviting groups to propose.
5. Be flexible to allow other representatives to join if they make themselves known during the participation process (however, it is more effective not to allow alternative representatives, as they can hijack the agenda and/or may need extra briefings that slow down the process).
6. Clearly state the role of the citizen committee and the objectives of the participation.
7. The organising group or agency should work closely with the committee during its formation.
8. The organising group or agency should work closely with the group during the participation process
9. Use third-party facilitators to manage conflict.
10. Be forthcoming with information.
11. Use a consistently credible process.
12. Set up reporting arrangements to ensure that members communicate with their constituents via their regular communications networks (e.g. newsletters, meetings, presentations, email, or websites).
13. Record decisions and keep a running summary. This is important if new people join the group.