

Jefferson Center

Originator of the Citizens Jury Process

Home ★

About Us ★

Current Activities ★

History ★

Citizens Jury
Process ★

FAQ ★

Citizens Jury
Handbook ★

Past Projects ★

Projects and News
Worldwide ★

Readings ★

Related Links ★

Bias Evaluation ★

Contact Us ★



Search

GO

Full Site

This Section

[Search Tips](#)

Citizens Jury Process

The Citizens Jury process is a comprehensive tool that allows decision-makers and the public to hear thoughtful citizen input. The great advantage of the Citizens Jury process is that it yields citizen input from a group that is both informed about an issue and a microcosm of the public.

Why a Citizens Jury?

Democracy is based on the idea that elected officials and public agencies carry out the will of the people. But the manipulative nature of our election campaigns and the great power of lobbyists make it doubtful that government policy is based upon the wishes of a well-informed and engaged public. Public opinion polls can tell what people quickly think in response to telephoned survey questions. The actual "will of the people" may be something quite different.

A Citizens Jury provides the opportunity for citizens to learn about an issue, deliberate together and develop well-informed, common-ground solutions to difficult public issues. The Citizens Jury process also allows decision-makers and the public to discover what people really think once they have heard witnesses and taken a close look at a topic.

What is a Citizens Jury?

In a Citizens Jury project, a randomly selected and demographically representative panel of citizens meets for four or five days to carefully examine an issue of public significance. The jury of citizens, usually consisting of 18–24 individuals, serves as a microcosm of the public. Jurors are paid a stipend for their time. They hear from a variety of expert witnesses and are able to deliberate together on the issue. On the final day of their moderated hearings, the members of the Citizens Jury present their recommendations to decision-makers and the public. Citizens Jury projects can be enhanced through extensive communication with the public, including a dynamic web presence and significant media contacts.

The Jefferson Center has conducted 31 Citizens Jury projects in the USA since 1974 at the local, regional, state, and national levels. Juries have tackled a number of topics including national health care reform, budget priorities, environmental issues, and local school district facility needs.

A number of similar projects have been conducted by organizations in Great Britain, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Australia and elsewhere.

Special Characteristics of a Citizens Jury

Random Selection – The members of the jury pool are randomly selected through scientific polling techniques.

Representative – Jurors are carefully selected to be representative of the public at large. No other process takes such care to accurately reflect the public.

Informed – Witnesses provide information to the jury on the key aspects of the issue. Witnesses present a range of perspectives and opinions. The jury engages the witnesses in a dialogue to ensure that all questions are answered.

Impartial – Witness testimony is carefully balanced to ensure fair treatment to all sides of the issue.

Deliberative – The jury deliberates in a variety of formats and is given a sufficient amount of time to ensure that all of the jurors' opinions are considered.

Key Components of a Citizens Jury

All of the following elements, with rare exceptions, are included in a Citizens Jury project. More details are found under [FAQ](#) and extensive details on how to conduct a Citizens Jury are found in the [Citizens Jury Handbook](#).

Advisory Committee – The Advisory Committee is composed of individuals knowledgeable on the topic who represent a range of perspectives. They provide advice concerning the charge, agenda and witness selection. The Advisory Committee also helps the project staff avoid bias throughout the project.

Telephone Survey – A high-quality telephone survey is conducted to randomly selected individuals in the given community (city, school district, county, state, nation). All survey respondents who agree to receive additional information are entered into the jury pool. The survey can also be used to establish baseline attitudes and demographics of the community, if needed. In special situations where a telephone survey will not reach certain elements of the public, scientific sampling methods can be used to select households and solicit participants through personal visits.

Jury Selection – Once a jury pool of 200 or 300 individuals exists, the jurors are selected at random to meet demographic targets that ensure that the jury is a microcosm of the public that reflects community demographics and attitudes regarding the topic to be considered.

Charge – The charge is the task facing the jury. It typically takes the form of a question or series of questions that the jurors address and answer during deliberations. It is always set in advance of the project so jurors will have a clear idea of what their task is.

Witness Selection – Individuals knowledgeable about the issue serve as witnesses. These individuals provide background information as well as in-depth information about various aspects of the issue. The expert witnesses are selected to represent a variety of perspectives and opinions. A balanced advisory committee is important in helping staff decide which witnesses should be called.

Hearings – Over several days of professionally moderated hearings, the expert witnesses address key issues, respond to questions and engage in a dialogue with the jurors. The jurors deliberate together and answer the charge.

Recommendations – After final deliberations, the jury issues its findings and recommendations in a public forum. The recommendations appear in language that the jurors themselves develop and approve.

Evaluation – At the conclusion of the project, the jurors are asked to complete an evaluation. This serves to assure the general public that the process was unbiased. This is important if the general public and decision-makers are to trust and respect the recommendations and outcome of the jury. The results of the evaluations are included in the final report. [Click here](#) for a summary of jurors' responses regarding staff bias in Citizens Jury projects.

Public Outreach – Before, during and after the Citizens Jury meets, most projects conduct extensive public outreach activities including an active Web page with project updates and all the witness testimony. Media contacts are also important to ensure that the public knows about the project.

The planning and preparation for a Citizens Jury project typically takes three to four months.

Past Citizens Jury Projects

[Click here](#) for a description of these projects, with links to the final reports. Contact the Jefferson Center for more information, or to request a report or video. Videos are available for select projects only.

Note About the Term "Citizens Jury"

In an effort to protect the integrity of the process, the Jefferson Center has established the term Citizens Jury as a registered trademark in the United States. This means that for any project in the USA to be called a Citizens Jury, it must either be conducted by the Jefferson Center in accordance with our Citizen Jury standards, or it must be a

project that is carefully monitored by the Jefferson Center and certified to be in accordance with our standards. By maintaining such high standards, the Jefferson Center is able to ensure that the Citizens Jury process retains a high level of integrity and trustworthiness.

For more information...

Please see the [Citizens Jury Handbook](#) for more details on the Citizens Jury process. The Jefferson Center can be contacted at democracy@olympus.net.

[Printer-friendly Version](#)

Copyright 2004 Jefferson Center

[Home](#) | [About Us](#) | [Current Activities](#) | [History](#) | [Citizens Jury Process](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Citizens Jury Handbook](#) | [Past Projects](#) | [Projects and News](#)
[Worldwide](#) | [Readings](#) | [Related Links](#) | [Bias Evaluation](#) | [Contact Us](#)

[powered by NonprofitOffice.com](#)