

# DELIBERATION

## Getting Policy-Making Out From Behind Closed Doors

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The Open Government Partnership  
Practice Group on Dialogue and Deliberation

May 2019

The Deliberation Series  
Volume I



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# A NOTE FROM THE PRACTICE GROUP

Our primary goal in compiling this briefing book is to provide accessible, concise, and cogent answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about public deliberation. We especially hope to spark conversations among both politicians and senior public servants on how deliberative practices can contribute to improved public engagement practices.

We are thankful to the **Open Government Partnership (OGP)** for convening the Practice Group on Dialogue and Deliberation, and for its ongoing support in facilitating meetings, prompting discussions, and brokering connections.

Deliberation is not new. Governments have always used deliberation as a part of the policy-making process, but it has usually been conducted internally and behind closed doors. This would typically involve a committee of elected officials or a team of policy experts. Such processes may be supported by public consultation but efforts to involve the public in the deliberative stage are rare. For the most part, governments do not have a reliable methodology to do so. Attempting deliberation can raise some difficult questions:

- What kinds of rules or principles should guide the discussion?
- How many participants can engage in meaningful deliberation?
- How are they selected?
- What if the participants fail to reach agreement?
- What if they arrive at solutions that are unacceptable to the government, say, by requiring resources it feels it does not have or pursuing a goal it thinks is unattainable?

If governments are to involve the public in deliberation, such questions require answers. This project aims to provide them. This briefing book is the first in a series of two publications from the Open Government Partnership's Practice Group on Dialogue and Deliberation, a group of 12 experts from seven countries. A second publication, [Designing Deliberative Engagement Processes: A Roadmap](#), will guide practitioners in the design and execution of deliberative processes.

Through these two publications, our Practice Group hopes to inspire a shared understanding of how deliberative processes work, why they are important to modern governments, where they can be used effectively, and how to design and deliver them. At the same time, we recognize that public deliberation is a relatively new field and that there are different views on how it should work. At this early stage, we thought it best to be open-ended and exploratory in our approach. Our main goal is to encourage further discussion and experimentation in the area by OGP members and to provide them with the tools they need to begin using deliberative processes in their Action Plans.

## PREFACE: WHY ENGAGE?

Creating a space for dialogue between people and the governments that serve them is the bread and butter of the Open Government Partnership. In 79 countries and 20 local members, governments have committed to working with civil society in support of more transparency, accountability and participation.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is this last one that often proves most difficult to get right. Meaningful participation is about fundamentally changing the culture of government. It is about seducing citizens to participate in processes that will be worth their while. It is also, critically, about power and access - about who gets to be in what conversation. Changing those dynamics in favour of more open and inclusive ones is not a one time effort, but a life-long one.

If you believe in what OGP stands for, this is not getting any easier. Trust in institutions is still very low across the globe. Many people feel left behind or worse off. They fear for the future, and worry about their cultural identity. And they perceive democratic institutions to be captured by elites, whose actions benefit the powerful at the expense of the people they should be serving.

As anxiety and discontent press on, getting participation right is all the more important. Citizens are staking their claim to political power, expecting politicians to be among them, not above them. And expecting them to make decisions with them, not just for them.

### Paul Maassen

Chief Country Support,  
Open Government Partnership

This briefing book is a first attempt to capture learnings from across the partnership about an emerging method for such citizen engagement: public deliberation. Public deliberation gives citizens a meaningful role, but it asks for something in return: a willingness to listen to different views, weigh competing needs and interests, and carefully craft balanced solutions.

The OGP Practice Group on Open Dialogue and Deliberation considers how and where deliberation can strengthen public decision-making. As the cases in this briefing book show, many governments are already experimenting with public deliberation, often with good results. In Canada, it has produced complex housing legislation. South Korea has employed deliberative polling to inject nuance into the nuclear energy debate. And Kenya devised a deliberative process to develop its OGP Action Plan. In each of these cases, deliberation delivered meaningful participation - and results followed.

To truly place citizens at the heart of government, you need political leadership and strong institutions. But above all, you need actively engaged citizens. OGP welcomes the Practice Group's contribution and trusts these examples will inspire new and improved practices across the Partnership. We look forward to learning with you as we move forward, another step closer to getting participation right.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last few decades, there has been a worrying trend toward less trust in government. Research shows that less than half of the citizens of countries in the OECD have confidence in their national governments. Yet if governments are to be successful in executing difficult decisions and delivering on their commitments, trust is crucial.

Greater transparency may be part of the solution to improving trust. Transparency alone, however, is unlikely to sustain the kinds of public debates that are needed to grapple with thorny policy issues and balance competing interests. Open and effective public engagement is needed to meet citizen demands for shaping government decisions and ensuring accountability.

## Public engagement in a changing world

One of the common ways governments engage citizens is through public consultation. This consists of reaching out to stakeholders to gather information that, once collected, is deliberated on by officials behind closed doors (see Figure E1). Public consultation can be effective in making certain policy decisions by providing the government with a better understanding of what the public thinks about a certain issue to inform its decision-making.

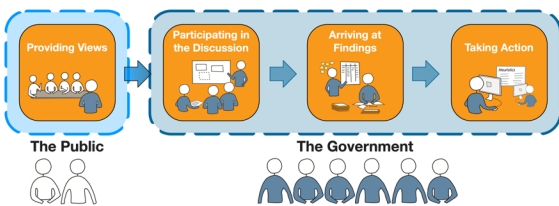


Figure E1 The Process of Consultation

Yet public consultations tend to entrench the positions of stakeholders, rather than promote dialogue and compromise. This is because they create the perception of one side winning and the other losing. Being locked out of the decision-making process, competing interest groups instead try to influence decision makers. If successful, they win.

Part of the problem is that those on the losing side may begin to question the legitimacy of the process. Even when the government provides a justification for a decision, those on the losing end – not having participated in deliberations themselves – may not trust that their arguments were given a fair hearing by decision makers. Issues that are complex or rooted in different values are particularly prone to this.

## Tackling complex issues through public deliberation

Deliberative processes differ from consultation in that the public is invited to not only share their views but to discuss potential solutions. Participation does not end with providing information and opinions but is sustained throughout the decision-making process (see Figure E2).

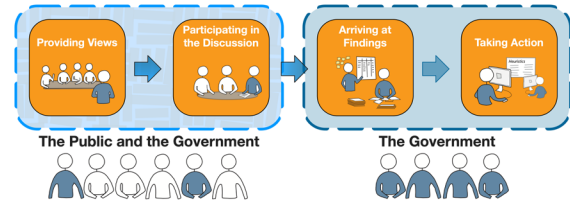


Figure E2 The Process of Deliberation

Unlike consultation, deliberative processes help participants see the complexity of a problem and look beyond win/lose scenarios to arrive at shared solutions. Ultimately, deliberation is about building ownership of the process and a commitment to the results. As such, deliberation is particularly useful for tackling complex issues, especially those that involve trade-offs, where priorities need to be set, or where values come into play.

## Three Common Myths About Deliberation

Many government officials are wary of public deliberation. They may have little experience in managing a deliberative processes and limited exposure to the concepts behind them. Furthermore, their experiences of public consultations may make them wary of public engagement in general – seeing it as running the risk of entrenching positions and igniting community conflict.

There are also a number of myths about public deliberation:

- Deliberation processes are risky: bad experiences of public consultations may lead some officials to be wary that public engagement processes in general can entrench positions and create conflict. However, participants in deliberative process have been found to treat each other with respect, to make reasonable compromises, and to be disciplined about their choices.
- Deliberation cannot capture wider public perspectives. As deliberative processes often involve a select group of participants, many believe that they cannot legitimately

capture the wider perspective of the public. In fact, by using representative sampling and successive rounds of deliberation, a diversity of public perspectives can be captured.

- Certain issues are too complex for deliberation: Some worry that the public is not equipped to grapple with the complexity of certain issues. However, deliberative processes set out to consider and reconsider, from every possible angle and viewpoint, challenges that demand a shared solution.

## Choosing between consultation and deliberation

Consultation and deliberation are both useful public engagement processes and each can be effective when used for the right purpose.

Consultation is appropriate when a government needs to get a better grasp on what the public thinks about a given issue to help inform a decision. For example, if a government is planning a program to retrain workers in an economically depressed region, it may want to consult local businesses on their labor needs.

Deliberation is used to help solve “complex” issues, especially where they involve trade-offs or where priorities need to be set. Thus, a conflict between commercial farms and environmentalists over the use of pesticides may benefit from deliberation.

## Creating informed participation through deliberation

Deliberation requires participants to digest information and consider different viewpoints to arrive at a shared decision. This allows for what we call informed participation. Giving participants a meaningful role in making decisions imparts a sense of personal responsibility for the success of the process and a sense of ownership of the decisions that result from it.

## Three kinds of Deliberative Practices

We distinguish between three different deliberative tools, each of which contributes to informed participation in a different way:

- Open Dialogue asks people to draw on their experience of an issue and to use their natural conversational skills to exchange views and propose solutions.
- Deliberative Analysis is more formal about the rules of engagement. It focuses participants’ attention on facts and arguments, and the information and data that support them.
- Narrative Building draws on the participants’ lived-experience to develop a story about an important change or challenge. Stories are useful because they speak to people in ways they understand and identify with.

## A toolbox for public deliberation

Each of the three kinds of deliberative practices—Open Dialogue, Deliberative Analysis, and Narrative Building—emphasize one dialogue style over the others. As a result, each one has different strengths and weaknesses. However, these different styles can be balanced within processes that consolidate some of the strengths of each.

- A blended approach takes the particular aspects from each deliberative practice that are best suited to the policy question at hand.
- A cyclical approach employs each deliberative practice over successive rounds of deliberation.

The downside is that both blending and cycling through different deliberative practices can be complex, demanding more time, resources, and effort.

## Where is informed participation in our future?

We are convinced that, to begin to restore public trust, governments must move beyond winner-take-all engagement processes to those which encourage the public to grapple with complexity and reconcile trade-offs. When they are thoughtfully employed, deliberative engagement processes can begin to reestablish public trust in government.

In today’s policy making environment, encouraging informed participation may be crucial to reversing some of the worrying trends emerging in many countries. While more evidence on the efficacy of deliberation is needed, and our understanding of deliberative processes needs to be refined, we believe the risks of not engaging in them far outweighs the risk of doing so imperfectly.





# INTRODUCTION: WHY ENGAGE?

Public trust is a key enabler for the complex and difficult decision-making governments undertake, including on the delivery of public goods and services. However, trust in government is declining. In part, this is because of concerns over effectiveness and responsiveness. Both can be improved through better public engagement, which also rebuilds trust.

Trust is a basic indicator of the health of a democracy. It shows how people feel about their government and how they believe their government feels about them. Governments rely on trust to make and execute difficult decisions, from protecting the environment to providing healthcare. The less citizens trust their government, the harder it is for governments to deliver on challenging commitments.

Over the last few decades, trust in government has declined. According to research from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), less than half of the citizenry of OECD countries – an average of 43 percent – have confidence in their national government. The same research links trust to a government’s stability and to the quality of the policies and services it creates to meet people’s needs. Some of the key factors that erode trust are well known, as are the solutions.

A lack of transparency is one factor. If the public has no reliable way of finding out what is happening inside their government, they may become suspicious of decisions they disagree with or don’t understand, such as why a contract was awarded, a new initiative undertaken, or a program cancelled. They may begin to wonder whether corruption or incompetence played a role and whether the government has something to hide. Improving transparency along the lines of open data and information initiatives may serve to alleviate some of these concerns. Yet greater transparency alone, while being necessary, may not be sufficient to foster public trust. We argue that engagement processes that encourage the public to grapple more directly with the trade-offs inherent in challenging policy decisions may be a big piece of the puzzle.

Two other factors seem relevant to this trust deficit: the ability of a government to achieve its goals (effectiveness), and the ability to focus on the things that matter to the public (responsiveness). In a democracy, public debate and engagement play critical roles in ensuring both effectiveness and responsiveness. Debate helps keep citizens informed on the issues of the day and helps them call their government to account. Public engagement, when effective, allows citizens to shape government decisions and provides feedback on how well these measures are working.

In many countries, the quality of debate and engagement are a subject of concern. For example, debate within political institutions and the media often sounds scripted – like a series of “talking points.” It tends to polarize opinions rather than contribute to discussions that help the public converge on solutions. Some think social media is making this worse by creating echo chambers filled with people who share the same perspective. As a result, they don’t have to respond to opposing views or address the needs of others, preventing issues from being thoroughly discussed and explored in the wider public sphere.

Concerns like these have provided fertile ground for another worrying trend on the rise in many parts of the world: populism. While there are many drivers of populism, an inability to sustain public debate and consultation must shoulder some of the blame. Populists pander to a growing feeling among citizens that they no longer have a meaningful voice in government or control over what it does. They stoke such sentiments by undermining the ways meaningful debate can be sustained. They may claim, for example, the “mainstream media” has been taken over by elites who use the press to disseminate “fake news” to further their own agenda. In the absence of considered debate, the simplistic solutions proffered by populists seem more plausible to greater numbers of people.

Yet such solutions are unlikely to make governments more effective at balancing competing interests and managing difficult trade-offs. Indeed, by sweeping complexity under the rug, they may well exacerbate existing tensions by raising the stakes for winners and losers. Furthermore, if anything, the policy-making arena is becoming more complex—at least from the vantage point of governments - as technology lowers the barriers to entry for collective action and social media gives rise to a diversity of voices and opinion.

Fostering trust is essential in such an arena. Yet current public engagement processes do not seem to be sufficient to reverse the downward trend in trust. Fortunately, practical steps can be taken to improve public engagement. This, in turn, can improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of government and help rebuild trust.

The task of this briefing book is to present these emerging public engagement tools and show how they are already being effectively used in many parts of the world. Part 1 examines public engagement, introduces the concept of deliberation, and provides a guide for choosing when to use it. Part 2 explores different types of public deliberation and how they can contribute to informed participation.



# PART I

## WHY SHOULD GOVERNMENTS USE DELIBERATION?

Governments engage the public to get a deeper understanding of an issue, establish public buy-in for a policy response, and balance competing priorities. In a traditional consultation process, they ask for the public's views and take these into account when making a decision. However, issues today are increasingly complex and often require a difficult balancing of competing interests.

### 1. Public Engagement in a Changing World

Modern governments have a long history of public engagement, from town hall meetings in the early 18th century to citizens' assemblies and participatory budgeting today. Governments have typically sought to engage the public under three conditions: to establish buy-in for policies that are new or controversial; when making decisions related to complex subjects that require specialist expertise, such as regulating the telecommunications sector; and when competing interests need to be balanced, such as managing the trade-offs between industry and the environment.

Yet much has changed over the last few decades. An increasingly interconnected world, coupled with a wide spectrum of information and opinions, have led to an extremely complex policy arena. At the same time, advances in communications technologies have brought down the barriers to entry for citizens to organize and make their voices heard. While this is no bad thing, many governments now face an increasingly challenging environment in which to plan, make decisions, and implement policies.

Food policy is one example. In most countries, the food supply chain involves a series of handoffs stretching from the producer to the consumer (see Figure 1). Governments must ensure that public health is protected as food moves through the supply chain, but they also want the system to function smoothly. Officials would traditionally consult with experts from the health sector and food industry, assessing what they heard to set some standards. This was, arguably, never sufficient, and frequently created winners and losers among different participants in the supply chain.

Yet today the barriers to entry to organizing are lower, more stakeholders are actively involved, and citizens demand attention to be paid to a wider range of concerns (see Figure 2). Beyond health issues, there are concerns over environmental sustainability, ethical concerns about animal welfare,



Figure 1 From Farm to Table

Such issues, all related to food policy, are often taken up by highly committed people and organizations. When conflicts between different interest groups emerge, governments are expected to strike the right balance between competing demands. Too often this turns into a tug of war that creates winners and losers. If the losers are unwilling to accept defeat, they can make life very difficult for the government.

Conflicts like these can divide a community and erode trust in government.



Figure 2 The Politics of Food Policy

## What is public consultation?

Public consultation is one of the most common forms of public engagement. When undertaking a public consultation process, the government invites the public (or a specific set of stakeholders) to provide their views on an issue. The process can take different forms, such as a town hall meeting, a call for submissions, or an online survey.

Once views have been collected, the government analyzes them and uses the findings to make an informed decision. Importantly, this stage of the process tends to be carried out by officials behind closed doors. The resulting conclusions are often presented in a report or public announcement, though sometimes the result is not made public at all. Finally, the conclusions or findings may be implemented. Figure 3 illustrates the consultation process.

Consultation often works well. For instance, asking people for views on how to improve a government training program can be highly useful. However, there are rules for managing a consultation process. It is crucial, for example, that once a decision has been made the public is informed and ideally given some sort of rationale for how it was arrived at. This helps to reassure participants (and the wider public) that they have been treated fairly and that their contribution was meaningful. Ultimately, while not everyone will agree with the result, a clear explanation of the decision can help to ensure that the process itself is seen as legitimate.

## What are the limitations of public consultation?

While there are many examples of effective consultation processes, some decisions do not readily lend themselves to this approach. In some instances, public consultation can even

exacerbate existing tensions by entrenching positions and stoking opposition.

Returning to food policy, it is useful to reflect on some of the areas it touches on. Some may be deeply concerned about animal rights, others about ensuring affordable food, others still about the plight of farmers. Such differences may be about self interest, but they are often just as much about values. As the barriers to entry for collective action have come down, clashes over issues that speak to competing values and interests have become more prevalent.

It is difficult for governments to resolve such issues in the same way as technical ones might be resolved. Trade-offs and compromises over values are more subjective and more prone to entrenched positions. They are also often championed by well-organized groups. Asking officials to solve them behind closed doors is a formula for disappointment and division. Any decision will inevitably create winners and losers among groups with different values and opposition can be both costly and time consuming (see Box 1).

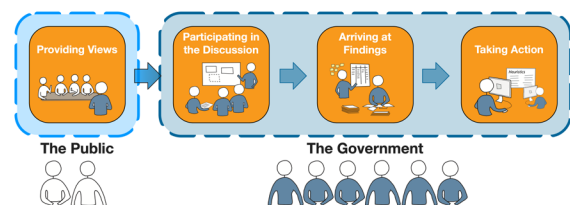


Figure 3 The Public Consultation Process

Opponents of a controversial project are often committed to doing whatever they can to derail it, while proponents do what they can to see it pushed through. To mobilize support, both sides have powerful incentives to create a sense of crisis in order to get the upper hand: they may exaggerate or distort key facts about a project, use traditional and social media to disseminate one-sided viewpoints, and enlist partisan politicians to champion their side. Such tactics can polarize public opinion and force government to modify or abandon its plans, even though the objections may be weak or unfounded.

Finally, even policies that most people agree on can be challenging to implement when they require coordinating a diverse set of stakeholders. Another example from food policy: suppose Australian wine producers want to make one of their products an international leader in the food system. There may be a recognition that a range of specialist skills and knowledge need to be developed, a rough idea of the kinds of institutions best placed to help, and general agreement on the value of such a proposition. Yet aligning interests and coordinating actors are far from straightforward. What are the

respective roles of industry groups, businesses, civil society, research institutions, and education providers? How can the government support them working towards a shared goal?

Developing an effective plan and coordinating roles and responsibilities requires deep discussions among stakeholders and government. Public consultation is often unable to adequately manage such complexities.

## 2. Tackling Complex Issues Through Public Deliberation

Deliberation is an alternative method of engaging the public. While consultation is a way of collecting inputs from the public, the actual process of weighing those inputs and making a decision is handled by public officials behind closed doors. Deliberation opens those doors.

Public deliberation gives participants a meaningful role in weighing trade-offs, discussing priorities, and forming solutions. In doing so, they engage in far deeper ways than a consultative process would allow. But there are rules. Participants must listen to one another, learn about each other's concerns, discuss their similarities and differences, weigh evidence, and work together to strike a balance between competing values and interests.

Unlike consultation, deliberation helps participants realize that complex problems rarely have simple solutions. Participants are asked to look beyond the winner-take-all stance and make a shared effort to find a scenario that incorporates many different concerns and viewpoints. Ultimately, deliberation is about building shared ownership of the process and a shared commitment to the results. Figure 4 gives an overview of how the deliberation process works.

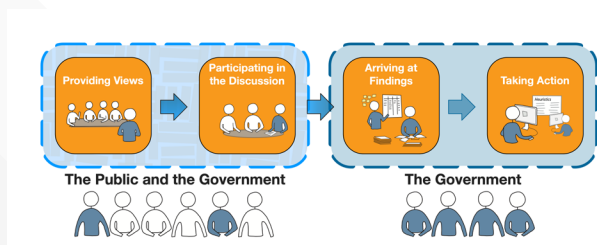


Figure 4 The Public Deliberation Process

### Why are rules so important for engagement?

Consultation and deliberation can be usefully compared to games, like chess or soccer. A game has rules that players must follow, which shape their expectations and guide their behavior. The rules also tell players how to win, which, after all, is the point of playing the game.

#### Box 1. Public Consultation in Antwerp: A Road to Nowhere

In Belgium, a major highway running through the city of Antwerp had long been a source of consternation for residents. Carrying an estimated 250,000 vehicles per day, including large trucks, the highway caused traffic congestion and air pollution. Recognizing the problem, the government decided to invest in new infrastructure and sought to engage the public on the possible alternatives. They employed a classic public consultation approach: of commissioning research reports, consulting lobbyists from large construction firms, and posting notice of a formal public consultation period. The government then retreated behind closed doors and decided that a bridge spanning the harbor was the best solution. Budget estimated, construction firms identified, support from Antwerp's Chamber of Commerce secured. What could go wrong?

The bridge proved highly divisive. Throughout the process, citizens felt that their alternative suggestions were not taken seriously by the government and they were not listened to. Residents banded together to form groups opposing its construction, launching petitions garnering tens of thousands of signatures, and called for residents to have more say in the decisions. In 2009, the government agreed to a non-binding referendum. But when it returned a 60-40 split against the bridge, they dug their heels in, arguing that the low turnout (35 percent) undermined the legitimacy of the result. After fifteen years, the consultative process resulted in a divided, distrustful, and angry public. Fortunately, as we shall see later, this was not the end of story.

Engagement processes also have rules and participants are expected to abide by them. As with games, participants look to the rules to see how to "win." That is, how to resolve the issue that brought them to the table. However, as we've already pointed out, the rules of consultation don't always work as they should. Sometimes decisions get made in ways that participants consider to be unfair. Let's take a look at a seemingly straightforward debate over how to balance green space and parking.

Suppose a consultation were held on this issue and people were invited to present their views. In theory, participants "win" this game by making a strong case for their preference and thereby influencing the deliberations that officials conduct behind closed doors. According to the rules, that's how the game is played. People make their arguments, decision-

### Box 2: Back to Antwerp

In Box 1, we left Antwerp in the middle of a public debate dominated by anger and distrust. Citizens were about to take legal action against the government, which threatened to delay the project indefinitely. Rather than keeping up the fight, however, the government opted to use a different public engagement tool to bring all sides together: public deliberation.

They reopened the conversation, appointed a mediator, and created political space for an alternative solution. Rebuilding trust and changing the tenor of the debate took time, but after another three years of conversation and compromise, participants in the deliberative process agreed on a political solution. The result was better for people, cheaper, and more environmentally sustainable. Crucially, it also restored trust and secured the buy-in of all stakeholders involved.

makers go behind closed doors to weigh what they've heard, and the best arguments should win.

The theory only works, however, under two conditions. First, the deliberations must be impartial and based on the arguments and evidence the participants provide; second, they must be seen to be impartial and evidence-based. As we have illustrated, issues such as these often harbour deeper, more subjective tensions over values. And this is where trust come into play.

Asking officials to make such trade-offs behind closed doors – as consultation does – can be at odds with the perception that the process is impartial and evidence-based. Making a trade-off between competing values goes beyond the weighing of evidence. It requires a basic choice or decision that can seem subjective to those who disagree with it.

Thus, those who find themselves on the “losing” side of such a decision will insist that it flouts the rules, and that the process is unfair. It may be more accurate to say that the rules don't match the task. In any event, if the deliberation phase requires such trade-offs, we can be confident that the rules of consultation will promise more than the process can deliver.

This has become a serious issue for consultation, which has been widely discussed over the last few decades. Indeed, consultation processes that run afoul of it today are likely to be called into question, often before they begin. Experienced stakeholders know that as issues get more complex, the rules

get less reliable, yet governments may continue to perceive that the process is fair.

In response, angry stakeholders and citizens look for other ways to influence the decision-makers. They may stage a crisis or try to bring media pressure to bear on decision-makers; they may exaggerate statistics; they may try to embarrass or intimidate a minister; they may ask opposition politicians to take up their cause. Although tactics like these can bend or even break the rules, it is important to see that they are used more out of frustration with the process than out of bad faith. Frustrated stakeholders see no reason why they should have to respect the rules when they feel that the government doesn't.

Why does a shift from consultation to deliberation change people's behavior? It changes the rules that define the process and, in doing so, alters how participants assess the issue and their role in it. This is such an important feature of deliberation, that it is worth developing further.

### How does deliberation change participation?

Why do participants behave differently in deliberation? The answer is that the rules are fair and fit for purpose. By presenting the process as requiring a combination of evidence-based decisions and trade-offs from the outset, and involving them in each phase, participants are confronted with the complexities of the task at hand.

Experience with deliberation shows that people tend to quickly grasp the basic ideas behind it. They understand that deliberation is a new game, played using different rules. They like that it increases transparency by moving the deliberation stage out from behind closed doors, letting participants see the important trade-offs being made, and ultimately giving them a say in how these trade-offs are made. This helps assure them that the decisions will be fair.

Participants also tend to get the point of the rules behind the game: they understand why they must listen to each other, be open to one another's views, and make reasonable accommodations. They recognize mutually beneficial solutions, and most people are not looking for much more than that. Mostly, they want to know that the government sponsor and the other participants are also willing to play by the rules. If they believe everyone else is willing to do so, they will too.



### 3. Three Common Myths About Deliberation

#### Are deliberative processes risky?

There are numerous examples of governments achieving strong results by engaging in deliberative processes, some of which are presented in boxes throughout this briefing book. However, few governments have much experience with using deliberation as a public engagement tool. Most are cautious – even skeptical – about trying to solve complex issues through a more open decision-making process that invites greater public involvement.

There are good reasons for this trepidation. As with the Antwerp example in Box 1 above, there are many instances where public consultations have backfired, serving only to further divide communities and polarize positions. Different groups can have widely divergent views about an issue and public consultations – particularly if poorly managed – can serve to harden them.

Such experiences have led some officials to be wary of public engagement altogether. They worry that deliberation, by engaging the public in a deeper way, may be even more prone to the negative effects of consultations. While people may agree to be reasonable when they join the process, they will dig in their heels and refuse to make concessions once the dialogue gets going. Or, even if they are willing to compromise, the group will arrive at solutions that are ineffective or even harmful.

However, deliberation encourages more constructive engagement. Participants in a well-designed deliberative process have been found to behave differently: they are usually respectful of one another, make reasonable compromises, and are disciplined about their choices. When an issue can't be resolved, people in a deliberative process tend to be more able to agree to disagree and move on. They are unlikely to push one another to the limit or try to hold the process hostage.

#### *Box 3 Deliberating the Condominium Act in Ontario*

In 2011, the Canadian province of Ontario decided to renew the Condominium Act, 1998. Condominium corporations are buildings where tenants own the unit they live in, but jointly own and manage the building. The Act establishes the regulations governing the creation and governance of these communities.

The Ministry began by launching a small, traditional consultation process with key stakeholders, from owners to builders. Officials quickly realized that they were deeply divided on many issues, ranging from how to finance building repairs to how to elect a board of directors. It decided to experiment with an engagement process that gave participants a bigger role in finding solutions in exchange for a commitment to respect the rules of engagement.

The process was led by an independent facilitator and had three stages: 1) Defining the issues; 2) Finding solutions; and 3) Validation. As these titles suggest, each stage had a different task; and each task built on the one before it, moving from issues-identification to finding solutions to validation. Further, each stage concluded with a report that consolidated the achievements from that stage and provided the material for the deliberations in the next stage. These reports ensured continuity through the three stages of the process, as well as transparency regarding what happened in the deliberations at the various stages:

Each stage of the process also included three distinct “engagement streams” through which members of the community could participate:

- The **online stream** was open to all Ontarians, who were invited to post and exchange comments on a website. The material was collected and shared with the other two streams.
- The **in-person sessions** used town halls, roundtables, and working groups to allow stakeholders and owners from across the province to meet face-to-face and exchange views. The results were published in a separate series of reports.
- The **deliberative group** included some 25 experts/ stakeholders who met regularly to conduct in-depth discussions on key issues. The results of the group's discussions were published in the three main process reports.

Several thousand Ontarians participated in the process. The final report from the deliberative group was signed by all 25 members and contained some 200 recommendations to reform the Condo Act. None of them supported all the recommendations, but each of them said that the number of times they “won” significantly outweighed the times they “lost.” While no one considered the report perfect, but everyone came out a winner. Stakeholders and owners from across the community also proved highly supportive of the proposals and new legislation was passed in October of 2015.

## Can deliberation capture the perspectives of the wider public?

The examples of deliberation provided so far have involved bringing relatively small groups of people to deliberate on an issue. In Part II we will examine the trade-offs between different deliberative practices, including in terms of the numbers of participants. But it is useful to take a broad look at how deliberation can legitimately tackle cross-cutting issues that concern the wider public.

Representative sampling can be used to ensure participants are reflective of the stakeholders for a given issue, or even for society as a whole. This not only means that the result of the deliberation can be reasonably assured of having input from the groups that it should, but also helps to shore up the legitimacy of the process by demonstrating that different voices were included.

Box 4 illustrates a different approach to deliberating on a broad issue. The process was completely open to all eligible voters, but did not present the question in binary terms. Through a deliberative referendum, nuances within the electorate could be expressed and different sides had to grapple with trade-offs in a deeper way.

## Can issues be too complex for deliberation?

Deliberative processes set out to consider and reconsider, from every possible angle and viewpoint, challenges that demand a shared solution. A well-designed deliberative process will be able to deal with complexity by bringing together critical actors to create a shared sense of how a problem can be framed. Local planning problems and climate change may differ in importance and impact, but the deliberative processes designed to unpack and address them will be quite similar.

### *Box 4 Deliberating Nuclear Energy in South Korea*

South Korea has long been divided on energy policy. During the 2017 election, President Moon Jae-In pledged to phase out coal and nuclear power by investing in renewable sources. While President Moon was successful in his bid for the presidency, the nuclear power debate raged on, with two partially constructed plants proving a flashpoint. Those in favor emphasized new techniques for ensuring safety; those against pointed to contemporary disasters, including in neighboring Japan.

Despite his mandate, President Moon recognized how polarized Korean society was on the issue and decided to use deliberative polling to decide the way forward. Using representative polling – ensuring sample participants reflected the population as a whole – the government conducted a series of surveys. They first conducted phone interviews with around 20,000 people. They then selected 500 people through a randomized control trial, inviting them to deliberate on the issue. Participants were given information produced by groups both for and against nuclear power and leading experts hosted lectures and Q&As. Finally, participants divided into small groups to discuss what they had learnt.

South Korea's deliberative polling resulted in a nuanced policy approach: recognizing the short-term need for more energy, 59.2 percent of participants supported completing work on the two plants already underway; yet 53.2 percent also favored phasing out nuclear power. There was also strong support for improving safety and investing in renewables. President Moon has proceeded on the basis of these recommendations.



## 4 Choosing Between Consultation and Deliberation

Our discussion so far has distinguished two types of public engagement processes: consultation and deliberation. Is one better than the other? No. They are both tools for engaging the public, both can be effective, but care must be taken in choosing which one to use.

In this way, each process is useful, but they are designed for different purposes. However, it is a mistake to try to use a saw to pound a nail or a hammer to cut down a tree. By the same token, it is a mistake to use consultation to solve a complex issue or deliberation to solve a zero-sum issue.

- **Consultation** is appropriate when a government needs to get a better grasp on what the public (or stakeholders) think about a certain issue, to help inform its decision-making. For example, if a government is planning a program to retrain workers in an economically depressed region, it may want to consult local businesses on their labor needs.
- **Deliberation** is used to help solve “complex” issues, especially where they involve trade-offs or where priorities need to be set. Thus, a conflict between commercial farms and environmentalists over the use of pesticides may benefit from deliberation.

### *Box 5 Estonia People's Assembly on the Future of Ageing*

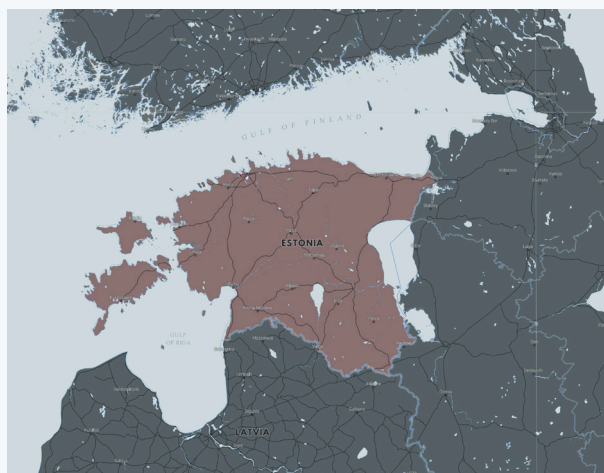
Pension 2050 was a two-year public discussion on the future of ageing in Estonia. It was launched by the Estonian Cooperation Assembly to support the government's work on pension reform, and to raise awareness on how a longer life expectancy is changing retirement among Estonians, especially regarding income and financial security.

In the first year, experts discussed ways to help people prepare for a longer life. Topic areas for discussion included finances, occupation, skills, and healthy living. Through the work of these experts a new vision for ageing was created.

In the second year, The People's Assembly on the Future of Ageing was launched. This was a deliberative process to help Estonians understand the new vision and to provide ideas on reforming the pension system that would support the vision. The Assembly focused on four topics – financial insurance, lifelong learning and working, health and adaptation to the change – and included six main stages:

In Stage I, Estonians came up with 80 ideas on the four topics. In Stage II, some 20 experts reviewed these ideas. In Stage III, the experts led three seminars, where they worked closely with interested parties (including the authors of the submitted ideas) to assess the viability of these ideas. In Stage IV, a vote was held on each idea to see if it was deemed suitable for the country.

Twenty-six of the 80 ideas were confirmed by a vote and progressed to Stage V. They were then posted as collective addresses to the Parliament (a civic right that emerged from the first deliberative democracy process back in 2013). All Estonians and permanent residents older than 16 years were invited to review them and to sign off on those



they supported. Ideas that attracted at least 1000 digital signatures then moved to the final stage of parliamentary discussion.

The Assembly's active phase ended in 2017, although many of the collective proposals are still posted on the citizen initiatives platform [rahvaalgatus.ee](http://rahvaalgatus.ee) and gathering signatures so that they can move to the Parliament.

The process was a complex one that engaged significant numbers of people through its various stages, including experts, stakeholders, and members of the public. While most of this occurred online, the three thematic seminars with experts, authors, and interested people were in-person events.

Several non-governmental organizations, scientists, think tanks and other interest groups participated in the dialogue. During the process, opinion pieces were written on how and why to prepare for old age and the media carried stories on the Assembly and its progress.

Working through the following series of questions can determine which process is best suited for the task at hand. Note that these are meant as “rules of thumb.” There are exceptions to every rule and good judgement is always required.

## Is the issue mainly evidence-based?

Policymakers often use evidence to evaluate options and arrive at the best choice. In such cases, consultation can be very useful. Suppose officials are wondering how to strengthen health regulations for meat packaging without creating unnecessary inefficiencies for industry. They may consult with industry representatives to get their views on how best to meet the new standards, then consult with health experts on how well various options will meet the standards. The officials can then choose the option they feel best balances health and efficiency goals.

## Is the decision binary?

Generally, a binary decision (either/or) can be addressed effectively through consultation, rather than deliberation. Suppose a rural community has two hospitals which serve different parts of the region and the government has decided to close one to reduce costs. Bringing people together to search for a win/win scenario may be asking them to look for something they will not find. If the choice is between one hospital or the other, people are likely to defend “their” own. It is difficult to find middle ground.

In such scenarios, it best to hold a consultation process that gives each side a fair chance to make the case for keeping their hospital open. Each side could present their case to a panel, allowing them to get their views on the table. In the end, the government would make the final decision. If each side’s argument is carefully considered, and the reasons for choosing one hospital over another are presented openly to the public, there is a good chance that the process will be viewed as legitimate.

## Does the decision involve trade-offs between values or interests?

As we’ve seen, policymaking often involves balancing competing values and interests. In this case, the choice between consultation and deliberation usually comes down to whether the government has the legitimacy to make and implement such decisions without involving the public in the deliberations. Sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn’t.

For example, a government that campaigned on improving public transport presumably has a mandate to make some difficult decisions about how land is appropriated and used. In such a case, consultations on zoning may still be needed to give affected parties a chance to make their views known. Once they have been heard, however, governments often can and should make some significant decisions.

## PART II

# PUTTING DELIBERATION INTO PRACTICE

## 5. Creating Informed Participation Through Deliberation

In Part I we discussed some of the challenges that traditional forms of public engagement face in today's policy making environment. We examined one of the most common forms of public engagement – consultation – and explored how and why it does not always achieve the desired outcomes. We introduced the concept of public deliberation, tackled some common misconceptions about it, and discussed some of its strengths. Finally, we presented a model for choosing when to use consultation and when deliberation may prove more effective.

While Part I touched on some of the ways deliberation works to change the behaviour of participants, it is useful to expand on this. Unlike a consultative process, where participation ends once all relevant views have been presented, deliberation requires participants to digest information and consider different viewpoints to arrive at a shared decision. This crucial extra step allows for what we call informed participation.

### What is informed participation?

In every public engagement process, there is a stage where deliberation takes place. For public consultations, this stage is handled solely by the government, usually behind closed doors. Deliberation aims at finding shared solutions to complex issues by giving the participants a meaningful role in the deliberation stage. To succeed, participants must engage in a spirit of openness and learning. They must be willing to inform themselves about relevant facts, as well as the values and the priorities of all those involved. They must be guided by the evidence and willing to make reasonable accommodations. Throughout the process, they must take on new information; in doing so, they gain a greater understanding of the issue. Deliberation creates informed participants, and therefore allows informed participation.

### Why is ownership important for informed participation?

Becoming informed requires digesting new information and listening to differing views. A process which ends once views are given does little to encourage learning about an issue or ownership of a decision.

Giving participants a meaningful role in decision-making imparts a sense of personal responsibility for the success of the process – everyone must do their part – and a sense of ownership of the decisions that result from it.

This is different from the kind of buy-in associated with consultation. When decision-makers talk about *getting public buy-in*, they may mean using consultation to get the public to agree to *their* plan. Ownership is about making participants feel they have a personal stake in a project. Ownership is important because it creates a kind of resilience that can protect a project from outside interference. The public is key to this. The stronger their sense of ownership, the more firmly they will resist partisan meddling in “their” project.

Ownership is not a silver bullet, but it can create the stability and legitimacy – the *resilience* – a project needs for a government to carry through the plan, despite angry or belligerent opposition. Changes in leadership will also be less of a threat. New leaders will be wary about cancelling a project for fear of provoking a backlash among stakeholders.

## 6 Three Kinds of Deliberative Practices

Deliberation can advance informed discussion and public ownership, both of which we see as hallmarks of successful deliberation. Our approach distinguishes between three different deliberative tools each of which contributes to informed participation in a different way:

- **Open Dialogue** asks people to draw on their experience around an issue and to use their natural conversational skills to exchange views and propose options to solve it.
- **Deliberative Analysis** is more formal about the rules of engagement and focuses participants' attention on facts

and arguments, and the information and data that support them.

- **Narrative-Building** draws on the participants' lived-experience to develop a story about an important change or challenge. Stories are useful because they speak to people in ways they understand and identify with.

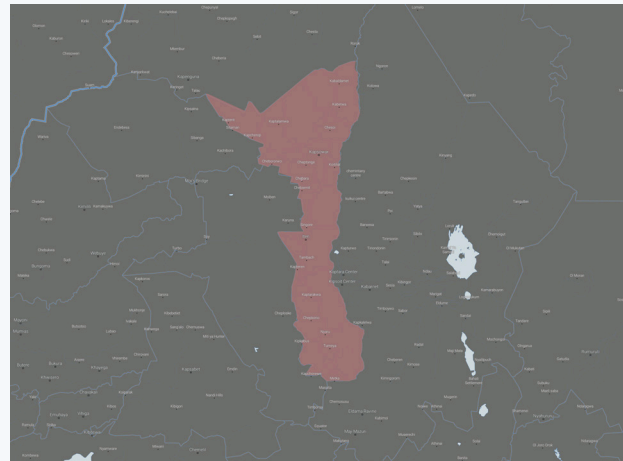
The following cases profile these three styles of deliberation and show how they advance informed participation. In a forthcoming publication, [Designing Deliberative Processes: A Roadmap](#), (Volume II in this series), we will provide a more detailed account of them, including a step-by-step process for designing each one.

### *Box 6 Deliberating Open Government Partnership Priorities In Kenya's Elgeyo Marakwet County*

Elgeyo Marakwet is a county in Kenya. It was selected to be among the first local government members of the Open Government Partnership (OGP). As a member of OGP, the local government was required to work with civil society to develop its 2018-2020 Action Plan that would set the agenda for reforms toward a more open government.

They decided to use public deliberation to develop this Action Plan. They began the process with two "Listening Tours," one for the community and one for government. The Community Listening Tour consisted of a series of dialogue sessions in each sub-county for the public and representatives from community organizations to discuss priorities, map problems, and identify solutions. These were structured in three phases: the first phase allowed participants to learn; the second phase saw focussed group discussions where participants, drawing on personal experiences, built consensus around shared concerns; the third phase was a plenary session where each focus group presented their findings to the rest of the participants. This third phase was an opportunity for all participants to discuss the issues identified, refine what was found, and deliberate on what should go in the Action Plan. About 120 people participated.

The results of these meetings were captured and synthesized in a report. They included a range of barriers to accessing different public services, such as healthcare and bursaries, and a list of factors that negatively affected public perception of government openness. The co-creation process took three months. By the end Elgeyo Marakwet had a well-designed OGP Action Plan that reflected the views and aspirations of people and stakeholders from across the county.



The Government Listening Tour came next. It involved a series of meetings for officials to respond to the findings from the Community Tour. For example, officials were asked for feedback on the list of barriers. They acknowledged that many of the barriers identified were real impediments to government openness and service delivery while adding their own list of barriers. This was a critical step. It showed that the dialogue was succeeding in bringing the community and government together around a shared view of the situation. This, in turn, strengthened stakeholders' ownership of the Action Plan and will help ensure their involvement in its implementation.

Following the Listening Tours, the findings were grouped into three thematic areas (Transparency and Accountability; Civic Engagement, Information and Feedback; and Public Service Delivery). Teams made up of both civil society and officials were created to tackle each them. They again reviewed the findings and deliberated on the reforms which could best address them. Finally, the results from this review were consolidated under five commitments in the Action Plan.

## What is Open Dialogue?

Open dialogue processes are flexible, scalable and relatively easy to carry out. The number of people involved can range from relatively small to very large, as can the number of events or sites where exchanges take place. The downside is that the process may fail to arrive at clear decisions, it can produce unreliable findings, and ownership and responsibility can be diluted as the process scales.

Elgeyo Marakwet is an example of Open Dialogue. Typically, these processes have multiple stages which work like a funnel: the process starts with a relatively open exchange of ideas, the ideas are gathered together, then focused and refined. The discussions usually converge on important goals, values, or priorities.

The Elgeyo Marakwet process, for example, began with the Community Listening Tour, which gathered ideas. Then there was the Government Listening Tour, which reviewed and commented on these findings. Finally, the results from both tours were organized under three themes and reviewed by multistakeholder teams. The Action Plan emerged from the team discussions.

This approach is highly flexible and relatively easily scaled, so the number of people involved can range from relatively small to very large, as can the number of events or sites where exchanges take place. Comments and proposals from different sessions are usually recorded in reports. Sometimes the results are made available to participants in other sessions or online which allows them to be responded to and built upon.

As for the dialogue, the organizers usually provide participants with some instruction and facilitation – the Community Learning Tour, for example, used problem-mapping – but people are assumed to know how to engage in dialogue. They know they should listen to each other, develop and explore different lines of reasoning, weigh evidence, and make compromises and trade-offs. “Official” rules of engagement are therefore kept to a minimum and, for the most part, people are expected to monitor their own behaviour.

Open dialogue informs participants through an exchange of views and perspectives. By giving them a meaningful role in decision-making, it creates a sense of responsibility for the process and ownership of the results.

A downside of this approach is that discussions may fail to reach clear conclusions, especially in the early stages. In addition, the methodology for consolidating the findings, both within and between stages, is usually very informal. Often this is left to rapporteurs. This makes scaling easier – the rapporteur might revise a rolling draft of the report, adding

### *Box 7 The UK Citizens’ Assembly on Social Care*

The Citizens’ Assembly on Social Care was led by Involve, a public participation charity based in the UK. The Assembly met in central Birmingham over two weekends in April and May of 2018. It brought together 47 English citizens who, as a group, were representative of the English population in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, social care, place of residence, and attitudes towards a small/large state.

Assembly members used a deliberative process to develop a set of recommendations for how social care should be funded sustainably in the future. They spent a combined total of 1,316 hours in a three stage process of learning, deliberation, and decision-making.

During the learning phase, they heard from and questioned a range of expert contributors, who were selected to cover the breadth of opinion on how social care should be funded. During the deliberation and decision-making phases, members worked through a series of carefully structured exercises to reach their conclusions. The exercises were designed, among other things, to ensure that all members could voice their opinions, and that no one dominated the conversations. The Assembly had two expert leads and an advisory panel, which helped ensure that the materials and plans were factually accurate, comprehensive, balanced and unbiased.

The recommendations of the citizens’ assembly heavily influenced the findings of the Parliamentary Select Committee inquiry. Clive Betts MP, the Chair of the Inquiry, commented: “The views of those that took part in our citizens’ assembly have been vital in informing our thinking and the model also provides a possible route for further public engagement and building the support that any reforms will need.”

new material from additional discussions – but it can also dilute the results and dissipate the sense of ownership, as the size of the process grows or the number of stages multiplies.

## What is Deliberative Analysis?

Deliberative analysis involves a more rigorous, rules-based exchange that guides participants toward informed decisions. It creates a high level of ownership among participants, but it is difficult to scale. Those outside the process may accept the decisions, but they are unlikely to feel a deep sense of ownership of them.



The process of deliberating over social care in the UK is a good example of deliberative analysis. While the UK assembly has much in common with the open dialogue in Elgeyo Marakwet, there is a basic difference in how the two processes were designed and, as a result, in how people participated.

In open dialogue, the terms of engagement are generally less rigorous, and the goals are often more open-ended. Discussion usually relies more on narrative or storytelling than facts and information, argument and analysis. (More on narrative shortly.) Norms such as listening to others, assessing evidence, or inclusiveness are expected to apply, but more as an aspiration than a rule.

Deliberative analysis involves participants in a more rigorous, rules-based exchange that guides them toward decision-making on tasks such as setting priorities and making trade-offs between competing interests. The process is designed to establish the legitimacy of its conclusions through a high level of representativeness, objectivity, fairness, and evidence-informed decision-making.

This rigour may apply to all or some aspects of the process, from the selection of participants to the preparation of briefing materials. The process normally follows a carefully constructed agenda and is led by a facilitator, who acts as a “referee” to ensure the rules are followed. Finally, processes like these are usually restricted to a smaller number of people. The larger the process becomes, the more difficult it is to maintain high levels of rigour.

Deliberative analysis certainly informs the participants. They routinely comment on how much they learn from these processes. Participants also feel a sense of ownership of the recommendations. Indeed, the rigour and intensity of the process tends to instill a deep sense of ownership, which helps underwrite its legitimacy.

However, people outside the process aren’t likely to feel this way. They may be impressed by the rigour and realize that the discussion includes voices that sound a lot like their own. So, they often see these processes as having a high degree of legitimacy.

Nevertheless, ownership and responsibility tend to result from struggling personally with the issues and the trade-offs. Ownership, in short, requires participation, but the rigorous nature of these processes makes them very difficult to scale, so that participation is restricted.

## What is Narrative-Building?

Deliberation is not just about analysis; it can be a powerful tool for narrative-building or storytelling. Stories include goals, characters, tensions, solutions, ways of evaluating actions (e.g. praise and blame), and much more. Creating a narrative from these elements not only helps ensure the results of a dialogue will reach the broader public in a form they understand, but that it will resonate with them and engage them in the discussion.

Open dialogue highlights a very important feature of deliberative processes, namely, that they are powerful tools for **narrative-building**. The Tanzanian scenarios were created from facts, goals, values, tensions, and other elements. These had been drawn from a set of expert papers prepared beforehand, an online survey, and the participants’ lived experience. Consolidating these elements into a series of stories – the scenarios – packaged the findings in ways that would resonate with ordinary people’s experience, and that they would be able to grasp and remember.

Storytelling is important for dialogue because it speaks to people’s emotional intelligence as well as their intellect. It provides them with a mental picture of a new situation or environment (what is there, how it will work, what it will achieve) and gives them a visceral sense of what is at stake (what they are aspiring to, what challenges must be overcome to achieve it, how this will be done and who are their allies and adversaries).

Policymakers may treat storytelling as inferior to analysis, especially where evidence-based decision-making is concerned. Many believe knowledge is based on facts and that narrative is “tainted” by emotion and values. Examples like the Tanzania case suggest a different way of seeing narrative. Stories not only contain facts and information, they integrate these with goals, values, hopes, aspirations, fears, tensions, solutions, praise, and blame in ways that reflect a person’s or community’s experience. In brief, they channel a person’s or community’s lived experience.

The whole point of “information” is that it strives to separate facts from the evaluative aspects of lived experience, such as values and emotion. Stripping lived experience down to facts and information can be useful, but evidence-based findings eventually need to connect with the broader public to arrive at a final decision or solution to an issue. For this, the human capacity for storytelling is essential.

The lesson is that facts play a role in building narratives and storytelling plays a role in interpreting facts. Either one alone provides insight that is at best incomplete, possibly misleading,



### *Box 8 The Tanzania Dialogue Initiative*

The Tanzania Dialogues Initiative was led by the Society for International Development, an international network to promote social justice and foster democratic participation. The project was carried out in 2014 and used nine “Futures Literacy Laboratories” across the country to engage nearly 400 experts, stakeholders and citizens in a dialogue on Tanzania’s future.

The goal was to develop “scenarios” about the future that could help inform discussion on a proposed new constitution for the country and on the 2015 general election. In developing these scenarios, the dialogue progressed through three stages:

1. Awareness: The first stage was used to establish a basis and starting point for the dialogue – a “Picture of Now” that reflected a shared understanding among participants of their country and its current state.
2. Discovery: Participants were then invited to “think the unthinkable” by contemplating a future in which Tanzania no longer received foreign aid. The goal was to challenge them to confront some deep truths about the country’s economic dependency on aid and the culture that has evolved around it. How would Tanzanians cope if this funding were suddenly stopped?
3. Choice: The third stage drew on the experience and imagination of the participants to articulate realistic scenarios for the future – “choices” based on the findings from Stages 1 and 2.

By working through these three stages together, the participants were able to articulate several different scenarios about possible futures for their country. These scenarios took the form of stories or narratives and were published in December 2014 as an insert in Tanzania’s biggest newspaper. The process organizers then toured the nine regions to disseminate the findings, which they hoped would help inform the coming debates on Tanzania’s constitution and its 2015 national election.

or just plain wrong. These two kinds of dialogue may look hierarchical but, in this view, they are better understood as complementary. Storytelling is a way of ensuring the results of a dialogue not only reach the broader public but will engage them in ways they find meaningful.

In sum, narrative helps people understand what is at stake in an issue. An effective narrative can travel through a community quickly and easily and still be absorbed by community members. Narrative is a powerful tool for creating shared purpose and community.

However, there are dangers: stories reflect what people think and feel – their lived experience – but are not guaranteed to be factually accurate, respectful, or fair. Often they are not. People are regularly misinformed and can harbour resentment and prejudices. These, in turn, can be incorporated into a narrative, then transmitted like a virus. We see this in aspects of populism, which dismiss leaders as elites, accuse the media of creating “fake news,” and label refugees as invaders.

## 7. A Blended Approach to Public Deliberation

Each of the three kinds of deliberative practices emphasizes one dialogue style over the others and each has different strengths and weaknesses.

However, these different styles can be balanced within processes that consolidate some of the strengths of each. A blended approach takes aspects from each practice according to the policy question. A cyclical approach uses different practices over successive rounds of deliberation.

The three deliberative practices outlined above all contribute to informed participation, but in different ways. Each one favours certain aspects of deliberation, which is why they have different strengths and weaknesses. None is better than the other. Rather, they are suited to different tasks. The right choice will depend, for instance, on how many people we want to involve in the process or how interested we are in rigorous analysis and conclusions.

Despite differences, open dialogue, deliberative analysis, and narrative building are not so much different kinds of processes but emphasize different aspects of deliberation. Each is stronger on certain aspects and weaker on others. For example, narrative building is strong on scalability and able to

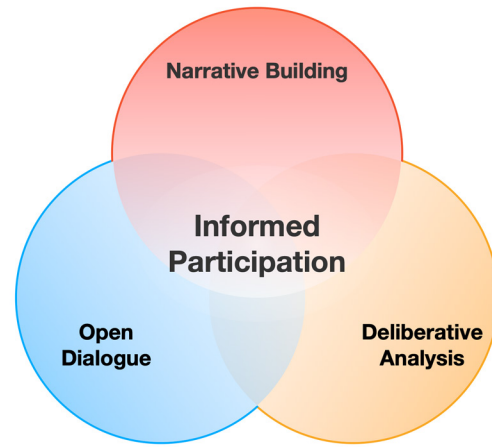


Figure 5 Informed Participation

reach large numbers of people but can be weak on generating evidence-based findings. On the other hand, deliberative analysis is good for arriving at evidence-based conclusions but is difficult to take to scale. Importantly, however, all three approaches give the public an informed and meaningful say on the issues if they are used appropriately and well designed.

While it is useful to separate out the three deliberative practices to better grasp how and when they may be useful, in practice they are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to take a blended approach that maximizes the strengths of the different styles by getting all three of them working together. This is

### Box 9 The Ottawa Hospital case

The Ottawa Hospital in the City of Ottawa, Canada is working on a plan to replace its aging Civic campus. The hospital is now in the second year of a five-year process to design a world-class medical and research facility. (It will take an additional five years to complete the build.)

The site includes 50 acres of superb federal land, which is populated with rare trees and surrounded by several national heritage sites, including the Rideau Canal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Simply identifying the site has taken 10 years and been the subject of ongoing, acrimonious debates between the various parties, including the hospital, federal, provincial and municipal governments, and stakeholders ranging from heritage and environmental groups to neighbourhoods that don't want a hospital nearby. However, in the last year, things have changed. The discussions have become a model of decorum. The reason lies in the adoption of a blended deliberative process. (<http://greatertogether.ca/reports/>)

Projects like this are normally led by a planning team that might include senior hospital staff, architects, engineers, and

a few other experts. Typically, these teams see community consultation as a tool to get public buy-in (acceptance) on controversial aspects of their plan, such as the proposed height of a building or the location for an access route. Once buy-in has been secured, the team has little reason to engage the community further.

The disputes of the last decade have convinced the hospital that the community not only has deeply held views on the design of the building and the site, but that giving these a much more significant place in the process is key to its success. Hospital administrators therefore resolved to make the community a full-fledged partner in the planning process. To achieve this, they needed a new kind of engagement process.

The model they've developed has three relatively distinct subprocesses or dialogue streams, each of which includes a larger number of people:

First, a "community engagement group" (CEG) has been established, which includes some 20 community stakeholders, several senior hospital staff, and representatives from the City and the federal government.



done by creating separate spaces for open dialogue and deliberative analysis, then aligning the two dialogues through development of a shared narrative.

A blended approach thus has important benefits: it can engage lots of people, give them a sense of shared ownership of the project, and ensures that decision-making is rigorous and fair. However, as the examples shows, the process can be complex, requiring more time, resources, and effort to complete. As with any engagement process, it is crucial to ensure the design choice fits the purpose.

## Informed participation through a cyclical approach

Depending on the issue, a deliberative process can often achieve its overarching goals in one “cycle.” For example, the aim of the deliberative process outlined in the case study on Ontario’s Condominium Act (see Box 8) was to amend a specific law. Once the recommendations were codified, there was nothing further needed from the deliberative group.

Many issues are not so straightforward. Some are too complex to be addressed in a single round. Others, such as promoting community health or environmental protection, constitute ongoing challenges that may never be fully completed. In such cases, deliberation often (perhaps usually) requires a cyclical approach. The cyclical approach begins with a “bite-sized” piece of the bigger challenge, works through that piece, and then begins again focussing on the next piece. For example, a goal of becoming a carbon-free economy will not be achieved by a single effort. It is an ambitious, long-term objective that will begin with some smaller, more focused ones. This might require new regulations and incentive systems, such as limiting emission levels and encouraging the use of solar panels.

The government – or, in an ideal world, successive governments – could establish an ongoing series of dialogue cycles. Once the objectives from the first cycle have been met, it will evaluate the progress, see what lessons have been learned, and move on to new objectives in a second cycle. Once that cycle has been completed, it will do the proper evaluation and start again, and so on.

Focusing each cycle on smaller, achievable objectives helps to ensure that the process isn’t overwhelmed by the size of the challenge and doesn’t get bogged down in planning. It can also be liberating. Participants may be relieved to know that not everything must be done immediately. It makes big goals seem more realistic and attainable.

Cyclical processes may also benefit from learning and capacity-building. As the participants work together to complete these cycles, they will deepen their common interests,

### *Box 10 The Ottawa Hospital case (continued)*

The CEG is effectively a forum for deliberative analysis. Over the next three years, it will meet regularly to deliberate from a community viewpoint on key non-technical issues around the design of the building and the grounds; it will then make recommendations directly to the hospital’s Board of Governors.

Second, the process includes an in-person stream, which will engage community members through town halls, roundtables, information sessions and other in-person meetings.

Third, there is an online stream where anyone can post ideas and information or exchange views with others at any time of the day or night.

The in-person and online streams are designed to promote open dialogue among community members. Together, these streams will allow large numbers of people to participate in ways they are comfortable with and on the issues they care about.

Although these three streams are separate, the process is designed to ensure they interact and complement one another. More specifically, alignment will be nurtured through development of a shared narrative that integrates the analytical work of the CEG and the story-telling from the open dialogues.

The CEG includes members with expertise in narrative construction who will be tasked with drawing on the three dialogues to evolve this shared narrative and to help work it into the three dialogues to draw them together.

In sum, the process creates an ongoing dialogue – a deliberation – that will give the community a voice at the planning table throughout the process. Through this process, the community is now effectively a member of the planning team and community members will feel a sense of ownership of the decisions around development and design of the facility and grounds.

expand their shared language, clarify issues and opportunities, and build new tools, systems, and practices to support deliberation. As a result, the working relationships between participants will become stronger, values and goals shift, there will be a history of successes, and openness and trust will grow – both among participants and between them and the government. Each cycle should get faster, easier, and more productive. Like a snowball rolling down a hill, it will gain size and momentum.

# CONCLUSION:

## REBUILDING TRUST THROUGH INFORMED PARTICIPATION

We began this briefing book by noting that governments in many parts of the world are seeing a decline in public trust. In part, we said, this is connected to the rise of digital technologies. Over the last few decades, events and organizations have become far more interconnected; information of all sorts has become readily available; and social media have created new forums for discussion and influence. As a result, building consensus is a growing challenge for governments.

Specifically, we talked about effectiveness and responsiveness. Many people feel their governments don't deliver on promises and/or feel they are out of touch with what ordinary people want. This paper shows how a new kind of public engagement, deliberation, can strengthen effectiveness and responsiveness in ways that will help rebuild public trust.

Traditional public engagement relies mainly on consultation. People have a chance to air their views on a topic; officials listen, then retreat behind closed doors to deliberate over what they've heard and arrive at decisions.

This deliberative stage is increasingly controversial. Officials are often forced to grapple with diverging views, weigh different kinds of arguments, and make trade-offs between competing values and interests. There are growing concerns about decisions that are made this way: too often, they unfairly advantage one set of interests over the others. Those on the "losing side" will feel the process was unfair. The result may be even deeper divisions on the issue.

Deliberation addresses this. It strengthens the process by giving participants a meaningful role in the decision-making stage. As our case studies show, this changes how the public interacts with policy issues, from South Korea, where a more nuanced approach to nuclear energy emerged from deliberative polling, to Kenya, where engagement shifted how the community and policymakers thought of each other and led to a concrete Action Plan, to Ontario, where it is helping to resolve issue around the development of a new hospital.

Despite different country contexts, policy issues, and deliberation techniques, cases like these share some distinguishing features: engaging participants in the deliberative stage increases the legitimacy of the outcome; participants seem willing to work together respectfully and fairly to solve issues; and giving participants an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the issue helps them arrive at shared solutions.

The research behind this paper thus reveals new ways that engagement can help governments build consensus and resolve complex issues. There is still a long way to go: we need to gather more evidence on the efficacy of deliberation, refine our understanding of which kinds of deliberative processes work best in which scenarios, and improve government capacity to carry them out. Nevertheless, we believe the risk of not engaging the public far outweighs the risk of doing so imperfectly – which brings us back to the question of trust.

A key lesson here for governments is that trust is a two-way street. For governments to foster trust among the public, they in turn must trust the public to play a more engaged role in decision-making. Governments must be willing to move beyond winner-take-all engagement processes to those that encourage the public to grapple with complexity and reconcile trade-offs. This means opening the policy making process to greater participation, creating more space for the public to engage directly with unfamiliar information, values, and opinions, and giving people a real stake in decisions. In short, governments must be willing to expand the toolbox of public engagement to include deliberative processes. We call this kind of engagement informed participation.

Our white paper is a first step along this path. The goal was to make the case for deliberation by explaining what it is, how it works, and why it is important. A second paper in this series, [Designing Deliberative Processes: A Roadmap](#), is now being prepared and provides a step-by-step guide to designing effective deliberative processes. Together, these two papers contain a comprehensive account of deliberation, from its conceptual underpinnings to practical considerations, such as choosing the right number of participants for a process. We hope governments will take advantage of these tools to test and experiment with the approach and to benefit from the results these processes can bring.