

Science Communication Working Lunch

Toolkit for dialogue

Thursday 6 and Friday 7, April, Our Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh

The workshop aimed to explore what we mean by 'effective dialogue' and highlight recent approaches to policy through dialogue and the potential impact on the science communication community. It also aimed to create some consensus as to what we mean by 'doing dialogue'.

SPEAKER: Mark Dyball, People, Science & Policy

The Working Lunch ran twice over two days and was attended by approximately 30 people on day one and 20 people on day two.

Summary

- Although the Working Lunch offered to provide a toolkit, it was clear that there is no such thing as a 'best fit option'. Successful dialogue requires a combination of approaches specifically chosen to match your needs and the needs of your audience
- It is vital that, before we start any dialogue process, we take time to think clearly about what we want out of it. Why are we running this and what do we want the outcomes to be?

The Working Lunch began with an introduction from Mark looking at different definitions of dialogue and participants were asked to identify areas of their programmes that they considered to be dialogue and why they ran them

Examples included

One way – Talks and presentations

Consultation – Visitor feedback or Government consultations

Engagement – Schools projects, discussions resulting from topics introduced

Dialogue – activities that share experiences and knowledge and encourage widespread involvement

Participants were also asked to identify the barriers to greater public involvement in decision making and discussion on science and technology

Responses included

- Time
- Not knowing the issues
- Not knowing how
- Lack of confidence
- Government not listening to or acting on discussions
- No opportunities
- People not wanting to take part

- Lack of understanding
- Lack of relevance
- Language
- Lack of knowledge about the facts of science
- Lack of knowledge about active citizenship
- Being labelled “the general public”

In the discussions that followed the following points were raised:

- Why bother with policy through dialogue?
 - I/we do not do it, things cannot be changed
 - It allows you to influence policy that has been made for you
 - Makes you feel a part of society with an ability to respond to the changes going on around you
 - You can engage people on topics where views are not yet determined
 - Why not?
 - Helps you understand what people want
 - Make better decisions
 - It's a means to an end
 - We have a democratic right to be involved
 - Because voting is not enough
 - To make your voice heard
 - Decisions are being made on citizens' behalf, if you are a good citizen you should engage
 - Our society has become more complex than the systems we use for decision making, we need to update our methods so that there is more accountability
- Should dialogue be compulsory? Can you force people to take part?
- What incentives can be used to encourage participation? If we have to pay people to engage, are we using the right methods?
- Is there not a duty to be involved?
- Information provision is important. How should people look for information and how should it be provided?
- Even if the public are informed about science, it doesn't mean they will be able to make the 'right choice'. Science doesn't always have yes or no answers. The questions you ask are the most important
- Some people don't want to know, should we bother with them? The challenge is to engage those who don't want to be engaged
- How can we eliminate bias and inappropriate organisational impact? Interested publics can also manipulate the discussions
- What are the toolkits for policy makers to engage? How do we do dialogue with them?
- We need to consider the role of scientific information. Science can be used in political ways too

Discussions then turned to the questions of whether dialogue should 'go somewhere'. Responses included:

- Can any dialogue go somewhere?
- You need to have buy-in from participants, this is often achieved from the potential to impact on decision making
- We need a better understanding of where dialogue fits into the process
- Why bother if nothing happens?
- It depends on whether you consider yourself a citizen or a consumer
- If it doesn't we are being dishonest, have we just re-branded Public Understanding?
- People want to know what they get out of it. I want more than information policy, I want to see an impact on me and my life

- If it does have impact it makes people feel good about themselves

The discussions then turned to focus on different methods for dialogue. Mark shared experiences of 5 different processes; citizen's juries, consensus conferences, Democs games, deliberative mapping and focus groups. Information on which is included below.

Democs is a conversation game enabling small groups to discuss public policy issues. No speakers or experts are needed, as pre-prepared cards convey the necessary facts. It works best for six people over two hours, but it is flexible.

Description: Democs helps people to absorb information and to make it meaningful. The information on the topic is provided on playing cards which are dealt out in two rounds. Each time, people reflect on their cards and choose one or two that they feel are most important. They take turns to read them out, explaining why they chose them, and then place them on the table. Next they cluster the cards, with each cluster representing a key issue relating to the topic. Once they've voted on a range of responses or policy positions they try to create a response that everyone in the group can live with.

Origin: Gaming/Deliberative democracy. Designed by the New Economics Foundation to provide some of the deliberation of Citizens' Juries and Deliberative Polls but for a wider use.

Used for: Helping citizens find out about an issue, form and share their opinions with others and establish whether there is a policy position that every member of the group can at least live with.

Who participates? Usually anyone who wants to. Sometimes representatives are sought. For instance, the Human Genetics Commission, investigating over-the-counter genetic testing kits, was interested in the views of the general public and in those of members of their consultative panel.

Cost: Low. A single kit costs £30 in

a box or is free by email. Developing the kits in the first place costs more (£5-10k), as does a full consultation using Democs.

Time requirements: Individual sessions are around two hours.

When should you use?

- When you want to give people the chance to participate in their own time and place;
- When you want to increase public understanding of an interest in an issue.

When should you not use?

- For a one-off session on a particular topic, as developing the information cards would be too expensive;
- Dangerous to combine citizens and experts in a single game.

Can it be used to make decisions?
No

Strengths:

- It encourages people to form an opinion on complex topics and empowers them to believe that they have a right to a say;
- It avoids the passivity that can come with experts lecturing people;
- It provides a safe place that will appeal to inexperienced participants;
- The game format helps people to enjoy themselves while they talk.

Weaknesses:

- Works better with a facilitator;
- Establishing common ground is not possible within a single game;
- Representativeness is hard to achieve;
- Can create conflict between participants.
- It is hard to feed the results of a Democs process into decision-making.

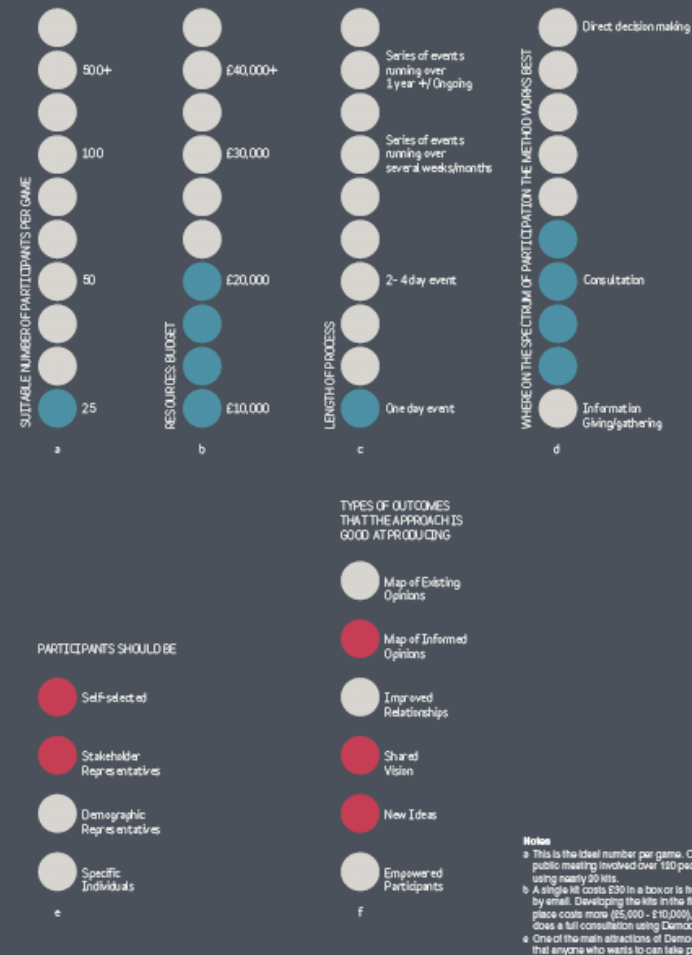
Can deliver:

- A citizenry that feels it can have a say and wants to do so;
- Some information about common ground and preferences.

Won't deliver:

- Lengthy deliberation;
- In itself, it doesn't deliver follow-up to people who have taken part and want more;
- Tangible outcomes.

Democs (‘Deliberative Meetings of Citizens’)



Citizens' juries consist of a small panel of non-specialists, modelled to resemble a criminal jury, who carefully examine an issue of public significance and deliver a "verdict".

Description: A Citizens' Jury is an independent forum for members of the public to examine and discuss an important issue of public policy. It is deliberative in the sense that the Jury receives information about the issues in question. This information includes a full range of opinions, often in the form of worked up options, on what should be done about the issue. Much of this information is presented through witness presentations followed by question and answer sessions. Juries are not designed to create a consensus amongst the jurors, but there does tend to be a momentum towards consensus. In a four-day process, day one is largely about bringing jurors up to speed on the issue. Days two and three tend to focus on witness presentations about different ways of dealing with the issue. Most of the fourth day is spent by the Jury developing its recommendations.

Origin: Social Research – the model used in the UK is a mixture of the US Citizens' Jury developed by the Jefferson Center, and the German Pannungszelle (planning cell) developed by the University of Wuppertal.

Used for: Live public policy issues where opinion is sharply divided and policy makers cannot decide how to proceed. This deliberative model creates an informed public opinion about what they feel policy makers should do. Although originally designed for local communities to tackle issues of local concern, Juries are now starting to be used to look at national issues. Juries are decision-advising rather than decision-making

tools. They are about enhancing representative democracy, not direct democracy.

Who participates? Most Juries include a 'best fit' (demographic) sample of 12 to 15 members of the public. They are brought together to examine both written and verbal evidence about different perspectives on the issue they are deliberating on.

Cost: A Citizens Jury usually costs between £20,000 and £40,000. The difference in the costing usually relates to how long the process is designed to last and the exact nature of the methodology. The original type of Jury introduced into the UK by IPPR and the Kings Fund tends to last for four days and involves much preparation time. This version would be at the higher end of the costing.

Time requirements: The set up time for a jury can be anywhere from two to four months.

When should you use?

- When you have a 'live' contentious issue where the way forward has not been decided;
- Juries usually work best where feasible policy options have been developed by policy makers about how to respond to a problem.

When should you not use?

- When you have already decided how to proceed on an issue;
- When the issue is not of significant interest to the public;
- When you seek consensus.

Can it be used to make decisions?
No

Strengths:

- Gives an informed public opinion about how a difficult issue should be tackled;

- Enables decision-makers to understand what informed members of the public might regard as realistic solutions;
- The results can also be used to generate wider public debate about the issues.

Weaknesses:

- Only involves a very small number of people, which means that the wider public may still hold a less informed view;
- A challenge for policy makers is how to reconcile these two different public voices to create wider public ownership of the jurors' recommendations;
- It can also be difficult for policy makers to decide how to proceed if they reject the Jury's recommendations.

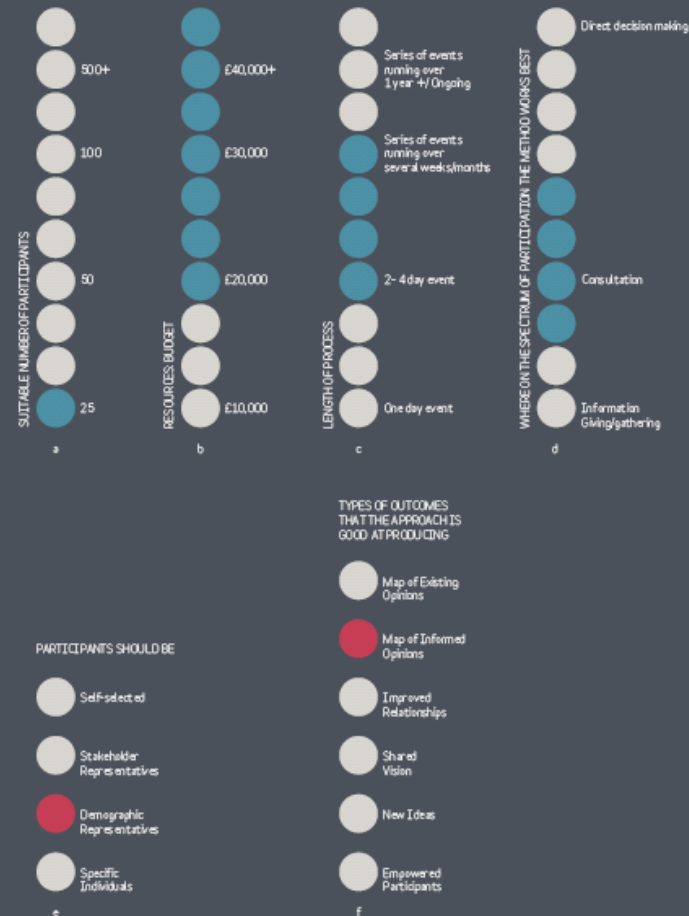
Can deliver:

- Decision-making that better reflects the public's views;
- A high profile example of public engagement.

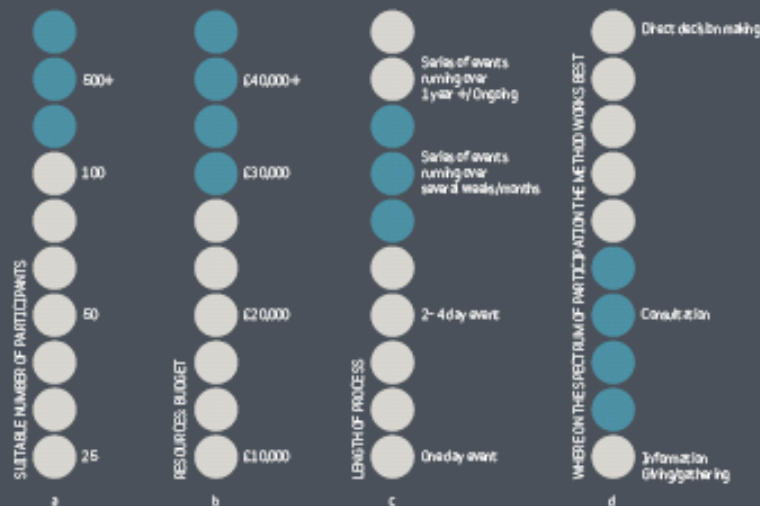
Won't deliver:

Wider democratic engagement and empowerment.

Citizens' Juries



Deliberative Polling



Note
 * Using a statistically representative sample of the public is important

A deliberative poll measures what the public would think about an issue if they had an adequate chance to reflect on the questions at hand by observing the evolution of a test group of citizens' views, as they learn more about a topic. Deliberative polls are more statistically representative than many other approaches due to their large scale.

Description: The participating sample is first polled on the targeted issues. After this baseline poll, members of the sample are invited to gather for a few days to discuss the issues. Balanced briefing materials are sent to the participants and made publicly available. The participants engage in dialogue with competing experts based on questions that the participants themselves develop in small group discussions with trained moderators. After this deliberation, the sample is asked the original questions again. The resulting changes in opinion are thought to represent the conclusions the public would reach if people had the opportunity to become more informed about the issues. Deliberative Polling creates dramatic, statistically significant changes in views. Follow up studies, however, tend to show that some of these changes are reversed over time. Deliberative polls are usually run in collaboration with TV companies, which then broadcast parts of the process, allowing the wider public to share the learning of the participants.

Origin: Social Research – Developed by US researchers to overcome the often uninformed and fickle nature of opinion poll results.

Used for: Deliberative Polls measure informed opinion on an issue. The results of a Deliberative Poll are partly prescriptive – pointing to what an informed and reflective citizenry

might want policy-makers to do.

Who participates? The number of participants in a Deliberative Polling process range from around 200 to 600. It is important that the participants constitute a representative sample of society; if a random selection process might exclude minority groups there is a need for a more affirmative method of selection.

Cost: It is hard to estimate what a Deliberative Poll might cost as there haven't been any recently, but we estimate that running one will cost at least £30,000. This excludes expenses for the media and participants.

Time requirements: The poll itself is run over several days, a few months before, the participants take part in a number of events (usually over a weekend) where they are polled the first time and where they can familiarise themselves with the issues. Allow at least six months.

When should you use?
 — Deliberative Polling is especially suitable for issues where the public may have little knowledge or information of the trade-offs applying to public policy

When should you not use?
 — If issue is non-controversial;
 — If issue and its relevant trade-offs are already well understood by the public.

Can it be used to make decisions?
 No

Strengths:
 — Combines the statistical representativeness of a scientific sample with interaction and deliberation;
 — Better demographical representation of population than

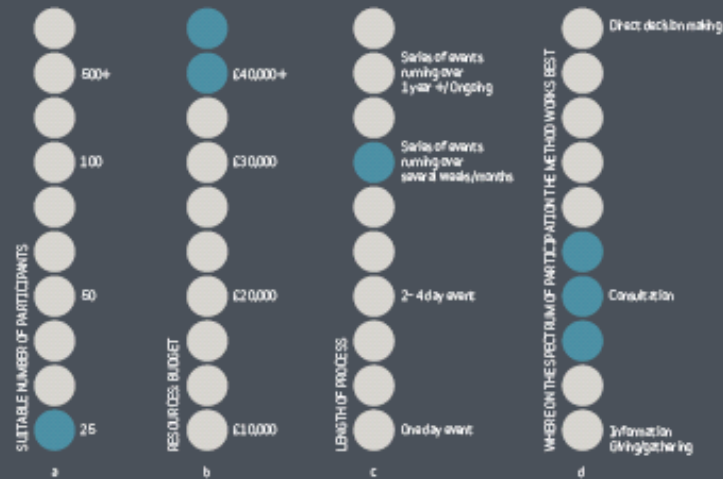
Citizens' Juries and Consensus Conferences;
 — Increases public understanding of the complexity of issues;
 — Includes people that would not normally choose to get involved;
 — Demonstrates the large difference between people's uninformed and informed views;
 — Good means of measuring the diversity of public opinion.

Weaknesses:
 — Requires use of television to achieve its wider public awareness raising effects;
 — Does not provide qualitative information;
 — Expensive;
 — Less scope for participants to identify witnesses and question them or determine the scope of the questions than exists for some other approaches (a.g. Citizens' Juries and Consensus Conferences).

Can deliver:
 — A statistically representative view of what the public's considered/ deliberated opinion might look like;
 — Increased public understanding of an issue through broadcasting of event

Won't deliver:
 — Improved relationships between groups of participants;
 — Shared views/consensus.

Consensus Conference



TYPES OF OUTCOMES THAT THE APPROACH IS GOOD AT PRODUCING

PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE

- Self-selected
- Stakeholder Representative
- Demographic Representative
- Specific Individuals

- Map of Existing Opinions
- Map of Informed Opinions
- Improved Relationships
- Shared Vision
- New Ideas
- Empowered Participants

Note
 a This number indicates those directly involved and does not include those who may be influenced by reports about it or by its results.
 b The costs of this method usually go well beyond this scale, sometimes amounting to £200,000.

A **consensus conference** consists of a panel of ordinary citizens who question expert witnesses on a particular topic. Their recommendations are then circulated.

Description: At a Consensus Conference a panel of citizens explores a topic through questioning expert witnesses. The panel is given time to prepare before the actual conference in order to fulfil their role as informed citizens. Panel members receive a comprehensive information pack and attend preparatory events (usually two held at weekends). A distinctive feature is that the initiative lies with the citizens. They decide the key aspects of the debate, including the choice of questions and selection of the witnesses, and formulate their own conclusions. The press and public are able to attend the main hearing. At the end of the conference, the panel produces a report outlining conclusions and recommendations that are then circulated to key decision-makers and the media. The process is usually run by an organisation with no stake in the outcome to limit accusations of bias.

Origin: Social Research. The Consensus Conference is based on a model of technology assessment originating in the health care sector in the USA during the 1960s and further developed by the Danish Board of Technology.

Used for: A Consensus Conference is a way of incorporating the perspectives of ordinary members of society into the assessment of new scientific and technological developments. In common with Citizens' Juries, Consensus Conferences aim to both inform and consult with the citizenry. The difference is that Consensus Conferences take place in open

view of the public. This form of citizen participation is particularly appropriate for involving citizens in decision making on complex and highly technical issues otherwise requiring specialist knowledge.

Who participates? A citizens' panel of between 10-20 people is selected to reflect a variety of socio-demographic criteria (note however that due to its size the panel cannot be a statistically representative sample of the population). Panel members should not have any significant prior involvement with the conference topic – they are taking part in their capacity as citizens, not as professionals or specialists.

Cost: A trained and independent facilitator is required during the preparatory weekends and during the conference itself. A Consensus Conference is expensive, requiring large facilities to accommodate the media and public during the event. Some claim, however, that Consensus Conferences are cost effective compared to the cost of informing the public through the media. UK examples have ranged in cost from £80,000 to £100,000.

Time requirements: The Consensus Conference itself usually lasts for three days; the participants also attend preparatory events. Ensuring that the relevant experts can attend as witnesses usually requires contacting them well in advance of the events.

When should you use?

- Useful for dealing with controversial issues at a national level;
- Works well with issues that are seen as controversial, complex or expert dominated.

When should you not use?

- When it is important to involve all

- key stakeholders;
- When you want the participants to make actual decisions;
- When the topic is very abstract or uncontroversial;
- When the funding and/or delivering body is seen as biased.

Can it be used to make decisions? No

Strengths:

- Good public outreach if run well;
- Open and transparent process which encourages increased trust;
- More control over subject matter and witnesses than is common in Citizens' Juries and Deliberative Polling.

Weaknesses:

- Expensive;
- The small sample of people might exclude minorities.

Can deliver:

- The views of informed citizens and their key issues of concern on a policy area;
- Useful and understandable written material suitable for public use;
- Wider and better informed public debate on an issue through the media.

Won't deliver:

- Decisions;
- Detailed technical recommendations;
- Results that are representative of society as a whole.