

What are Citizens' Assemblies and why is XR demanding one?

A UK-wide National Citizens' Assembly for Climate and Ecological Justice (CACEJ) is an incredibly democratic and effective mechanism for deciding the steps that need to be taken to respond to the emergency.

For such a Citizens' assembly to be in a position to lead major change, it is critical that :

- 1) the scope of the task is both wide and urgent enough***
- 2) the process is robust, transparent and independent***
- 3) the mandate and what the government will do with the recommendations is clear from the outset***

Questions on a UK-wide CA: sortition (selection), structure, organisation and implementation:

1. What does a Citizens' Assembly look like?

Answer: A Citizens' Assembly takes place over the course of several weeks (the length is dependent on the issue being discussed and sometimes the funding available). Usually the Assembly convenes on weekends so that it is easier for the majority of members to attend (although of course not everybody works 9-5!). CAs are often held in the conference room of a hotel where members are provided with accommodation and meals. Assembly members sit at round tables and there is a space at the front of the room for experts and others to speak to the assembly. Sometimes there is an area for visitors and / or the press, but they are only permitted to witness the speakers and not to hear or take part in the facilitated conversations held amongst assembly members.

2. What happens in a Citizens' Assembly?

Answer: There are three stages to a Citizens' Assembly: Learning - where the participants are given the space and time to look at an issue in depth; deliberation - where participants discuss the topic they have heard about in carefully facilitated conversation; and decision making - where the members come to conclusions or vote on a matter. Often this is carried out using a system of trade-offs and nuance of how the members arrived at

their conclusions are recorded.

3. Who would run a UK-wide Citizens' Assembly on Climate and Ecological Justice (CACEJ)?

Answer: It is important that a CACEJ is not run by either the Government, XR or any one invested body in order to ensure legitimacy. Instead, it would be carried out by an independent organisation or consortium of organisations who specialise in running deliberative democracy processes.

4. Who selects the experts?

Answer: An advisory body usually made up of reputable academics and practitioners in the field. They ensure information is balanced and not controlled by vested interests. During the process, the Assembly members can also decide to invite in other speakers to fill in any gaps or to broaden out a perspective that they feel is missing.

5. Who would oversee the advisory body? And how would they be selected?

Answer: The independent organisation running the Citizens' Assembly selects and oversees the advisory body. However there are also models where an 'oversight body' exists that checks up on and has an overview of all of the workings of the Assembly. If used for a Citizens' Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Justice, the make up of the oversight body could include randomly-selected members of the public.

6. How could a Citizens' Assembly logistically be implemented on a national scale?

Answer: There have already been several national Citizens' Assemblies, for example in France, Ireland, and the UK. This is a tried and tested approach that selects members from across the entire country, meaning that anyone could potentially be invited. All materials from the Assembly must be made public and available online, including live streaming of the evidence being given in person. There are all sorts of ways that conversations being held within the Assembly could be expanded out into the wider public, such as online forums or a network of peoples assemblies.

7. How would the funding be sourced?

Answer: Government i.e. taxation. To give an idea, the Irish CA covering five topics over one and a half years cost 1.5million euros. The current French Climate CA is costing approx 4 million euros. But to put this in perspective, the House of Lords costs 10s of millions of pounds every year.

8. Would you have to be a UK citizen to be eligible to be a CA participant?
Answer: The expectation is that all UK residents would be eligible. The limitation may be that the invitations are sent out via the postal system, and so if you have no fixed residence (such as those who are in a position of homelessness), then you will be discounted from the process. Some Citizens' Assemblies save places for individuals representing particular communities to ensure that they are included - perhaps this is a model that could be employed here.
9. How are participants selected and by whom?
Answer: There are several specialist organisations who have software for carrying out the random selection of potential participants and who conduct the invitation process. Thousands of these invitations are sent out as there is usually a 3-7% response rate. Those receiving the letter can then either register online or by freephone.
10. How could it be random selection, and representative at the same time?
Answer: Respondents to the invitation are made representative of the UK using 'stratified sampling'. This is where the pool of potential participants are divided into different demographic categories - such as age, region or gender for example. Within each of these categories (ie. within five age ranges) a further random selection takes place, to make sure that the end sample is random yet reflective of the population. Therefore in any stratified sampling that takes gender into account, you would expect there to be half women and half men (which of course is gender binary and this could be broadened out). By the end of all of this, the Assembly should look like a sort of 'mini UK'.
11. But won't a lot of people feel excluded from the process?
Answer: Some CAs receive and consider submissions from anyone in the wider population - in the form of comments, proposals or suggestions - for Assembly members to consider. There is also the option of opening out discussion as mentioned at the end of ques. 6. This would not involve broadening out the decision making however, but could be a way to get the public more involved in the discussions of the Assembly.
12. How and who will determine the mix of assembly members sat at each round table during the facilitated deliberations?

Answer: organisers and professional facilitators with experience of deliberative processes determine the mix of the groups to ensure diversity. Unless necessary to remain in these initial groups, the make up of participants around each table will change over the course of a CA to enable assembly members to discuss issues with as many of their fellow participants as possible.

13. Would the quota sampling include political party affiliation?

Answer: the organiser would advise, but it is expected to be included to ensure the public feel represented and that a diverse range of opinion is heard. During Climate Assembly UK, the organisers also included a scale of concern around the climate, again, to make sure that a full span of viewpoints were present. We imagine the same would be the case for a CACEJ.

14. Are there any examples of other Citizens Assemblies?

Answer: Yes! One of the most often quoted examples is the Citizens' Assembly that took place in Ireland to change the constitution on a number of issues including abortion - a contentious, moral-based issue that normal politics just wouldn't touch. Currently there is the Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat taking place in France and a CA on the climate planned in Scotland and potentially Wales. In fact there are many excellent examples to check out either in our XR Guide to Citizens' Assemblies or on our database of mini publics. [Examples of Deliberative Mini-publics](#). Another excellent resource is Participedia which maps out all of the deliberative processes taking place across the world.

Relationship of Citizens' Assemblies to the existing government and its scope

1. Would a CA replace the government? How exactly would a CA relate to our existing governmental structures?

Answer: No. The CA is established specifically to advise the government on what key actions should be to tackle the climate emergency, how to reach net zero and how to stop biodiversity loss. It should have a clear mandate and will come up with proposals for government action. What government obligation is in implementing and responding to these proposals will have been stipulated beforehand. In the Climate and

Ecological Emergency parliamentary bill, recommendations agreed upon by 80% of the CA and that the Government also agrees with should be implemented. Any of these recommendations that the Government does not agree to immediately implement would go directly to parliament for a debate and vote, therefore creating a system in which citizens, the government and parliament all work together.

A Citizens' Assembly upgrades our democracy. When given good information and time to learn and talk with other people, a randomly selected, cross section of society will find common ground and make good, informed decisions. The government then has real input as to the views and values of its citizens instead of relying on methods such as opinion polls. It also means that we all understand for ourselves the depth and breadth of the change required as well as the options we have available to do so. This in turn, makes lifestyle changes and the policy changes required more palatable to the electorate and therefore less of a political hot potato.

2. A CA's remit is defined by the 'question' put to it. Doesn't whoever sets the question therefore limit the Assembly's power to address climate and ecological justice?

Answer: Yes. We have seen with Climate Assembly UK that a Citizens' Assembly can be hamstrung by the question it is addressing - as this Assembly is framed around net zero by 2050, which is of course disastrously late. The question could also limit the scope of the Citizens' Assembly, for example within a CA on the climate emergency it is essential that key elements such as biodiversity loss and global and social justice are addressed. Citizens' Assemblies, however, can think for themselves - for example in the French CA they did not believe that they were given enough time so requested an extra session. So there is the potential that the Assembly members themselves question the nature of the question's framing.

3. The climate and ecological emergency is very complicated and I've heard that any solutions would require far-reaching changes to our economy, our society, our entire way of life. Is XR demanding just one CA?

Answer: The situation is very complex. The expectation is that the time available and the duration is proportionate to the question and that the assembly can decide if more time is necessary, which may well be the case. There is also the potential that several concurrent CAs on different

topics (ie. agriculture, transport) could be taking place at the same time and which come together at key stages in the proceedings.

Legitimacy: Quality control/standards of inclusion:

1. What would be the minimum age of CA participation considering that 16-year-old British Citizens resident in Scotland, can vote on internal affairs in local and Scottish parliamentary elections?

Answer: most CA's have used voting age, i.e. 18. Given that young people will be most impacted by this emergency, lowering the participation age to 16 is likely. As most UK adults have children and families, it is expected that the interests of young people and future generations will be fully considered.

2. Certain people might be more dominant than others due to cultural / educational background, levels of confidence and personality traits. How would this be addressed?

Answer: The Assembly process is designed and supported by professional facilitators trained in ensuring that all voices are equally heard and no one dominates the discussion. Experience and research has shown that participants contribute quite equally in what is a discussion and not a debate. It has also been shown that when people of diverse opinions meet face to face in these environments, they tend to temper extreme opinions and are willing to find common ground.

3. What measures would be in place to ensure that the Citizens' Assemblies remain free of bribery and corruption?

Answer. Government statement and public expectation that participants take this responsibility seriously, as it is for the benefit of all, including their family and friends. People undertake to be part of a citizens' assembly for a wide range of reasons, the vast majority come with an open mind to seek solutions for the common good. Each member has an equal voice, so the power of individual voices determining outcome is minimal. Materials and presentations will be public and indicate where particular views are coming from. Reasons for supporting decisions made will also be documented and will be open to the public. It is often the case that Assembly members' identities are not fully revealed during the course of the Assembly and that each participant can choose for themselves whether to remain anonymous or to be contactable afterwards.

4. 'What if those randomly selected citizens representative of those in society with physical disabilities are not able to attend the citizens' assemblies (e.g. due to the nature of their disability or those with carer responsibilities)? Would there be provision for them to participate remotely?

Answer. The accessibility requirements of assembly members will be anticipated and met including care responsibilities. Carers of assembly members will be welcomed and provided for. Also, each Assembly member receives travel costs and a stipend to help with caring costs or loss of earnings. Remote participation is unlikely as face to face interaction is critical to the process.

5. How would we ensure that the 'facilitators' of the round tables would be unbiased? What measures would be implemented to control for unconscious bias?

Answer: Facilitators do not participate in the discussions so opportunity to exercise bias is limited. Assembly members have sessions in critical thinking at the start of the process so should be better prepared to assess what they hear/experience.

'Playing devil's advocate - the cynic among us' questions:

1. What if the citizens' assemblies' decisions/conclusions are not as far reaching as XR's wants?

Answer: XR is not proposing specific solutions, but is demanding a UK-wide Citizens' Assembly free from interference from government, corporations or anyone else, including XR. People from all walks of life come together to investigate the issues, consider evidence from all sides, listen to each other, discuss and then make decisions on how to deal with the emergency. We have to trust our fellow citizens. If the process is open and fair, and members have time and support to learn, to consider the issues and options, they are expected to come to an informed judgement as to what they believe is in the best interest for us all.

2. Would people with very different jobs and life experiences really be able to share common ground in mutual respect of each other's views?

Answer: Yes. People come together in the interest of finding solutions for the common good. Research on deliberative processes have shown that people from all walks of life are able to find common understanding and mutual respect.