

PARTICIPATORY METHODS TOOLKIT
A practitioner's manual

Consensus Conference

Colophon

Participatory Methods Toolkit. A practitioner's manual
Method: Consensus Conference

This is an extract of the publication 'Participatory Methods Toolkit. A practitioner's manual', a joint publication of the King Baudouin Foundation and the Flemish Institute for Science and Technology Assessment (viWTA).

The full version of the manual includes:

- Introduction about participatory methods
- General guidelines and tips for participatory methods
- Complete description of 13 participatory methods: 21st Century Town Meeting® ; Charrette ; Citizens Jury ; Consensus Conference ; Deliberative Polling® ; Delphi ; Expert Panel ; Focus Group ; Participatory Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation ; Planning Cell ; Scenario Building Exercise ; Technology Festival ; The World Café
- Brief descriptions of 50 methods and techniques

All publications are available free of charge, online via www.kbs-frb.be or www.viWTA.be.

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CONSENSUS CONFERENCE

I. DEFINITION

A consensus conference is a public enquiry centred around a group of 10 to 30 citizens who are charged with the assessment of a socially controversial topic. These laypeople put their questions and concerns to a panel of experts, assess the experts' answers and then negotiate among themselves. The result is a consensus statement that is made public in the form of a written report directed at parliamentarians, policy makers and the general public that expresses their expectations, concerns and recommendations at the end of the conference. The goal is to broaden the debate on a given issue and include the viewpoints of non-experts in order to inform policy-making. In addition, the Danish model emphasises the goal of arriving at a consensus opinion, whereas others say that this is not necessary. Consensus conferences usually have a 3-day intensive programme that is open to the public.

Originally developed in the United States, the Danish Board of Technology (DBT) largely developed this method for use in technology assessment and deserves enormous credit for stimulating its use throughout Europe. While the DBT places considerable emphasis upon reaching a consensus, this differs to some extent among other national settings, such as the Flemish (viWTA) and Swiss technology assessment institutes.

II. WHEN TO USE

The objectives of a consensus conference include providing a vehicle for citizens to meaningfully influence policy decisions, conflict assessment, clarification of attitudes and assessing relevance of an issue to society. It has also been used for social experiments, research projects and as a means for promoting social awareness and public debate. The process generally gives the outcome a high level of credibility because laypeople define the agenda of the conference as well as conduct the assessment. Some effects of the method may include new regulations, generating new debate and understandings, consolidating politics, building bridges between interest groups and perspectives and removing fears.

It is necessary that the topic to be addressed can be defined and delimited.

This method is most useful for combining many forms of knowledge (e.g. local, traditional, technical). It is a useful method for obtaining informed opinions from laypersons. It can also allow for the inclusion of subjective knowledge in scientific, technological and other technical developments. More generally, it is a viable alternative to use when all or most of the following criteria are present:

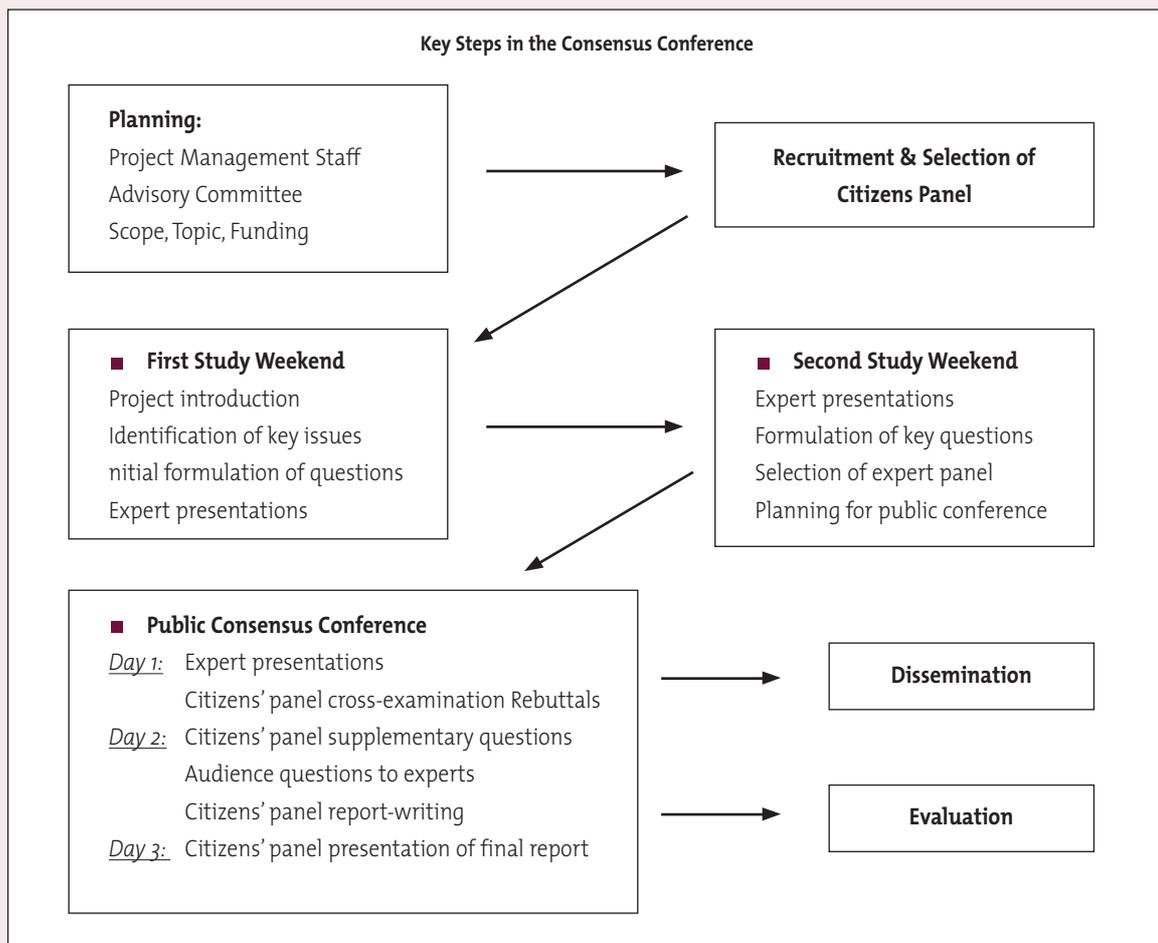
- Citizen input is required for policies under review or development.
- Issues are controversial, complex and/or technical.
- Many diverse groups and individuals have concerns.
- Ensuing decisions significantly and directly affect select groups or individuals.
- There is a need for increased public awareness and debate.
- There is citizen desire for a more formal involvement.

The process of communicating information about the conference topic provides a strong educational component.

III. PROCEDURE¹

A. Overview

The consensus conference begins with the selection of a panel of citizens drawn randomly from the general population. During two weekends prior to the public conference, this panel discovers the significant issues relevant to the topic of concern by drawing upon experts and documentation. From their own perspective, they then formulate a set of key questions. These are put to a panel of experts at a public consensus conference. After two days of expert presentation and citizen cross-examination, the citizens' panel composes a report based upon their comprehensive learning and expert response to their key questions. The report is presented on the final day of the conference and then disseminated to policy-makers, major stakeholders and other interested groups and individuals, constituting public input into public policy.



¹ Most of the given procedure is taken from Einsiedel, E. & Eastlick, D. (Unpublished paper).

B. Preparation

The main persons involved in the planning and execution of a consensus conference include the following:

- project management (director, assistant and clerical staff)
- advisory/steering committee ('planning group'): 5 – 6 persons
- citizens' panel (panel of laypeople): 12 – 15 persons
- expert panel: approximately 20 persons
- facilitator

The main responsibilities of each of these individuals or groups are detailed below.

(a) Project management

The tasks of the project management include:

- preparing the project
- managing the different partners
- taking care of the lay panel
- contacting experts
- balancing the budget
- taking care of the press
- assisting the lay panel in writing the recommendations
- documenting the conference.

(b) Advisory/Steering Committee

The advisory committee is composed of topic stakeholders that may include – but are not limited to – regulators, policy-makers, scientists, industry and non-governmental agencies. They should be selected for their knowledge of and expertise in topic-related fields and for the diversity of their viewpoints. This means that they speak for themselves as members of the steering committee and not for their organisations. The committee aids the project management in setting the aims, determining the conference scope, identifying potential experts (and funding sources, if applicable) and compiling the initial information package. The tasks of the advisory/steering committee include:

- ensuring that the project is objective
- monitoring the process
- discussing the content with the project manager
- ensuring that papers for the lay panel are relevant and neutral
- making a list of the best experts on the subject
- deciding – together with the panel – which experts to call upon
- giving approval of the conference programme.

(c) Citizens' Panel

The members of a citizens' panel are not intended to be representative of a given population, as this would be virtually impossible. Rather, the goal is to have as many different opinions as possible represented in the constitution of the panel, in order to permit an exchange of different perspectives. It is the task of the project manager to ensure that enough divergent opinions and perspectives are present to allow for such rich dialogue.

In addition to meeting any other qualifying criteria, all applicants are asked to be available for both study weekends and the consensus conference. Participants must volunteer their time. The project must pay for their travel, accommodation and all other expenses (child care, holidays, etc).

The tasks of the citizens' panel include:

- a profound understanding of the subject
- deciding the agenda and preparing questions for the conference
- questioning the experts during the conference
- writing recommendations related to the questions
- presenting and discussing recommendations.

(d) Facilitator(s)

One or two professional facilitators who are experienced in participatory and consensus-based processes should be recruited. The facilitator(s) must be non-directive and committed to the citizen-driven aspect of the process. They will be required to facilitate the two study weekends and the conference itself.

The tasks of the facilitator(s) include:

- steering all processes during the study weekends and conference
- managing the dialogue during the study weekends and conference
- chairing the conference
- assisting in writing the document.

(e) Reference Persons

The reference persons are 12 to 15 people with both traditional and non-traditional expertise in the topic at hand. They are only required to attend the consensus conference weekend. Both pro and con viewpoints should be represented in each of the issue areas, which may include social/ethical, science, policy, environment, health and safety and economics.

Compilation of the expert pool begins very early in the planning process and requires that the project management team anticipate the categories in which the citizens' panel may post questions. Potential reference persons in these categories are contacted, informed of the process and expectations and asked if they are both willing and available to participate if selected. Actual selection of the reference persons is done by the citizens' panel during the second study weekend after they have finalised their key questions.

While the citizens' panel will identify the types of reference persons it desires at the conference, it may not know the names of specific individuals. The citizens' panel may assign this task to the project management team. Although the reference person pool compiled by the project management team may contain dozens of names, it seldom satisfies all the requirements of the citizens' panel. Consequently, the team must locate, invite and inform suitable reference persons as soon as possible after the second study weekend, so that they can be confirmed early enough prior to the conference.

Once the reference persons are confirmed, they are sent the one or two questions related to their particular expertise. They are asked to prepare a short presentation in response to the question(s) provided. This is to be delivered at the consensus conference and will be followed by cross-examination.

TIP: Some additional reference persons may be required at the study weekends to aid the citizens' panel in their understanding of the issues. Their role during these weekends is determined by either the management team or the citizens' panel.

The experts may or may not be provided with honoraria, depending on the customs that apply in the society. This must be determined at the budgeting stage. Members' travel, food and accommodation expenses are customarily covered in any case.

C. The consensus Conference

1. PREPARATORY INFORMING OF THE CITIZENS' PANEL

Between the selection of the citizens' panel and the first study weekend, it is customary to provide the panellists with some preliminary information on the topic at hand. The nature and extent of this information is a decision to be made by the project management and advisory committee. Various components of the package may be requested from stakeholders, provided by the advisory committee or other experts. Information packages need not be limited to print. Between the first and second study weekends and between the second study weekend and the conference, the citizens' panel may itself request specific kinds of information or expertise be provided – or may gather and share information amongst the panellists themselves.

TIP: In the interests of informed choice, a concerted effort should be made to present all sides of the issues with the information package and all subsequent information. However, it should not be expected that every panellist will have the time or interest to read/view/listen to the entire package.

2. FIRST WEEKEND

Five objectives:

- Competency development
 - provide basic information
 - introduce the context and method
 - interacting with reference persons, the public and the media
- Team-building
- Identify areas of interest or concern
- Begin formulation of questions
- Set agenda for second study weekend

The first study weekend represents the beginning of a steep learning curve for the members of the citizens' panel, who will become better informed on the topic over the coming months. This is also the beginning of relationship-building between the project management team, the facilitator and the panellists. One of the objectives of the process is to have the panellists take a progressively more active role in the decision-making. Thus, while the study weekend begins with an agenda planned by the project management team, it should be flexible and adaptable to the readiness of the panellists to assume control. One of the roles of the facilitator is to guide this gradual shift of control over the process. It is imperative to give the group enough space to develop their own thoughts and attitudes, without external disturbance.

TIP: All tasks required of the panelists will be made easier if the project management team makes every effort to provide for all their needs. This includes but is not limited to pleasant accommodation, good food, scheduled breaks and opportunities for social interaction away from the learning or conference venues.

The tasks of the participants for the first study weekend are as follows:

Project management:

- Provide an overview of the topic context and the expectations and stages of the process.
- Provide a broad information base upon which the panellists can begin to formulate their key questions.

Facilitator(s):

- Guide the citizens' panel in reaching decisions by consensus.
- Aid the citizens' panel in the assumption of control of both the direction and the process.
- Team-building.

Citizens' panel:

- Become familiar with the full range of issues relevant to the topic.
- Identify the areas of greatest concern or interest to them.
- In each of those areas, formulate a set of questions to which they seek answers.
- Set an agenda for the second study weekend.

Consideration: If the project management team wishes to tape the proceedings, it is necessary to obtain the permission of the citizens' panel in advance of this weekend. Some conferences are taped for the purposes of the organisers, others are taped by local or national news media for promotion or documentary purposes.

TIP: Due to time and/or complexity issues, it is entirely possible that all the tasks set for this weekend will not be accomplished. Some conferences have solved this by having the panellists continue to work on the formulation and categorisation in the month between the two study weekends. This is made easier if all are electronically connected. Others encourage strict enforcement of the agenda.

TIP: Some conference management teams have started the first study weekend with an in-depth exploration of core values and assumptions held by the citizens' panel. The rationale is that by having these on the table, panellists would have a better understanding of why certain positions are held by others. A listing of these values may also be used to help direct the identification of areas of interest, the formulation of key questions, and the placing of emphasis in the final report. However, such an exercise may be met with a degree of resistance, as some panellists have noted that, at such an early stage in the process, they were not yet comfortable enough with their fellow panellists to reveal their most personal beliefs.

3. SECOND WEEKEND

Five objectives:

- Further develop competence for the final public weekend.
- Shift control of the process decisions and facilitation to the citizens' panel.
- Formulate a set of key questions.
- Identify types of experts required for the conference.
- Plan the conference.

The agenda for this weekend should have been planned by the citizens' panel during the first study weekend and will thus follow from whatever they set out. As much as possible or to the degree with which they are comfortable the panellists should control both the facilitation of the process and any decisions made. The management team and facilitator support this shift of control by assuming whatever roles the citizens' panel assigns them. This increases both the panellists' responsibility for, and ownership of, the process and its outcomes.

The tasks of the participants for the second study weekend are as follows.

Project management:

- Organise the second study weekend in accordance with the citizens' panel's wishes.
- Prepare a list of experts available for the consensus conference.

Facilitator(s):

- Support the citizens' panel in assuming control of process and outcomes.

Citizens' panel:

- Refine questions to one or two overarching in each issue area.
- Select experts to address questions at the consensus conference.
- Plan the consensus conference.

4. THIRD PUBLIC WEEKEND

The consensus conference is a three-day public event in which a citizen-driven discussion takes place between citizens and experts. By this point, the members of the citizens' panel are well-informed on the topic at hand. At the conference they have two roles: as citizens representative of the general public and as well-informed citizens in discussion with reference persons. They must keep both of these roles in mind in their interactions with other conference participants so that the proceedings may be as meaningful to attendees as to the two panels.

The tasks of the various participants during the conference are as follows.

Project management:

- Conduct registration and trouble-shooting.
- Coordinate media access to citizen and expert panellists.

Facilitator:

- Assist the citizens' panel with the conference proceedings and the writing of the final report.

Moderator:

- Facilitate the timing and flow of the conference.

Expert panel:

- Make presentations based on key questions.
- Respond to cross-examination by the citizens' panel.
- Respond to questions from the audience.
- Be available for media interviews.

Citizens' panel:

- Cross-examine the expert panel.
- Write and present the final report.
- Be available for media interviews.

(1) Conference Day One

Key features:

- expert presentations
- cross-examination of experts by citizens' panel
- expert rebuttal.

The first day is devoted to expert presentations, followed by cross-examination by the citizens' panel. The citizens' panel will have determined the format during the second study weekend. The audience plays only a passive role on this day, observing the proceedings. At least one person from the project management team should focus on the needs and requests of the two panels, while another is responsible for trouble-shooting. This is the longest of the days, with six to eight hours of presentations and cross-examination not uncommon.

At the conclusion of the day, the citizens' panel meets to review the day's proceedings and to determine which of its questions and concerns are still outstanding. Members formulate a set of supplementary questions that are put to the expert panel on the next day.

TIP: It is helpful to have one member of the project management team solely responsible for media relations and coordinating media interviews with both panels. The project director should also be available for media interviews. Some of these duties, as well as the registration, may be delegated to volunteers.

(2) Conference Day Two

Key features:

- supplementary questioning of the expert panel by the citizens' panel
- audience questioning of the expert panel
- citizens' panel writes final report.

The citizens' panel first poses its supplementary questions to the expert panel and the panel responds. When the citizens' panel has concluded its questioning, the forum may be opened to audience questions to the expert panel. Such audience participation is not a feature of all conferences!

At the conclusion of the formal proceedings, the citizens' panel retires to write its report behind closed doors, supported by the facilitator and a scribe. The report is structured around the key questions and incorporates all that the panellists have learned and heard throughout the study weekends and the conference itself. Traditionally, the report is written between the second and third day of the conference and is presented on the final day. The facilitator's role here is most sensitive. (S)he must motivate and encourage without appearing excessively directive.

TIP: The report writing is a very intense and time-constrained process that is mentally and emotionally draining for the citizens' panel members and the facilitator. It is not uncommon to have it concluded in the early morning hours. It is thus important that their every need and comfort is anticipated or promptly addressed. Alternatively, some people/cultures may prefer to enforce a strict time limit in order to avoid working throughout the night.

(3) Conference Day Three

Key feature:

- Citizens' panel presents their report and fields questions from the expert panel and audience.

Prior to the day's proceedings, the project management team makes copies of the report for the expert panel and audience members. The consensus conference is concluded with the presentation by the citizens' panel of their report. The expert panel, followed by the audience, are allowed to ask the citizens' panel questions of clarification. The expert panel may only make changes of factual error, as the report represents the perspective and conclusions of citizens. Afterwards, the report is finalised, printed and disseminated.

IV. RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS (TIME, BUDGET)

A. Schedule

From start to finish, this process requires, on average, twelve months. However, this can be condensed to a more intensive process of approximately seven months. Two different schedules are presented below. The first is a more general 12-month overview. The second is a detailed checklist that begins 24 weeks prior to the actual consensus conference event. Both timetables are presented as a countdown up to the beginning of the consensus conference. Then the schedule of the conference and post-conference events are presented in normal chronological order.

12 – MONTH GENERAL TIMELINE:

One Year Prior to the Consensus Conference:

The first step is to recruit the advisory/steering committee. Once selected, this committee and the organisers set the context for the conference (see contextual considerations above). Concurrently and continuing for several months is the identification and contact of potential funding sources (if applicable).

Four to Six Months Prior:

Recruit and select the citizens' panel. Organisers should begin to build a pool of potential expert panellists, as well as recruit a facilitator(s) and conference moderator. With the help of the advisory committee, a set of informative readings, tapes or videos can begin to be assembled for the citizens' panel. Design the conference promotion materials.

Three Months Prior:

Prepare an information package and send this to the members of the citizens' panel prior to the first study weekend.

Two Months Prior:

The first study weekend is held. This is the first meeting of the citizens' panel. The purpose of this first weekend is to introduce the topic, identify key issues and questions, begin to identify the type of experts desired at the conference and to plan the second study weekend. Expert recruitment continues.

One Month Prior:

The second study weekend is held. This is the final study weekend of the citizens' panel. Tasks include further education on the topic, finalisation of key questions and sub-questions, finalising the selection of experts for the conference and planning the conference agenda. Conduct conference promotion and registration.

The Consensus Conference Weekend:

This public event normally covers three days and does not necessarily have to take place over a weekend. Day One is normally filled with expert presentations and cross-examination by the citizens' panel. On Day Two, there is supplementary questioning of the expert panel by the citizens' panel as well as the audience. When the questioning closes, the citizens' panel retires to write its report privately. The citizens' panel presents its report to the experts and audience on the morning of Day Three. The experts may correct errors of fact only, before they and the audience are given the opportunity to question the citizens' panel.

One Month Post:

The final report of the citizens' panel is corrected for grammar, printed and disseminated to policy-makers, industry, non-governmental organisations and other interested groups and individuals. It represents public input into public policy. The citizens' panel debriefing may also occur one to two months after the conference.

One To Twelve Months Post:

The evaluation is conducted.

6 – 7 MONTH DETAILED TIMELINE AND CHECKLIST:

The following timeline requires approximately 24 weeks of pre-conference planning and preparation, followed by the conference and dissemination of the final report.

Week 24

- Recruit the project manager, project assistant, and project secretary.
- Form the project team.
- Set conference dates and book locations.
- Assemble the planning group. (This group usually consists of 5-6 experts and stakeholders of the topics in question.)

- Make reservations for the necessary technical equipment.
- Contact a reporter to make preparations for the introduction material given to the lay panel.
- Request (from the appropriate authority) the names and addresses of 2,000 citizens, randomly selected from the database.
- Prepare a budget (or specify the project budget).

Week 23

- Reserve accommodation for the two weekend courses for the lay panel.
- Reserve accommodation for the actual conference.
- Produce guidelines for the introduction material.
- Begin to prepare a preliminary list of experts and possible speakers for the conference and elaborate this during the following two weeks.
- Recruit a facilitator and introduce him/her to the project.
- Send a letter to the 2,000 randomly selected citizens, inviting them to be a member of the lay panel and asking them to fill out an application with information relevant to the final selection of the lay panel. Request that the citizens return it (in provided stamped envelope) if (s)he would like to participate. Set a deadline of two weeks for their reply.

Week 22

- Generate a meeting schedule with the planning group and arrange first meeting.
- Create a website for the project.

Week 21

- Inform politicians about the project.
- Inform other interested parties.

Week 20

- Deadline for applications from citizens to be members of the lay panel.
- Hold first meeting with planning group: Tasks include:
 - discuss guidelines for the introduction material
 - establish criteria for selecting the lay panel
 - propose potential experts/speakers for the conference.

Week 19

- Send proposal for the composition of the lay panel to the planning group for approval.
- Send letter to the selected lay panel members. Attach a 'confirmation form' and request that the citizens sign and return it (in provided stamped envelope).

Week 18

- Plan the process of the project with the facilitator.

Week 17

- Send appropriate letters to the applicants who replied but were not selected for the lay panel.
- Recruit a speaker for the first weekend course.
- Begin generating a list of people that should be invited to the conference and elaborate this in the weeks to come.
- Send a first draft of the introduction material to the planning group.

Week 16

- Send a letter to the lay panel with instructions about the first weekend course, the project and any additional information they require.
- Hold the second meeting with the planning group: introduction material should be discussed and corrections noted by the journalist. Elaborate on the list of possible experts/speakers.
- Send a letter of notice to the listed experts, telling them that they might receive an invitation to speak at the conference. Ask them to reply (using the enclosed stamped envelope) as to whether or not they would be available.

Week 15

- Finalise editing of the introduction material.

Week 14

- Arrange table plan and other details for the conference. Decide how the two panels, chairman and audience will be seated.

Week 13

- Print introduction material and send it to lay panel.
- Print the programme for the first weekend course and send it to lay panel.

Week 12

- Book restaurants for the conference. (The experts and lay panel are usually invited to dinner.)

Week 11

- Finalise practical preparations for the first weekend course.
- Hold the first weekend course. Tasks include:
 - introduction
 - brainstorming and debate of questions and problems
 - delimitation of 6 – 8 themes that can structure the questions
 - identify additional information required by lay panel.

Week 10

- Follow up and research factual questions that could not be answered during the weekend.

Week 9

- Send additional information material to the lay panel.

Week 8

- Send programme for second weekend course to lay panel.
- Make practical preparations for second weekend course.

Week 7

- Hold second weekend course. Tasks:
 - specify and delimit questions
 - distribute questions among the 6 – 8 themes.

Week 6

- Draft a preliminary programme for the conference.

Week 5

- Hold third meeting with the planning group: make final decisions regarding which experts can answer which questions at the conference.
- Contact the experts: Ask them to speak at the conference and to deliver a written paper two weeks in advance for distribution to the panel. For those who confirm, tell them they will be sent a letter in the following week with more information.
- Send out invitations to the conference.
- Book accommodation for out-of-town experts.

Week 4

- Make practical preparations for the conference.
- Send a letter to experts/speakers with practical information about the conference, as well as a precise briefing on the question(s) from the lay panel that they are asked to answer.
- Send detailed programmes for the conference to the lay panel.
- Send letters to experts who were contacted earlier but will not be asked to speak at the conference.

Week 3

- Finalise practical preparations for the conference.

Week 2

- Deadline for conference papers from experts/speakers.
- Deadline for registration (audience at the conference).
- Edit conference papers and print them.
- Print final programme and other information.
- Send the above materials to lay panel, experts and other interested parties. Make extra copies to have available at the conference.

Week 1

- Send confirmations to the audience.
- Contact the press.
- Finalise practical preparations. Consider making the following available:
 - newsprint paper
 - several large tablets for recording ideas
 - * Note: it is better to use paper rather than chalk or white boards. The individual sheets can be used for archival purposes and are easier to transport.
 - tape or tacks to attach paper to walls
 - several broad-tipped, bold colour markers
 - copy machine (with transparency capabilities)
 - computer/word processor
 - slide projector and screen
 - (overhead) projector
 - camera that produces instant photos (digital or film)
 - pens and/or pencils

B. The Conference

One Day before the public conference

- Lay panel arrives, sees the conference facilities and has dinner together.

Day 1 of the public conference

- Experts give their presentations, answering the questions made by the lay panel on the weekend courses. In the afternoon, time is allotted for experts to elaborate and clarify any questions of the panel.

Day 2 of the public conference

- The lay panel questions and debates with the expert panel. After the citizen panellists' questions have been answered, the forum may be opened to the public audience.

Traditionally, the next tasks have been conducted during the evening and throughout the night. Alternatively, one can add another day to the process.

- The panel discusses to decide its recommendations and prepares the report.
- The document is printed for distribution and uploaded on the website.
- A press release containing the principal recommendations of the lay panel is prepared and sent to the press.

Day 3 or 4 (depending upon whether a day is added for debate and the writing of the report)

- The lay panel presents the final document (reads it out loud) to the expert panel, politicians, the press and the rest of the audience. Comments are made and factual errors corrected.

- Conduct project evaluation.
- Lunch and goodbyes.

After the conference

- The final document of the lay panel is set out in a report together with the written contributions of the experts.
- Principal conclusions of the lay panel are communicated to members of the Parliament in a newsletter (and to any other relevant persons).
- Summarise project evaluations and post them on the website.

C. Budget

The process is elaborate and requires significant resources. Costs will vary depending on the conference scope (i.e. regional versus national), selection method, transportation and accommodation and the type and amount of advertising. The following items listed are the main budgetary items in a consensus conference:

- Personnel
 - project manager
 - communications manager/assistant
 - facilitator(s)
 - clerical staff
 - moderator
- Travel
- Accommodation
- Food
 - study weekends
 - consensus conference: panels and audience
 - media reception after consensus conference
- Recruitment and Promotion
 - mailings to recruit citizens' panel
 - conference promotion and advertising
- Communications
 - printing of conference papers
 - printing of draft and final reports
- Facilities
 - study weekends
 - consensus conference
- Materials and Supplies
(See list provided.)

V. ADDITIONAL BEST PRACTICES AND POTENTIAL PITFALLS

While the citizens' panel must be constituted by persons with divergent opinions and perspectives, the members should also be open-minded enough to engage in thoughtful discussion with others. This entails a willingness to listen and attempt to understand the viewpoints of others, as well as to explore and explain one's own assumptions and rationales. Simply reiterating a rigid stance will not facilitate fruitful exchanges.

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