

Choosing and wording the question

An issue IS appropriate for a Citizens' Assembly IF:

- Broad concern exists within a community
- Choices must be made, but there are no clear "right" answers
- A range of people and groups must act in order for the community to effectively move forward
- Additional perspectives and ideas may help the community to move forward
- Citizens have not had the opportunity to consider different courses of action and their long-term consequences
- The decision-making of officeholders and other leaders needs to be informed by public judgment, as well as experts' views

An issue is NOT appropriate for a Citizens' Assembly IF it:

- It is solely technical and requires a technical solution
- Needs only a "yes" or "no" answer
- Has a specific solution that has already been decided, and the public's role would only be a "rubber stamp"
- Requires an immediate response
- Is relevant only to a narrow interest group
- Is one for which your group has a particular approach to advocate

Do's for defining the remit of the Assembly

- Start with a question, not merely a subject description
- Ensure that it is a neat fit for what the decision maker will ultimately decide
- Aim for brevity and clarity
- Make it not neither too broad nor too narrow
- Do not lead the participants toward a pre-determined answer or even give the unintended perception impression that you are
- Sometimes it will be useful to precede or follow a question with an explanatory statement
- Embed the trade-offs in either the question or supporting statement
- Test your remit with someone outside the organising group – check that it makes sense to an everyday citizen
- Share the problem/dilemma; don't sell a solution

Don't's for defining the remit of the Assembly

- Don't frame a question that can be answered with either 'yes' or 'no'
- Avoid compound questions (two questions in one). Keep each question separate
- Avoid words like 'should' or have a good reason for using them

Sources:

OECD (2021), "Catching the Deliberative Wave: Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions"; Pratt, Julie (2005), "A Guidebook for Issue Framing", Kettering Foundation; Carson, Lyn (2018), "Framing the Remit", newDemocracy Research and Development Note.

How to cite this document:

DemocracyNext (2023), "Choosing and wording the question", Assembling an Assembly Guide, <https://assemblyguide.demnext.org/>.