What is a deliberative meeting?

A deliberative meeting is a particular way of bringing people in a community together so they can exchange information with their government or other decision-making body.

These meetings may also be part of a larger engagement process that is designed to learn from many different people in a community.

This poster highlights what you can expect when you participate in one of these deliberative meetings.

What happens when people deliberate?

In a deliberative meeting participants are not simply asked to provide an opinion – they are given opportunity to reason together.

To do this, you would be given time to reflect on information and think critically about it. You would then be asked to discuss your thoughts on this information and engage with some different ideas.

This would involve: explaining your opinions; respectfully listening to people with different perspectives; and asking questions that arise for you.

Research shows also that using deliberative meetings to obtain a community’s views on issues and policies that affect their lives, leads to better-informed and more legitimate decisions.

Deliberative meetings are being used around the world to make many important decisions - including policy development - though the use of these methods of engagement in health policy is still quite new.

Why deliberate?

Many people believe deliberative meetings offer a more democratic and meaningful way for members of the community to exchange information with their governments.

This is because deliberative meetings capture diverse perspectives in a community to influence policy in a dynamic, open and transparent way.

‘I found it a very encouraging sort of thing from a government department – one of the most encouraging I’ve ever struck’
(Past participant’s comment)

‘Everybody’s opinion is valued... You felt understood’

‘It wasn’t just tokenism... you were being valued’
(Past participants’ comments)

‘I feel very proud of the fact that some of my input was actually considered worthy of putting it into the final report... I was proud to be part of it’.

‘It opened my eyes a little bit to think about what...other experiences people out there have... just to realise that there’s other views out there that may be quite different from mine and just to be a bit more mindful of that’
(Past participants’ comments)

There are different types of deliberative meetings. Some focus on participants achieving a consensus, while others aim to reach a common understanding amongst participants - not necessarily, agreement - about the topics they have been deliberating on.

‘You could relate to what they had to say’
(Past participant’s comment)

‘I felt welcome, I felt as though I was included in everything that was going on’
(Past participant’s comment)

Often a large number of people will come together for these types of meetings. These people would be seated at tables in small group numbers to deliberate – possibly 6–10 people per table group.

And, typically, trained table-facilitators work with each table group. This helps to ensure that each participant has the opportunity to effectively deliberate and feel comfortable to contribute.

‘Your opinion is valued because (a) you’re allowed to voice it; and (b) other people listen to it...You have respect and you value the other person’s opinion’

‘Without exposure to that how do you empathise and understand other people’s lives...without exposure to other things, well what else do you judge your opinions on?’

‘This has actually changed me a little bit...yeah, it’s changed my outlook on a few things’
(Past participants’ comments)