



Citizens' jury

Citizens' juries are relatively new in the UK. They were first tried here in 1996 after meeting some success in the US and Germany. They involve a group of 12 to 25 representatives from the community, who volunteer to spend several days considering a subject in depth, discussing and researching the matters at hand. Juries are organised by independent organisations and only report back at the end to the concerned parties. Jurors hear evidence from witnesses who might be experts or members of pressure groups and receive written evidence. They scrutinise the evidence and debate the questions and deliberate their decisions in the groups. The commissioning organisation is expected to publicise the jury and its report as part of the process of public involvement. Forest or woodland managers might commission a Citizens' jury to contemplate a resolution to a particular, often controversial dispute, then consider its findings when deciding on a policy. A Citizens' jury does not replace other forms of consultation or participation, but may provide a new perspective that adds openness and fairness to governmental activities. Citizens' juries are non-binding with no legal status. Therefore a link with normal decision-making processes needs to be made.

Resources and requirements

Skills

- Independent organisations can be used to supervise a jury.
- Forest managers need to be able to recognise when an option may be desirable.
- Running a jury requires one or two skilled moderators with considerable understanding of group dynamics.
- Good written communication skills are needed to produce a report.

Equipment

- Meeting facilities and an ability to gather evidence and produce a report is required.

Time

- Several weeks are required to organise the jury, usually four days to carry out the process and a short time to prepare a report.
- Managers who commission the jury will need time to prepare and present information to the proceedings.

Cost

- Normally budget of about £17,000–20,000 (New Economics Foundation, 1998).

Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING: ★★

INVOLVING: ★★★

PARTNERSHIP: ★

Strengths

- A jury provides an avenue for the public to identify with findings and support a recommendation.
- New perspectives brought by people who are outside a dispute may highlight new solutions.
- A jury can help to build consensus and share information.

Weaknesses

- Juries require considerable resources and time to set up and conduct.
- They may not produce a group consensus if the issue is extremely controversial.
- The jury/report does not normally generate widespread participation.

Useful sources of information

Books

- Making better decisions: report of an IPPR symposium on citizens' juries and other methods of public involvement. C. Delap (1998). Institute for Public Policy Research, London.
- Participation works! 21 techniques of community participation for the 21st century. New Economics Foundation (1998). CD-Rom edition 1999. Available from: www.neweconomics.org
- Techniques for talking: participatory techniques for land use planning – a review. M. Toogood (2000). Report Commissioned by RSPB.

Training

- The Prince's Foundation: tel. 020 7613 8500 or www.princes-foundation.org

Case study

- The Fife Council ran one successful example in March 1997: Creating job opportunities in a deprived area.

This toolbox is designed to assist Forestry Commission staff when they are considering which tools they could use to involve the public in the forest and woodland planning process. For more information please visit the website at: www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox