

How we select members of a citizens' jury

Citizens Juries CIC recruits the participants in the citizens' juries it designs and runs. This is a crucial part of organising a citizens' jury, and for this reason we do not sub-contract recruitment to a third party organisation. We explain here how we do it.

Advertising

We advertise for applicants in more than one place. For example, we get a lot of applicants by advertising on a jobs website, but if that was our only source we would get few people applying in full-time employment. So we use at least one other media outlet to advertise (e.g. newspapers, email, radio etc.). We also reduce self-selection bias - the tendency that the people who come forward are not broadly representative of the wider population – by making clear in our advertising that we pay participants. If we did not pay participants, we would not attract people who could not afford, or would not wish, to take a few days out from their lives to take part in a jury.

Designing the application form

The advertisements point applicants towards an on-line survey form where they complete basic details about themselves, including name, address, gender, age range, ethnic group, educational attainment, and employment status. Applicants provide a few other relevant details, including where they heard about the opportunity. We use many of these data items to select a cross-section of the public (see below). We may advertise a phone number to applicants who cannot access the internet and then complete the application for them over the phone (as done in Forest of Dean).

We also sometimes include a “filter question”. For example, on a jury we ran on sharing health records, we asked applicants to answer a question about how willing they would be to share their health records for medical research. We know how a representative sample of the public answered the question from a large public attitudes survey of 1524 adults by the Wellcome Trust, and we used the filter question to get a close match between the answers given by members of our jury, and the answers given in the public survey. This meant we could be confident that, in a small group of 18 jurors, there was a broadly representative balance of people in favour of information sharing and those unwilling to share health records. Without that, in a small sample of 18 jurors, we might recruit a skewed mix e.g. with almost everyone supportive of information sharing.

Shortlisting applicants

After the application closing date, we download a spreadsheet of the online application forms. We select the shortlisted applicants from that spreadsheet. There is some debate amongst academics and people who run citizens' juries on how to reach a shortlist. Some organisations include some randomness to their method of



selection. For example, they might pick every fifth applicant in their spreadsheet, or they might recruit by stopping every second person who passes them in the street and asking them to take part. Although the principle is good, without the power to force a person to take part in a jury (as in a criminal jury), no method can be truly random. There is always self-selection in who applies, who says “yes”, or which street is picked for recruitment. And the disadvantage of these methods is that they do not lead to a jury that is “broadly representative” - note that such a small group cannot be statistically representative - of the public in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and education. For these reasons, Citizens’ Juries CIC shortlists by choosing applicants from the spreadsheet to reach a broadly representative sample.

In a sense, the shortlist picks itself. We begin by removing applications which are incomplete or clearly do not meet the eligibility criteria (e.g. the postcode is outside the designated district). We then exclude identifiers like name, address and other irrelevant identifiers.

We identify the variable which is most important to control. In some cases, this might be the filter question (see above). In the case of the Forest of Dean jury to choose the location of a new community hospital, the most important variable to control is the postcode of the applicant. We want a geographical spread across the Forest of Dean District, with slightly higher representation from more densely populated areas. So for the Forest of Dean we begin by sorting the applicant spreadsheet by postcode. Then we shortlist perhaps half of these people so as get a good spread of postcodes across the Forest, especially areas from which there are few applicants. If we see that after shortlisting 9 people in this way, we have for example a lot of graduates, and few people with 0-4 “O” Levels/GCSEs, we might then sort the spreadsheet by educational attainment and postcode and pick a few people to balance out educational attainment. We might then need to balance a different variable, like age group. This continues until we get a broadly representative sample. There is quite a bit of trial and error. People are picked solely to get the best mix we can achieve.

Selecting participants and reserves

Having selected a shortlist, we then contact applicants by email to arrange a phone call (with either Amanda Stevens or Chris Barnes of Citizens Juries CIC). The main purpose of the phone call is to check:

- the information the applicant provided,
- they understand what a citizens’ jury involves,
- they are capable and committed to take part, and
- they meet the eligibility criteria which were set out on the online application form.



After the call, there is a brief discussion within Citizens Juries CIC about whether the person should be included. People may not be selected because we judge that they do not meet the eligibility criteria, or we are unsure they will attend every day of the jury. We do not choose or exclude people because we agree or disagree with their views, or we think the people who commissioned the jury would agree or disagree with their views.

We then let people know whether they have been selected. We will shortlist a new applicant from the spreadsheet if we do not offer the original applicant a place on the jury.

We also select a few (usually three) reserve jurors. They are invited and paid to take part in the jury for the first half day in case a selected applicant does not attend, or leaves early. The reserve chosen will be the one who best maintains the broadly representative mix on the jury.

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