

## NIOGN Factsheet - Civic Participation

*Open government requires openness to citizen participation and engagement in policy making and governance. The benefits of engagement include: better policy outcomes, better service delivery & more engaged and empowered citizens, as well as greater trust and better understanding of government.*

### Democracy

*Political scientists usually split forms of democracy into representative and direct democracy. In representative democracy, citizens vote for elected officials who will represent them because of lack of time, knowledge or will to contribute to policymaking. In direct democracy, the contribution of citizens becomes stronger. In its extreme form, elected officials are not even needed anymore as citizens make the decisions.*

### Participatory Democracy

*Participatory democracy is "decision making about public problems where citizens get involved".*

*Decision making in participatory democracy can be broadly divided into the following stages:*

- *Problem identification: identifying problems to be solved and/or choosing which problem/s to focus on*
- *Ideation and co-creation: generating solutions for the problem*
- *Drafting proposals based on the solutions suggested*
- *Voting for and against proposals*
- *Checking that the solution has been properly deployed and actually solves the problem identified*

*When it comes to participatory democracy, political scientists like to distinguish between deliberative democracy and collaborative democracy. Deliberative democracy puts the emphasis on citizens discussing views and opinions about what the state should and should not do. Focus is on the input, opinion formation, self-expression and talk. Collaborative democracy puts the emphasis on citizens working together. The focus is on developing a solution leading to action.*

### Tools for participatory democracy

*From a technology and technical point of view, the frontiers between these various forms of democracy is pretty fuzzy. But there are various methods, techniques and tools that foster participatory democracy and citizen engagement.*

### Engagement methods, formats & techniques

- *Advisory/Focus Groups: small ongoing reference groups of experts & stakeholders that engage in focused discussion on a specific topic*
- *Citizen Panels: juries that can be convened to hear evidence deliberate & make recommendations. Representative, deliberative & able to hear a wide range of voices*
- *Crowdsourcing: collectively gathering, evaluating and/or ranking ideas online. Draws out original ideas & allows the public to evaluate & prioritise*
- *Hackdays: Co-creative gatherings where people from a range of backgrounds actively prototype solutions. Creative & energizing spaces where innovative ideas will emerge*
- *Scenario Planning: Intensive multi-day workshops that bring together a range of views & backgrounds with the aim of developing future scenarios. Can help to create shared vision, so well suited to conflict situations*

- *Participatory Budgeting: Communities coming together to allocate budgets for services. Promotes informed decision making, community cohesion & collaboration*
- *Virtual or Physical Hubs: A cross-organizational space for ideation, innovation & experimentation. A space to think, experiment, prototype, fail & refine; design, explore & build. Where ideas can be floated, hacked & tried out. Good for rapid prototyping & co-creation using lateral techniques. Virtual think tanks drawing in the 'best' to solve the problems at hand*
- *Open Policy Making: Test & demonstrate projects across different policy areas, to show citizens & officials how open policy making can be integrated into the everyday business of government; and to show how different open approaches can be used to improve policy. Approaches could include: sharing the context & evidence on which policy development is based; engaging a broad range of experts in the development of policy; and using new platforms to break open traditional consultation approaches to enable citizens to comment and track how policy is developing*
- *Digital Engagement: New digital public commons managed by communities & governments as partnership models for information, engagement & discussion. The internet is an ideal support tool for citizen engagement because of its viral, connected & rapid nature*
- *Open Data Repositories. Citizens, government and third party agents can create 'mash-ups' and dynamic digital resources for communities to become active citizens, linking these directly to government processes*

## Engagement Tools

*Loomio is an open source tool that makes it easy for groups to make decisions together. Rather than a majority rules vote, Loomio combines deliberation with a flexible consensus-building process. Groups can discuss a topic, build agreement around a proposal, and arrive at a clear agreed outcome that can be put into action. With the tool, citizens start a discussion on a given topic, invite people and start the conversation. As the conversation progresses, anyone can put a proposal to vote. The proposal gets discussed. People can vote and change their vote. If a proposal reaches a majority, a decision has been reached. Otherwise, another proposal can be issued, discussed and put to vote.*


*DemocracyOS brings collaborative decision making and easy governance to communities and organisations of all sizes. With the tool, citizens can build proposals, from scratch or by branching from others and decision-makers build two way-conversations with their constituencies. Debates take place with the platform rewarding the best arguments, filtering the noise and keeping the trolls at bay. Then people can vote for or against the proposal.*

*Your Priorities is a service that enables citizens to voice, debate and prioritise ideas. With the tool, people submit ideas and debate them. The best ideas rise to the top.*

*Democracy 2.1 is a new voting system. The tool offers voters the additional option of casting up to four equally weighted "plus votes" and two "minus votes".*

*Google Moderator is a Google service that uses crowdsourcing to rank user-submitted questions, suggestions and ideas. The tool manages feedback from a large number of people, who can submit a question or vote up or down for the top questions.*

*OpaVote is a service for online elections and polls. The tool lets you create elections where voters select a single candidate, a ranked-choice voting election, approval voting, or any combination of methods.*





*DeLib Dialogue App* is a service to produce ideas that are valuable and actionable through structured online discussion. With the tool, participants suggest ideas, refine them via comments and discussions and rate them to bring the best ideas to the top.

Further guidance and information around civic activism is provided by the Building Change Trust Civic Activism Toolkit: <http://civicactivism.buildingchangetrust.org/>

**Challenges related to civic participation in Northern Ireland**

- *To create more opportunities for civic society and individual citizens to shape decisions that impact on their community and on their lives*
- *To promote and implement a range of innovative forms of engagement, collaboration & co-creation*

