



Building the evidence base on the value of public deliberation

Request for proposals

January 2020

The Nuffield Foundation invites applications to review the evidence on the value of public deliberation for both public policy decision-making and social science research, and, based on that evidence review, develop practical guidance on its effective uses.

The project is intended to help build the evidence base as to the value of public deliberation, and then use that evidence to inform the deployment of public deliberation in practice. Please see the Appendix for a description of the types of methods and approaches that we consider fall within the term 'public deliberation'. We are excluding from the remit of this project types of research conducted with the public such as focus groups, surveys, ethnographies or digital/online public engagement processes such as crowdsourcing and online panels.

We expect this work to be strongly grounded in examples (nationally and internationally) of public deliberation exercises that have been used in a wide range of contexts and settings.

1. About the Nuffield Foundation

The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance educational opportunity and social well-being across the UK. We fund research that informs the design and operation of social policy, primarily in Education, Welfare, and Justice. We also provide opportunities for young people to develop skills and confidence in science and research.

The Nuffield Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory and the Ada Lovelace Institute.

2. Purpose and objectives

The term public deliberation can cover a wide variety of activities bringing the public together with experts, allowing participants the opportunity to consider, deliberate and come to conclusions on the information, topics and questions presented to them. In recent months, there has been significant interest in the use of public deliberation, and discussion of their legitimacy and authority. However, there remains a lack of clearly agreed standards of practice or evidence of the value and limitations of public deliberation, possibly because efforts to synthesise and capture learning from its different uses have to date been limited.

Accordingly, the aim of this project is to:

- a) Review and report on what the existing evidence does (and does not) tell us about when and how public deliberation is a valuable and appropriate tool to use (and when it isn't) for both policymaking and in social science research.
- b) Translate and present that knowledge in such a way as to inform and assist those using public deliberation in practice (including policymakers, commissioning organisations, researchers, and others). It should outline, in an accessible way, the context and circumstances in which public deliberation can and cannot be appropriately used.

3. Project scope

The scope of this project is to review and synthesise the available evidence so as to:

- Describe what effective public deliberation looks like, with reference to context, use and purpose, in both social research and policy. We are especially interested in examples (from across the world) of what has worked, as well as in learning from less successful examples.
- Describe and explore the limitations of public deliberation, how the limitations might be addressed, as well as setting out limitations and gaps in the existing evidence base.
- Describe what is known about the impact public deliberation can and has had upon those involved (whether as policymakers, experts, commissioners, or participants), as well as the wider population via public debate.
- Develop practical guidance for researchers and policymakers, informed by the evidence base, to guide them on when and how best to deploy public deliberation.

In requiring this project to examine the value of public deliberation we are expecting the work to include the following elements:

- Testing claims that are often made for public deliberation by assessing what evidence exists about the claims that can be made for it, including an appraisal of the strength of that evidence, and identifying where there are gaps.
- Assessing the purpose and application of public deliberation– what are legitimate objectives in making use of public deliberation? When should we be more cautious about its use? Are there instances in which public deliberation might be, or has been, misused?
- Considering how public deliberation might strengthen and enhance approaches to social research where the need to engage with public perspectives is a key requirement. As part of this, we would like to understand better the extent to which public deliberation offers insights and inputs to frame research questions differently and identify new questions that may not have otherwise been thought of.

We are especially interested in proposals which examine how public deliberation can be used in a range of contexts, with different purposes, identifying how and in what ways the notion of effectiveness might vary depending on application, use and context. This may be through developing a taxonomy or a typology of the aims and uses of public deliberation.

Applicants should use the aims (and claims) for public deliberation set out in the Appendix as the outcome criteria against which to assess what the evidence tells us about its effectiveness. They may also wish to propose others.

Some of the additional themes and questions this work might address could include (where and if possible) proposing **minimum and best practice standards** for:

- Maintaining the integrity of the public deliberation process, especially with regard to the selection of experts, the selection and retention of participating citizens, and provision/oversight of evidence use in the process.

- Managing unequal power dynamics in public deliberation, ensuring adequate diversity of perspectives and voices involved.
- Interpretation and analysis of the findings from public deliberation, including process for consulting participants on findings and interpretation of the findings.
- The relative weight one might ascribe to the findings and insights garnered from public deliberation, in contrast to other methods of understanding public attitudes and perspectives.

The above themes and questions are only indicative. There may be other issues that you as an applicant may think need to be researched, and we are open to suggestions for other areas this research may explore. Applicants are also free, if they wish, to define the scope of the project more specifically. For example, applications may wish to confine the remit of this work to the use of public deliberation in particular areas of research and public policy, but this decision should be justified in the application.

Please note that subject to further discussion, we may request that the successful applicant(s) liaise with Nuffield Foundation grant-holders who are or will be using public deliberation as part of their projects.

4. Outputs

The required outputs from this research will be:

- a) A **literature review**. We leave it open to applicants to define and propose a suitable approach for this review – it must be rigorous, proportionate, and deploy an established and replicable methodology, such as a Systematic Review or Rapid Evidence Assessment. The aim of the literature review is to consider and to synthesise the existing evidence on the uses, value, and limitations of public deliberation.
- b) A **guidance document** for a practitioner, policymaker and commissioner audience, translating and presenting the findings of the literature review in such a way as to inform practice in the deployment of public deliberation. This should aim to inform a wide range of organisations as to the benefits, limitations, applicability, and value of using public deliberation in research and policy.

The literature review should cover UK and international research (although we understand that for practical purposes this is only likely to include English-language reports). We do not suggest a time range for the literature search, but the main focus should be on evidence from the last 20 years. The evidence reviewed might be both formative and summative in nature, but it needs to enable some form of assessment of public deliberation processes and outcomes. The robustness of (or otherwise), and gaps in, the evidence base should be made clear in the report.

The report of the review should set out the methodology used, making explicit the scope of the review, the inclusion and exclusion criteria used for literature search and the quality standards for inclusion in the study. The key findings should be presented in a clear and accessible way in plain English. The report should include a short executive summary of no more than four pages.

We do not specify what form the guidance document should take, other than it should be short, accessible to a mixed audience (including both experts and non-experts). We very much welcome creative suggestions from applicants on the format of the guidance document.

Applicants should note that we would want to consider the results from the literature review before making a final commitment on proceeding with the guidance document. The award to the successful applicant will include a break clause to enable that if required.

All outputs will be reviewed by the Foundation prior to publication and the commissioned researcher(s) will be expected to respond to feedback in further iterations. Intellectual property rights will be discussed and reviewed with applicants during the appointment process, but it is envisaged that both the literature review and the guidance will be published by the Nuffield Foundation.

4. Budget and timeframes

Up to £100,000 is available for this work. This figure is inclusive of both VAT and all expenses.

As part of the application a realistic and clear timeframe must be set out for delivery of the proposed work. Under the award to the successful applicant payments will be released in stages alongside agreed milestones, providing these have been met.

5. Project advisory board

As this is a project of a relatively small size, we envisage a light touch approach to the governance of this project. However, an advisory board, comprised of researchers with social science expertise, but also including practitioners and commissioners experienced in deploying public deliberation will be established to oversee this research. This board will be established and run by the successful applicant. It will be tasked specifically to ensure that the project achieves its intended objectives, and that the outputs from this research are practical and relevant to policymakers, researchers and practitioners.

The Nuffield Foundation will be represented on the advisory board.

6. Submission of applications

We are looking for applications that demonstrate a rigorous approach to reviewing existing research and evidence in this space, while at the same time articulating distinctive questions about the impact and value of public deliberation that will connect with a range of audiences. The completed work must be capable of being of practical use and value to those commissioning and delivering public deliberations. You can apply as a single organisation, or as a consortia of organisations bringing different skills and expertise to the task.

Your proposal should consist of no more than **six** pages (excluding CVs which can be attached as an annex) setting out:

- **A proposed approach and methodology.** Those undertaking the study would be expected to take a systematic approach to searching for key sources and make inclusion and exclusion criteria , including quality standards, explicit.
- **Up to three specific examples of relevant research** (in method or topic) you have completed and the names and contact details of two referees who will be able to comment on your work.
- **A project plan with clear timescales** showing key activities, milestones and deliverables.
- **Brief details and CVs of the project lead** (and/or team) to demonstrate that they possess the necessary qualifications and experience. We welcome applications from multi-disciplinary teams to reflect the breadth of issues covered by the evidence review.
- **A budget breakdown**, which should include the literature review and guidance document work costed separately.

All proposals should be submitted in PDF format and emailed to rpatel@nuffieldfoundation.org by no later than **12 noon GMT on Monday 24th February 2020** clearly marked PUBLIC DELIBERATION PROPOSAL: <<APPLICANT SURNAME>>

In assessing applications we will consider:

- The applicants' experience and expertise, both in relation to the subject and in undertaking rigorous evidence reviews.
- Proven ability to deliver high-quality work to time and budget .
- Proposed creativity of the approach, particularly in respect of the guidance document for practice.
- Value for money.

After assessing the applications, we will shortlist for interviews. We would be grateful if applicants could hold the date of **Tuesday 10th March** for the interview, which will be held at the Nuffield Foundation's office in London. We can arrange for video conferencing interviews if required. Please let us know if you cannot make this date. We will give shortlisted applicants a week's notice before interview.

7. Timetable

We set out our timeframes below.

Fri 10th January 2020	Request for proposals published
Mon 24 th February 2020	Deadline for applications
Mon 24 th Feb – Tues 3 rd March 2020	Shortlisting applications
Tues 10 th March 2020	Interviews for shortlisted applicants
Tues 31st March 2020	Successful applicant confirmed
April/May 2020	Research project launched

8. Contact

If you have any further queries about this work, please contact Reema Patel, Programme Head, Public Engagement on rpatel@nuffieldfoundation.org

Appendix: Defining public deliberation

Public deliberation is one form of public engagement and refers to a specific set of engagement activities. It is often claimed that public deliberation helps to:

1. Strengthen the **quality** of the policy or research in question by ensuring a process of reasoned and careful reflection on diverse perspectives and values takes place.
2. Strengthen the **legitimacy** of that policy or research; anticipating and responding to public values early on and upstream in the process of shaping policy & research.
3. Identify areas with potential for **building consensus** on polarised issues and decisions.
4. Improve **levels of civic and democratic engagement** among the public.

The term ‘public engagement’ covers very different types of activities. A useful categorisation is Arnstein’s ‘ladder of participation’. This moves from more passive to more active ‘rungs’ of forms of engagement: inform; consult; involve; collaborate; and empower. As we move up the ladder, we increase the degree of meaningful engagement in decisions that affect them:

Purpose	Description and examples
<p>1. Informing</p> <p><i>Communicating messages to inform the public.</i></p>	<p>Work that traditionally falls into the category of public communication about policy, science or social science questions.</p>
<p>2. Receiving</p> <p><i>Understanding what the public think about a particular issue.</i></p>	<p>The soliciting of public views or perspectives on a particular question. Traditional approaches within this category have included public consultation from self-selecting stakeholders or surveys.</p>
<p>3. Involving</p> <p><i>Dialogue between ‘expert’ and ‘citizen.’</i></p>	<p>Facilitating two-way dialogue between a researcher and the participant themselves; e.g. or social media exchange/focus groups.</p>
<p>4. Collaborating</p> <p><i>Bringing together diverse perspectives (expert & non-expert) to advise on complex issues.</i></p>	<p>Public deliberation between diverse perspectives (citizens; stakeholders and experts). Examples of such approaches include citizen juries, citizen assemblies and deliberative polling. These approaches are usually advisory, although can sometimes also be decision-making.</p>
<p>5. Empowering</p> <p><i>Delegating decision-making power</i></p>	<p>Decision-making power is handed over or delegated to the public. E.g. personal budgets, referenda, and participatory budgets.</p>

Mini publics

Public deliberation processes are usually situated within the 'collaborating' space of the engagement spectrum. They are often described in the academic literature as '**mini-publics**', which can take different forms. The purpose is to assemble a microcosm of 'the public' to discuss, resolve, consider and/or advise upon a specific question, series of questions or a policy issue. The mini-public is assembled for a significant period of time (anything from two days up to three weeks, spread out over a period of 3-12 months (depending on the scale and nature of the question concerned). The discussions are independently facilitated and include experts who provide evidence and relevant information and are then questioned by the lay citizens. They are usually issue specific, advisory, and dissolved as soon as the issue has been deliberated on. Participants are remunerated for their time.

The defining features of public deliberation

- **Fact-regarding and concerned with evidence:** Participants are required to consider, learn about and interrogate the evidence from different perspectives before coming to a conclusion. It is customary to invite a range of experts to present formally to the mini-public, and then to be questioned about their presentation as part of a deliberation.
- **Concerned with arriving at common ground:** Deliberation actively encourages people to consider the long-term consequences of particular issues or decisions, and the interests of those beyond themselves: requiring people to work with those who bring a different perspective to the table. As such approaches are usually deployed where issues are complex or controversial, identifying areas where common ground might emerge is a central aim of deliberation.
- **Long-form and advisory:** Many deliberations take place over a period of time, convening and reconvening over a period of weeks to months, and involving in-depth examination of evidence and issues by all those who participate. They then make specific recommendations and provide advice on a clearly defined question or set of questions by the commissioning body.
- **The selection of participants:** Participants are usually selected through stratified random sampling so that the group mirror the diversity of the general UK population in the sample. However, this will depend on the nature of the issue being deliberated upon. In some instances, recruitment of participants may focus specifically on particular groups of citizens, or seek to be regionally representative rather than nationally representative.