

FACILITATING DELIBERATION

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

Kimbra White • Nicole Hunter • Keith Greaves

Facilitating Deliberation – A Practical Guide

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FOREWORD

When designing a major project such as the Australian Citizens' Parliament or teaching a university course like Dialogue, Deliberation and Public Engagement, one cannot predict the impact that it will have on volunteer facilitators (in the former) and graduate students (in the latter). I wish I could. If only every one of those facilitators and students had tackled deliberative democracy with as much enthusiasm as the team at MosaicLab, the field would be germinating far richer, far more fertile seeds.

Needless to say I am proud of this crew. I have had occasion to observe deliberative processes that they have designed and/or facilitated. It has been a pleasure to witness their respectful interactions with participants and each other, their creativity and their clear attention to purpose, enabling participants to find their way to the recommendations that they have collectively determined.

With 39 deliberations undertaken to date, they are amongst the most experienced facilitators worldwide. On occasions, I have certainly sought their opinion and involved

them as collaborators in various ways, such is my high opinion of the work they do. No surprise that they have made significant contributions to the activities of an international network, Democracy R&D. This means that they are influencing deliberations not just locally, but also globally.

This handbook can be added to their impressive track record. It is evidence of the tremendous experience that they have acquired over almost a decade, and is also yet another example of their impressive generosity – sharing their hard-earned experience with others, for the benefit of democracy in Australia and beyond. I wish they could be cloned.

I know that this handbook will be a useful resource for those who are new to public deliberations. It is coherent, comprehensive and sufficiently detailed that it will provide real guidance for those who are less familiar with this important democratic pursuit.

**DR LYN CARSON, DIRECTOR,
THE NEUDEMOCRACY FOUNDATION**

Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION



WHY WE WROTE THIS BOOK

Every deliberative democracy process requires facilitators. This book provides a step-by-step guide to facilitating deliberation. We wish we had something like this back in 2014 as we embarked upon this work. We hope it will be valuable for fellow facilitators who are committed to this field of work and for governments and organisations that convene deliberative processes (such as citizens' juries) because successful deliberations are partnerships between the sponsoring organisation, the facilitators and the participants.

Many others have written guides to deliberative democracy, including academics and foundations.¹ This guide is specifically written through the lens of *facilitation* and the role of the *facilitators*. We have found that other guides focus on the reasons for undertaking deliberation and the broader design elements (what we call 'macro-design'). Less has been written on detailed facilitation planning ('micro-design') and 'in-the-room' facilitation. While we cover all design steps in this guide, we pay particular attention to micro-design and in-the-room facilitation.

We also provide a very practical focus based on our experience over the past eight years of concentrated work in this field, which now includes facilitating fully online as well as face-to-face and mixed-format deliberations.

In the recently published *Handbook of Democratic Innovation and Governance*, Oliver Escobar provides an insightful and complex description of the facilitator's role in deliberation. He defines *facilitation* as 'the craft of enabling collective work through conversations that are inclusive, meaningful and productive' and goes on to describe how 'experienced practitioners can facilitate group work with unassuming dexterity, jazzing up conversations in ways imperceptible to the unfocussed observer'.² This imperceptibility of the facilitator's skill – the discreet and multidimensional nature of the role – could be the reason why facilitation has received relatively little attention in the deliberative democracy literature.

Escobar seeks to address this oversight and bring the practice into focus.

We too are seeking to make facilitation visible, and this is another reason for writing this book. We believe that the practice is both a science *and* an art. As a science, it has at its core the theory of how people communicate and learn together. We continue to seek new ways of building the informed, scientific basis of our work. As such, we have taken part in research, explored recent thinking and developed new techniques on a range of matters, including brain biases, critical thinking, outrage, polarisation and response rates to recruitment invitations.

FACILITATING PUBLIC DELIBERATIONS IS AN HONOUR, AN ADVENTURE AND THE MOST HUMBLING OF EXPERIENCES.

1. See the newDemocracy Foundation and the United Nations Democracy Fund, *Enabling National Initiatives to Take Democracy Beyond Elections* (Sydney: newDemocracy Foundation, 2019). See also the Bibliography for a list of further reading.
2. Oliver Escobar, 'Facilitators: The Micropolitics of Public Participation and Deliberation', in *Handbook of Democratic Innovation and Governance*, eds. Stephen Elstub and Oliver Escobar (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2019), 178.



The art of facilitation, on the other hand, is about the facilitator's ability to respond in the moment, adjusting the approach where necessary to support the deliberating group. In some deliberations, our run sheet has gone out the window in the first hour and we are improvising and adjusting for the rest of the day in order to get the task completed.

We stick rigidly to the principles of deliberation and facilitation whilst constantly experimenting with facilitation processes.

MosaicLab was established by three community engagement specialists: Kimbra White, Keith Greaves and Nicole Hunter. We had each crossed paths with democratic work through our involvement with the Australian Citizens' Parliament; Port Phillip Speaks; the newDemocracy Foundation (also known as newDemocracy); the University of Sydney's Certificate in Dialogue, Deliberation and Public Engagement; and other deliberative democracy networks in Australia. Our intent in setting up MosaicLab was to facilitate deliberation as part of a wider community engagement offering that also included working with high levels of community outrage and emotion. Our first opportunity was to facilitate the City of Melbourne's People's Panel on the council's 'Ten-Year Financial Plan', a process that also involved

WE STICK RIGIDLY TO THE PRINCIPLES OF DELIBERATION AND FACILITATION WHILST CONSTANTLY EXPERIMENTING WITH FACILITATION PROCESSES.

newDemocracy. From this starting point in 2014, we have now facilitated 39 long- and short-form deliberations (as of early 2022). These deliberations have spanned a huge variety of topics and been held in many different locations. They brought together deliberating groups of various sizes who participated in both online and face-to-face formats. See Appendix 1 for the full list. Deliberation has now become the main focus of our facilitation work.

We would like to acknowledge those who have gone before us. Our mentors, coaches, friends and colleagues in the field of facilitation and deliberative democracy. In particular, our guides and partners in this work have continued to be Dr Lyn Carson and newDemocracy. We have facilitated several deliberations that newDemocracy has convened on behalf of various governments and Dr Carson continues to encourage us in undertaking practice-based research and documenting our work. This book has come to life with the encouragement of Dr Carson, as well as Dr Gerry Stoker, who observed our work during the 'Democracy in Geelong' deliberation in 2016.

Our work relies on independent recruitment specialists, and we have been fortunate to work regularly with Deliberatively Engaging and the Sortition Foundation. We would also like to acknowledge Lucy Cole-Edelstein who facilitated the 'Canada Bay' deliberation in Sydney in 2012. When we started on our first deliberation, Lucy generously shared her run sheets with us, to show the flow and structure of a deliberation.

We believe deliberation provides transparency, fairness and an opportunity for citizens to have greater influence. This drives our ongoing involvement in this field of work. We are constantly challenging ourselves and seeking to learn.

Facilitating public deliberations is an honour, an adventure and the most humbling of experiences. We hope that this book provides an opportunity to share our processes with others and, in response, that others will share their processes with us. In this way, we can all contribute to improving the practice, experience and impact of deliberation, both for the sponsoring organisations and for the deliberating participants.

1.1 The book's structure

In order to plan and facilitate a democratic deliberation, facilitators should be familiar with the principles and broad practice of deliberation. **Chapter 2** provides a brief introduction to deliberative processes and lists some of the different types of deliberation. We discuss the 10 principles of deliberation that guide our work and describe how they can be put into practice. We go on to explain how deliberation is different to more standard community and stakeholder engagement and discuss the benefits it can provide and where it is most applicable.

Deliberation is a complex process, involving many key players. We explain the various roles and responsibilities of these groups (e.g. the sponsoring organisation, deliberators and facilitators) at different stages of the process. Chapter 2 also includes information about how to assess whether an organisation is ready to host a deliberation, as this readiness will be a critical factor in the deliberation's success (e.g. it's important that the organisation's key decision-makers understand and fully commit to the deliberation process). Chapter 2 concludes with a brief history of deliberative processes, focusing on the Australian context in recent decades.

A public deliberation requires comprehensive planning. **Chapter 3** covers the initial stages

of this planning and the role of the facilitator (and/or independent process designer) in collaboration with the sponsoring organisation and other key players. We refer to this initial design process as the 'macro-design' stage and it incorporates the key elements of a deliberation (e.g. the remit, scope, promise of influence, timeframe and the deliberating group's demographic characteristics). The key outputs from this stage are a strategic engagement plan (otherwise known as the process design) and a recruitment plan.

Once the macro-design process is complete, all key players move into the mobilisation phase. There are several tasks for the sponsoring organisation, such as contracting the recruiter, initiating a communications strategy and preparing staff for a range of responsibilities. The facilitation team will mobilise and start the detailed design stage (see below); and the recruiter will begin sending out invitations to households in the relevant community. The sponsoring organisation or an independent steering committee prepare comprehensive and balanced information on the topic to share with the deliberating group.

Chapters 4 and 5 form the core of the book and provide detailed guidance on designing and facilitating deliberation based on our years of experience. This is the crucial information that facilitators need when taking on a deliberative engagement process. It is information that has not been covered in detail by other deliberation manuals and it's what we were looking for when we first embarked on this work.



While it is not our intention to cover the basics of facilitation (this topic is covered by many existing facilitation guides), **Chapter 4** defines 10 principles that we uphold as facilitators and applies them to facilitation of a deliberation. All of these principles need to be considered during the planning and design stages of a deliberation so that they can then be upheld during in-the-room facilitation.

In Section 4.2, we introduce our seven core steps for facilitating deliberation. These steps have been developed to enable facilitators to strike the right balance between focusing on the task of deliberation and at the same time supporting the deliberating group to achieve that task.

Section 4.3 provides detailed information about the key frameworks, priorities and practices that we implement to uphold the principles of deliberation and facilitation and to move a deliberating group through

the seven core steps. These topics include managing group dynamics, supporting different learning styles and encouraging critical thinking. All of these concerns and practical measures inform our approach to the detailed planning of a deliberation – the ‘micro-design’ stage – when we draft our overall facilitation plan and detailed daily run sheets, and prepare our other facilitation resources. This stage is covered in Section 4.4.

Chapter 5 provides a step-by-step guide to the facilitation of deliberation in the room. We break our seven core steps down into 34 sub-steps, which we use to guide the group through the entire deliberative process. We include a range of activities and approaches facilitators can use to achieve each step (see also Appendix 2 for detailed activity descriptions), as well as additional guidance based on what we’ve learnt from our years of facilitating deliberation.



A deliberation does not finish when the deliberators present their report to the sponsoring organisation. **Chapter 6** describes how the sponsoring organisation and the facilitators can make the most of a deliberation’s outcome.

Most importantly, the sponsoring organisation should implement the deliberating group’s recommendations to the greatest extent possible. The details of this implementation should be shared with the group and with the public.

The facilitation team will need to report to the sponsoring organisation on the deliberation’s process (including the findings of the participant survey) and this report should also be shared publicly.

Ideally, both the sponsoring organisation and the facilitation team will have learnt from the experience, and this learning can be documented, shared and used to develop their respective approaches to deliberation going forward.

Chapter 7 concludes with some final thoughts and reflections on the facilitation of deliberation and the benefits that this practice can provide to sponsoring organisations, deliberating participants and, by extension, local communities.

1.2 A word about online deliberation

The world of deliberation changed in March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic led to the cancellation of all face-to-face meetings in Australia and across the world. Almost all of the deliberations we had facilitated since 2014 had been held in person³ and suddenly all of our deliberations had to be moved online.⁴

Due to the collaborative nature of deliberation, the intense discussions among group members and the activities that involve mixing the group repeatedly, it’s virtually impossible to maintain social distancing during face-to-face deliberations. Throughout the recurring lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, we facilitated several deliberations fully online, and we continue to facilitate all formats: fully online, mixed and fully ‘in person.’

Even though parts of this book were written prior to the pandemic and describe face-to-face deliberation, the principles of facilitating deliberation remain the same, whether you are face-to-face or online. We were able to adapt our practices to an online format as part of our work in the field throughout the pandemic. These adaptations are described in highlight boxes where applicable throughout the book. In Section 3.1.8, we reflect on the differences between online and face-to-face deliberations and provide advice on choosing the most appropriate format.

3. One exception to this was the VicHealth ‘Obesity in Victoria’ deliberation that had been designed to have a six-week online component prior to the deliberating group coming together for just two days over one weekend to finalise and agree on their recommendations. We had also delivered webinars as part of the information component of some deliberative projects. Additionally, most of our processes involved an online participant portal where the deliberating group could continue their conversations between sessions.
4. Some of our deliberations during the early stages of the pandemic had a mixed format, as they had commenced as face-to-face in February 2020 and had to be completed online (Bayside City Council’s ‘Community Vision’ and Glen Eira City Council’s ‘Community Vision’).