

Designing ‘deliberative events’ to explore public attitudes towards police and universities working together

This update outlines what the Public Engagement Strand has been doing in terms of developing a programme of deliberative events. Dr Sarah Mosedale joined the strand in November 2017 in order to take this work forward. Her initial literature review (including academic papers and reports from various organisations) encouraged us to rethink the original plan of conducting a series of 11 ‘Citizens Juries’ and instead consider ‘deliberative events’ more broadly.

What such events generally have in common is that they bring a small group of people together and expose them to a range of perspectives and sources of information on a controversial topic with plenty of opportunities to ask questions and talk amongst themselves in a safe and supported environment. The event is skilfully facilitated in order to help the group to come to some kind of conclusion or consensus (which may not be unanimous) on the question they have been asked to consider. Usually there is some sort of commitment from the event sponsors to respond to what the group has to say.

The underlying purpose of such events can vary. For instance, they may be intended to educate participants - to help them make better informed decisions - or they may be primarily intended to educate policymakers and practitioners - to help them understand “the scope and prevalence of experiences, arguments, attitudes, values and preferences that surround a particular issue” (Degeling, C. et al. 2015, 116). An event may seek to combine elements of both but the relative importance placed on each may well influence how participants are chosen. When educating policymakers or practitioners is the main aim it may be particularly important to make efforts to include people whose voices are less often heard or to bring together people with a particular shared experience. Another key motivation can be independent methodological research – how do such events ‘work’ and why? Conducting such events can also lead to participants identifying knowledge gaps which lead to promising new research questions.

The ‘citizens jury’ model typically brings 12-20 people together and often seeks a ‘representative sample’ of the larger population, usually commissioning a professional recruiter or market research company to provide this through random sampling, sometimes followed by targeted replacement when dropouts occur. However it is highly debatable how meaningfully ‘representative’ such a small group can be and this is not the strategy we have chosen. An alternative approach uses advertising to produce a relatively large group of volunteers (who do not know what the event will be about) who are then asked to rank their opinion on the issue. A smaller group is then chosen to reflect a range of opinions. Alternatively a large group of volunteers may be asked to provide some basic demographic information and a smaller group selected in the light of that information. No claim of representativeness need be made for this group; selection here seeks only to prevent any particular demographic dominating.

If the issue is a local one then efforts will focus on getting together a good range of people who live nearby. Sometimes ‘enclave deliberation’ may be used to bring together a group of people who are particularly disempowered in relation to a particular issue or who may find it especially difficult to take

part in a more mixed group (Abdullah, C. et al. 2016). (At any deliberative event it is of course part of the facilitator's role to try to ensure everyone is included in the discussion and decision making.)

Choosing topics and facilitating participation

In order to design a series of productive deliberative events we first needed to be very clear about the purpose of each event and the nature of the 'public' it would be most appropriate to engage with. So an email was sent out on 16th November 2017 to all N8 PRP partners inviting them to identify relevant topics, issues and developments for discussion and volunteer to provide support in arranging events in different areas. We received ten responses – from two universities and five police forces. We had three responses from Northumbria Police and two from Humberside suggesting our request for input had been successfully cascaded.

One respondent identified several pieces of ongoing work that might benefit from some sort of deliberative event. Another was seeking input to an evaluation of a particular service; we explained this was beyond our remit and sent details of the N8 PRP Mobilising Data event. We replied to four respondents who identified broad topics of interest asking them whether they might be able to be more specific about what a deliberative event might focus on. In some cases we explained a bit more about what we meant by deliberative events. After reviewing all the responses we decided to focus on three very different topics: road safety, domestic violence and restorative justice.

By design deliberative events only include a small number of people; this is to ensure that each participant has the opportunity to fully contribute, to have their questions answered and their views heard. And although we will not be claiming our participants are 'representative' of anything but themselves we are keen not to exclude people because they are working / not working / have young children / have money problems. We are therefore trying to time our events so as to be as inclusive as possible and are respecting the time and effort we are asking from participants by offering payment by shopping voucher.

Deliberative event on Domestic Violence

This topic was chosen because it was raised by several respondents and is clearly a priority for the police. At the time of writing we are very pleased to be in the process of designing the event with our N8 PRP university partners from the Durham Centre for Research Into Violence and Abuse (CRIVA) who have offered to host it. CRIVA is dedicated to improving knowledge about interpersonal violence and abuse and to improving professional and societal responses.

The question that has been chosen for deliberation is, "To what extent should police take into account the preferences/wishes of those who have asked them for help in relation to intimate partner violence"? Clearly the wishes of the person who has asked for help are very important; however they are not always the only thing that the police have to consider. For example and to oversimplify, sometimes the 'right' thing for society is to prosecute offenders but the 'right' thing for the individual may be not to prosecute. Opinions can be highly polarised on this question; what we aim to do is to facilitate a group of participants who have experience of asking the police for help with intimate

partner violence to think through the nuances of the problem and express their views. We plan to conduct the process with two different groups over two consecutive days in July, first in school hours to enable those with school age children to attend and then repeated in the early evening for the second group.

Deliberative event on Road Safety

Improving road safety is a priority for the Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner and is an issue which seems well suited for public deliberation given that it affects everyone. A very productive meeting with the OPCC's Community Engagement team identified some key stakeholders and resulted in a decision to experiment with a two-session event model. It is envisaged that, in the first session, as well as identifying relevant issues and deliberating on some evidence the group will determine the focus of the second session and the issues on which more information is required.

Through the Merseyside Road Safety Partnership we have identified willing speakers from both Merseyside Police and Liverpool City Council. We are currently in discussions with local road safety campaigning groups to identify someone who can contribute as a 'critical voice'. The overall purpose of the process will be to identify some priorities for police activities which promote road safety. It is anticipated that the outcome from these events will help inform the OPCC's road safety agenda.

Deliberative event on Restorative Justice

We reviewed the recent report by our Leeds and Sheffield partners, *Restorative justice at the level of the police in England: implementing change*, with a view to identifying how our work might build on this. Having identified a researcher at Leeds who can work with us on this we are now refining our ideas about the precise question to be addressed and moving towards designing the deliberative process.

References

Abdullah, C., Karpowitz, C.F. and Chad, R. (2016) "Affinity Groups, Enclave Deliberation, and Equity," *Journal of Public Deliberation* 12(2) Available at: <http://www.publicdeliberation.net/jpd/vol12/iss2/art6>

Degeling, C., Carter, S.M. and Rychetnik, L. (2015) Which public and why deliberate? - A scoping review of public deliberation in public health and health policy research. *Social Science & Medicine* 131 114-121.

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