

# OECD Standards and Evaluation Guidelines



## **What is it?**

The texts considered here are a series of publications by the OECD on citizen deliberation between 2020-22. They consist of: “Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave” (2020), “Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes” (2021), “Eight Ways to Institutionalize Deliberative Democracy” (2021), and “OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes” (2022).

## **Who is it by and for?**

These texts were published under the OECD Open Government Unit under the Directorate for Public Governance (GOV). Intended audiences for each text range from public officials and policymakers to deliberative practitioners and academics. Notably, the reports were created with contributions from multiple practitioners and academics in the deliberative democracy field primarily located in Europe. Data collection, too, focused on European case studies.

## **Implications for mutual learning**

The OECD texts on mini-public practice are noteworthy because they reflect the growth of the deliberative democracy field and the consequent confluence of new actors such as international organizations and development banks. Parallels can be drawn to the experience of participatory budgeting which was heavily researched, standardized, and exported by the World Bank, often as a contingency for aid. On one hand, the resources and attention of an international organization have catapulted participatory budgeting to a global phenomenon; others criticize the Bank’s authority on what constitutes good practice or highlight the neutering down of emancipatory aspects of the process (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014). Increasing attention and investment in mini-publics by international organizations like the OECD can be channeled toward the improvement of research and resources, but they also merit an expansion of their range and critical conversations to avoid pitfalls. It is a welcome development that the texts considered here have been discussed reflexively, including at their academic launch, as in the reflections submitted by scholars and practitioners on their implications for deliberative practice outside the Global North.



## Strengths for Mutual Learning

### **(1) Research and evaluation:**

The OECD's evaluation guidelines provide practical tools to guide the independent evaluation of processes and set out a useful framework for comparative analysis of mini-publics.

### **(2) Visibility:**

Publication, and with it, acknowledgment and promotion, by the OECD can add credibility and visibility to the method of deliberative mini-publics and support future advocacy endeavors.

### **(3) Quality control:**

Setting high standards for mini-publics can serve to establish "regulative ideals," wherein setting high targets encourages stakeholders to expect and invest in better processes (Claudia). This perspective is echoed by Rey, who warns against the "tropicalization" trap wherein we assume the Global South needs its "own form" of deliberative democracy. In other words, tropicalization can enable actors to become complacent to laxer implementation of deliberative norms and practices in challenging contexts, a phenomenon that can be mitigated by publications such as this one (Rey 2022).

## Risks to Mutual Learning

### **(1) Unrepresentative data collection:**

Texts were developed by considering mini-publics primarily from resource-rich countries in the North (with the exception of the Itinerant Citizens' Assembly in Colombia). This point can also apply to unrepresentativeness in regime type: There is a need to be open to and incorporate what has been learned from public deliberation in non-democratic contexts, even though they may not adhere to these standards (Woo 2022).

### **(2) Marginalization of "differently deliberative" processes (Curato & Steiner 2018):**

Setting steep standards for mini-public processes can marginalize processes implemented in more difficult contexts or create the perception of unattainability.

### **(3) Prior learning on the uptake of democratic innovation by international organizations:**

The uptake of democratic innovations by IOs (consider the case of participatory budgeting) as contingencies for developmental aid or subjects of standardization may "conceal a new form of dominance that has nothing to do with a new process of democratization."

