

The Sounding Board

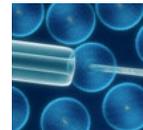
(Digital Discussion Panel)

What is the Sounding Board and how does it work?

The Sounding Board is Sciencewise's new and innovative tool to gain rapid public input on challenging issues involving science and technology. It complements our full scale, face-to-face dialogue model, providing informed public input in a shorter time-frame and at lower cost.

We are currently piloting approaches and methods to run the Sounding Board and are looking to work with a commissioning government department on a science and technology topic. Sciencewise will pay for the first pilot of the Sounding Board. Future initiatives will be funded by the commissioning government body.

The Sounding Board brings together a demographically balanced panel of 8-12 citizens selected from our diverse pool of 100 registered participants – all of whom are familiar with discussion on science and technology issues, in a verbal, real-time online conversation. Policy makers will be able to circulate materials to the group in advance, and then engage in a facilitated discussion to gather an understanding of public views on the topic in question. If desired, it will be possible to run several panels on the same issue to increase the sample size.



Why use the 'Digital Discussion Panel'?

The Sounding Board 'Digital Discussion Panel' method offers increased flexibility and responsiveness to both the public and policy-makers – reducing barriers of time, travel and cost in the engagement process.

The online system allows for information to be presented to citizens in a variety of engaging and layered ways. It creates a virtual

space for the public to consider the issue at hand, bridging geographical divides between citizens and policy-makers at the same time as facilitating an informed and coherent discussion in real time.

Whilst it doesn't offer the same depth or range of views as full-scale, face-to-face dialogue, the Sounding Board approach is suitable for those who require considered input from the public (rather than 'top of head' responses) from a demographically diverse group, at lower cost and to tighter deadlines than face-to-face dialogue.

How will it work?

From commissioning to write-up, we envisage that the process will take approximately 6-8 weeks from start to finish. The process will work in the following way, but can be flexible to meet policy-makers' needs:

- The policy-maker will work with the Sciencewise team to frame the question and put together an information pack for citizens.
- Citizens will be selected for the panel and briefed with the information pack in advance of the online discussion.
- A discussion of approximately two hours will take place online and in real-time using an online seminar platform, with a trained facilitator. A policy-maker and experts will present the information as well as taking any questions that arise. The public will then participate in the facilitated discussion.
- Participants can continue the conversation online by way of a closed forum or e-mail discussion, and key outputs can be circulated to a wider group of participants for additional feedback.
- The discussion will be written up into a short paper on key messages and public views for policy makers, and there will be a light-touch evaluation of the process and impacts.



What's required of me?

Policy-makers will be asked to:

- Help design the framing of the questions for the Panel.
- Work with the Sounding Board team on the information pack to send to citizens.
- Send a representative to the Sounding Board session to introduce the issues and respond to questions.
- Input into evaluation, feedback and learning following the events.

Costs of the initial pilot will be covered by Sciencewise, although subsequent Sounding Boards are expected to be funded by the commissioning bodies.

The Sounding Board is a valuable tool to deploy in many different circumstances and can be drawn upon frequently during the the policy and decision-making cycle. As well as being effective as a one-off tool, it is also suitable for use when policy-makers need iterative input for an issue that is changing and developing quickly.

More information

If you'd like to find out more about piloting the Sounding Board, please contact

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For further information about Sciencewise please visit www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk