

Communication from Public

Name: Public Democracy Los Angeles
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Council File No: 23-1027
Comments for Public Posting: Community coalition letter in support of the motion with comment (see File Attachment), signed by the following organizations recommending the establishment of a “Supplemental Civic Assembly” to augment and support the Charter Commission’s work: California Clean Money Campaign, Federation of Innovation in Democracy - North America, Healthy Democracy, Public Access Democracy, Public Democracy Los Angeles, Los Angeles for Democracy Vouchers, RepresentUs Los Angeles, The River Project.

To: LA City Council Governance Reform Committee
From: Public Democracy Los Angeles
Date: July 8, 2024
RE: Establishing a Supplemental Civic Assembly on Charter Reform - [Council File 23-1027-S2](#) - (Support and Comment)

Dear LA City Council Governance Reform Committee:

We, the undersigned organizations, strongly support the establishment of a Charter Reform Commission, and urge the establishment of a “Supplemental Civic Assembly” to augment and support the Charter Commission’s work. A Supplemental Civic Assembly will provide significant meaningful public engagement and deliberation, increased public trust and confidence, and a heightened view by the public of the legitimacy of the charter review process.¹

WHY A SUPPLEMENTAL CIVIC ASSEMBLY?

There are four major reasons to create a Supplemental Civic Assembly:

1. **Innovative Process for Democratic Decision-Making:** Civic Assemblies are an innovative process for democratic decision-making. Unlike traditional forms of governmental decision-making, which tend to rely primarily upon the perspectives of elected officials and experts, Civic Assemblies bring together a demographically-balanced random sample of people to develop solutions to public problems in collaboration with experts and public officials.
2. **Draws Upon Diversity of Resident Lived Experience by Lottery Selection:** By including people from all walks of life, Assemblies meaningfully draw upon a diversity of experience to inform the decision-making process. Participants are selected by democratic lottery to ensure that the Assembly is representative of the population along key demographic criteria such as age, race, gender, and location.
3. **Decision-Making by Informed Deliberation:** Participants spend several weekends over several months to learn about the issue from different points of view, deliberate potential solutions, identify areas of substantial agreement, and submit their policy recommendations to public officials. Finding common ground and reaching group decisions is a key aim.
4. **Minimize the Impact of Political Bias in the Decision-Making Process:** Because Assemblies provide participants with sufficient time, resources, and support to develop informed and actionable solutions, they minimize the impact of political bias in the decision-making process and help lawmakers make better decisions.

¹ Our recommendation builds on a [letter](#) we submitted to [Council File 23-1027](#) (uploaded on 1/16/2024) that encouraged the City’s Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA) to research the potential of implementing a “civic assembly” *as either the primary or supplementary charter review commission body*. Chief Legislative Analyst Sharon Tso cited our letter in the “Best Practices: Public Outreach” section of the CLA’s January 11 [report](#) and recommended that the prospective Charter Commission consider the use case of civic assemblies (referenced in the letter as “citizens’ assemblies”). With the authorization of a Charter Reform Commission by the Governance Reform Committee, this letter outlines a preliminary proposal for a Supplemental Civic Assembly to support work of the Charter Commission.

As we indicated in our previous letter, abundant research has demonstrated the effectiveness and fairness of civic assemblies in tackling complex policy issues.² Globally, this civic assemblies model is referred to by various names, including citizens' assemblies, lottery-selected panels, and policy juries. They have become proven tools for tackling contentious issues at various levels, from local to national, around the world (see Attachment 1 for a list of local and national precedents). Civic assemblies can complement traditional, democratic decision-making bodies, advising them on significant matters.

GOAL OF A SUPPLEMENTAL CIVIC ASSEMBLY

The goal of a Supplemental Civic Assembly on Charter Reform would be to support the work of the Charter Reform Commission in an advisory capacity, supplementing its deliberative process with a representative body of Angelenos. The Assembly could deliberate a specific area or areas of the charter, identified by Councilmembers or Commissioners in advance, and deliver policy recommendations to the Commissioners.

The most useful areas of the charter to ask an Assembly to weigh in on are those requiring the most input and engagement from the public. Because the Assembly would be an independent body whose members are primarily or completely selected by democratic lottery, Commissioners could be confident knowing the Assembly's proposals would provide a comprehensive view of the policy preferences of all Angelenos, highlighting areas of substantive agreement and disagreement.³

Convening an Assembly to support the Charter Commission would increase public trust in government and alleviate the influence of political pressures faced by the appointed Commissioners and elected Councilmembers.⁴ Finally, an amended charter needs to be ratified by the electorate. Councilmembers can be confident that the proposals produced by the Commission that were informed by recommendations from the Supplemental Civic Assembly on Charter Reform have already been pre-approved by a representative body of residents. Likewise, voters will know that elements of the new charter have been proposed by people just like themselves.

PLANNING AND EXECUTING A SUPPLEMENTAL CIVIC ASSEMBLY

The process of planning and executing a Civic Assembly on Charter Reform can be outlined in six stages:

- 1. Community Education & Topic Exploration:** This phase explores potential Assembly topics, funding sources, and partnerships through conversations with various stakeholders. It involves meetings between the Convening Body (City Council), the Convening Partner (Public Democracy Los Angeles), the Design and Delivery Partner (the implementers of the eventual Assembly), legislative staff, commissioners, community leaders, and the public. The aim is to co-create an initial proposal with broad support, socializing the idea among officials and building capacity. Check-ins evolve

² John Gastil and Katherine R. Knobloch, *Hope for Democracy: How Citizens Can Bring Reason Back into Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020).

³ Ariel Procaccia. "Citizens' Assemblies Are Upgrading Democracy: Fair Algorithms Are Part of the Program." November 1, 2022. <http://tinyurl.com/3fedwikt>.

⁴ Katherine Knobloch, Michael Barthel, and John Gastil. "Emanating Effects: The Impact of the Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review on Voters' Political Efficacy." *Political Studies*. June 6, 2019. <http://tinyurl.com/399czdtx>.

from irregular to weekly as the project progresses towards a planning contract. This phase establishes the foundation for the Assembly, ensuring stakeholder alignment before detailed planning begins.

- 2. Assembly Co-Design and Approval:** This stage involves full proposal development, high-level Assembly design, and approval. It may start with pro bono work, followed by an interim planning contract. The Design and Delivery Partner drafts official proposal language and a detailed budget. The Assembly invitation letter, which is sent out to roughly 10,000 individuals, is created during this period. Weekly meetings become more frequent as communication and stakeholder work branches off. The stage typically concludes with the convening governmental authority approving the proposal. This phase solidifies the Assembly's structure and prepares for implementation.
- 3. Community Engagement and Information Gathering:** This phase may include community-based planning with public engagement to select or refine the Assembly topic (an area of areas of the charter). An Information Committee, composed of diverse stakeholders and lottery-selected individuals, selects initial expert presenters and organizes background information from different points of view for Assembly members to become familiar with the topic. Becoming more connected with existing public engagement initiatives, particularly those focused on language communities or marginalized groups, is a goal of this phase.
- 4. Selection by Lottery:** The lottery process involves two stages. First, official invitations are sent to 10,000-20,000 randomly selected addresses, with targeted outreach to hard-to-reach populations. The Assembly design partner sets demographic targets using Census data, such as age, race and ethnicity, gender, educational attainment, housing status, neighborhood location, and language, to ensure a representative Assembly. At a public Lottery Selection Event, an open-source algorithm selects Assembly members, matching respondents to these targets. The software generates 1,000 potential Assemblies, all random and demographically representative. One is randomly chosen as the official Assembly. This process ensures diverse representation and transparency in member selection.
- 5. The Assembly: Learning, Deliberation, and Recommendations:** The Civic Assembly process unfolds over several months in three phases: Learning, Deliberation, and Recommendations. In the Learning phase, members receive comprehensive background information, hear presentations, and consider public input to gain a deep understanding of the issue from various perspectives. They also receive training on cognitive biases and critical thinking. The Deliberation phase involves members discussing positions and options, facilitated by professionals to encourage collaboration across differences without forcing consensus. Finally, in the Recommendations phase, the Assembly produces actionable, prioritized recommendations written entirely by members. The final report includes dissenting opinions and individual voices, giving lawmakers a comprehensive understanding of the Assembly's position. Throughout the process, members draw on their lived experiences to inform discussions and decisions.
- 6. Response and Follow-up:** The Assembly has its own subcommittees that are paid to define its post-final-report work. This can include plans to advocate for the Assembly's recommendations, sharing its own story with the public, participating in further community engagement work, and reconvening six-months to a year and more after the fact to follow-up and

monitor implementation alongside the Convening Body (City Council).

A preliminary timeline for a Civic Assembly on Charter Reform (accounts for the proposed Commission timeline)

Action	Period of Year	# of Months
Community Education & Topic Exploration	August-September 2024	2
Assembly Co-Design and Approval	October-December 2024	3
Community Engagement, Information Gathering, & Selection by Lottery	January-April 2025	4
The Assembly: Learning, Deliberation, and Recommendations	March-August 2025	6
Response and Follow-up	September '25-May '26	9

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Organizing a Civic Assembly on Charter Reform requires a significant investment of time and resources. Adequate time and a dedicated budget are crucial for the successful execution of a Civic Assembly on Charter Reform, ensuring that it is well-prepared, representative of the population, and equipped with the necessary resources to effectively convene, deliberate, and generate meaningful recommendations. The budget required for the Assembly will vary depending on the context, size, and duration of the Assembly. A substantial portion of the budget is allocated to compensating Assembly Members for their time and hiring skilled facilitators to guide the deliberation process. We estimate that for a Civic Assembly on Charter Reform, a budget of about \$1-1.5M should be sufficient, depending on the scope of its mandate, the number of participants, the type of outreach, and the length of engagement. For budget references from other Assemblies, see Attachment 2.

CONCLUSION

We thank outgoing Council President Krekorian and Councilmember McOsker for leading on charter reform, as well as all the members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Governance Reform. Establishing a Supplemental Civic Assembly to support the work of the Charter Commission would significantly increase public participation, engagement, and trust in the charter review process. A Supplemental Civic Assembly can address an area or areas of the charter that require substantial public input and deliberation. This letter gives an overview of the Civic Assembly planning process, potential timeline, budget, and precedents for consideration.

Sincerely,

California Clean Money Campaign, Federation for Innovation in Democracy - North America, Healthy Democracy, Public Access Democracy, Public Democracy Los Angeles, Los Angeles for Democracy Vouchers, RepresentUs Los Angeles, The River Project

ATTACHMENT 1: NATIONAL AND LOCAL PRECEDENTS

Civic Assemblies are proven tools for tackling contentious issues at various levels, from local to national, around the world. Here are some examples at the national level that are noteworthy for their strong process and significant policy impact:

- **France:** In 2023, France formed the Citizens' Convention on the End of Life (CCFV) to generate proposals focused on the issues of euthanasia.⁵ 184 participants were randomly selected and committed to attending sessions over the course of nine weekends. The final report included 65 proposals, and received 92% participant approval. As of April 2024, a draft law on assisted dying was introduced with the support of President Macron. The cost of the CCFV is estimated at approximately 5 million Euros.
- **Brussels:** In 2019, Brussels formed the Brussels Citizens' Assembly to integrate Civic Assemblies into the heart of their governance.⁶ On a permanent basis, three times a year, 45 citizens and 15 parliamentarians work together on a specific topic, such as 5G deployment in Brussels, homelessness, citizens' participation in times of crisis, biodiversity in the city, and employment and job training. Participants meet over five weekends or more, deliberate together, and formulate policy recommendations, many of which have been adopted into policy, such as a mileage tax and expanded green spaces. 95% of national Members of Parliament stated that the citizens contributed to the effective and constructive discussions, and 82% of citizens feel they have a better understanding of the political system.
- **Ireland:** In 2012, Ireland formed the 2013-2014 Convention on the Constitution, a citizens' assembly composed of 66 randomly-selected citizens, 33 politicians from the Oireachtas and Northern Ireland Assembly, and an independent chair.⁷ The Convention examined ten topics, eight predetermined by the Oireachtas and two self-selected, and submitted reports to the government. The government accepted six recommendations for constitutional amendments, including marriage equality, reducing the voting age and presidential candidate age threshold, removing the blasphemy offense, and enhancing the powers of various non-executive bodies. A referendum on marriage equality was held in 2015 and passed by 62.1%, making Ireland the first country in the world to legalize marriage equality through popular vote. The Citizens' Assembly 2016-2018 involved 100 randomly selected citizens deliberating and producing recommendations on reproductive rights, an aging population, fixed term parliaments, referenda procedures, and climate change. In 2018, 66.4% of the Irish people voted to legalize reproductive freedom. Subsequent assemblies deliberated on gender equality (2020-2021), governance in Dublin and biodiversity loss (2022), and drug use (2023).

In recent years, Civic Assemblies and other lottery-selected deliberative bodies composed of randomly selected citizens have gained traction in the US. Assemblies

⁵ Dawn Nakagawa and Marjan Ehsassi, "Putting The Public Back In Public Policy," August 15, 2023, <https://www.noemamag.com/putting-the-public-back-in-public-policy>.

⁶ "Brussels Citizens' Assembly," <https://www.assemblee.brussels/?lang=en>.

⁷ "2013-2014 Convention on the Constitution," *Citizens' Assembly* (blog), <https://citizensassembly.ie/overview-previous-assemblies/2013-2014-convention-on-the-constitution/>.

have included a range of sizes and issues, as described below:

- **Michigan:** In 2018, Michigan voters approved a constitutional amendment that transferred redistricting authority from the partisan state legislature to a randomly selected commission of thirteen Michiganders.⁸ The Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC) was tasked with redrawing the state's electoral maps. The initiative aimed to reduce partisan influence in the redistricting process and ensure fair representation for Michigan residents. In 2021, MICRC created and adopted new congressional and state legislative maps that effectively ended the practice of gerrymandering.
- **Milwaukie, OR:** In 2019, Milwaukie, Oregon, conducted a Citizens Jury Pilot Project to address the question of City Council members' compensation.⁹ The panel, consisting of 20 participants randomly selected from the city's residential addresses, deliberated for four consecutive days. They considered whether Council members should receive more than their existing volunteer stipend and, if so, what the appropriate compensation level should be. The City Council subsequently adopted the panel's recommendations, which included a specific pay rate and a provision to link future increases to inflation.
- **Eugene, OR:** The 2020 Eugene Review Panel on Housing brought together 29 randomly selected residents to provide input on the city's Middle Housing Code Changes Project.¹⁰ From November 2020 to April 2021, the panel met online for a total of 15 sessions, spanning 35 hours. They produced four reports offering policy recommendations on both housing code revisions and the city's public engagement strategies. The panel costs were covered by the City of Eugene, the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, and the Carol and Velma Saling Foundation.
- **Petaluma, CA:** In 2022, the city of Petaluma, California convened the Fairgrounds Advisory Panel, a civic assembly formed by democratic lottery, to resolve conflicts over the future of the city's fairgrounds property.¹¹ The panel consisted of 36 residents aged 16+ who reflected Petaluma's demographics in terms of race/ethnicity, age, gender, geography, education, housing status, and experience of a disability. The panel met a total of 12 days over 2 months, and resulted in three reports presented to Council and Fair Board. A randomized public survey showed broad community support for the Panel's recommendations. Panelists were paid \$20/hour for their time to diminish barriers to participation. The total cost of the Panel was \$425,000, 80% of which was to support panelist engagement (i.e. stipends, offering child support).
- **Montrose, CO:** Unify America, a non-partisan, non-profit organization, collaborated with Montrose local government officials and community

⁸ "Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission," <https://www.michigan.gov/micrc>.

⁹ "2019 Milwaukie Citizens Jury Pilot Project – Healthy Democracy," <https://healthydemocracy.org/what-we-do/local-government-work/2019-milwaukie-citizens-jury-pilot-project/>.

¹⁰ "2020 Eugene Review Panel on Housing – Healthy Democracy," <https://healthydemocracy.org/what-we-do/local-government-work/2020-eugene-review-panel-on-housing/>.

¹¹ Marjan Ehsassi, "How Democracy Should Work' Lesson in Learning, Building Cohesion and Community – Berggruen Institute," June 27, 2023, <https://www.berggruen.org/news/how-democracy-should-work-lesson-in-learning-building-cohesion-and-community>.

members to address childcare issues through a pilot Civic Assembly.¹² Over 12 weeks, 46 Delegates participated in online conversations to get to know one another, learn about the problem, deliberate solutions, and vote on policy proposals. Unify Montrose compensated all Delegates for their participation at \$15/hour and worked with community organizations to recruit and support Spanish-speaking Delegates. Out of 24 proposed actions, five received the required two-thirds support to become formal recommendations. More than 90 percent of Delegates believed deliberation should be used for future political problem-solving.

¹² Katharhynn Heidelberg, “Across the Partisan Divide: Unify America Brings Montrose Together for Solutions,” Montrose Daily Press, March 15, 2023, https://www.montrosepress.com/news/across-the-partisan-divide-unify-america-brings-montrose-together-for-solutions/article_417123b8-c369-11ed-a535-2f4f245a399b.html.

ATTACHMENT 2: *BUDGET REFERENCES FROM OTHER CIVIC ASSEMBLIES*

<p>French Citizens' Assembly on End of Life (2023)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● National level ● 185 members ● 27 days of deliberation ● Generous communication budget 	<p>5M EUR</p>
<p>Tolosa (Spain) Citizens' Assembly on Emotional Wellbeing (2022)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local level ● 32 members ● 12 days of deliberation ● Includes capacity building ● Does not include project team costs 	<p>217K EUR</p>
<p>Petaluma (California) Fairgrounds Citizens' Assembly (2022)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local level ● 36 members ● 12 days of deliberation ● Includes interpretation costs ● Partially includes project team staff costs 	<p>455K USD</p>
<p>Francisco Morato (Brazil) Citizens' Assembly on Waste Disposal (2022)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local level ● 40 members ● 5 days of deliberation ● Does not include venue hire 	<p>48K USD</p>