Drenthe's Citizens' Assembly on housing (2024)

Province of Drenthe

INTRODUCTION

In **2024**, the Province of Drenthe organised a **Citizens' Assembly on housing, its first large-scale citizens' assembly**, and part of the province's broader ambition of **"connected governance"**: bringing politics, government, and citizens closer together. **Housing** was chosen because it's a pressing, complex issue in the province, touching affordability, spatial planning, and how new development fits alongside nature and existing communities. Also, citizens indicated that housing is an important topic to have a say in.

The aim was to develop concrete, socially supported **policy recommendations** for the province's housing plans and its long-term policy on housing and spatial development, grounded in real **deliberation among a representative group of Drenthe residents**, rather than a one-off consultation. From the outset, the assembly was also designed to **connect into existing decision-making structures**, so its conclusions could genuinely inform policy discussions within both the provincial administration and parliament, not sit isolated on a shelf.



THE NETHERLANDS

ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

- ○ Inform
- ● **Consult**
- ● **Involve**
- ○ Collaborate
- ○ Empower



MANDATE

The initiative was **formally endorsed by the Provincial Parliament of Drenthe**. To keep it genuinely independent, **politicians witnessed some of the sessions, but did not participate in the sessions themselves.** This was to make sure political agendas didn't shape or overshadow what was meant to be the citizens' own process.

Before the assembly started, **parliament committed to adopting every recommendation** that came out of it (unless there are weighty reasons against it), and giving each one a follow-up within provincial policy wherever possible. That's a much stronger commitment than most consultation processes make. The assembly's role stayed **advisory**, participants weren't handed decision-making power themselves, but the promise to adopt every recommendation gave their work real weight from the outset.

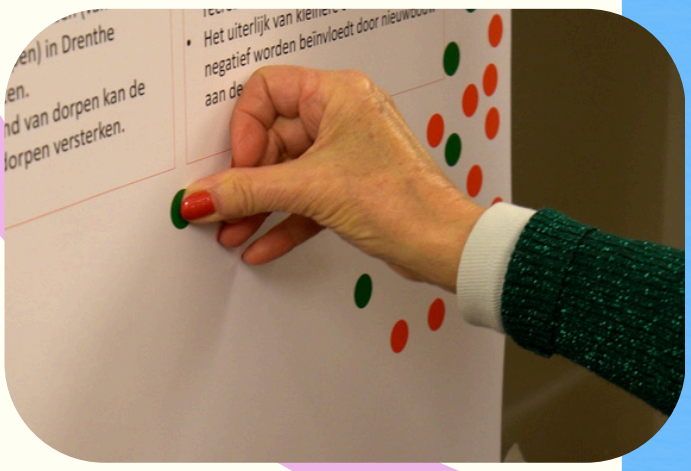
RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Participants were selected through a **civic lottery**. The province sent **30,000 invitation letters to randomly chosen residents**, backed by a **publicity campaign** in regional newspapers, online, and through street conversations.

Almost **2,300 people volunteered**. From that pool, the province used **stratified sampling**, a method that deliberately selects people to mirror the population's makeup, to choose **160 participants** representative of Drenthe's demographic profile: age, gender, municipality, education level, and housing situation.

To keep participation accessible, participants **received €135 per full day, including travel costs**.





PROCESS DESIGN

The process ran over **five months**, in **four sessions**: one evening session, and three full-day sessions.

The **first evening** was about **getting to know each other**, and agreeing on **ground rules for the conversation**. The **second session** built a **shared understanding of the topic**, with input from **independent experts** in housing, spatial planning, mobility, social housing, and sustainability.
The **third session** moved into **structured small-group deliberation**, where participants drafted their first policy recommendations. In the f**inal session**, the group consolidated everything and voted on the **final set of recommendations**.

An **independent participation consultancy** designed and facilitated the entire process, to keep it neutral and ensure high-quality deliberation throughout.

OUPUT AND FOLLOW-UP

The assembly put forward **26 concrete policy recommendation**s, covering a wide range of topics: keeping young people in the province, mobility, energy, spatial planning, infill development (building on existing urban land instead of new sites), the relationship between nature and city planning, and regulations and participation itself.

The **final report** went to parliament during a **public session** in July 2024, and was **published online**. By **early 2026**, all but one of the 26 recommendations had been **folded into the province's housing and spatial planning policy**. The province also reports transparently on this: a **separate attachment to its annual account** tracks the follow-up of every recommendation.





RESOURCES

The initiative cost around €385,500 in total, covering **facilitation**, **participant compensation**, **venue costs**, **external communication**, and **evaluation**.

Twelve people worked on it, from the Statengriffie and several provincial units, including participation, communication, finance, and housing.

The province commissioned an **extensive evaluation**. It found high levels of participant satisfaction, and concluded that the assembly strengthened how legitimate the climate transition plan felt to residents.

STRENGHTS

- High quality of deliberation, with **respectful dialogue.**
- **Low dropout rate** throughout the process.
- **Strong political follow-up**. Parliament had committed in advance to adopting every recommendation.
- **High participant satisfaction** with the organisation and the experts involved.
- **Increased confidence** among participants in cooperation between residents and the province.
- **Decreased perceived polarisation** between groups on the topic of housing.

CHALLENGES

- **Difficulty reaching certain groups**, particularly those less likely to respond to a general invitation.
- **Managing expectations** about implementation, since results take time to show up in policy.
- **Trust in the province** as an institution didn't shift much. Some participants stayed in a "wait and see" mindset, holding back judgment until they saw what happened with their recommendations.
- The **process's hybrid nature**, combining online and in-person elements, didn't get much attention, limiting its wider societal reach and legitimacy.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Secure political commitment** before launching, and involve the **executive branch** of the province from the start.
- **Jointly define the assignment, objectives, and frameworks** between parliament and the executive branch, before the process begins.
- Invest in **professional facilitation**, and in **external communication** throughout the process.
- Plan **follow-up mechanisms** early, and report on them transparently and structurally.



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