

Working method 'Wij zijn Drenthe' ('We are Drenthe')

Province of Drenthe

INTRODUCTION

In April 2025, the Provincial Parliament of Drenthe (Provinciale Staten) launched a **new way of talking to citizens: Wij zijn Drenthe** (We are Drenthe). It's part of a broader ambition called "**connected governance**", bringing politics, government, and citizens closer together. **Members of parliament go out into the community themselves**, to markets, libraries, schools, and community centres across the province.

The initiative aims to **lower the barrier for conversations about provincial issues**, and make sure **a wider range of citizens' voices** reach their provincial representatives. It **specifically targets** people who rarely take part through more formal, traditional participation channels.



THE NETHERLANDS



ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

- ☐ Inform
- ☒ **Consult**
- ☐ Involve
- ☐ Collaborate
- ☐ Empower

MANDATE

The **Provincial Parliament's working group on connected governance** developed the Wij zijn Drenthe method in 2024, and ran its **first edition in spring 2025**.

The working group itself is **apolitical, made up of members from different political parties**, but **formally mandated by the full Provincial Parliament** to carry the ambitions of connected governance forward. That mandate gives the process **real legitimacy**. It shows citizens this isn't a side project, but something the whole parliament stands behind.

As part of the Speak Up project, the working group aims to **run several editions before the end of 2026**, so they can **learn, evaluate, and improve the method for long-term use**.

The outcomes differ per edition, but the purpose stays the same: **informing members of parliament about what citizens actually think, need, and worry about**. This isn't a formal advisory or decision-making process. Its value lies in bringing citizen perspectives directly to the people who make decisions, not in binding commitments to act on them.

RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPATION

There's **no pre-selection** here. **Members of parliament go out into the community themselves.** The visits are **announced through press releases and local media**, so residents can plan to join, but most conversations actually happen **spontaneously**, with passersby who weren't necessarily expecting it.

To reach different kinds of people, the initiative offers several ways in: **face-to-face street conversations**, an **online participation platform**, and a **public event** hosted at a library. Afterward, the outcomes and the **closing event** are made accessible to everyone through a **podcast**.

PROCESS DESIGN

The first edition ran from 15 April to 19 June 2025, on the topic of **cycling in Drenthe**.

Wij zijn Drenthe works as a **"dialogue cycle"**: **four components that build on each other**.

It starts **online**, at wijzijndrenthe.nl, where residents can **vote on or add ideas about a provincial issue**. The voting is kept simple, agree, disagree, or skip, using a tool called Polis. Polis **clusters people into opinion groups** based on how they vote, surfacing a top ten of widely supported statements, without needing anyone to write long responses.

Street conversations happen informally, in public places like markets and libraries, giving parliament and committee members a direct, unscripted way to hear what matters to people.

Together, the online votes and these street conversations shape the agenda for the next step: the **public dialogue**. This is a **facilitated round-table conversation in a public venue**, bringing together residents, experts by experience, interest groups, and members of parliament, to explore the key issues raised earlier in more depth.

The whole public dialogue is **recorded as a podcast**, so residents and parliament members alike can listen back and see exactly how the outcomes came together.

RESOURCES

The Statengriffie, the parliament's own support office, organises each edition. The first edition cost around €49,000, covering a new website, a visual identity, a communication campaign and materials, a dialogue facilitator, conversation training for members of parliament, venue costs, and the podcast.

Three people worked on it: a **project manager** responsible for delivery, an **externally hired support staff member** for two days, and a **communication officer**. The project manager carried out the evaluation, together with the working group.

A few concrete changes are planned for the next edition. **Committee members will be able to join** alongside parliament members, since not enough parliament members were available. There will be **closer collaboration with local media**. And the **podcast will be shorter**, and more enjoyable to listen to.

STRENGTHS

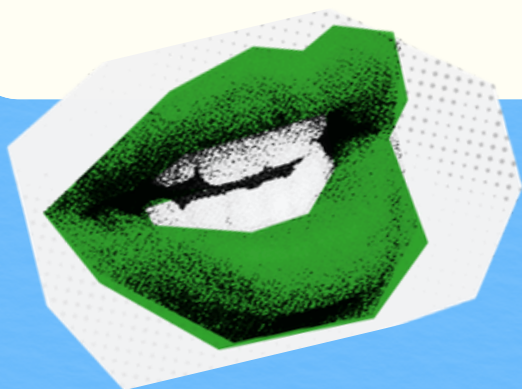
- Reaches people **who are normally not reached**.
- Offers a very **accessible, low-threshold** way to take part.
- Generates **real enthusiasm**. Residents appreciate being asked what they find important.

CHALLENGES

- **Low participation in the online process**.
- **Not enough parliament members available**. Busy schedules, and not every faction takes part actively.
- **Choosing a topic** where the results can actually be used and make a difference.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- The real strength lies in **repetition**, not a one-off experiment.
- Once the website and method are in place, repeating the process becomes **low-cost**.
- For residents, **personal contact** is what matters most. **Being clear about the purpose** of the conversation from the start makes that contact meaningful.



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