CITIZEN PANEL ON PEOPLE-CENTRED SERVICE DELIVERY

City of Roeslare

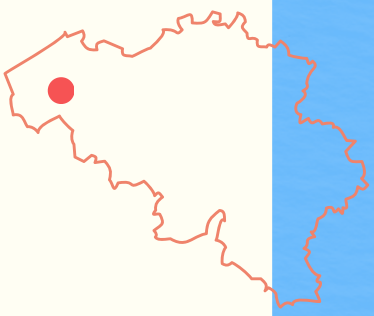
INTRODUCTION

The Citizen Panel in Roeselare, focused on service delivery, was first piloted in **October 2022** as part of the **'Test House for People-Centred Services' project**, a collaboration between the City of Roeselare and ARhus.

Following the pilot, an evaluation confirmed that the mechanism worked and should be scaled up, with some improvements. Today, it's an ongoing participatory initiative that **directly involves citizens in testing and evaluating the city's communication, tools, and processes**, from websites and forms to flyers and physical services.

The goal is straightforward: **make sure services are understandable, accessible, and genuinely aligned with what users need**. Rather than relying on assumptions, the city gathers direct feedback from citizens, leading to better-informed decisions and a service delivery model that's more people-oriented, without losing sight of efficiency for staff.

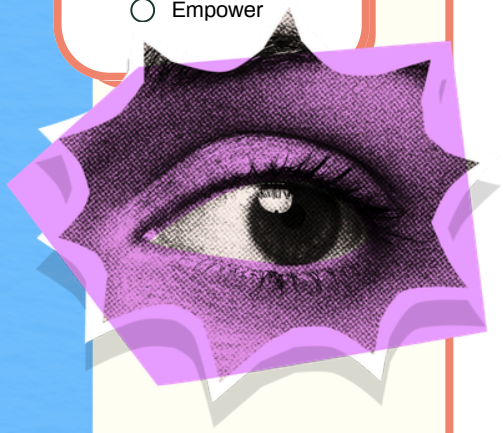
Ultimately, the initiative aims to turn citizen input into real, visible improvements: better-designed services, higher user satisfaction, and more efficient internal processes. Just as importantly, it **helps build trust between citizens and local government**, by showing that what citizens say actually leads to change.



BELGIUM

ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

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



MANDATE

The **pilot** started as part of a **subsidised innovation project on people-centred service delivery**, led by the **City of Roeselare** in collaboration with ARhus, the city's knowledge and community centre.

Support runs deep on the administrative side: **several municipal services are actively involved, with staff taking part directly**, both in designing test cases and implementing improvements.

The Citizen Panel's role is **advisory**: it doesn't have decision-making power of its own. What participants can count on is a structural feedback loop after every session, so they know where their input landed. There's no formal obligation to implement every suggestion, but there is a standing commitment to factor user insights into decision-making and service design.

Political backing comes through the **alderman** responsible for service delivery.

RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The Citizen Panel consists of **around 60 engaged citizens**, with about **20–25 participants per session**.

Participation is **voluntary**, driven mainly by intrinsic motivation: citizens are drawn by the chance to influence services, preview new initiatives, and contribute to real improvements.

Recruitment runs continuously, through **multiple channels**: the city and ARhus websites, social media, personal outreach, and targeted actions such as surveys or events.

Selection focuses on diversity rather than strict representativeness. The panel brings together a mix of ages, genders, language backgrounds, and digital skill levels. Special effort goes into **reaching vulnerable groups by meeting them in familiar environments**. ARhus's own activities, word-of-mouth, and outreach work help further increase that diversity, alongside the city's own efforts to reach vulnerable groups. The aim is a broad range of user perspectives, not a statistically representative sample.

The venue is fully accessible, familiar, and pleasant, and the people present are recognisable faces, which helps put more vulnerable participants at ease. There's no financial compensation, but participants are always offered a snack and a drink.

PROCESS DESIGN

The Citizen Panel runs as an **ongoing process**, **organised quarterly**.

Sessions usually involve **small-scale, hands-on testing**, mostly one-on-one, where participants interact directly with prototypes or existing services.

The approach is designed by municipal staff and ARhus together, with strong internal ownership on both sides. Staff play a key role: they help define test cases, observe user behaviour, and analyse the results. Each session has **one single point of contact (SPOC)** from Roeselare and one from ARhus. The Roeselare SPOC makes sure there's a concrete case to test, helps build the test setup with the responsible staff members, and analyses the results so the relevant department can act on them. The ARhus SPOC makes sure that, where possible, ARhus itself can test something too, or connects with another organisation that signed the "Everyone Digital" charter on digital inclusion.

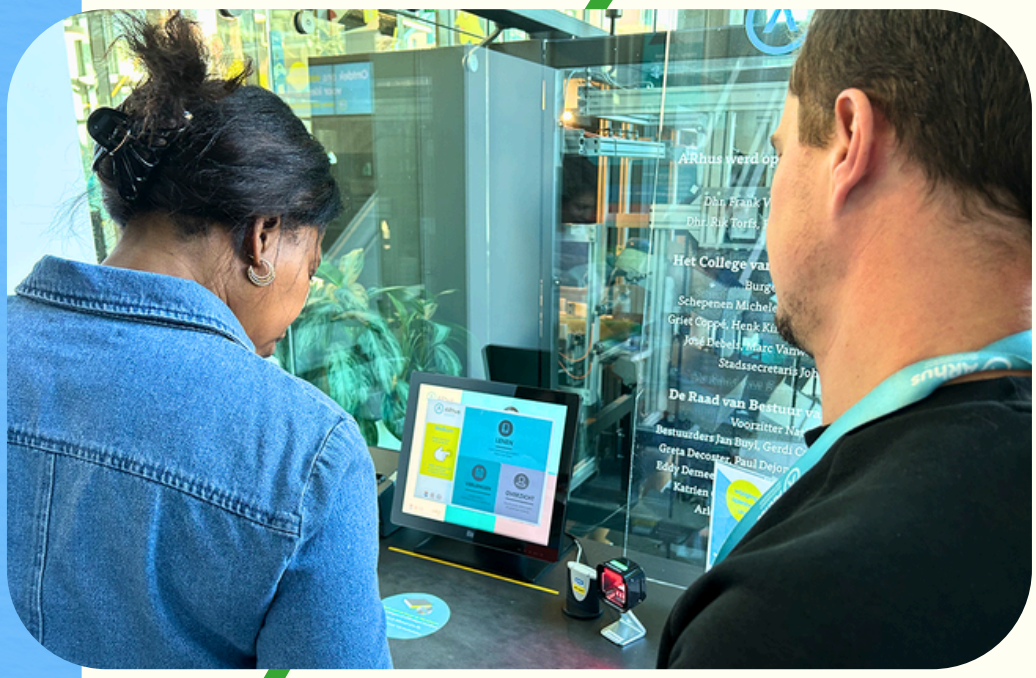
Panel members have also expressed **interest in giving feedback to other locally rooted organisations** in Roeselare, such as the police or care institutions.

Each session follows a **structured approach**:

- **Preparation**: selecting topics, designing scenarios, inviting participants.
- **Testing**: guided or independent user testing in a controlled setting.
- **Observation**: capturing feedback, barriers, and behaviour.
- **Follow-up**: internal analysis (see below for how results are used and shared).

The process moves in **quick learning cycles**. This lets the city test ideas early, adjust before full implementation, or adapt when new needs come up.

Small details make a big difference: clear communication, a smooth flow, a welcoming atmosphere, and feedback to participants afterwards. Together, they make participation feel worthwhile.







FOLLOW-UP

The main outputs are **qualitative user insights that translate into concrete improvements in service delivery**, from adjustments to websites and forms to communication materials and physical service interactions. Rather than producing formal reports alone, the focus is on **actionable findings**: identifying barriers, validating assumptions, and refining solutions.

Results are **shared internally with the relevant services and folded into ongoing projects**, with staff using the insights directly to redesign processes and communication. Some findings extend beyond the original topic, for example, insights on how to communicate better with a specific target group, in which case they're shared more widely within the organisation.

Examples of tested outputs include:

- Digital applications and websites that were adjusted, such as different colours, larger fonts, or improved navigation.
- Printed materials (flyers and brochures) that were adjusted, such as different photos or larger fonts.
- Service processes and physical service environments that were adjusted, such as more accessible spaces or a redesigned user flow.

Participants get feedback too, during **summer drinks or a New Year's gathering**, where the city explains how their input was used and thanks them for their engagement. That moment helps strengthen trust and keep people engaged.

RESOURCES

The Citizen Panel runs on a **relatively limited budget**, since it's largely embedded within the existing organisational budget. There are **no venue costs**, thanks to the collaboration with ARhus or other linked organisations, and **no consultants** are needed, since the process is managed entirely in-house.

Key resources include:

- **Staff** time for preparation, testing, and analysis (a minimum of 4 people per session).
- **Catering** for testing sessions, with snacks and drinks offered to participants.
- **Communication and recruitment efforts.**



IMPACT

Impact shows up in **improved usability**, **fewer complaints**, and **more efficient service delivery**. Just as importantly, the initiative is helping shift the administration's culture toward **more user-centred thinking**.

STRENGHTS

- Direct, practical impact on **service quality**.
- Strong **staff involvement**, which builds real ownership.
- A continuous process that enables **fast learning cycles**.
- Builds **trust** with citizens through visible results.
- **Keeps citizens engaged** through meaningful feedback.
- **Keeps employees engaged** by giving them direct feedback and quick wins for their services.

CHALLENGES

- Reaching vulnerable and underrepresented groups: **younger people and young families (18–40) remain underrepresented**, though an action plan with several test actions is in place to improve this.
- Maintaining diversity over time, as **sampling bias** can creep in.
- **Managing expectations** about what can realistically change.
- The **risk of 'professionalised' citizens**: participants who've tested many times tend to give more polished, expert-like feedback than someone new to the process, which can skew results.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

These lessons come from a mix of sources: feedback from participants during each session, a broader evaluation event held with panel members since 2025, and internal staff reflections:

- **Start small, then iterate. Q**uick tests deliver value faster than big, slow consultations.
- **Involve employees early**, or all those great insights just sit there, unused.
- **Diversity** doesn't happen on its own. It takes active effort.
- **Show people their feedback mattered**. That's what keeps them coming back.
- Focus on **real-life situations**.
- **Make the setting pleasant.** Give people time and space to actually enjoy being there.
- Be upfront about what's happening and why. **Clear expectations** save everyone a headache later.
- A **familiar, friendly face** at the door goes a long way.
- Don't make people wait around. **Keep things moving.**
- Pick **dates and times** that actually work for the people you're trying to reach.
- **Always thank participants** for showing up.
- Don't just evaluate the sessions, but evaluate the whole format with your panel. Ask them directly: is the format still working? Do the times suit you? What would make you want to stay involved?
- **And the biggest lesson of all?** Real users spot the blind spots your own team walks past every day. That alone makes the whole thing worth it.



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