# Citizen engagement in STI policy – what is it?

The process by which public authorities engage citizens in a *dialogue* to shape STI policies
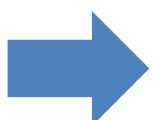
➤ **Experts & industry stakeholders** are often involved in policymaking – but they play different, complementary roles

Why?
Four key reasons

1 Increase the **quality** of policies

2 Ensure **inclusive** policymaking

3 Increase **visibility** & support for STI

4 Enhance **trust** in public institutions
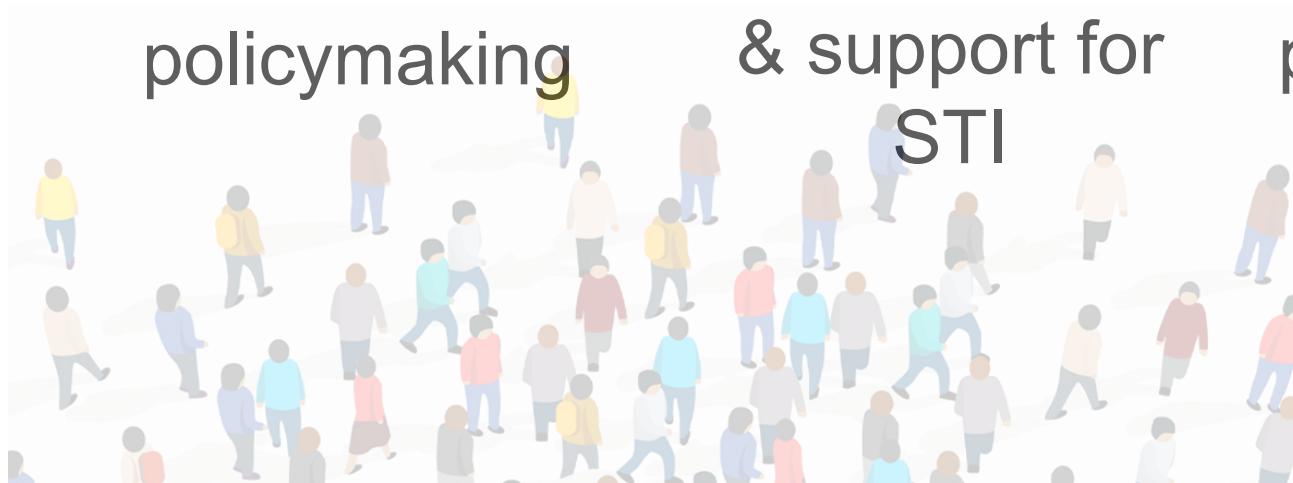
Why?
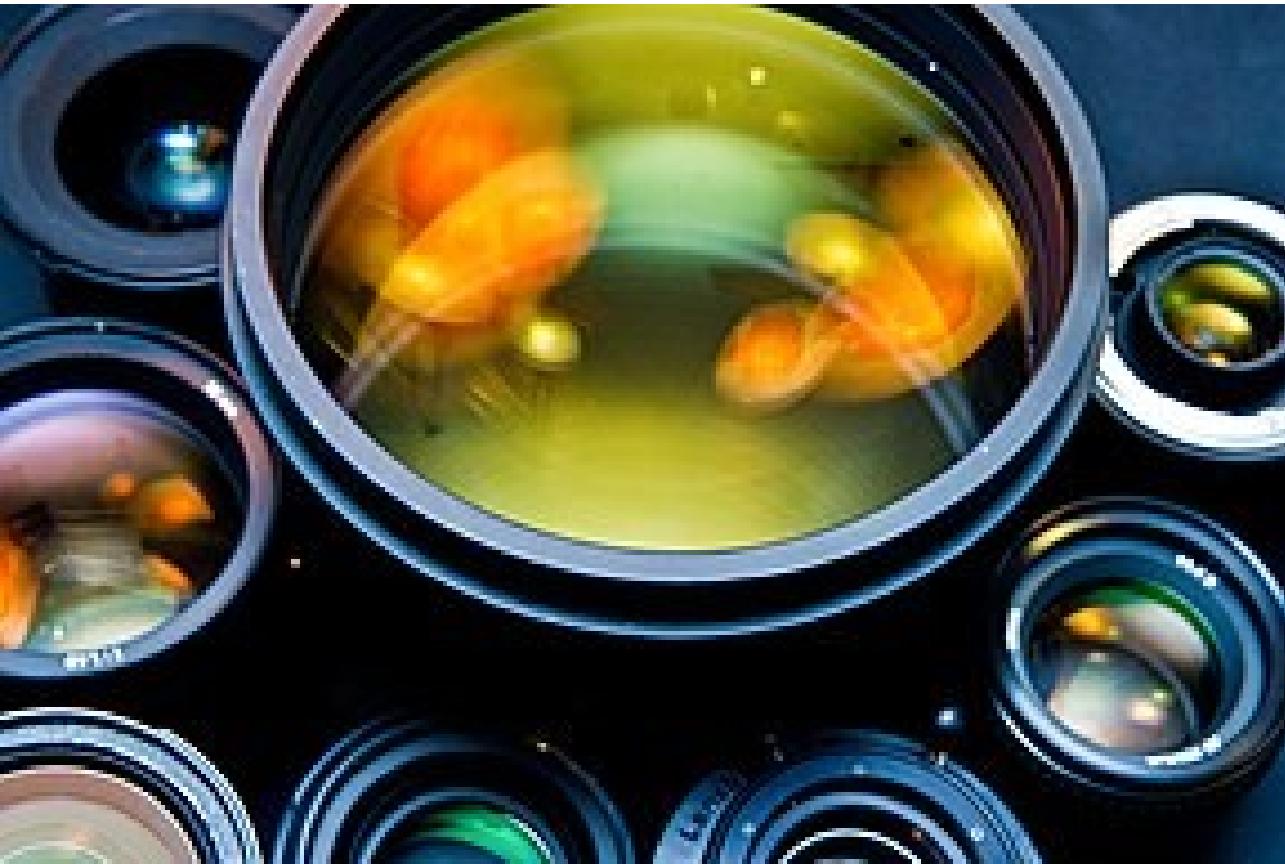
Views of experts and citizens on research and innovation priorities differ significantly, with the latter putting social needs more at the forefront

When?
Not all STI policy processes can engage citizens directly

Citizen engagement is…
- **Costly** & time-consuming
- **Demanding** for citizens
- **Challenging** for unprepared public administrations to manage

It **COMPLEMENTS** (does not replace) representative democracy mechanisms
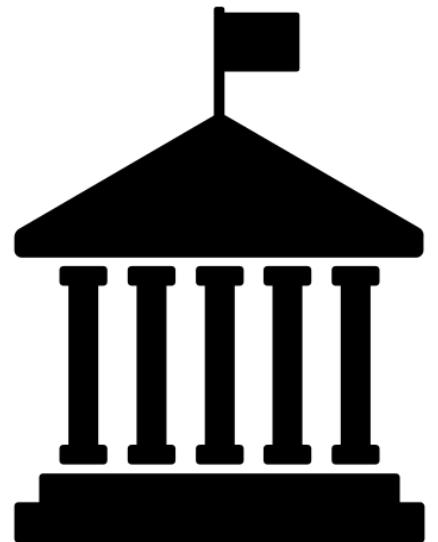
When?
Citizen engagement is particularly valuable in three cases

1

Setting **long-term policy directions**

Such decisions may involve:
- Value judgements
- Important trade-offs
- Short-term costs
- Some groups being disproportionally affected

When?

Citizen engagement is particularly valuable in three cases

1

Setting **long-term policy directions**

2

Policies requiring **local community knowledge**

3

Topics citizens deeply care about and create divides

When?
Citizens can engage at different stages of STI policymaking

Stage	Purpose
Strategy & agenda setting	• Define **short- and long-term strategic priorities** for STI policy and funding • Research **agenda setting**
Programme development	• **Define priorities** for research and innovation programmes • **Allocate funding** across projects / priority areas
Technology assessment	• Identify possible **short- and long-term consequences** (e.g. societal, economic, ethical) **of new technologies**, in order to socially steer technology development toward desired outcomes
Foresight	• Develop a **shared vision for the future** and determine the actions, steps and resources needed to reach it

Participatory research agenda setting
One example

A National Conversation on Research in Ireland

Creating our Future (2021-22) encouraged citizens in Ireland to share their ideas to inform future research and innovation agendas.

Participatory technology assessment

Integrating public perspectives into controversial science and technology policy decisions

Engaging citizens in STI policymaking is challenging

Challenges

Specific to STI

| Less connected to people's everyday lives | Perceived as dominated by scientists & experts | Issues can be very technical |

Common to all policy areas

| Specialised skills needed to design & implement tailored processes | Risk of unbalanced representation | Consultation "fatigue" |

Who engages with the public?
Three possible types of actors

Specialised intermediaries

Elected officials

Citizens

Civil servants
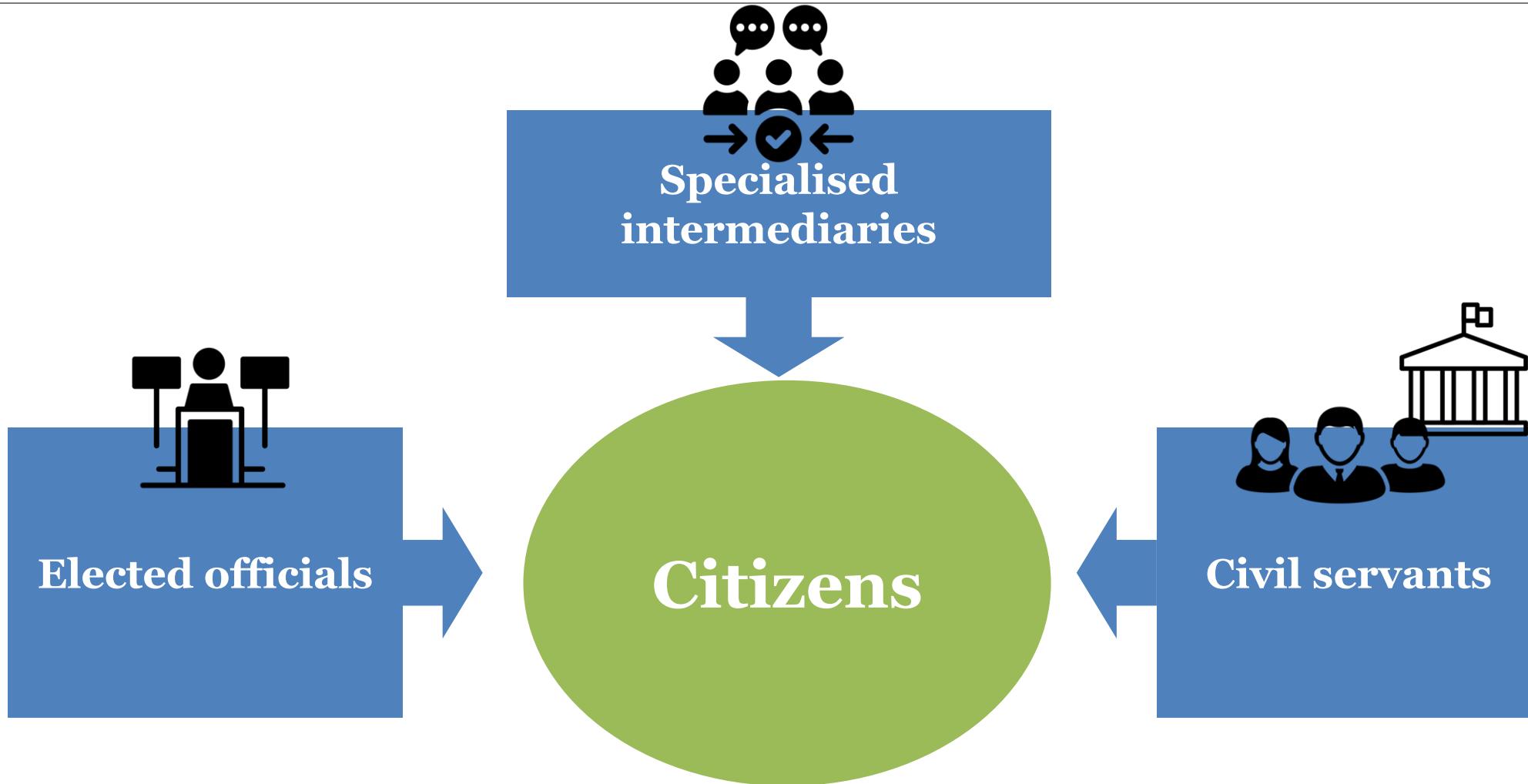
See section 2.2 for an analysis of their relative strengths and weaknesses as key interlocutors of citizens

How to get started?
Some practical considerations for STI policymakers

- Account for **cost, time & resources**
- **Define the "public"** to be involved
- Set the **conditions of the "contract"** between organisers & participants
- **Commit** to work with results
- Ask: how will **citizens benefit?**

How will citizens benefit from engagement?
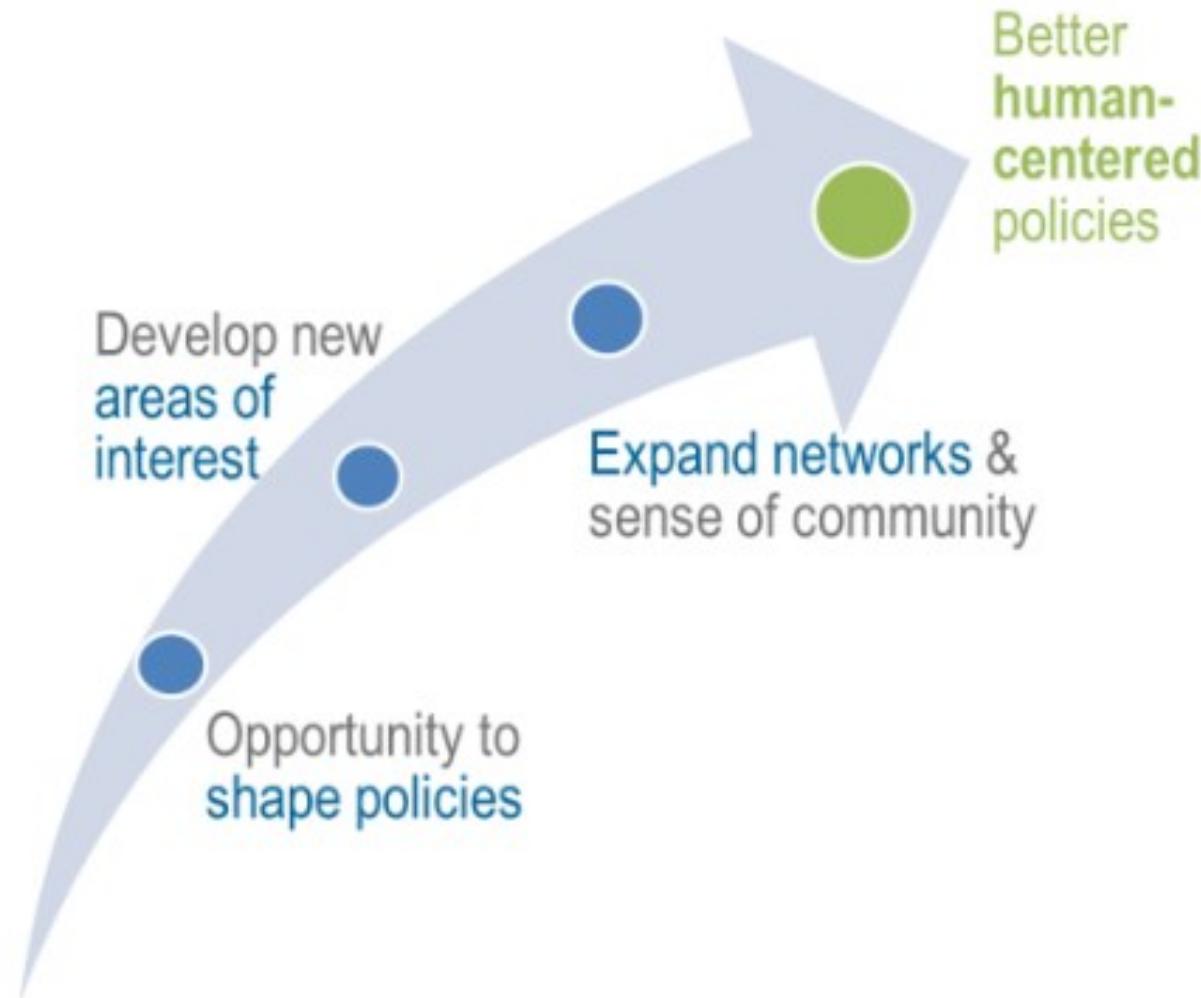
How to ensure all voices are heard?
The problem of increasingly polarised debates

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Brandsma, B (2017) Polarisation – Understanding the dynamics of us versus them.
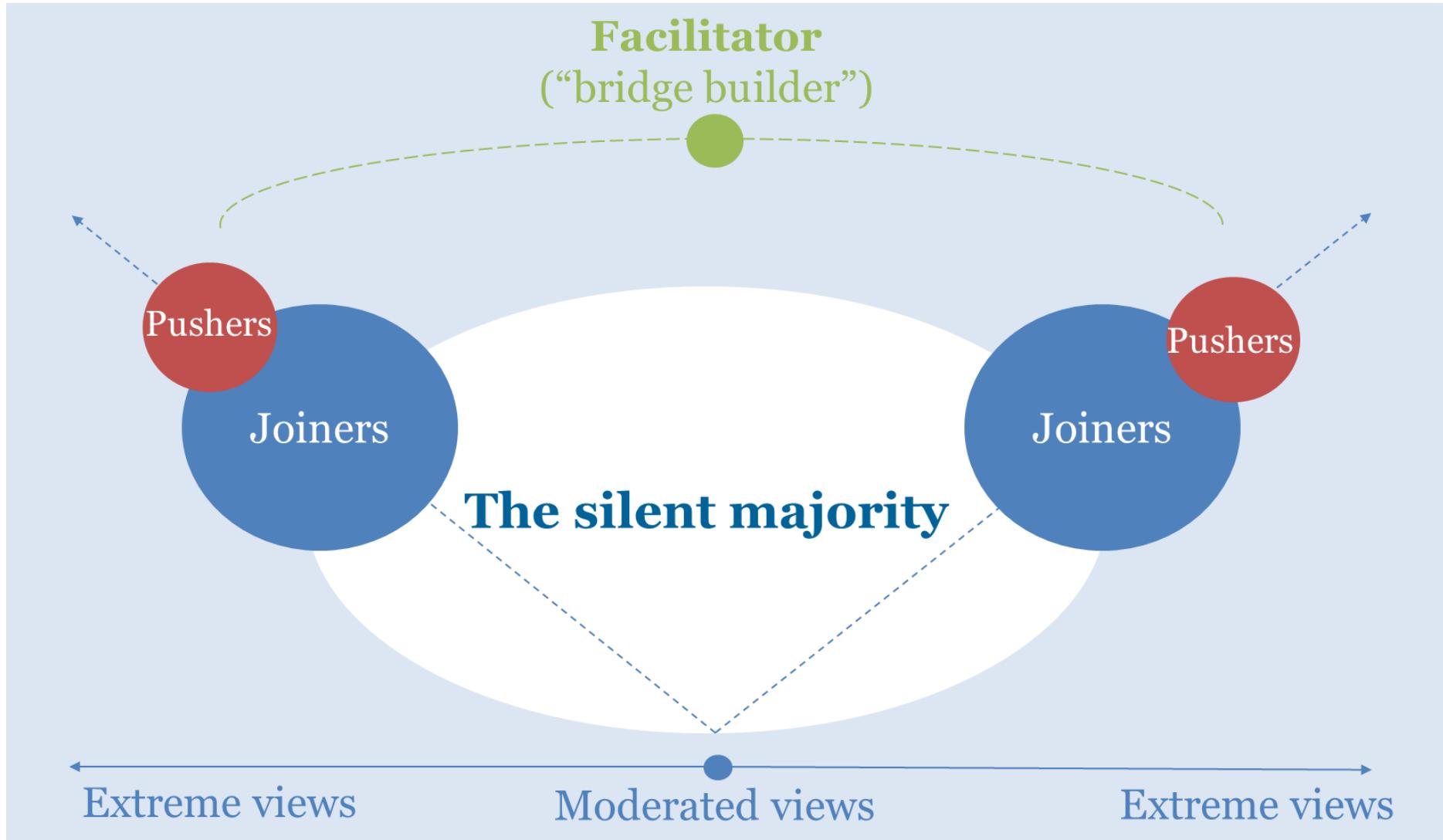
How to ensure all voices are heard?
Four key actions

1 Tailor **reach out activities**

– the role of **"trusted voices"**
(e.g. community leaders, academics)

– tailored **"narratives"**

2 Invest in **preparatory processes** to help build well-informed views

3 Expert **facilitation** – impartial & trustworthy

4 Ensure **neutral convening spaces**

What comes after the engagement?
Integration of inputs and feedback loops

Integrate inputs from citizens in policy processes

Communicate with citizens about how their inputs were used

Solicit **feedback** from participants & evaluate the process and its impacts

High-level policy implications

- **Quality over quantity**: focus on fewer, more impactful processes

- Bringing **civil servants closer to citizens** can enhance trust

- **Design choices** make a major difference – no one-size fits all!

Practical do's and don'ts

Do's	Don'ts
Defining the purpose and scope of engagement	
Prioritize societal engagement activities to undertake in view of available time and resources	Organise citizen engagement processes as a "tick the box" formality.
Organise citizen engagements activities with the intention of integrating the results in policy process and at the right moment	Engage with citizens without consideration to how outcomes will inform policy or when there is little scope for inputs to shape policy decisions as decisions need to be taken prior to having those outcomes
Account for costs of the participatory processes, allocate sufficient time and resources to organise, effectively engage and anticipate costs for processing inputs from citizens.	Organise many processes without sufficient funding or planning.
Develop compelling and clear "narratives" – stories that explain why a specific policy issue deserves citizens' attention – with diverse citizen audiences in mind	Communicate using jargon and technical/ scientific style from official document directly for consultations.
Set realistic targets for citizen engagement in processes	Solicit too much from citizens during the engagement
Targeting the relevant public and ensuring inclusive engagement	
Clearly define the "public" to involve and implement robust recruitment methods to avoid unbalanced samples, overrepresentation of specific interest groups and the polarization of debates.	Design participatory processes without defining the target population and resulting biases in engagement for certain groups in society

Do's	Don'ts
Plan specific actions to ensure under-represented groups can engage and have their voice heard (e.g. specific outreach activities, support throughout the process to ensure informed views, expert facilitation to guarantee level playing field in the participation space).	
Provide support for participation when needed (e.g. financial or other compensations such as recognition)	
Use hybrid strategies and leverage trusted voices to mobilize underrepresented groups.	Use a single method to reach all types of groups and disregard biases from using specific engagement methods.
Designing and implementing inclusive citizen engagement processes	
Choose the engagement method (e.g. citizen assembly, focus working group, etc.) that is more suitable given the purpose of the exercise and target group. Adapt standardized methods to best respond to specific needs.	Apply existing participatory methods inflexibly, without adapting to specific context, purpose, and target groups.
Set up a 'contract' between organisers and participants from the start, specifying what the organisers expect from participants and how outcomes of the process will be integrated in policy processes.	Lack of clarity about the process (objectives, expected outcomes, role of citizens, etc.)
Present and inform citizens about issues to be discussed, with all its complexity/nuances so they can develop their own well-informed perspectives. Ensure information provided is clear, unbiased, evidence-based, and accessible to all. Sufficient time should be allocated to the preparatory/information stage.	Issues are presented using technical jargon and without attempts at making complexities accessible or, conversely, they are presented in oversimplified ways, resulting in biases of engagement processes and outcomes. Provision of partial selection of evidence available (e.g. evidence supporting the political agenda of specific groups)
Create a level-playing field for all participants to express their views and avoid 'louder voices' (often those with more polarized views) to dominate the process and have an excessive influence on its results. Engage neutral and trustworthy facilitators and neutral spaces for discussions	Lack of measures to ensure that all voices are heard. Lack of action to prevent the overrepresentation of vested interests. Lack of action to avoid the polarization of debates, dominated by those with more extreme views and leaving more moderated views unheard.
Devise methods for dealing with divergent perspectives and communicating decisions to citizens with different perspectives.	Solicit citizen inputs as "formality" without developed plan on integration to the detriment of future engagement.
Integrate inputs from citizens in the policy process. Communicate to participants how their inputs were used and how they shaped the policy process.	Unclear/non-transparent or lack of integration of citizen inputs in policymaking. Lack of follow-up and communication on how inputs were integrated.
Solicit feedback from participants regarding the engagement process. Identify what worked and what could have worked better to inform future similar citizen engagement processes.	Missing to solicit feedback from participants, therefore losing opportunities to learn from the experience.

See section 6.2

Citizen engagement as part of a wider involvement strategy
Three complementary ways of involving citizens in STI

	1	**2**	**3**
	Communication activities	**Consultation activities**	**Citizen participation in STI activities**
Purpose	Increase public awareness, interest & understanding of STI issues	Collect citizens' views & feedback to policy proposals	Engage citizens directly in research & innovation
Examples	Science fair, documentary, exhibit in public space, open lab days	Online public consultation, targeted survey	Citizen science project, open challenge, living lab, fablab, hackathon

In the context of the green & digital transitions, engagement becomes a policy imperative

Overview of innovation policy imperatives for transitions

COORDINATED GOVERNMENT — Align policy action (transnational, national & sub-national) to maximise impact

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT — Define and coordinate shared, inclusive pathways and needed actions

AGILITY & EXPERIMENTATION — Respond swiftly to the unexpected & continuous policy learning

DIRECTIONALITY — Channel efforts & resources to advance on desired pathways

FOSTERING BREAKTHROUGH INNOVATION — Enable conditions for transition-supporting innovations

Source: Arnold, E., et al. (2023), "Navigating green and digital transitions: Five imperatives for effective STI policy", *OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers*, No. 162, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/dffb0747-en.

To sum up

When to engage citizens in innovation policy?

1
Setting **long-term policy directions**

2
Policies requiring **local community knowledge**

3
Topics citizens deeply care about and create divides

BUT QUALITY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN QUANTITY!
Focus on **fewer, more impactful** processes

How?

- Account for **cost, time & resources**
- Ensure all voices are heard to **avoid polarisation** of debates
- Commit to **integrate results** in policy processes

Design choices make a major difference!

Expert support can be key to progressively **expand public administration capacities**

Thank you!
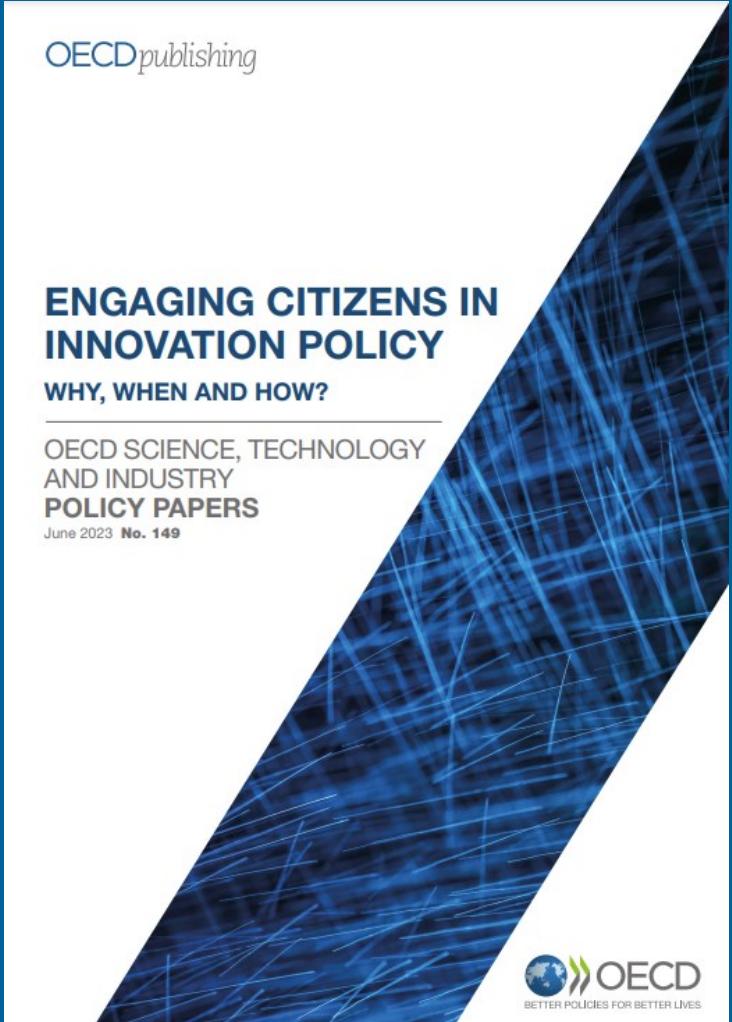
Find out more:

Report
Paunov, C. and S. Planes-Satorra (2023), "Engaging citizens in innovation policy: Why, when and how?", *OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers*, No. 149, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ba068fa6-en.

Blog: https://oecd-opsi.org/blog/imperative-of-engaging-citizens-in-innovation-policies/

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