

The FUTURE ARMENIAN

Framing Question Guideline

The purpose of this document is to introduce the concept of a “framing question” adopted within the framework of The Convention of Future Armenian.

1. Framing question

“If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask, for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN

1.1 Purpose of the framing question

In deliberative processes, Assembly members are presented with an overarching question they need to address during their deliberations: we call it a **framing question**. Historically, the question put to the citizens tends to be determined by an oversight committee to ensure it is not skewed or biased, is understandable to participants and is achievable to address in the given time ([Roberts et al. 2020](#)). The question should be framed therefore to meet the following criteria:

- not be a leading question or a binary question.
- include constraints, trade-offs and boundaries in the question.
- focus on what is most important at this moment in time.
- use simple language.
- not purely technical, but allows to surface beliefs, values, and governing sentiments (e.g., hopes and fears).

It is also possible for the members of a deliberative process to have a role in shaping a framing question. Benefits include:

- citizens use their own creativity and their own unique expertise to set the agenda.
- citizens feel their opinions and ideas are valued so increasing buy into the process and a sense of ownership.
- neglected issues and marginalised perspectives may be articulated and considered.
- a recognition that citizens are agents of change.

1.2 Examples of framing questions from citizens’ assemblies

We can learn lessons from previous questions given to citizens’ assemblies. Here a traffic light system is employed to classify questions as poor (**red**), average (**amber**) and good (**green**).

Citizens' Assembly of Scotland: *'What kind of country are we seeking to build? How best can we overcome the challenges Scotland and the world face in the 21st century, including those arising from Brexit? What further work should be carried out to give us the information we need to make informed choices about the future of the country?'* There are too many questions here, but each question is far too broad and vague. It's not clear what information is necessary to provide the members. Moreover, the answers to these questions could be quite general too, meaning it would be hard to hold the government to account.

Germany Citizens' Assembly: *'Germany's role in the world'*. Although it involves values, it is still very broad and vague. It would be difficult to determine an appropriate agenda, but also to hold the government / parliament to account in response to emerging suggestions of the assembly.

Climate Assembly UK: *'How should the UK meet its legally binding target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050?'* This is a reasonable question as there is plenty of potential here for the assembly to decide how to decarbonise. However, the 2050 target is too restrictive and overall, the question is too broad to cover in the available time of four weekends. To address this, they split the assembly into thematic groups which detracted from the overall coherence of the assembly.

French Citizens' Convention on Climate: *'How to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030, in a spirit of social justice?'* This is a clear and precise question, suitable to be answered in seven weekends, but the '40%' and '2030' targets were too restrictive and didn't allow citizens to really engage with the systemic drivers of climate change and the political economy.

Scottish Climate Assembly: *'How should Scotland change to tackle the climate emergency in an effective and fair way?'* This is a good question as it requires the assembly to make trade-offs between effectiveness and fairness. It's not too narrow or leading as the assembly also got to decide what 'effective' and 'fair' were. It is a broad question, but the assembly met for 6 weekends, so it was more likely to be answerable in the time available.

1.3 Choosing a framing question for the Convention of The Future Armenian

Elements to explore to identify the framing question:

- Who should decide on the framing question?
- How should this be done?
- What are the elements of the framing that need to be considered?
- What are the embedded assumptions / values / beliefs in that framing?
- What are the sub-questions that the framing question should address. For example:
 - What kind of lives do the participants of the Convention want future generations to have?
 - What commitments do they want the leaders and institutions to make to secure that future?
 - What principles should guide how leaders and institutions act to secure that future?
 - What do they want to do as citizens to secure that future?
 - What help do they need from institutions and leaders to take those actions?