

Deschutes Assembly on Youth Homelessness

Modeling a pragmatic, concrete way to bridge divides in Deschutes County

Quick Facts

Citizens'/Civic Assemblies are a democratic innovation taking root around the world to solve tough policy problems amidst political division. The proposed Assembly in Deschutes County will be a unique democratic exercise that engages a representative sample of everyday residents to tackle the complex issue of youth homelessness.

- **30 Assembly Members**, selected by democratic lottery (sortition), to form a cross-section of the community (based on gender, age, race/ethnicity, and other factors)
- **5 days** of in-depth deliberation in September and October 2024.
- **Robust accessibility measures**, including substantial stipends and expense reimbursements, to make sure *all* Assembly Members can meaningfully participate.
- **In-depth learning phase**. Members hear from all sides of the issue – via written background materials, stories collected from the broader community, and diverse stakeholder and expert presenters.
- **Broad community connections**. Collaboration with a standing Youth Action Board, made up of young people with lived experience, and integration of a tech platform that will enable hundreds more community members to join the conversation.
- **New model for collaborative decision making**. With meticulous deliberative process design and specifically trained small group moderation, Members are empowered with the tools to unlock collaboration and identify common ground solutions.
- **Regional policy impact**. The Assembly will present its recommendations to the Deschutes County Commission and local city councils – all of whom will publicly discuss and consider implementation of the Assembly's recommendations.
- **National media strategy** that proves a *different kind of democracy* is possible amidst a polarized election.

Context

Deschutes County sits at a socio-political crossroads. In many ways it is a microcosm of our country's cultural divides, with its growing tech and recreation industries contrasting with its agricultural and logging roots. Bend is also one of the fastest growing cities in the United States, with a population that has more than doubled since 2000 – and is forecast to do so again in the next 30 years. Accompanying this is the fourth highest cost of living growth rate in the country, and a level of income inequality in the top 12% among all cities nationally in 2022. Central Oregon ranks in the top five rural places nationwide for its rate of families and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness. Paired with a major grant from HUD on the same topic, the Assembly will be well-positioned to implement creative solutions to a wicked local challenge.

Partners

This project is a partnership between the Central Oregon Civic Action Project, Democracy Next, Healthy Democracy, and OSU–Cascades. Multiple officials from COIC, Deschutes County, and the City of Bend have also pledged their support for the project.