



Vienna, December 2022

Briefing: Role of liaison person or “Civil Society Engagement Officer” (CSE Officer) at the Austrian Climate Assembly

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To support the Austrian citizen’s climate assembly in engagement with civil society a dedicated “liaisons-persons” function was established.

The role of the Civil Society Engagement (CSE) Officers was created and based on the learnings from previous citizens’ assemblies about the importance of reinforcing the link between the process of the Assembly and the broader civil society to increase awareness about the assembly and ensure a more meaningful impact of the final recommendations.

The CSE Officers worked closely with all the actors involved in the organization and facilitation of the Assembly to facilitate outreach to civil society, provide support to the PR-Team and act as assisting facilitators at the weekend sessions. Due to the relative novelty of the position, the role was evaluated and adapted over the six months during which the Climate Assembly took place. The CSE Officers provided an important point of mediation, supplying civil society organisations with contacts to participants, members of the scientific board, the evaluation team and facilitators.

Key objectives were ...	Key outcomes were:
... to inform the general public about the assembly and to deepen the understanding of the method and the process;	Enhanced engagement with the wider public.
... to inform established (climate) actors about the assembly and build relations for further cooperation;	Further outreach of the assembly via events and cooperation with civil society actors.
... to support the organization of the assembly’s official stakeholder board;	Enhanced interaction with media.
... to support the assembly participants in spreading the word about the assembly and become active in their home regions;	Enhanced interaction with regional politicians.

... to ensure transparency about the process on different levels, e.g. on the website and in the communication with civil society;	Enhanced transparency of the assembly
...to support the PR team in their work, e.g. in social media, organising interview partners.	Enhanced PR for the assembly.

Examples of main activities

1: Cooperation with established Climate Actors

- Staying in touch (via e-mail and online calls) with NGOs, regional managers and activist groups
- Organising Online-Webinars and networking-events with regional (Climate) managers
- Participating in events of cooperation partners to present the work of the assembly (in town halls, schools, conferences, etc.)
- Organising film-screenings (“the People vs. Climate Change” from the UK climate assembly) followed by discussions with regional actors in cinemas and town halls
- Workshop about the method and process of the citizens’ assembly for Teachers
- Presenting the Citizens’ Assembly at the National Youth Climate Assembly

2: Producing media content in a addition to the PR team with a focus on in depth engagement

- Actively engaging with podcast-makers and talk about the Assembly on their shows
- Participating in discussions about the assembly in Community-TV
- Getting invited to talk about the assembly on smaller radio stations
- Proposing text-snippets for regional newspapers
- Publishing support-declarations for the citizens’ climate assembly mayors online and in the press
- Providing content for the social media channels

3: Engagement with general publics

- Sending out a monthly newsletter
- Managing the website’s content to ensure transparency for the wider public
- Organising public online webinars about the assembly

4: Engagement with politicians

- Presentations of the assembly’s design and process to regional politicians
- Supporting the media team to get statements of support from Mayors of participants’ towns.

Setting-up enabling conditions to support the role of CSE Officers

1. Finding an active role for CSE Officers during the sessions is important for two reasons:
 - a. First, so they can have direct contact with participants and build trust early on.
 - b. Second, to help acquire a thorough first-hand understanding of the process in order to convey it well to civil society actors.

The involvement of one of the CSE Officers in the facilitation team was very helpful for the officers to deeply understand the deliberative process. However, it posed an additional strain on their resources, adding to the many communicative tasks ingrained into their role. Also, appearances as facilitators can overshadow the participant's perception of the CSE role.

2. The role and significance of CSE – and their place in the governance of the assembly- needs to be clarified to and with all other entities of the organisation team right from the start. It is important that the CSE officers are well informed about developments and changes in the process, planned interventions etc., as they are the first point of contact for the wider public.
3. The different working logics of press/social media and CSE need to be made visible and negotiated in the beginning.
4. Ensure the role of the CSO is presented to the assembly participants at the beginning of the assembly.
5. Involvement in the official board of stakeholders was an important source of information and contacts for the CSE officers. These contacts were a starting point for further cooperation and invitations by various stakeholders. However, it has to be considered that the stakeholder board and its membership follows a different logic and has different tasks than other communication with stakeholders. Some stakeholders could be approached following both logics, which can interfere with each other.
6. Ensure the PR team and communications around the assembly is continued for several months after the assembly – the CSEOs depend on the support of these teams to do their work.
7. Create a space where feedback can be given to the organisation team by the CSEO - Interested and aware civil society can provide important critical and external feedback on the process and its perception in the media.
8. It has to be clarified in the beginning who is in charge of political contacts: CSEO, PR team or others. Whoever takes on this role, needs to stay on at least until a first reply from politicians is published. CSEO can take on this task, however, it has to be considered that it requires the necessary contacts and skills, which differ from the skills needed in the work with civil society.