

## What is the Charlotte Assembly?

The Charlotte Assembly is patterned after the American Assembly process, founded in 1950 by Dwight D. Eisenhower.

### Q. What is an American Assembly?

A. An American Assembly is a structured approach for developing a consensus on a vision for the future or an action plan.

### Q. What is the purpose of an Assembly?

A. Its purpose is to develop a vision or action plan to meet the needs of residents in a community, a region, or a state.

### Q. How do we develop this action plan?

A. The Assembly has a structured process that allows each member to express his or her ideas and suggestions. By using a fair and open process of consensus building, we can develop a viable action plan.

### Q. Why should we use this specific process for consensus building?

A. The Assembly approach provides a body of knowledge, a setting, and a technique for bringing thoughtful persons together to discuss issues and voice their concerns in a manner that allows each participant to participate in a meaningful way.

### Q. Does consensus building occur only during the Assembly?

A. No, consensus building begins to emerge during the earliest stages of Assembly planning as members of the Steering Committee determine, through consensus, such items as the issues to be discussed, who is included, questions that guide discussion, and budget and fundraising. During the Assembly, consensus building is part of the information exchange, formation of trust, and relationship building. Also, it continues after the Assembly, throughout implementation, as participants continue to build relationships and inform others about anticipated outcomes.

### Q. What takes place during the actual Assembly?

A. The attendees are divided into discussion groups, each with 20 to 25 participants. Each group has a facilitator, a scribe, and a fact sheet with questions for the group to answer on each topic. There is an effort to avoid voting and instead to develop a consensus position. After deliberations, a general or plenary session is held at the end to resolve, through voting, any differences between the consensus statements of the five groups. The overall facilitator would prepare a final report, or Policy Statement that contained the language agreed to on each topic.

### Q. How is the Policy Statement written?

A. The final Policy Statement is written by integrating each group's notes into a single document. It contains the consensus reflected in the group discussions. The Policy Statement is an integrated report, rather than a summary of the separate statements from each small group discussion. The focus is on overall objectives and associated implementation strategies, as detailed as possible without violating the spirit of a single group.

### Q. What assurance is there that the Assembly recommendations will be carried out?

A. There is no guarantee that Assembly recommendations will be carried out. The force of the Policy Statement rests entirely on its practicality, the support it receives from participants, and the perception among the media and the larger community that it is a legitimate expression of community sentiment.

### Q. How do public officials react to Assembly recommendations?

A. It is difficult for elected and appointed officials not to respond when a large group of their most active constituents have assembled, openly debated controversial topics, and reached conclusions which respect the interests of all concerned parties.