SORTITION FOUNDATION
STRATEGY
2019-2024
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The Sortition Foundation campaigns for a world free from partisan politicking, where a representative random sample of everyday people make decisions in an informed, deliberative and fair environment.

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This document was co-created by members and supporters of the Sortition Foundation throughout 2018. Thank you to all who contributed.

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www.sortitionfoundation.org
Executive Summary

The Sortition Foundation wants to transform how democracy is done. We want to do democracy differently. We believe that deliberative sortition assemblies* are a demonstrably better way of discovering the considered will of the people, and would like to see these assemblies used routinely at every level of government.

Ultimately, our aim is for these assemblies to be permanently instituted in our democratic structures, and many within the Sortition Foundation would like to further see the abolition of elected chambers and a complete shift to a sortition democracy.

Our plan to achieve these objectives has three phases. The first phase is to promote and organise regular sortition assemblies – we believe sortition will only be adopted as a fundamental part of our democracy after successful assemblies have been held in a significant number of our communities. High-profile, national assemblies will also play a key role in popularising these assemblies and making decision-makers and citizens aware of their benefits, and, given the long-term, potentially generational nature of the changes we are seeking, exposing students and young adults to the possibilities of sortition democracy will also be important.

Our proposal is for the Sortition Foundation to instigate, support and promote high-profile assemblies to attract widespread media attention; to organise and promote extensive and regular local deliberative sortition assemblies; and to engage with students in schools and higher education, with the ultimate aim of achieving democratic institutional transformation. This document sets out a vision for how the Sortition Foundation can be developed to deliver these outcomes and make our vision of democratic transformation a reality.

*A note on terminology: We use the term deliberative sortition assembly throughout this document. Sortition is a synonym for random selection, although we technically promote stratified random selection (or pseudo-random selection) in a democratic context, i.e. the random selection of people such that they match the socio-demographic profile of the wider community. The transparent application of a well-managed deliberative process is a crucial element of these representative assemblies.
Sortition at the Heart of our Democracy

In the last few decades deliberative sortition assemblies have increased in number and scope and have occurred all across the globe,¹ and the awareness of the power of this model is growing rapidly. Well publicised assemblies, such as the Irish Citizens’ Assembly,² have demonstrated that this is an effective, robust and trusted tool for citizen engagement. This expanding awareness has resulted in the UK government promising to fund 8-10 pilot citizens’ assemblies as part of their 2018 Civil Society Strategy.

However, although deliberative sortition assemblies are a demonstrably better way to discover the considered will of the people, there is no guarantee that they will be deployed to fundamentally revolutionise our democracy.

Our task, therefore, is to leverage the increased awareness and use of deliberative sortition assemblies in order to place sortition and deliberation at the heart of a renewed transformation of democracy.

In particular, the Sortition Foundation wants:

1. Ad-hoc sortition assemblies to occur more often, and for more people to know about, and advocate for, these assemblies.
2. Sortition assemblies to be permanently instituted as part of a hybrid election-sortition democratic system.
3. The replacement of elections with sortition democracy.

We move from Phase 1 (using advocacy and education to implement regular assemblies) to Phase 2 (institutionalisation) to Phase 3 (sortition democracy).

To achieve our Phase 1 aim (while being aware of the further aims) we are setting three immediate goals: advocacy, implementation and education. We believe all three will be necessary to achieve our Phase 1 aim, and make significant progress towards our Phase 2 and 3 aims during the course of the next five years.

A word on resources: we are currently a small group of volunteers who has set up the digital, online, legal and financial structures to allow groups to campaign for the implementation of sortition assemblies. We aim to enable, empower and connect motivated people to act. When we have the financial resources we will employ a campaign manager and other staff to oversee and enhance the effectiveness of these activities.

Members’ comments from our June 2018 strategy meeting: Sortition should be a key tool in the democratic toolbox, the gold-standard of democratic engagement and participation. It should be familiar to many people and seen as a viable option. We could be the bridge between sortition events and the media and public. We must generate public interest, provide information and increase the awareness of the failures of the electoral process and that elections aren’t sacred.

¹ See https://www.sortitionfoundation.org/sortition_around_the_globe
² See https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/
Goal I: Local Sortition Advocacy Groups and Sortition Ambassadors

We will support the creation of local volunteer advocacy groups and trained “sortition ambassadors”. They will:

1. **Promote sortition assemblies** to a wide range of organisations, including local, regional and national governments (and their departments), schools, universities, NGOs, civil society groups and businesses (to achieve our Phase 1 aim).

2. **Contact elected political representatives** (writing, visiting, advocating) to advance both our Phase 1 and 2 aims.

3. **Mobilise further support** for change by, for example, building their local group, holding information evenings or debates, film screenings, fund-raising events etc.

Local groups and ambassadors should be spread throughout the United Kingdom and around the world. These groups, and especially the ambassadors, should:

- have a **detailed knowledge of sortition assemblies** around the world;
- understand **when, why and how** sortition can be effective;
- be able to set out a **clear path** for the delivery of a successful assembly, including the detailed steps needed, the likely costs and a realistic time frame; and
- have, preferably, **practical experience** in delivering citizens’ assemblies.

Two distinct types of sortition assemblies should be promoted:

1. **High-profile, news-worthy national assemblies** likely to attract widespread media attention. These should address controversial topics which remain unresolved because politicians are reluctant to, or have no effective way to effect change. Examples could include House of Lords reform, a Constitutional Convention, funding and reform of the NHS, corporate taxation in a global context, drug reform, climate change, and doubtless many other topics.

2. **Local assemblies** for councils and civil society groups. Again these could best be used to address controversial topics that traditional politics has struggled with, e.g. transport issues in Cambridge.

Achieving Goal I: Education, training and resources

In order to deliver effective advocacy for deliberative sortition assemblies across a range of organisations we need **sortition ambassadors** who have been trained to effectively communicate the benefits of, and understand the practicalities involved in delivering, these assemblies. Our groups and ambassadors will need access to clear and accessible presentations, printed material and online resources to achieve this aim.

The principal skill required by our ambassadors is an ability to communicate clearly and effectively with government officials, organisations and other groups. These ambassadors should come from a diverse range of backgrounds and professions to bring different experiences and skills to our network.

**IMAGINE:** Jane has graduated from the Sortition Ambassador programme and finds herself explaining to a **government select committee** how a particularly thorny policy issue could benefit from a deliberative assembly, providing them with likely costs and time scales and examples of relevant, similar assemblies. Meanwhile Michael is meeting with **representatives from his local council** to discuss how they could benefit from a randomly selected citizens’ assembly in their transport policy making. And last week Rachel met the **board of a large corporation** to discuss how their employees could be given a meaningful role in guiding the future direction of the business.
A set of online resources and face-to-face training should be made available to our groups and ambassadors. We will:

- **Document** a wide range of recent examples of sortition assemblies on our website;

- **Develop** a paper detailing how our Phase 2 goal could be met, to be distributed to political representatives (and other interested parties);

- **Create** an online forum and hold regular online meetings for ambassadors to share ideas and experiences;

- **Seek** financial support to cover our ambassadors’ expenses;

- **Make** a set of best practice ‘why’ and ‘how-to’ guides (and potentially videos) for the promotion of sortition assemblies;

- **Hold** periodic face-to-face meetings to share new ideas, discuss best practice, learn from experience and allow new members to interact with more experienced ambassadors. Initially this could be combined with our AGM and perhaps be a weekend event.

- **Build** an assembly logistics team that can be brought in to deliver an assembly.

- **Provide** a set of grassroots advocacy tools for political lobbying.³

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³ We should learn from successful grassroots advocacy movements around the world. For example, the Indivisibles in the US have a very useful guide: [https://www.indivisible.org/guide/summary/](https://www.indivisible.org/guide/summary/)
Goal II: Regular Sortition Assemblies

Sortition must happen in every community for people to understand its power. Only then will we be ready for the political transition to a deliberative sortition democracy.

We believe that a significant number of communities need to experience a sortition assembly for citizens to really understand how well they work and how a truly representative group of citizens can change the way society engages in political debate and policy creation. Only then will a sufficient number of people understand how our national government will be better served by sortition than it currently is by elections.

High-profile, national assemblies will also play a significant role in publicising sortition assemblies, and preparing for Phase 2. Therefore, as mentioned above, we should promote two distinct types of deliberative sortition assembly: Local Assemblies and National Assemblies.

Goal IIa: Delivering Local Assemblies

Our groups and ambassadors will promote the use of smaller assemblies (with around 30-50 participants) to local governments, businesses and other groups.

Typically these will be single-issue policy-jury-style assemblies, used to solicit the considered public judgement about one specific, often contentious local topic. These assemblies open up the space for politicians to act by discovering what a representative group of informed citizens want.

Another option we have previously explored is the significantly larger G1000-style citizens’ assembly. These events often set agendas and priorities for future development, and involve a large one-day event, followed by several meetings of small groups of volunteers. Designed to engage with a relatively high number of constituents, this model continues to be used successfully in a number of European countries, most prominently in the Netherlands.

We will develop guidelines and/or best practices booklets outlining all the necessary steps to create and deliver either or both of the options above.

However, there is an important fundamental question: should the Sortition Foundation only “promote” and “market” deliberative sortition assemblies, to be delivered by third parties, or should we deliver them ourselves, or should we deliver them in partnership with existing organisations? The options are:

1. The Sortition Foundation develops the capacity to deliver these assemblies;
2. We support other organisations with resources and best practice guides to allow them to deliver their own deliberative projects;
3. We bring in third parties (e.g. Involve, Citizens’ Juries CIC) to deliver these assemblies;
4. A partnership approach that combines elements of the above.
There are several pros and cons to this decision, outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Should the Sortition Foundation deliver assemblies?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop direct experience of assembly delivery issues, problems, and build our own capacity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It could become a source of funds to pay for advocacy work and staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve is still small and may not have the capacity to deliver more. We should be able to deliver what we are “selling”. We must make it easy to implement our ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good advertising and marketing for our organisation.</td>
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</table>

Perhaps the solution is to **wait and see, but start preparing**. We will start building the necessary capacity and, if we find there is demand, and existing organisations can not respond to it, then we dedicate more resources to the delivery of sortition assemblies. We could then refine, improve and expand this capability as demand grows and our resources allow. Initially we may need to subsidise these assemblies (through grants or in-kind donations) in order to prove their worth to communities and councils.

**Goal IIa: Measures of Success**

- The **Number of assemblies**: One (crude) measure of success will be how many assemblies are delivered and how many citizens are involved. We will aim to deliver 1-3 assemblies in 2019, increasing in the following years.

- **Quality interaction**: the deliberative quality that people experience is even more important than the number of assemblies. The strong positive experience, which assembly participants typically report, feeds directly into how effective each assembly is. We will aim for participants to consistently rank their experience highly in post-event questionnaires.

- **Valuable to decision-makers**: decision-makers will use these assemblies again, and spread the word, only if they find them valuable.

- **Empowered decisions**: are the ideas of the assemblies listened to by those in power? We will track and promote the implementation of assembly decisions.

All these elements will determine how effective we are in our long-term aim of advocacy and education through experience. The people and groups who will resist the expansion of citizens’ democracy will need few examples of poor or ineffective assemblies in order to attempt to undermine the concept. We need to have very strong quality controls throughout every assembly (transparency, independence etc) to ensure that the overwhelming experience of governments, groups and participants continues to be a positive one.

**The resource question (again!):** Delivering assemblies requires many resources and skills we are yet to develop. So far we have been unsuccessful in convincing local councils or groups to pursue a citizens’ assembly. Are we being realistic here? At the moment we can support local groups to advocate sortition assemblies about prominent local issues.
Goal IIb: High-Profile Assemblies

The second aspect of promoting sortition assemblies will be advocating for their use in tackling complex, controversial, high-profile national issues. We are already engaged in several projects pursuing such assemblies (albeit in a limited way):

- **UK Constitutional Convention**: We are part of a network advocating for a UK Citizen’s Constitutional Convention, with Graham Allen (an ex-MP of 30 years) leading this initiative. He is an enthusiastic convert to sortition and is building an extensive network of supporters.

- **Democracy R&D**\(^4\): we are part of an international network of sortition practitioners, supporting the network and meeting them face-to-face annually. There are potential EU collaborations available.

- **Citizens’ Parliament Campaign**: we are maintaining and promoting a House Of Lords reform website,\(^5\) which is sparking some interest and progressing our Phase 2 aim. An assembly on House Of Lords reform could be pursued, as part of our collaboration with the Constitutional Convention campaign.

By using our increasingly wide contacts within the ‘democratic change’ community we can, and are already influencing decision-makers to consider sortition as a way of addressing their democratic problems. We will work to extend this influence into areas of politics where we perceive an opportunity.

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\(^4\) See https://democracyrd.org/

\(^5\) See https://www.citizensparliament.uk/

Goal III: Spreading the Word: Informing and Educating

At the moment a large part of our social media strategy involves spreading the word about successful citizens’ assemblies from around the world. We could continue this and extend it to school and universities in several ways. We could:

- **approach schools**, in partnership with Democracy In Practice, to convince them to experiment with sortition on student councils and school boards;\(^6\)

- **provide** engaging, educational, free seminars to sixth form (and potentially younger) students;

- **promote** successful international and local sortition experiments throughout our network;

- **approach** University clubs and societies (especially political clubs) to promote sortition;

- **develop** a detailed media strategy to expand our network of contacts within the mainstream media.

Achieving Goal III: Education

We will:

- **create** a short, entertaining presentation of around 20-30 minutes to be followed by questions and discussion, aimed at students, with substantial elements of audience participation (using sortition!). We will need to engage with teachers, presenters or entertainers (possibly comedians) to develop it;

- **support and train** volunteer ‘presenters’ around the country to approach schools and run these sessions. University students may be a prime group who could deliver these talks.

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• deliver the presentation as widely as possible;
• apply for funding to cover the volunteers expenses, and perhaps turn them into professional communicators, who could train others to deliver the talks.
• integrate this student education into our Sortition Ambassador Programme.

There are, of course, thousands of schools (and other educational establishments) across the UK so there is both a geographic challenge and the well-publicised issue of the congested school curriculum. However, many schools actively seek out interesting speakers and subjects for their sixth form students and if we can provide something engaging, educational and free we should be able to create the demand. We must ensure there is gender and age balance, and a high level of diversity among our presenters.

Reality Check

We are excited by the ideas outlined in this document, and believe we can achieve many of the aims and goals outlined above. But are we being realistic? Are we setting ourselves up to fail? Below we touch on some of the key issues and constraints we currently have, to try to keep our feet on the ground and our heads out of the clouds.

The Resource Question

At the moment we have very few resources. Our best current resource is probably our network of volunteers - we should engage with them in a fun, useful, motivating way and delegate smaller, achievable tasks to them.

If we hope to become a professional campaigning and assembly-delivery organisation, we will require significant funds and paid staff. Here are some funding-raising ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea</th>
<th>PRO</th>
<th>CON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Membership fees and member donations</td>
<td>Gives us independence. Predictable (should not fluctuate much). Can cover core expenses.</td>
<td>Few in number at the moment, but growing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philanthropy</td>
<td>Potentially large sums.</td>
<td>Dependence on a single or few uncertain sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowdfunding</td>
<td>Independence. Could also contribute to our future membership base.</td>
<td>Difficult to do well. Probably easier to fund a single project and not ongoing core costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants and/or government tenders</td>
<td>May be an avenue to prove/build our capacity for a first project.</td>
<td>Time consuming. Difficult to get: we have applied for several and been unsuccessful so far.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-kind support</td>
<td>The Dutch G1000 cover ~70-80% of their assemblies through in-kind support.</td>
<td>Need to be good at networking and promotion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Funding</td>
<td>We partner with academics and apply for a research grant to hold a Citizens’ Assembly.</td>
<td>Typically such assemblies are ignored by decision-makers, which could be demotivating?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selling Merchandise</td>
<td>Books, T-shirts and mugs etc can help spread the word.</td>
<td>Inventory management etc is time consuming.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Administration, Coordination, Staff, Systems & Infrastructure

As a registered not-for-profit business we have several ongoing legal requirements, and maintaining the basic core business and minimal campaigning infrastructure requires work, all of which is currently done by volunteers. This includes:

- Budgeting, accounting and financial reports (including annual tax returns and reports to HMRC/Companies House);
- Administering and maintaining content for three websites (sortitionfoundation.org, citizensparliament.uk, g1000.uk), email, and e-lists;
- Social media maintenance and activity to engage and inform existing members and supporters;
- Organising and documenting directors meetings & decisions, volunteers' meetings, and scheduling/organising our Annual General Meeting;
- Tracking membership fees, chasing lapsed members, promoting membership opportunities.

Reviewing this document

We commit to reviewing this document every six months (at a minimum); at least one review every year should be face-to-face.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Review type</th>
<th>When and where?</th>
<th>Done?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Document adopted by members and directors</td>
<td>17 October 2018 – Directors’ meeting</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>First review (face-to-face)</td>
<td>AGM, ~April/May 2019</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Second review (perhaps online?)</td>
<td>~Oct/Nov 2019</td>
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