

# Practical guides for citizen participation in Barcelona

## Participatory bodies



**Decidim  
Barcelona**

Ajuntament de  
Barcelona





# **Practical guides for citizen participation in Barcelona**

**Promote.  
Citizens' initiatives**

**Debate.  
Participatory processes**

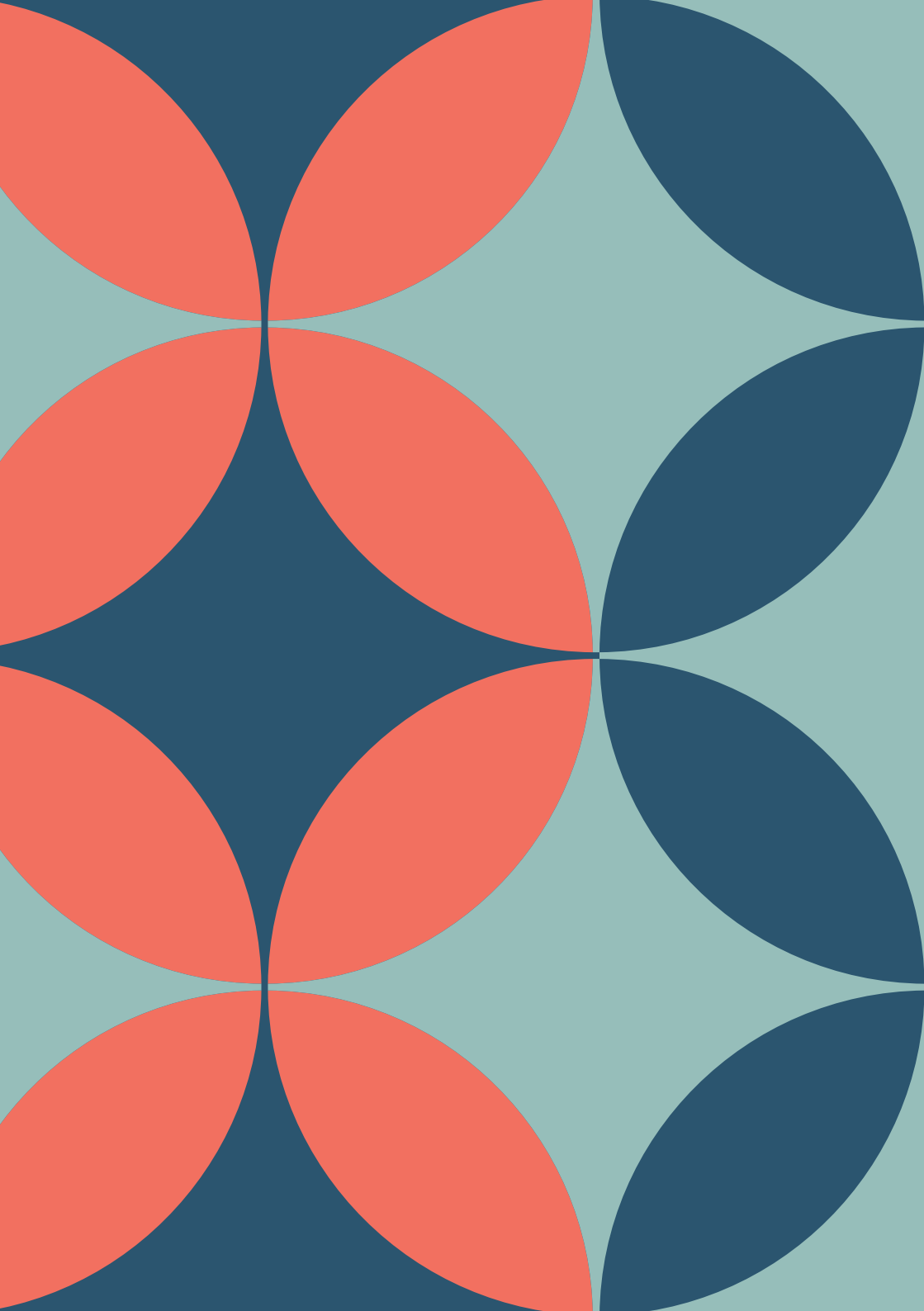
**Co-produce.  
Participatory bodies**

**Decide.  
Citizen consultations**



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# Introduction

As in any city, Barcelona residents have access to certain services such as transport, education, social services and health care, and they share public spaces in the streets and neighbourhoods. Using these services is a collective right, which in a democracy is determined by the policy decisions made by city council or parliamentary representatives.

Citizens choose their councillors via elections, which are one of many ways to participate. But citizen participation goes much further than voting in elections. Policy decisions, which affect all citizens, should not be limited to interactions between different political parties. Citizens need to have an active presence in proposals, opinions and initiatives.

Complex societies such as ours encompass a wide range of interests, which may contradict each other and which require rich and innovative solutions. In a democracy, as many different perspectives and outlooks as possible need to be heard and considered when making policy decisions. Pluralism is a value within a democratic system.

A democracy that incorporates this plurality consistently, inclusively and directly is the ideal system to achieve a better quality of life, fight inequality, obtain higher rates of justice and equality and for personal and community aspirations to develop with freedom and dignity.

That said, for a democracy to truly be transformative and representative of this wealth of perspectives, we need channels that recognise citizens as active subjects. Channels that ultimately allow their voices and ideas to be heard, expanding the spaces for dialogue and for the opportunity for collective proposals to be made.

Over the years, Barcelona, its inhabitants, social organisations and the other players that make up the city have consistently tried to improve the democratic quality of the city. This legacy has now been consolidated and shaped into the Regulation for Citizen Participation, with the aim of providing different channels for city residents to exercise their right to participation and thereby demonstrate their transformative energy.





# What you will find in this guide

Barcelona City Council has created these guides as a simple way for anyone living in Barcelona to familiarise themselves with the Regulation for Citizen Participation and to discover and use all the related resources available.

The participation system described in this Regulation brings together three channels:

- Participatory processes
- Participatory bodies
- Citizen consultations

All three may be instigated by the City Council or through a citizens' initiative. In other words, citizens have the opportunity and ability to set any of these channels in motion. Citizens can also make regulatory proposals (byelaws and regulations) and instigate actions by government bodies in the city or district by proposing points for their meeting agendas.

Even though the Regulation has a system in place to guarantee the efficacy and efficiency of these channels, the best way to ensure this is for citizens to use them regularly.

To bring it into force, a regulation needs to be put into practice in the social sphere, not just published in an official organ. We therefore suggest that citizens of Barcelona make it their own: only then will it become truly useful and innovative.

The following guide refers to [participatory bodies](#).

## What are they?

Regular meeting channels



Citizens



City Council

## Spheres of action and types

Geographical areas



City

**Municipal  
Citizen  
Council**



District

**District citizen  
councils**

**District hearing**



Neighbourhood

**Neighbourhood  
councils**

By sector



**City sectoral  
councils**



**District sectoral  
councils**



**Pacts  
and agreements**



**Citywide public  
hearing**

## What are their functions?

Accountability

Analyse or  
diagnose  
problems

Draw up  
proposals

Co-produce  
policies

## Who is on them?



**City Council** and other political and technical **authorities**



**Organisations** and **associations**



**Citizens**



**Experts**  
(if applicable)



**Representatives of other councils**  
(if applicable)



**Chair: elected position / Deputy chair: city resident**

## How do they work?



Periodical calls  
(at least one per year)

Most have a Standing Committee for follow-up throughout the year

Working groups can be created for specific issues



They may be in place indefinitely or for a specific period as defined by the articles of association

# Participatory bodies

## What are they?

Participatory bodies are channels for regular meeting and exchange between citizens and the City Council to discuss and gather opinions and proposals with the aim of influencing municipal policies. They are characterised by dialogue and collective construction between different social and institutional players. Their objectives are to:

- Promote accountability in municipal policies
- Analyse or diagnose specific problems
- Draw up joint proposals
- Work together and co-produce public policies

Regarding their sphere of action, participatory bodies may be:

- Territorial: for the city, district or neighbourhood
- Sectoral: related to a specific issue. These may also cover the city or a district.

## Who is on them?

Participatory bodies aspire to continuity over time and meet regularly. They seek to consider as many different outlooks and opinions of their participants as possible.

The political representative for the geographical area or sector chairs them, together with the deputy chair, who is a resident. They include people linked to the City Council (politicians and technicians), organisations and associations, city residents and, in some cases, experts and representatives from other councils.

## How do they work?

Plenary sessions are called at least once a year, and most have a Standing Committee to follow up in greater depth. In many cases, working groups are created to deal with certain issues that require more specific work. Participatory bodies may be called by the Municipal Government, municipal groups, citizens through, a citizens' initiative, or by the body itself, when a third of its members decide to do so.

# Territorial participatory bodies

Territorial bodies aim to improve all aspects of a certain geographical area. Bodies exist for each territorial level within the city:



## Municipal Citizen Council



The Municipal Citizen Council is the highest body for public consultation and participation, a forum where City Council representatives and residents discuss the main issues affecting the city.

### Its functions include:

- Providing support and advice to define municipal policy
- Debating the city government's strategy programme, regulations and byelaws
- Analysing budgets and the results of municipal management
- Promoting itself as a space for accountability

The Municipal Citizen Council may also propose points for the Municipal or City Council's agenda, present candidates for the Barcelona Medal of Honour, validate the creation of a new participatory body and request initiation of a participatory process.



Once a year, the Municipal Citizen Council presents its annual activity report to the Municipal Council, and organises a session on the state of the city in which the Municipal Government (executive) reports back

## Composition



**Chair.**  
Mayor



Representatives of  
associations listed  
in the General File of  
Citizen Associations



**Deputy Chair.**  
Citizens



Leading  
public figures



Councillor  
per municipal group



People randomly selected  
from the civil register



Representative from each  
district citizen council



People randomly  
selected from the  
municipal register



Representative  
from each municipal  
sectoral council



Barcelona  
Ombudsman's  
Office



Representatives from  
the city's most significant  
institutions



Participation  
Commissioner,  
if applicable



The ordinary meeting of the Municipal Citizen Council is held every six months

The Municipal Citizen Council has a Standing Committee to oversee its work and actions and also to assist the chair in their functions. Moreover, the Council can set up any working groups it deems appropriate to deal with specific issues of particular importance.

The Municipal Citizen Council has its own website at [www.conselldeciutat.cat](http://www.conselldeciutat.cat)



## District citizen councils



District citizen councils are the Municipal Citizen Council equivalent in each district. They are governed by the District Organisation and Operation Regulation and their main functions are to:

- Advise the District Council on defining policy and management of the district.
- Debate the district action programme, regulations and byelaws.
- Be aware of and debate large projects in the district.
- Support the district sectoral councils and neighbourhood councils, and to be aware of their initiatives, deliberations and conclusions.



District citizen councils hold an ordinary meeting at least twice a year

## Neighbourhood councils



Neighbourhood councils are bodies for participation and which strengthen community relations in order to deal with all issues relating to the neighbourhood. They promote community life and social cohesion and improve the quality of life in each neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood council sessions are open to all residents and are divided into four parts:

- 1 **Following up** the main **agreements** adopted by previous councils.
- 2 **Debating** the main **points** on the agenda relating to local actions.
- 3 **Informing on the state** of participatory processes, public consultations and citizens' initiatives in the **neighbourhood**, if applicable.
- 4 **An open question and answer** session for the **general public**, where questions may be asked about any issue concerning the neighbourhood.

### How can I participate in the neighbourhood council?

- You can attend the session to find out about the participatory processes, public consultations and citizens' initiatives in the neighbourhood.
- You can request to speak during the question and answer session by registering before or during the council sitting.
- You can propose an issue for discussion by suggesting a point for the agenda to the Monitoring Committee up to three days beforehand via email or on the participation platform [decidim.barcelona](https://decidim.barcelona).



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Neighbourhood councils are chaired by the district councillor. The deputy chair is a city resident with a recognised history linked to the social life or associations of the neighbourhood. It's members include:

- Political representatives (one district councillor for each municipal group)
- Citizen associations, organisations and platforms





Neighbourhood councils meet at least twice a year. Up to four sessions per year can also be called by individual citizens, by the Monitoring Committee or the district council itself, provided there are at least two months between them.

### How can a citizens' initiative convene a neighbourhood council?

A citizens' initiative consists of collecting signatures in order to encourage the City Council to carry out a specific action, in this case to convene the neighbourhood council.

The number of signatures required for a citizens' initiative to take effect is equal to 1% of the total population of the neighbourhood affected (minimum 25, maximum 450).

Each neighbourhood council must constitute a monitoring committee, which, in addition to running the session agenda, monitors the evolution of issues proposed. This committee is made up of representatives from the district's policy and technical department, a councillor for each municipal group, people from organisations in the neighbourhood and people elected to the neighbourhood council.

If the neighbourhood council agrees by a two-thirds majority of those attending that a point should be included on the district council plenary session agenda, the Monitoring Committee shall petition the Board of Spokespersons (for the municipal groups). Any grounds for rejection must be supplied in writing.



Up-to-date information on each council can be found on the municipal website and the participation platform [decidim.barcelona](https://decidim.barcelona)



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## Sectoral participatory bodies

Sectoral participatory bodies are work spaces built around a specific issue. Their sphere of action may be the city or district. Depending on how they work and their purpose, **these types of bodies are divided into:**



City sectoral councils



District sectoral councils

### City sectoral councils



City sectoral councils are subject-specific participatory bodies that debate municipal actions in their sector and programmes or initiatives in the sector of interest.

The first sectoral participation body in the city was the Municipal Social Welfare Council (CMBS), created in 1988 with the aim of including civil society in the debate and construction of social welfare policies in the city.

The CMBS currently has more than seven active working groups comprising over forty organisations in addition to public institutions and political parties.

During its thirty year history, the CMBS has drawn up thousands of proposals, written recommendations, carried out impact assessments and has consistently demanded accountability for the council's social policies.

There are currently eighteen sectoral councils operating citywide. They are the:

- Animal Coexistence, Defence and Protection Council
- Municipal Council of International Cooperation
- Barcelona Women's Council
- Municipal Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transsexuals and Intersexuals Council
- Social Housing Council
- Municipal Environment and Sustainability Council
- Municipal Sports Council
- City and Commerce Council
- Barcelona Security Council
- Municipal Social Welfare Council
- Culture Council
- Municipal Schools' Council
- Senior Citizens' Advisory Council
- Municipal Immigration Council
- Barcelona Municipal Council of Roma people
- Municipal Consumer Council
- City and Tourism Council
- Barcelona Economic and Social Council

The number of councils and the areas they relate to may change over time. Up-to-date information on each council can be found on the municipal website and the participation platform [decidim.barcelona](https://decidim.barcelona).



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## District sectoral councils



District sectoral councils are bodies restricted to the geographical area of the district and which deal with specific issues within that area. Districts currently have a wide range of councils, including those for senior citizens, women, people with disabilities, culture, the environment, social economy, sport, health, schools, etc.

Over the years, district sectoral councils have been established to answer the different needs and characteristics of each district, and so not all districts have sectoral councils for each area.

Some district sectoral councils have been real pioneers, such as the Women's Council in Sant Martí, established in 1993, a year before the Barcelona Women's Council.

Other district councils, such as school and health councils, are prescribed by the legislation of the autonomous region and are a competence shared with the Government of Catalonia. For example, the City Council, the Healthcare Consortium and the Barcelona Public Health Agency all participate in the health councils, in addition to the healthcare organisations for each district.



# Other participation channels

## Public hearings

A public hearing is a meeting between municipal officers and the general public to provide information about, submit and debate proposals related to public actions, activities or action programmes.

Hearings may relate to the city or district:

District hearings are regulated by the General Regulations on District Organisation and Operations. They are a channel for local participation as they deal with issues affecting each district.



District public hearings are held every two months at different centres and facilities in the various neighbourhoods that make up the district. They may be convened by the district councillor or via a citizens' initiative.

City hearings are a channel for sectoral participation, as they are convened to deal with a specific issue.

There is no defined calendar for city hearings. They may be convened by the Municipal Government, opposition or the general public through a citizens' initiative.



A city public hearing may have a digital space for debate, before and after it is held, on the participation platform [decidim.barcelona](https://decidim.barcelona).



### How to convene a public hearing through a citizens' initiative

Citizens' initiatives consist of collecting signatures in order to encourage the City Council to carry out a specific action, in this case to convene a public hearing.

A minimum number of valid signatures have to be collected for a citizens' initiative to take effect. For a city public hearing, the minimum is 7,000 signatures, for a district public hearing it varies by district:

**1- Ciutat Vella- 1,000**

**2- Eixample- 2,600**

**3- Sants-Montjuïc- 1,800**

**4- Les Corts- 800**

**5- Sarrià-Sant Gervasi- 1,500**

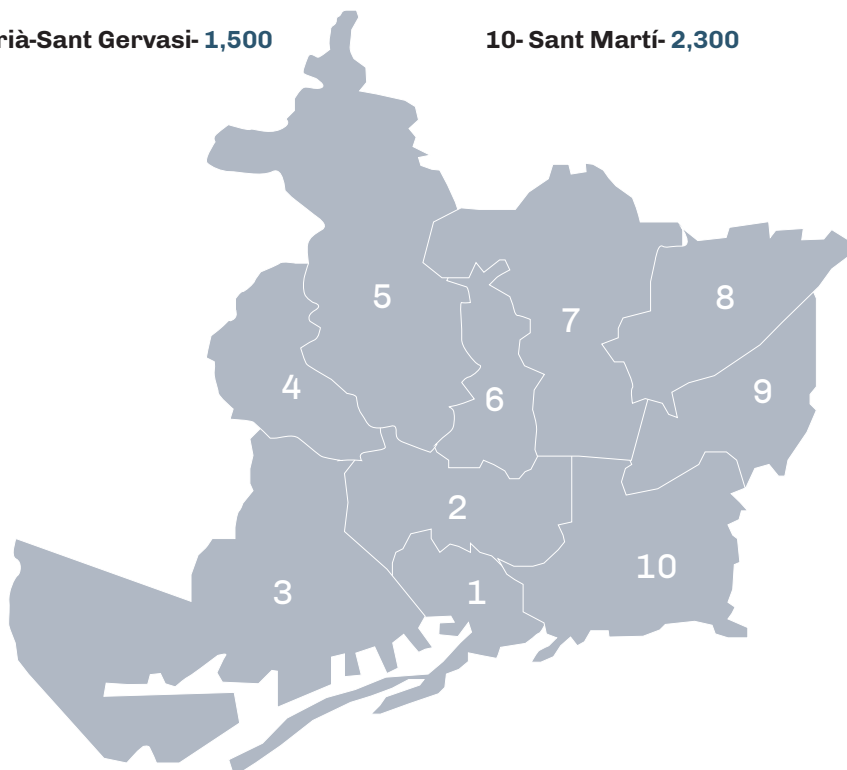
**6- Gràcia- 1,200**

**7- Horta-Guinardó- 1,700**

**8- Nou Barris- 1,700**

**9- Sant Andreu- 1,500**

**10- Sant Martí- 2,300**



## Pacts and agreements

Pacts and agreements are working frameworks between institutions and social players focusing on a specific common aim. They are spaces for debate, collaboration and action between the City Council and people, organisations and institutions.



Through them, shared principles are agreed on a certain area such as mobility, sustainability, gender violence or social inequality, with the aim of driving forward established challenges in an initial joint statement.

Barcelona currently has the following pacts and agreements:

- Citizen Agreement for a Barcelona Free of Violence Against Women
- Citizen Commitment to Sustainability
- Mobility Pact
- Citizen Agreement for an Inclusive Barcelona

The number of pacts and agreements may change over time.

# The system of guarantees

## Safeguards Committee

If at any time any person considers that the participation regulations have not been correctly applied, or that the rights to participation have been breached, they can submit a query or written complaint to the Safeguards Committee.

This Committee is a consultative body within the Municipal Citizen Council and is made up of experts outside the City Council. The committee aims to ensure citizens' rights to participation.

The Safeguards Committee is made up of **6 members with gender parity distributed between:**



2 proposed by the **Municipal Council**



2 proposed by the **Government Commission**



1 proposed by the **Municipal Citizen Council**



1 proposed by the **Ombudsman's Office**

### They must be

Independent of the Municipal Government

People of recognised standing and experts in citizen participation

Maximum plurality and diversity

### They cannot be

Elected positions

Municipal staff

### How to appeal to the Safeguards Committee

A written complaint can be submitted to the Safeguards Committee online using the participation platform [decidim.barcelona](https://decidim.barcelona) or by filing a request in-person at any Citizen Help and Information Office.

The Safeguards Committee will issue a report and make a recommendation to the City Council, if applicable.





*decidim.barcelona* is a digital platform built using free software. It is a space to coordinate any participation mechanism in the city of Barcelona. This tool is available to all citizens to organise democratic processes in the city at all levels.

*decidim.barcelona* makes it possible to instigate and support citizens' initiatives, play a direct role in participatory processes in the city, find out about debates being held in the participatory bodies and vote in citizen consultations.

For further information, go to  
**[decidim.barcelona](http://decidim.barcelona)**  
**[barcelona.cat/participaciociudadana](http://barcelona.cat/participaciociudadana)**

Or call

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