The Citizens’ Initiative Review
Informing Voters through Deliberative Democracy

Ballot measures drive major policy decisions in 24 states, yet 75% of voters say they often find initiatives too complicated or confusing to understand. Accurate and unbiased information is not only difficult to come by; it is often obscured by misleading statements and advertisements by both sides of an issue.

Citizens don’t want less democracy. But they do want more – and better – information.

How it Works:

The Citizens’ Initiative Review, created by Healthy Democracy and first institutionalized in Oregon in 2011, engages citizens to help their fellow voters make policy decisions. The deliberative process brings together a randomly-selected, demographically balanced “jury” of citizens and gives them the time and resources to fairly evaluate a statewide ballot measure. At the conclusion of each review, panelists take a vote on the measure and draft a statement highlighting the most important fact-based findings about the measure and the most relevant pro and con arguments. The results are placed in the official voters’ guide.
What Are People Saying?

This opportunity to work side by side with fellow voters has affirmed my belief in the value of public participation in the democratic process.

-CIR Panelist

The panelists know they’re expected to base their opinions on hard evidence, and this expectation becomes part of their temporary identity. Under those conditions...facts suddenly matter.

- The New York Times Magazine

Voters should have the opportunity for this type of balanced analysis of every ballot measure. Voters won’t always agree with recommendations of these panels — that’s not the point. The purpose is to help voters make the most informed decisions possible.

-Portland Tribune

Research:

Independent studies in 2010, 2012, and 2014 funded by the National Science Foundation and Kettering Foundation demonstrated that process is deliberative and gives panelists an opportunity to come to an understanding of a complex issue. They found that the CIR is frequently used (about half of Oregon voters read a statement and the majority of those find it useful when voting) and that it provides voters with a factual and easily understood source of trustworthy information about ballot measures. In fact, a controlled study found that voters who read a CIR statement learned more about a ballot measure than those who read other parts of the Voters’ Guide. Contact us for the full research report.

Read the Results and Get involved

After pilot projects in Arizona and Colorado in 2014, we’re gearing up to bring our deliberative approach to public decision-making on ballot measures to additional states. We’ll be looking for people to collaborate, build support, and assist with projects.

Go to www.HealthyDemocracy.org or email info@healthydemocracy.org to sign up or get in touch.