

# **Evaluation report: citizens' assembly Drenthe 2024**

*English summary*

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*Participants during the final meeting of the citizens' assembly in Drenthe, June 2024*

# FORWARD

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The purpose of this evaluation report is to assess the effects and quality of the first hybrid citizens' assembly that was held in 2024 the province of Drenthe in the Netherlands. For the province the goal of the evaluation is to research whether a citizens' assembly can serve as a valuable new instrument for the Provincial Parliament, contributing to more connected governance in the province. It also examines possible ways in which a citizens' assembly could foster even greater connection in the future.

The purpose of this English summary is to share lessons learned in Drenthe with a wider audience of governments and practitioners in citizen participation. The full Dutch evaluation can be found on the website [www.drentsparlement.nl](http://www.drentsparlement.nl).

Lessons learned are shared within an international network with the support of [Interreg Speak Up](#).

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# BACKGROUND

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In 2021 a group of residents made use of their right of initiative to place an topic on the political agenda. They called for stronger connection and greater influence of residents on provincial governance. In response, the Provincial Parliament (Provinciale Staten, PS) commissioned an exploration of how a citizens' assembly could contribute to this.

To this end, advice was sought from one of the Dutch experts in the field of citizens' assemblies: Dr Kristof Jacobs of Radboud University. His research shows that so-called *hybrid citizens' assemblies* contribute to public support and citizen engagement. A hybrid citizens' assembly means that, in addition to the participants in the assembly itself, input on the topic is collected from a much larger group of residents through a broad public consultation.

In Drenthe, an explicit decision was made to regard the first Drenthe citizens' assembly as a learning experience. For that reason, an evaluation was conducted with the main question:

*“Is the hybrid citizens' assembly a new instrument for the Provincial Parliament that contributes to more connection?”*

Based on the lessons learned, recommendations were formulated for ways in which a hybrid citizens' assembly can contribute even more to connection in Drenthe in the future.

The evaluation was designed broadly in order to learn what precisely contributes to connection and what does not. From the outset, several researchers were involved. Evaluation research was carried out among the participants in the citizens' assembly, among the wider population (via the Drents Panel), and among the provincial administrators (the Executive Council (GS) and the Provincial Parliament (PS)). Relevant (administrative) organisational issues were also taken into consideration.

The insights from the Drenthe citizens' assembly are also being shared at an international level. This is done through the European Interreg Speak Up project, which aims to strengthen collaboration between governments and citizens and to counter polarization.

# Part 1

## Hybrid design and participant selection

# 1. THE HYBRID DESIGN OF THE DRENTHÉ CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

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Phase 1: The hybrid design of the Drenthé citizens' assembly comprised the following.

- With the help of a resident survey, the topic of housing was selected for the citizens' assembly. This survey identified six topics on which residents of Drenthé indicated they would like to deliberate in a citizens' assembly. "Access to care" was the highest-rated topic for which residents wished to give advice to the province through a citizens' assembly (with an average score of 4.25 on a scale of 1 to 5). However, access to care is not a policy domain for which the province is responsible and is therefore not a suitable topic for a provincial citizens' assembly.

The other five topics – "climate change", "energy", "rural areas", "housing development" and "mobility" – differed by only a few hundredths of a point and were therefore all assessed against the criteria set out by Jacobs ([Jacobs & Theuwis 2022](#)) for suitability as a topic. Based on this assessment, the Provincial Parliament chose "housing".

- Everyone in Drenthé could complete a public questionnaire on "living in Drenthé" and could register for the lottery for participation in the citizens' assembly. A total of 6,500 residents completed the questionnaire and thus shared their views on housing with the citizens' assembly.

Phase 2: Four meetings were held between March and June 2024

An externally contracted and independent organization then organized four meetings of the Drenthé citizens' assembly, as well as all participant communication. There was also an independent chair of the citizens' assembly, who facilitated the meetings. In addition, trained facilitators moderated the group discussions. The citizens' assembly had its own online environment where information could be shared.

For each meeting, detailed facilitator guides were developed to ensure that the process unfolded in such a way that all decisions on the steps in the process and on content could be taken by the citizens' assembly itself. Between meetings, the organization processed the decisions taken by the citizens' assembly and structured and prepared the content for the next meeting.

In four meetings, this process led to policy recommendations on housing in Drenthé.

Meetings	Programme	Participants
Monday 11 March (evening)	Getting to know each other and each other's expectations, becoming familiar with the rules of the citizens' assembly, and understanding the substance of the issue.	155
Friday 12 April	Working with the knowledge and perspectives of experts and stakeholders, exploring values and dilemmas.	143
Friday 17 May	In working groups, using the outcomes of meeting 2, draft partial recommendations on specific topics.	136
Saturday 8 June	Finalizing the recommendations and reaching agreement on them.	131

The citizens' assembly itself decided to ask an external agency to verify whether the draft recommendations prepared by the third meeting aligned with the formal role and competences of the province. After the finalization of the recommendations at the last meeting, all draft recommendations were read aloud in plenary session and all recommendations were voted upon.

The citizens' assembly itself developed and agreed a voting procedure. A two-thirds majority (66%) was required for a recommendation to be adopted. Recommendations that did not achieve this two-thirds majority were still included in an annex to the advisory report and submitted to the province.

The advisory report of the citizens' assembly comprises eight key themes, 26 adopted recommendations, and an annex containing the 15 recommendations drafted by the citizens' assembly that did not reach the 66% threshold. The report also includes background information on the citizens' assembly, including the process, composition and the experts involved.

### Phase 3: Presentation and follow-up

On 10 July 2024, the citizens' assembly presented its advisory report to the province. A delegation of the assembly was present in an official meeting of the Provincial Parliament in Assen.

## 2. RECRUITMENT AND COMPOSITION TO MIRROR DRENTHE

In advance it was determined that it would be desirable to have about 150 participants in the citizens' assembly.

The following communication channels were used to recruit people for the lottery for participation in the citizens' assembly:

- 30,000 letters based on a stratified sample by postcode;
- Street canvassing in Emmen and Hoogeveen and outreach at schools (locations with lower turnout in elections);
- Online and offline campaigns, including social media, local newspapers and leaflets in all village halls; and
- The Drents Panel (an online panel of approximately 6,000 residents of Drenthe).

### **Stratified lottery: a reflection of Drenthe**

A total of 2,359 residents registered for participation in the citizens' assembly. Of these, 162 people were drawn by lot for participation. Based on the characteristics of gender, age, level of education and municipality of residence, registrations were grouped and participants were randomly selected from those groups, taking into account the demographic composition of Drenthe. The distribution of these characteristics among the participants closely matches that of the population of Drenthe.

In addition, it was checked whether the selected participants also differed in characteristics relevant to the topic of housing: such as a good mix between types of housing (owner-occupied or rented), living inside or outside the built-up area, and the extent to which people are worried about housing in Drenthe. Here, too, there was a good distribution across these characteristics.

### **Desire for an even more diverse group**

According to Kristof Jacobs, the lottery design used to select participants for the Drenthe citizens' assembly is one of the best examples in Europe. Most citizens' assemblies select participants only by age, gender and place of residence. Some add educational level. Relatively few citizens' assemblies add additional factors directly relevant to the topic.

Under Dutch privacy legislation (the GDPR), questions on “special categories” of personal data, such as race, ethnic origin or political opinions, are not permitted for the purposes of selection.

Nevertheless, the political evaluation revealed a broadly shared desire for a more diverse group on the basis of socio-cultural characteristics, such as people with a migration background or people with low literacy. There are several options that can be explored or used for this in future.

- One option within the lottery design is to ask for more detailed information that is relevant in substantive terms and may be correlated with a migration background, and to use those as criteria in selection. In the case of housing, for example, criteria such as “social rented housing” or “terraced house” could be included in the selection criteria.
- Another option is to add targeted recruitment activities to the recruitment methods to involve certain hard-to-reach groups, so that these are better represented in the pools from which participants are drawn.
- The hybrid design also makes it possible to gather targeted input from specific groups in society and introduce this into the citizens’ assembly.
- It could also be a deliberate choice in particular cases to recruit participants outside the weighted lottery process, if for specific topics participation of specific groups is considered so important that a more purposive composition is needed.

All decisions regarding the lottery design, recruitment methods, hybrid design and any desired (required) composition should be determined in advance when organizing any future citizens’ assembly.

# 3. FROM ADVISORY REPORT TO IMPLEMENTATION

After the advisory report from the citizens' assembly was received in July 2024, an official decision was taken in a public meeting of the Provincial Parliament on how the province would follow up the recommendations. On 25 September 2024, the Provincial Parliament decided that the Executive Council would elaborate the recommendations from the citizens' assembly into policy proposals, unless this is not possible due to compelling interests.

The elaboration and implementation of the recommendations then had to be "transferred" into the regular procedures of the province so that they could be incorporated into provincial policy.

- At political level, the advisory report had to be handed over within the provincial governance system from the parliament (PS) to the executive (GS).
- At policy level, the advisory report as an integrated and general document could be translated into more specific policy. In this way, substantive recommendations can be reflected in policy proposals from the Executive Council to the Provincial Parliament.
- Finally, the Provincial Parliament needed to be able to resume its oversight role: in its decision PS requested the Executive Council to provide integral and recognizable monitoring of the "follow-up" to the recommendations, via the financial documents in the planning and control cycle.

On 18 December 2024 the Drenthe Housing Agenda 2024–2028 was adopted. The recommendations on housing from the citizens' assembly have been incorporated into this housing agenda. All 26 adopted recommendations from the citizens' assembly, including those not directly related to housing, are included in Annex 2 of the housing agenda, with an explanation of how each recommendation is being followed up.

## **Requested follow-up meeting of the citizens' assembly after one year**

During the citizens' assembly in 2024, the participants requested to meet again after one year for feedback on what the province had done with their recommendations. In June 2025, a follow-up meeting was organized for members of the citizens' assembly to provide this feedback. In the meantime, participants and other interested parties were kept informed via a newsletter, to which anyone could subscribe.

# PART 2

## Evaluation results

# 4. RESEARCH SET-UP

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The Drenthe citizens' assembly on housing was the first citizens' assembly organized by the province of Drenthe. One of the objectives was to learn from the experience. It can be concluded that this first citizens' assembly was a successful first effort and that valuable lessons can be drawn from it.

To enable this evaluation research, the evaluation has been broadly designed, based on the most recent scientific insights. This is not only about the latest knowledge on citizens' assemblies, but also about trust, feeling heard, transparency, polarization, inclusivity, and group dynamics. For the participant study and the Drenthe Panel research, collaboration took place with three universities to ensure these diverse perspectives and the most up-to-date science.

Research partners involved:

- J. Turkenburg, University of Twente
- A.C. Eichholtzer, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen
- J.M. Starrenburg, Tilburg University

The work was carried out across different disciplines, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain deeper understanding of how the components of the hybrid citizens' assembly function. In addition, the parliamentary researchers of the Drenthe Parliament conducted the governance evaluations and performed analyses to clearly highlight the relevance for the Provincial Parliament across all partial evaluations.

The following chapters present the conclusions that answer the main and sub-questions of the evaluation.

## **Main question:**

*What has been learned from the first hybrid citizens' assembly of Drenthe and in what way can a hybrid citizens' assembly in Drenthe, as a new instrument of the Provincial Parliament, contribute to "governing in connection" (in verbindig besturen)?*

**Sub-questions:**

1. How was the citizens' assembly experienced in practice by the participants, by the wider population and by the provincial administration?
2. What were the effects of the citizens' assembly on the participants, on the wider population and on the provincial administration?
3. What does "governing in connection" mean in 2025 (from the perspectives of participants, wider population and administration)?

# 5. EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPANTS

The evaluation shows that participants generally look back positively on the citizens' assembly. This conclusion is supported by the measurements carried out among those who attended both the first and the final meeting. It is also reflected in the low dropout rate during the process: in Drenthe this percentage was lower than expected and lower than measured in other citizens' assemblies in the Netherlands. Participants expressed their appreciation in high scores, all around 8 out of 10.

Total citizens' assembly	8,3
Session 1	7,9
Session 2	8,1
Session 3	8,2
Session 4	8,0
Process around advice	7,8
The advice	7,9
First reaction province	8,1

They were very satisfied with the discussions: they found them respectful, everyone could say what they wanted to say and people felt heard. The group discussions were experienced as very valuable. Participants were also satisfied with the experts and with the voting procedure: no one considered the citizens' assembly unfair. Many compliments were given regarding the organization and the catering. The facilities were generally well arranged and appreciated. Sound (acoustics) and time planning were the aspects most often mentioned as needing improvement.

What stands out from the data is that the citizens' assembly has a positive effect on the following aspects:

- **Satisfaction with provincial democracy shows a fairly strong increase.** The distribution among participants is as follows: 44% of participants report an increase in satisfaction, 43% remain the same, and 13% show a decrease in trust in democracy after the assembly.
- **The feeling of being heard shows a small but significant increase.** For 53% of participants, the feeling of being heard rises, for 22% it remains the same, and for 25% it decreases.
- The **sense of connection with the province** was already relatively high before the start of the citizens' assembly, with an average of 3.09 on a scale of 1 to 4. After the assembly, this increased to

an average of 3.41. This corresponds with the answers to the open questions, where participants associate 'connection with the province' with 'feeling heard'.

Furthermore the data shows:

### **Trust in the province remains stable**

Trust in the province was above average at the start of the citizens' assembly (3.04 on a scale of 1–4). It does not change significantly; after the assembly, it is 3.09. For 65% of participants, trust remains the same, 19% show an increase in trust, and 16% a decrease.

Trust was measured directly with the question: *"How much trust do you have in the province of Drenthe?"* and through several aspects of trust: *"The province: is capable of carrying out tasks effectively," "represents the interests of people like me," "is open and transparent about its activities, plans, and ambitions."*

Transparency is rated the least positively. Open-ended questions and interviews reveal that people are still very cautious about whether their recommendations will actually be acted upon. Their trust depends on this.

### **Trust in good cooperation between residents and the province increases**

Participants were also asked about their trust in cooperation between the province and its residents. At the start of the citizens' assembly, 62% of participants trusted that the province of Drenthe is governed in good cooperation with residents. After the assembly, this rose to 74%. The citizens' assembly significantly increased trust in good cooperation between residents and the province.

### **Perceived polarization on housing significantly decreased**

The extent to which participants perceive polarization in society regarding housing significantly decreased during the citizens' assembly. Before the assembly, more than 20% of participants agreed with the statement: *"Groups of people are deeply divided when it comes to housing in Drenthe."* After the assembly, perceived polarization dropped to 14% of participants.

### **Perceived polarization between residents and the province remains stable**

Although participants feel more connected to the province (see previous page), they do not perceive less polarization at the end of the citizens' assembly (statement: *"In Drenthe, residents and the province are deeply divided."*)

### **Almost half of the participants expect the recommendation to be adopted**

At the end of the citizens' assembly, nearly half of the participants expect the recommendation to be fully adopted by the province. We see no significant increase compared to the beginning of the assembly.

# 6. EXPERIENCE OF THE WIDER POPULATION

For the evaluation of the citizens' assembly within the broader Drenthe community, two online surveys were conducted with the Drenthe Panel. This is the digital residents' panel of the Provincial Parliament, composed through random sampling and consisting of around 6,000 residents. The baseline measurement was carried out in January 2024, with 2,651 panel members completing the questionnaire. The follow-up measurement in November 2024 was completed by 1,541 panel members. Respondents who also participated in the citizens' assembly were removed from these datasets.

### Low overall awareness among the general public

The first thing that stands out is that in the follow-up survey in November 2024, a majority of respondents—54%—had not seen, read, or heard anything about the Drenthe citizens' assembly. 41% knew about the assembly “a little,” and 4% “quite a lot.” The following results on how the citizens' assembly was experienced in practice were measured only among the group that had heard about it.

### Low awareness of the outcomes of the citizens' assembly

Among the 46% of respondents who had heard of the assembly, about 80% were not familiar with its outcomes (the recommendations). Respondents with higher education, income, age, political interest, and women were more familiar with the process and its components.

### Fairly positive assessment

Respondents who were familiar with the citizens' assembly gave it an average score of 6.5 out of 10. This means that society is reasonably satisfied with the citizens' assembly. These figures in Drenthe are comparable to the participatory budgeting cases studied by the researcher from Twente. People with higher income and greater knowledge of the process tend to give higher scores.

Process	6,3
Results	6,2
Citizens' assembly	6,5

### **No significant effects attributable to the citizens' assembly**

In the measurement conducted with the Drenthe Panel, no clear increase over time was observed in political trust or the feeling of being heard by the province as a result of the citizens' assembly. The average scores for trust in the province and feeling heard were in all cases above average (slightly above 3 on a scale of 1–5), except for the aspect “perceived transparency of the province,” which is part of the trust measurement. No differences were found between different groups of residents.

### **Trend: the more knowledge about the citizens' assembly, the greater the growth in trust and feeling heard**

Although, as mentioned above, no clear increase was measured in political trust or the feeling of being heard, a trend is visible when looking at knowledge of the citizens' assembly process (p. 32). When people have more knowledge about the citizens' assembly process and its components, a greater increase in trust and feeling heard is observed. This suggests that there may be potential for a positive effect of the citizens' assembly on the broader society. In other words: the more the province is able to showcase the functioning and process of the citizens' assembly, the more people may develop trust in the province and feel heard by it.

This was the first citizens' assembly ever held in Drenthe and as such it was a relatively unknown phenomenon at the outset. It can be concluded that the citizens' assembly did not reach everyone and had a low impact on the wider population in Drenthe. On this basis we can conclude that there is potential for a citizens' assembly in Drenthe with more emphasis on communication and outreach.

# 7. EXPERIENCE OF THE PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

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To evaluate how the provincial administration experienced the citizens' assembly, semi-structured interviews were conducted in March/April 2025 with the fifteen representatives of the Provincial Parliament (PS) factions and with the two involved members of the Executive Council (GS). In addition, a focus group discussion with the Provincial Parliament working group on 'Connecting Governance' took place in April 2025.

The interviews show that the enthusiasm and engagement of participants were perceived as a major success. The interviews also underline that the process provided valuable experience with a methodology that facilitated meaningful conversations among residents.

The advisory report produced by the citizens' assembly was valued, but also experienced as very broad. In retrospect, the question that PS put to the citizens' assembly – without specifying any further framework or political priorities – was also very broad. The evaluation interviews revealed a desire to agree more clearly in advance on the issue, the objectives, the mandate, the parameters and how these are linked to the citizens' assembly. When clear expectations are communicated up front – taking into account each actor's role and the independence of the citizens' assembly – the assembly can better address the province's political questions in its final recommendations. This benefits everyone.

The instrument of the citizens' assembly narrows the distance between participants and government. It is important to invest in the connection between the participants and the provincial administration. For greater impact on the wider population, the hybrid format was experienced as valuable and there is still more to be gained from it. Another lesson was that the formulation of the assignment can be aligned more specifically internally within the province and, for example, externally with municipalities, in view of the multifaceted position of the province as an intermediate level of government.

This leads to the following recommendations:

- Take more time to jointly define the governance question that PS and GS want to see answered in the citizens' assembly, in the spirit of 'connecting governance.' This requires more alignment in the preparatory phase between PS and GS on what they want to learn from residents within the topic.

- Strengthen the connection between PS and GS by considering their different roles in the citizens' assembly process when setting its framework. By clarifying the purpose and roles, the governance needs can be better addressed: PS from its representative and framework-setting role, and GS from its executive role. Including these roles and related needs in the formulation of the citizens' assembly mandate will help meet the needs of the provincial administration.
- Invest in the connection between the provincial administration and the citizens' assembly. Both PS and the assembly participants appreciated that Council members were allowed to observe the citizens' assembly meetings. The independence of the citizens' assembly is not compromised if PS and GS can engage with the process without exerting substantive influence on its content.

**From the evaluation interviews the following key principles can be formulated regarding connecting governance today:**

### **1) Collaboration**

The citizens' assembly was a prime example of collaboration—between different groups of residents who jointly developed policy recommendations, and within the Provincial Parliament and between the Provincial Parliament and the Executive Council. The assembly showed that residents expect better collaboration between PS, GS, and civil servants. For a future citizens' assembly, there is also a desire for all Council factions to be part of a preparatory working group that is involved from the start in shaping and designing the process.

### **2) Bridging the gap between residents and the province**

The citizens' assembly is particularly mentioned as a tool to reduce the gap between residents and the province. This is because participants gained insight into the province's role and the complexity of provincial policy issues. The successful recruitment campaign, which resulted in 6,500 completed questionnaires and nearly 2,400 registrations for the assembly, made the province more visible to the wider Drenthe community even before the assembly began. However, evaluation with the Drenthe Panel shows that awareness of the process and its outcomes was ultimately relatively low, and there is still a strong need for more information and initiatives that make the province more transparent and involve residents more actively.

### **3) Engaging in dialogue with residents**

Council factions unanimously agree that direct dialogue with residents plays an important role in connecting governance. Direct contact and meetings help to better understand what is happening in Drenthe society and

make the provincial representation more visible. The citizens' assembly again demonstrated that there is a need for accessible conversations and that residents themselves strongly want to be heard through direct contact.

#### **4) Transparency of provincial governance**

The citizens' assembly showed that transparency is crucial for residents' trust in the province. Trust can be strengthened through greater openness and explanation. This also requires clear communication and continuous feedback in participatory processes like a citizens' assembly about what is being done with the input provided.

# 8. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**Main question:** *What has been learned from the first hybrid citizens' assembly of Drenthe and in what way can a hybrid citizens' assembly in Drenthe, as a new instrument of the Provincial Council, contribute to "governing in connection"?*

First of all, the citizens' assembly has been positively experienced by the participants and by the provincial administration, and it has had a positive impact. The methodology has led to greater connection between the participants and the province. The hybrid format was regarded as positive by all groups involved. At the same time, we observe that the wider population has not yet been reached on a large scale. More attention is needed for external communication, visibility and transparency in order to reach residents effectively. This was particularly successful in the preparatory phase of the citizens' assembly – during recruitment – when people could also share their opinions and needs regarding housing in Drenthe.

More attention is needed for external communication during the meetings and during the follow-up and implementation afterwards. Other participation tools, such as dialogue tables or the online platform "Wij zijn Drenthe", can be used to support more dialogue with the population of Drenthe.

On the basis of the evaluation, the following seven recommendations have been formulated.

- 1. Further development**  
Build on the investment made, the knowledge acquired and Drenthe's first introduction to the concept of a citizens' assembly. The recommendation is to organize another hybrid citizens' assembly during this PS term and to evaluate it again.
- 2. Assignment, objectives, frameworks**  
The Provincial Parliament (PS) and Executive Council (GS) should decide jointly in advance what the assignment, objectives and frameworks of the citizens' assembly are. Taking account of everyone's own roles, it is important for the provincial administration (PS and GS) to align their objectives, frameworks and joint political questions before the citizens' assembly starts.
- 3. Recruitment and selection**  
As a provincial administration, align in advance the frameworks for the desired selection criteria

and recruitment methods. For a next citizens' assembly, the recommendation is to determine jointly beforehand the frameworks for the lottery design, recruitment methods, hybrid design and any desired (required) composition, so that all relevant target groups are involved and can participate if they wish.

4. **Hybrid format**

Place the hybrid nature of the citizens' assembly more centrally so that the wider population of Drenthe is involved. The recommendation is to once again give the hybrid character a prominent role in the Drenthe citizens' assembly. The hybrid character is valuable for the legitimacy of the assembly. The combination of a representative group of residents who engage in in-depth deliberation and the broad input from society creates greater support for the resulting recommendations.

5. **Communication**

Invest more in external communication throughout the entire process, in the interest of outreach, transparency and public dialogue. Societal engagement around the citizens' assembly has been limited, partly due to limited reach, and not because of the instrument of the citizens' assembly itself.

6. **Connection**

Use the citizens' assembly as a vehicle for connection with the provincial administration. In a next citizens' assembly, again invest in the connection between the provincial administration and the assembly. Both PS and participants in the assembly appreciated the fact that councilors came to observe the meetings.

7. **Monitoring outcomes**

Monitor the follow-up to the recommendations from the citizens' assembly in an integrated and continuous manner. When transparent, integral monitoring is structurally embedded, it becomes easier to provide regular feedback to participants and residents via newsletters and other communication channels.

The recommendations will be taken up in the development of the second Drenthe Citizens' Assembly in 2026.

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**Speak Up**

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