

Fact Sheet Independent Administrative Department for Citizens Participation and Direct Democracy at the Federal Level

One of the demands of the Citizens' Assembly on Democracy was the "creation of a state-financed, politically independent body that coordinates citizen participation and direct-democratic procedures nationwide, and accordingly, informs the public".

The establishment of this office – an "administrative department for citizen participation and direct democracy" – would be an important step towards promoting citizen participation and, in the long term, direct-democratic procedures at the federal level. Thus, parliamentary democracy can be strengthened and supported.

The central aspects are:

- The responsible office connects actors, develops procedures, and bundles knowledge and information.
- The office follows the model of the "Civil Society and Citizen Participation Office" in Baden-Württemberg, which has been in existence since 2011 and has initiated and accompanied many participation processes in recent years.
- Lot-based citizens' assemblies and other forms of structured citizen participation are still relatively new and unknown in Germany. There is therefore a high demand for further training and skill-building of employees in the political and administrative fields. The office would be particularly suitable for meeting this need for further training.
- The office can also evaluate and process knowledge and information regarding referendums and their connection to participation procedures – for example, the experience in Ireland.

1. Proposals for the task profile

The Citizens' Assembly demands three central tasks of a department for citizen participation and direct democracy (coordination, implementation and information). The following detailed tasks and functions are essential for an administrative department for citizens' participation and direct democracy.

The possible tasks and functions of an administrative unit are in essence the following:

- Information about formal participation processes and the possibilities of informal participation
- Mediation between governmental institutions and civil society actors in matters of citizen participation
- Development, implementation or commissioning of participation procedures
- Guarantee of neutral preparation of the information, selection of independent experts and

process moderation for participation processes

- Bundling of process know-how to design apposite formats (form follows function)
- Monitoring of completed participation processes
- Preparation of proposals for the further development of citizen participation
- Networking of further actors in federal and state politics on the topic of citizen participation
- Training of federal administrative staff in the field of public and citizen participation
- In the case of (future) referenda: preparation of information, including a voting booklet that is sent to all households before a referendum – following the Swiss model, the "Abstimmungsbüchlein".

Practical experience in terms of tasks, competencies, resources and independence is available in Vorarlberg, Baden-Württemberg, Potsdam and Ireland.

2. Connection at the highest political level

- The administrative department could be anchored within the Bundestagpräsidium.
- Alternatively, an administrative department could be located in the Bundeskanzleramt. From there, exchanges with the heads of other ministries and state authorities could be organised.
- As long as an administrative department is not yet regulated by law, it should be included in the coalition agreement with concrete projects and goals defined.

3. Example State Councillor in Baden-Württemberg

Since 2011, the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of State has provided a responsible department at the "State Councillor for Civil Society and Citizens Participation". State Councillors are "honorary". They are "additional members of the Government" (Article 45(2) of the Baden-Württemberg Constitution). As a member of the cabinet, State Councillor Gisela Eler's task is developing citizen participation in the country and strengthening civil society. An "Advisory Council for Civil Society and Citizen Participation" supports the State Councillor in her work. It consists of representatives of associations, organisations and foundations of citizen participation, as well as science and administration.

4. Other possible legal forms

- An administrative department can also be set up as the supreme federal authority like the data protection officer or as a federal office, such as the Federal Office for Nuclear Disposal Safety.
- In Potsdam, the participation office is divided into an administrative and a civil society part in independent sponsorship. The civil society side often contributes important suggestions from a new perspective.