



## PDLA Overview Memo

### I. About PDLA

Founded in December 2022, Public Democracy Los Angeles (PDLA) is a local campaign organizing to establish an officially-sponsored citizens' assembly for Angelenos on a topic of broad public concern by 2026. By organizing Angelenos to support an independent, equitable, and people-led California citizens' assembly, we aim to create a more representative, equitable, and responsive democracy in Los Angeles.

### II. Background

A new democratic future for Los Angeles is possible. And we don't have to invent it whole cloth, we already contain many strengths as a city that make for a more representative, equitable, and responsive democracy: Our incredible racial and ethnic diversity, the overflowing creativity from the arts and entertainment industry, and a participatory civic spirit—one that helped bring direct democracy to the City in the early 20th century, to today's push for empowered neighborhood councils, accountability and transparency at LAPD and City Hall, CicLAvia, participatory budgeting, and more. But we have a series of structural problems that get in our way: We have a disparity of demographics between the representatives and the represented; a redistricting process where politicians choose their voters instead of voters choosing politicians; we have regulatory capture of appointed boards, panels and commissions, which are stacked with voices of special interests and corporations; and we have a system of public comment that limits real dialogue and over-represents the usual suspects.

In this crisis, there is an opportunity to draw upon the city's diversity, creativity, and participatory spirit to re-imagine democracy and put the people at the center of governance. A citizens' assembly is an institution that could get us there. Put simply, a citizens' assembly is a new approach to democracy that brings together a group of everyday people to tackle difficult policy questions. The assembly is reflective of the general public, in terms of age, race, gender, location, and diversity of experience and thought. These panels are like a city in one room, are professionally facilitated to accommodate different languages and communication styles, and follow a structured process to ensure fairness and productivity. They are designed to reduce the influence of political bias and instead put the focus on collaborative problem solving and evidence. Academic research has shown that they handle complex policy questions effectively and fairly. More importantly the assemblies counteract the apathy and cynicism that pervade public discourse and cause citizens to disconnect from the process of governance. Hundreds of assemblies across the world, as recently the Petaluma fairgrounds assembly in California, have enlivened their communities and restored faith in the democratic process.

PDLA's goal is to draw upon the lessons learned from these experiments across the world, build a coalition of mission-aligned individuals and organizations, and work towards the development of a citizens' assembly in Los Angeles. Through leadership development, public education, and lawmaker briefings, PDLA hopes to advance the foundations for a new democratic future in Los Angeles.

### III. Campaign Description and Outcomes

To achieve its mission to establish an officially-sponsored citizens' assembly for Angelenos on a topic of broad public concern by 2026, PDLA plans to execute a **three-pronged, partnership-based campaign** built around leadership development, community engagement, and public official education. The campaign will be led by a skeleton team of six people and rely heavily upon re-granting to organizations that fill-out the organization's capacity gaps (e.g., leadership development, language justice and narrative

work, and grassroots organizing). PDLA is “issue agnostic” and plans to decide which issue to organize the citizens’ assembly around through a triangulation of input from a representative sample of the general public, community leaders, and public officials. Ultimately, we envision a public official(s) officially-sponsoring this citizens’ assembly, so we plan to ensure that there is broad alignment between our sponsor(s), grassroots leaders, and everyday Angelenos—maximizing the likelihood of a successful implementation and recurring citizens’ assemblies. Key outputs for the campaign will include: the quantity and diversity of community organizations that have signed-on to support PDLA’s mission; deep relationships with public officials interested in sponsoring and supporting a citizens’ assembly; and broad public support and engagement for organizing a citizens’ assembly.

#### IV. **Major Activities To-Date**

- **Public briefings:**
  - [What if the People Governed? How Citizens’ Assemblies Can Restore Trust in LA City Government](#) (December 2022)
  - [Power Shift: Plans for an Angeleno Assembly](#) (February 2024)
- **Private community leaders briefing:** Lunch and Learn about Citizens’ Assemblies with Claudia Chwalisz at the Berggruen Institute (March 2023)
- **Website:** [www.publicdemocracyla.org](http://www.publicdemocracyla.org)

#### V. **Four-Year Plan**

##### 1. **Goal**

Our goal over the next four years is to generate support for establishing and implementing a successful, officially-sponsored citizens’ assembly on an issue of broad public concern. We estimate that there are around **50-100 community organizations** that would support a coalition to bring a citizens’ assembly to Los Angeles. We also estimate that there are **60-80 municipal leaders** (public officials and advocates) who would benefit from being trained to advocate for citizens’ assemblies, and democratic lotteries in general, in their respective communities. Finally, we want to engage over **50,000 everyday Angelenos** in a participatory poll that helps us understand what issues matter most to Angelenos. These together will help us ensure that **the first citizens-assembly in Los Angeles** has broad inside and outside support.

##### 2. **Timeline**

- January 2024 — December 2024
  - Objective: Build Team, Coalition, and Launch Campaign
  - Tactics: Public briefings, events, and organizational introductions
  - What Success Looks Like: Fundraising goals met; initial coalition launched with geographic and issue diversity; core campaign team hiring process
- January 2025 — December 2025
  - Objective: Secure Assembly Topic and Sponsor
  - Tactics: Polling, meet with lawmakers and staff, policy coalition meetings with community organizations, social media campaign

- What Success Looks Like: Clear understanding of every lawmaker’s position on citizens’ assemblies; polling data on public perceptions and desires for a citizen assembly; community input on assembly topic priorities
- January 2026 — December 2026
  - Objective: Plan and Implement Assembly
  - Tactics: Pre-, concurrent-, and -post assembly public briefings in support of the assembly and its planning team
  - What Success Looks Like: Citizen assembly hosted; >2/3 of policy recommendations passed by body

## **VI. Project Co-Leads**

**Mike Draskovic** is a media producer and advocate from Los Angeles, CA. He is co-founder of Democracy Policy Network and Los Angeles for Democracy Vouchers. He also founded Overture, a digital and immersive content studio, where he produced several mini-documentaries. He spent five years at The ONE Campaign, a global anti-poverty advocacy organization, where he managed marketing. He was a 2017 New America California Fellow, and served on the 2012 Obama Campaign as an Operation Vote Coordinator. He is a citizen of Cherokee Nation and he graduated from the USC in 2009 and Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government and MIT’s School of Management in 2018.

**Wayne Liebman** is a physician, playwright, and community organizer. In 2020, he founded Public Access Democracy to advocate for a democratic system more representative of, and responsive to, its citizens. Public Access Democracy seeks to invest political power in deliberative citizen groups chosen by lot. As a result of Public Access Democracy’s advocacy efforts, in 2022 the city of Petaluma, California, convened the first municipal citizens’ assembly in the state, to recommend a plan for the future use of its municipal fairground--a contentious issue for the city.

## **VII. Advisors & Organizational Partners**

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| ● The Berggruen Institute   | ● Hannah Arendt Center at Bard for |
| ● Public Access Democracy   | Politics and Humanities            |
| ● The American Public Trust | ● DemocracyNext                    |
| ● Healthy Democracy         | ● Solidarity Research Center       |
| ● The River Project         | ● Represent LA                     |
| ● Kitchen Table Democracy   |                                    |