

Collective problem-solving, Part 1: Agenda setting

CS-234: Technologies for Democratic Society, Fall 2023

NOTE: If you have **any questions regarding this assignment**, please **do not hesitate to contact us** by starting a [discussion on Moodle](#) so that (1) we can help you and (2) your classmates who might potentially have the same questions benefit from our answers. You **can also always contact the CS-234 staff** at: cs234@groupes.epfl.ch

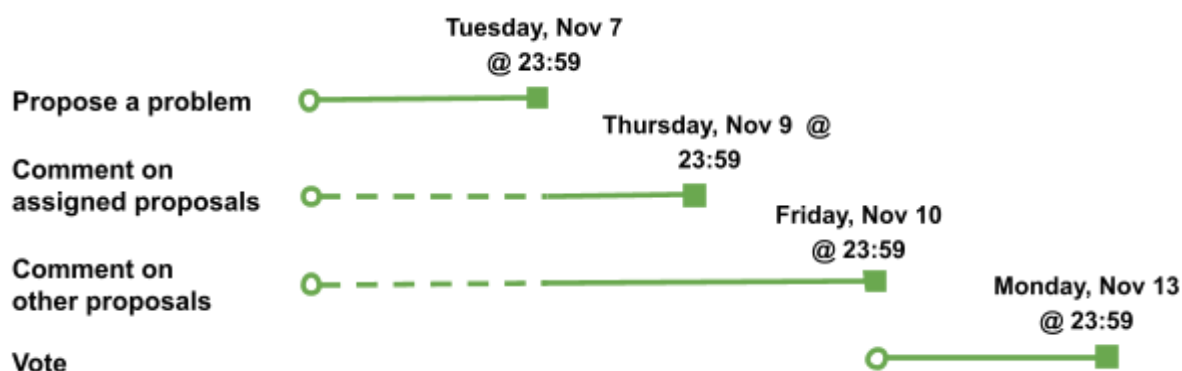
Introduction

Deliberation is the process of thoughtfully weighing and carefully considering possible options. The process can be used for choosing the best candidate in an election or identifying a potential solution to a problem. In the following weeks, you will practice collective deliberation through agenda setting to identify problems that you have identified at EPFL (Part 1), gathering information to come up with a solution proposal (Part 2), and cross-validating and consolidating the proposals (Part 3).

- **Part 1 (Agenda setting):** Identifying the existing problems at EPFL that are potentially worth discussing (perhaps problems that emerged due to the pandemic); followed by narrowing them down to focus on the most important problems. Agenda setting consists of three stages: problem proposal, discussion, and voting. The outcome of this part is a list of problems that will be collectively studied and tackled in the next parts. **Note that this document is solely about Part 1. The guidelines for the next parts will be available in the following weeks.**
- **Part 2 (Information gathering & Initial proposals):** Gathering information (e.g. interviews, expert counseling, case studies, literature research) to come up with a proposal for solving one of the previously-identified problems. Note that this part must be conducted in complete compliance with the rules of EPFL and of the canton Vaud about the pandemic.
- **Part 3 (Cross-validating proposals & Voting on the final proposals):** Comparing the suggested proposals, deliberating over their advantages and shortcomings, consolidating proposals, and, finally, doing an approval voting over all the proposals.

To facilitate efficient collaboration with your peers, we are going to use a decision-making software called Loomio. You should have received an invitation from Loomio. If you have not, please contact us at cs234@groupes.epfl.ch.

Timeline of Part 1



Problem proposal (250 words +/- 50)

We ask each student to suggest **one problem** that is present at EPFL that you have identified and think should be addressed. This problem might concern education, university infrastructure, sustainability policies, student life, bureaucracy, diversity, foreigners vs. Swiss citizens, this course, courses in general or anything else directly related to EPFL. The problems **do not** have to be unique across all the students (different students might be concerned about the same problem) but you need to come up with your own unique supporting arguments.

Each problem must be submitted as a new thread in the “**EPFL CS-234: Technologies of Societal Self-Organization**” organization on Loomio. Give your problem a concise but informative title, e.g., *Rise and Fall of the BC cafeteria: Monopolization of EPFL’s Food Supply*. Then, provide one paragraph describing the problem that you are bringing up in more detail **and** two concise paragraphs with arguments that explain why this problem is important. For example, you could briefly explain that all the cafeterias at EPFL have the same owners and that it affects the food quality. The arguments could include the importance of competition for maintaining quality and of fine food for students’ productivity. Other students will use your description and arguments as a starting point of discussion in the next stage.

We emphasize that each student needs to suggest **exactly one problem**, i.e., create one thread within the CS-234 organization on Loomio. Remember that the problems **do not** have to be unique. **The deadline for creating a thread on Loomio with your proposal is Tuesday, November 7 @ 23:59.**

In the following stages of this assignment, you are going to deliberate on the suggested problems to later collectively decide on which one is the most crucial.

Discussion

This is the stage of active deliberation. As a true patriot of your future alma mater, you are going to ponder the problems that are raised by your fellow classmates and argue either in favor of or against their relevance/importance **in the context of EPFL**.

Specifically, you have **two tasks** during this stage. **First**, you must comment on **at least four** problems that are raised by other students (e.g., the problems that you can relate to the most) with elaborate arguments that either support the proposed problems or question them. Each comment must be **200 words +/- 100**. **You are going to be assigned to two problem proposals that you have to comment on.** This is to make sure that everyone gets feedback on their proposals. **You are free to choose the other 2+ proposals that you want to comment on. We are going to announce your assignments immediately after the proposal deadline.** **Second**, you must engage in discussions with students who comment on your proposal, *i.e.*, provide counterarguments to or agree with their questions/suggestions.

As you go through the proposed problems, you might realize that there is another proposal that is similar to yours. For instance, you might have brought up the problem of not having enough bike racks on campus, and another student might have pointed out that Point Velo is understaffed and their opening hours are not convenient. In this case, you can start a discussion with the other student and after deliberating over your distinct-but-related proposals, you can decide to merge your proposals under “EPFL is not bike-friendly enough”. Note that merging proposals **is NOT mandatory**: you can still engage in a discussion with the other student but keep your proposals separate. However, if you choose to merge your proposals, leave a comment under the thread “Request for Merge” in Loomio. In your comment, put (1) the names of the authors of the proposals that are merged and (2) the new title for the merged proposal (e.g., EPFL is not bike-friendly enough).

The goal of this stage is **NOT** to defend your proposal or trash the problems brought up by other students but to collectively deliberate and figure out which problems are the most crucial.

The discussion stage starts immediately after the assignment is released: **you do not need to wait until the problem proposal deadline (Nov 19) to start commenting on proposals. There are two deadlines for this stage:** (1) **Thursday, November 9 @ 23:59** for commenting on the two proposals that you are assigned to, and (2) **Friday, November 10 @ 23:59** for commenting on at least two other proposals that you can choose freely. **Please make sure that the comments that you submit for the two assigned proposals start with “[MANDATORY]”. Points will be deducted if you do not include this exact string: [MANDATORY]**

Voting

Now that you have deliberated over the problems that are plaguing EPFL, the time has come for you to choose the problems that you want to solve! In this stage, you are going to collectively decide on the problems that you believe to be more important or to require more immediate action than the others. To make this decision, you are going to vote on the proposals using Loomio.

Once the discussion stage is over, we are going to collect all the proposed problems (some of which might be merged if requested by their authors) and create a poll on Loomio with these proposals being the candidates. Specifically, we will create a multiple-choice poll with each proposal being an option, and you will be able to vote for as many proposals as you like. In other words, picking an option means voting in favor of the corresponding proposal and skipping an option means voting against it. At the end of the voting, you will have decided on the problems that everyone in the class is going to work on in the following weeks. We will announce the exact number of proposals that got selected (at least 3) shortly after the deadline for voting. **The deadline to cast your votes is *Monday, November 13 @ 23:59*.**

Plagiarism

All work that you submit as part of this assignment must be your own original work. Failure to comply with this rule will be considered as plagiarism, which is a form of cheating and a severe violation of the academic honor code. Any potential case of plagiarism will be handled seriously in accordance with EPFL's disciplinary rules and regulations. If you have any questions about whether your actions might cause any violations, please contact the CS-234 staff immediately.