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 **NIF’s “Four Key Questions of NIF Forums”**

1. ***What is valuable to us?*** This question gets at the reason that making public choices is so difficult, namely, that all the approaches are rooted in things about which people care very deeply. This key question can take many different forms. To uncover deeper concerns, people may ask one another how each came to hold the views he or she has. Talking about personal experiences, rather than simply reciting facts or stating rational, impersonal arguments, promotes a more meaningful dialogue.
* How has this issue affected us personally?
* When we think about this issue, what concerns us?
* What is appealing about the first option or approach?
* What makes this approach acceptable – or unacceptable?
1. ***What are the consequences, costs, benefits and trade-offs associated with the various approaches?*** Variations of this question should prompt people to think about the relationship that exists between each approach and the values people have. Because deliberation requires the evaluation of pros and cons, it is important to ensure that both aspects are fully considered. Questions to promote a fair and balanced examination of all potential implications include:
* What would be the consequences of doing what we are suggesting?
* What would be an argument against the approach we like best? Is there a downside to this course of action?
* Can anyone think of something constructive that might come from the approach that is receiving so much criticism?
1. ***What are the inherent conflicts that we have to work through?*** As a forum progresses, participants should consider the following:
* What do we see as the tension between the approaches?
* What are the “gray areas”?
* Where is there ambiguity?
* What are you struggling with? What are you not sure about?
* Why is reaching a decision (or moving forward) on this issue so difficult?
1. ***Can we detect any shared sense of direction or common ground for action?*** After saying during the first few minutes of a forum that the objective is to work toward a decision, the moderator or someone else may continue to intervene from time to time with questions that move the deliberation toward a choice, always stopping short of pressing for consensus or agreement on a particular solution. Then, as the tensions become evident, as people see how what they consider valuable pulls them in different directions, the moderator tests to see where the group is going by asking such questions as:
* Which direction seems best?
* Where do we want this policy to take us?
* What tradeoffs are we willing and unwilling to accept?
* If the policy we seem to favor had the negative consequences some fear, would we still favor it?
* What are we willing and unwilling to do as individuals or as a community in order to solve this problem?

**At the heart of deliberation is the question of whether**

**we are willing to accept the consequences of our choices**

**General Questions to Encourage Deliberation Cheat Sheet**

* Could you share a story to illustrate that point?
* I understand you do not like that position, but what do you think people who favor it deeply care about?
* How would someone make a case against what you said?
* What is there about this approach that you just cannot accept?
* How may your ideas affect other people?
* Can someone suggest areas that we seem to have in common?
* Would someone identify the values that seem to be clashing? What is really happening here?
* Who should we include in this dialogue that is not already represented?
* If we followed this course of action, what would be the effects on your life?
* What values might people hold who support this position?
* Can anyone envision how their life would change if this approach became national policy?
* What are the consequences of what you said? Do they make a difference?
* How might your concerns differ if you were (poor/wealthy)?
* How do you separate what is a private matter from a public matter in this issue?
* Other favorites?