**THE POWER OF PUBLIC DELIBERATION**

In a time of polarization within our communities, nation, and world, it is critical that we find ways to have civil discourse about the challenges we face. With that in mind, the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) would like to introduce you to a model of civil discourse that utilizes a well-established method for deliberative dialogue. This unique deliberative and democratic approach allows people to engage in meaningful and informed discussion across lines of difference – including ideological, political, religious, social, cultural, and gender differences. NIFI builds on this respected tradition by creating opportunities for diverse persons to engage in informed discussion about the topics of the day.

Recent topics have explored safety and justice in communities, climate change, immigration, obesity, and end-of-life questions, among others. Discussion guides are framed in nonpartisan ways with three options for addressing the topic being discussed. NIFI has found that this approach encourages people to identify shared concerns rather than default to polarizing positions that lead to inaction and division. The objective of a forum is to demonstrate the deliberative process of examining the nature of a significant public issue and reviewing the tensions and tradeoffs of three possible options and, then, to see if “common ground” can be found by the participants.

NIFI, in partnership with the Kettering Foundation, has been involving citizens in both face-to-face and online discussions, through the Common Ground for Action platform, of major issues for over 35 years. It has found a significant positive response to the interactions. Forums create a space for participants to share experiences, offer suggestions, and to hear what others have to say before identifying common ground for action. Forums have been used across the country and internationally with young people, intergenerational groups, and senior citizens in diverse settings such as classrooms, religious communities, libraries, and community centers. More than simply being a place for someone to speak, deliberative forums are intentional environments where people are encouraged to wrestle with complexity and step away from otherwise simplistic “either/or” and “left/right” approaches to public issues.

We believe that deliberative forums can offer another facet to your programming that encourages inquisitive discussion, deep reflection, and a sense of community.

**About National Issues Forums Institute**

Located in Dayton, Ohio, The National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves to promote public deliberation about difficult public issues. Its activities include publishing issue guides and other supporting material used in a forum.

**What is Deliberation?**

It’s not a debate. It’s not a contest. It’s not even about reaching agreement or seeing eye-to-eye. **It’s the discovery of a shared direction, guided by what we value most.** It’s about examining the costs and consequences of possible solutions to daunting problems, and finding out what we, as a society, would or would not accept as a solution.

**What is a forum?**

Usually small gatherings where people come together for a few hours to deliberate on the serious issues they face in their communities and the country with the help of a neutral moderator and a discussion guide that presents several possible approaches to the problem.

**What is the role of the moderator?**

The moderator, while remaining neutral, will help participants at the forum use an issue guide as they deliberate about possible approaches to the problem. NIFI offers in-person and online training for people interested in this role.

**What background material is needed for a forum?**

To help participants prepare for the deliberation, they should read the issue guide offered for each forum.

**About the Issue Guides**

The issue guides are prepared for NIFI in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation. NIFI issue guides are used by a variety of organizations, groups, and individuals interested in addressing serious issues they face in their communities and the country. The guide presents an overview of a public problem, or issue, and three possible approaches to the problem, along with the potential costs, consequences, and tradeoffs that would likely result from following any of the approaches. Some NIF issue guides have companion videos that provide an overview of the issue framework. For more information on the topics available, including, but not limited to, the opioid epidemic, safety and justice, end of life, climate choices, visit [www.nifi.org](http://www.nifi.org). For more information about the Kettering Foundation, please visit [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org).

**Why Deliberate?**

What NIF forums offers is a different way of talking about issues, and also a different way of talking to each other.

* Builds relationships
  + awareness of others’ experiences and concerns
  + Identification of shared values and concerns
  + Empathy for others
* Builds capacity to address community problems
  + Political tolerance
  + Awareness of common ground
* It supports sound public decision-making

**Forum Design**

Deliberating is most likely to occur when participants have the chance to do all of the following:

* THINK about the distinctive goal of deliberative forums and consider the ground rules for the conversation
* SHARE their personal stakes and experiences and LISTEN to those of the other participants.
* WEIGH the options and proposals in the issue framework and wrestle with the costs and trade-offs.
* REFLECT on their work, considering where they’ve moved toward common ground and where work remains. This may include identifying points of agreement, areas of tension or ambivalence, remaining questions, and trade-offs people are willing to make.

**PUBLIC DELIBERATION CLASSES**

**AT OSHER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTES (OLLI)**

For the past five years, the University of Dayton’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute has offered a course on The Power of Public Deliberation. Other members of the nationwide National Issues Forums network have looked to their local Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes to play a similar role.

The curriculum at each OLLI is unique and we’ve included program descriptions from five OLLI programs held in 2017.

**UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON OLLI | Fall 2017 Curriculum**

**Learning From Others: The Power of Public Deliberation**

Using the National Issues Forums process, interactive deliberation and participatory classroom discussion will be guided by experienced moderators on the following issues:

Sept. 19 Orientation  
Sept. 26 Land of Plenty: How Should We Ensure that People Have the

Food They Need?  
Oct. 3 Alcohol in America: What Can We Do About Excessive Drinking?  
Oct. 10 End of Life: What Should We Do for Those Who Are Dying?  
Oct. 17 Where Have All the Voters Gone?  
Oct. 24 The Immigration Dilemma: How Should We Fix the System?

Required text: The issue books will be supplied prior to the first seminar session.

*Note: Due to high demand, the class is offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays for six weeks in the spring and fall semester. Each forum was facilitated by a different UDOLLI member trained by NIFI.*

**UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON OLLI | 2017 Summer Program**

**Civil Discussion on Contemporary Issues: A Different Way to Talk – to Listen – to Act**

Do you feel it has become more and more difficult to talk to friends and family about important issues on your mind? Are certain subjects taboo because they might start an uncomfortable argument? Deliberation Day at UDOLLI will give you renewed energy and commitment to revive civility and respect in our public and private conversations.

One way to do that is to talk and listen to one another in small groups with a moderator guiding us through a process of open group discussion of important policy issues. No experts are present, just participants who will discuss various pros and cons offered and then summarize the options and make decisions as to what everyone thinks are the best solutions. The value of the program is not necessarily agreeing on a solution – everyone may not agree – but on the deliberation process itself: talking as concerned citizens and

gaining knowledge of the issue which can enlighten everyone at the table and can be disseminated community-wide.

8:30 – 9 am Continental breakfast

9 – 10 am Welcome and Introduction to Deliberation

10 am – 10:30 am Break

11 am – 12:30 pm Safety and Justice: How Should We Ensure Everyone

Feels Safe in Our Communities?

12:30 pm – 1:30 pm Lunch

1:30 pm – 3:00 pm Healthcare in America: How Do We Fix It?

3:00 pm – 3:30 pm Closure

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA OLLI | Fall 2017 Curriculum**

**Deliberative Democracy: Civil Discourse about Critical Public Issues**

Oct. 17 – Nov. 14, 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. 5 sessions, $55

“To deliberate is to carefully weigh civic actions, laws or policies against the various things that people hold dear in order to settle on a direction to follow or purpose to pursue.” That definition captures the essence of ordinary citizens engaged in civil political dialog. Deliberative forums draw on the wisdom of citizens as they share and listen to one another’s opinions and seek some degree of common ground on complex questions. You will deliberate a total of four important issues including two facilitator-selected topics (Safety & Justice: How Should Communities Reduce Violence? and End of Life: What Should We Do for Those Who are Dying?) and two chosen by the class. You will also contribute to the development of “Let’s Talk about Water,” an issue book that will be published jointly by the North American Association of Environmental Educators and the Kettering Foundation.

**Required:** An open mind, a commitment to listen carefully and share honestly, respect for diverse ideas and perspectives

**Facilitator:** Gregg Kaufman

**UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI OLLI | Fall 2017 Curriculum**

**2001 Finding Solutions to the Problems Facing America**

Thursdays, Sep. 21–Nov. 9, 11 am–12:15 pm (VPC) $5 + materials fee

*CLASS LIMIT: 20*

This is the fifth OLLI course using the National Issues Forums (NIF) public deliberation process. We will weigh the alternatives from various courses of action using the NIF issues guides. Participants are encouraged to express, listen to, and consider all points of view. Discussions will involve three major issues. 1. Safety and justice: how should communities reduce violence? 2. How should we reduce obesity in America? 3. What should we do when alcohol and drug use become a problem to our society? Moderator will collect $10 to cover cost of NIF Issues guides.

*Moderator:* Kent Friel, UC, 1965, recently served as a Community Fellow with the Knowledgeworks Foundation, an educational foundation. He has been trained by the NIF, a subsidiary of the Kettering Foundation, as a deliberation process moderator.

**UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MANOA OLLI | Fall 2017 Program**

NIF Forum: Land Of Plenty

Presenter: Dolores Foley, Ph.D., NIFI Director

Date: November 20, 2017  
Time: 2-4pm  
Location: Krauss 111

National Issues Forums (NIF) is a nonpartisan, nationwide network that bring citizens together to voice their views about challenging social and public policy issues. NIF provides materials for groups that meet with a moderator to participate in a deliberative guided dialogue. Join us for a National Issues Forum at OLLI-UHM on the topic: “Land of Plenty: How Should We Ensure that People Have the Food They Need?”

Reading materials on the topic and more information about NIF are available at www.nifi.org. We will also provide hard copies of the Land of Plenty Issue Guide for forum participants.