

## Texas Forums: Building Common Ground

# A Handbook on how to convene and moderate deliberative public forums on divisive issues using the National Issues Forums model

*Sponsored by the LBJ Presidential Library and Museum*



The materials contained in this handout were created by members of the National Issues Forums network and the International Deliberative Democracy Workshop Faculty and reflect over two decades of research and practice. The presenters are grateful to the citizen practitioners who have labored long and hard to promote the NIF motto: A Different Kind of Talk, Another Way to Act in communities across this country and even abroad through the international work of the Kettering Foundation. The presenters are also grateful to the Kettering Foundation and the National Issues Forums Institute for support of this program. For more information about NIF, visit [www.nifi.org](http://www.nifi.org) or call Taylor L. Willingham 866.215.0843.

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## **Overview: The Conceptual Framework of Deliberative Democracy**

## What is Deliberative Democracy?

There are two threads in democratic thought. One is the institutions, rules and procedures—the machinery—of democracy: written constitutions, one person/one vote, political parties, free and fair elections, representative government, checks and balances, independent judiciary, etc.

The other has roots in the citizens' forums of ancient Greece and Rome and in communities anywhere in which citizens come together to talk about their issues and their plans for the future.

In this workshop, we are talking about the second idea—about how people come together to talk about issues. It is called "**deliberative democracy**" because it builds on the capacities of citizens to think, talk and work together in their common interests. "**Politics**" in this tradition is what citizens do when they come together to solve their own issues—in contrast to the electoral, legislative and decision-making processes of governments.

For this workshop on public participation and deliberation, it helps to have a full understanding about how the process of deliberative democracy works.

1. For "politics" to work as it should—to have the qualities we want it to have—requires **citizens to be actors**. The political system won't change by itself. People have to claim their responsibilities and act on those responsibilities, both by setting directions for government and by joining together in public action. The purpose of this workshop is to enable participants to create experiences in which citizens can develop their capacities as **political actors**. This workshop is about how people become political actors.
2. People can't act together, either to set directions or build **relationships** to work together as citizens, without making **choices**, or decisions. This is always difficult because choices about what kind of community or country we want to have forces us to deal with what is important to people. What people value may differ from person to person.
3. When people have different concerns, this "choice work" can really only be handled effectively in a **deliberative dialogue**. Deliberation is a particular form of reasoning and talking together in which we weigh carefully the costs and consequences of our

various options for action, in the context of the views of others. Forums (gatherings of citizens) have to be deliberative if they are to lead to sound decisions.

4. Deliberation tends to change first opinions into more shared and reflective **public judgment** about how we should act. We discover what we share, despite what we don't agree about. Deliberative forums create **public knowledge** (a deeper understanding of what people feel they need and why) and a **public voice** (a shared sense of concern).
5. Deliberation helps people find **connections** among their varied purposes and a shared sense of direction. People have to "work through" conflicts and deal with the trade-offs. They may not come to full and complete agreement, but may get to the point that they have a shared sense of direction for moving ahead and some idea of what people are and aren't willing to do to solve a issue. Often we live our lives somewhere between complete agreement and complete disagreement. Public action becomes possible when citizens discover where their interests are interconnected.
6. Though not complete agreement or consensus, when people find a shared sense of direction, this provides **common ground for action**. Thus, deliberative forums create a basis for **public action**, which is often citizen-to-citizen actions that are mutually reinforcing, or complementary, because they serve compatible purposes. Public action can often make governmental action more effective. Sometimes citizen action is in itself more effective than government action.
7. The public knowledge or public voice that comes from a forum—about how citizens think and talk about an issue and what they are or are not willing to do to address it—is essential information for officeholders. When governments act in accord with public judgment, they acquire **public legitimacy**.

## **Section 1**

### Understanding the Types of Problems that Require Citizens to Act Together

## **Characteristics of Public Issues<sup>1</sup>**

1. Cross a number of traditional boundaries
  - Organizational and jurisdictional
  - Functional
  - Temporal and inter-generational
  - Interrelated web
2. Socially constructed
  - Differing values, beliefs, cultural traditions and worldviews
  - Strategies for dealing with issue are based on people's definition and mental model about "cause and effect"
  - Go beyond the scope of scientific and technical data
3. There is no one "optimal" solution
  - Intractable; never entirely solved
  - Technical remedy only is ineffective; requires deeper systemic changes

### **Public issues require shared power**

Public issues do not respect conventional boundaries. No one sector – governmental, industrial, or civic – owns them. Technical remedies alone are insufficient. No one agency of government has full jurisdiction to solve them. No one special interest group has the power to force a solution. No one discipline or mental model can fully explain them. No one local area can wall itself off and deal with them exclusively. They must be addressed collaboratively.

Determining HOW to involve the public is very important. The International Association of Public Participation has developed what they call the "Spectrum of Public Participation" which presents five different levels of public participation ranging from informing the public to having the public make the decision.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Jeffrey Luke. 1998. *Catalytic Leadership: Strategies for an Interconnected World*

## Different types of Problems in Public Issues

In order to address public issues, it is helpful to know what type of problem you are dealing with. All problems are not the same. Some are more easily solved than others. It is human nature to try and solve problems rapidly because people are uncomfortable dealing with the unknown. However, in haste, people try to solve problems with the wrong type of solutions. Here's a helpful way of thinking about different types of problems:

<b>Three Types of Problems</b>			
	<b>Type 1 Technical Problems</b>	<b>Type 2 Value Problems</b>	<b>Type 3 Wicked or Intractable Problems</b>
<b>Agreement on the definition of the problem</b>	YES	YES	NO
<b>Agreement on possible Solutions</b>	YES	NO	NO

## Three Types of Problems<sup>2</sup>

### Type I

Type-I problems are fundamentally "how to" questions. They are usually technical in nature, meaning they tend to be solved by technical fixes. There are high levels of agreement on both the definition of the problem and possible solutions. Generally, Type-I problems are amenable to expert-generated solutions. Intrinsicly, these problems tend not to require much consideration of values and beliefs and may not even require high levels of participation and involvement by those who have the problem. Examples of Type-I

<sup>2</sup> Excerpts from *The Creative Problem Solver's Handbook For Negotiators and Mediators* edited by John W. Cooley, American Bar Association, 2004. Chapter by Peter S. Adler, "Leadership, Mediation, and the Naming, Framing, and Taming of Type-II And Type -III Problems". Forth coming late 2005.

problems might include finding the fastest route to Chiang Mai, fixing a broken arm, washing clothes if you spill something on them.

## **Type II**

Type II problems are best thought of as “value” problems. Solutions become less clear because value dimensions are present. The more that people study such problems, the more difficult it might become to find “the reasonable solution” because of the differing values. Even though there may be general agreement on the definition of the problem, there is little or no agreement on potential solutions. In fact, solution-seeking discussions can cause people to confront painful choices that they will either try to avoid or dominate because they don’t want to choose.

Unlike Type-I problems that lend themselves to the diagnostics and interventions of experts, Type-II matters require a serious consideration of values, not just by the experts, but by those who in some way must implement the solutions or live with the outcomes. In these circumstances, information alone won’t fully inform decision-making because the problems involve matters of the heart. Type-II problems evoke the emotions and stubborn responses associated with worldviews, ideologies, and belief systems.

Technical experts can help inform possible solutions to Type-II problems but without the participation of those who actually will be impacted in some way by the problem (stakeholders), solutions are not sustainable. In day-to-day life, examples might include the need to build a new bridge. (The problem is clear; engineers know how to build bridges...) But where should the bridge be located? What if it impacts a sensitive environmental area or is less accessible for some people than others—who should get to decide WHERE the bridge will be built?



### **Type III**

Type-III problems are often referred to as “wicked” or “intractable” because they seem to have multiple stakeholders, overlapping jurisdictions, powerful moral dimensions, and deep histories. Because there are a variety of stakeholders with differing perspectives, there is broad disagreement on what “the problem” actually is. Competing solutions create on-going discord among stakeholders when they try to discuss “the problem.” Further, no one has power over the whole situation. So no one party is capable of both defining the problem in a way that everyone agrees on immediately, and imposing a solution. People actively seek to defeat each other rather than work together.

Like Type-II problems, Type-III problems are driven by deeply conflicting values but, unlike Type-II challenges, proposed solutions may not be considered valid simply because they are brought forward by someone who is typically defined as an essential part of the problem. Consider the Iraq war. One ethnic or religious group might propose a solution on new ways to govern but is immediately considered suspect by others in a different ethnic or religious group.

Complex public issues do not always fall neatly into one of the three categories. The usefulness of these typologies is to diagnose problems to help us think about how we might approach them. This typology can help us

- understand what the problem entails and how complex it might be—a clean technical solution versus a problem based on a number of differing values.
- determine if we need to approach a diversity of stakeholders and if so, when and how and with what information?
- appreciate that some problems are so complex that they may take a long time and a lot of effort to resolve, if they can be resolved at all. Maybe these problems will result in small changes overtime so that the conflict is lessened but the problem itself never disappears.

A tool for determining how much public participation you need to address a public issue is by using the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum. This offers helpful information on what the public can expect from each type of process and how information can be shared. The level of public participation required will depend on the type of problem to be resolved.

## IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

# IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

Developed by the International Association for Public Participation

INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC IMPACT				
INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
<p><b>Public Participation Goal:</b></p> <p>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.</p>	<p><b>Public Participation Goal:</b></p> <p>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.</p>	<p><b>Public Participation Goal:</b></p> <p>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.</p>	<p><b>Public Participation Goal:</b></p> <p>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</p>	<p><b>Public Participation Goal:</b></p> <p>To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.</p>
<p><b>Promise to the Public:</b></p> <p>We will keep you informed.</p>	<p><b>Promise to the Public:</b></p> <p>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</p>	<p><b>Promise to the Public:</b></p> <p>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</p>	<p><b>Promise to the Public:</b></p> <p>We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.</p>	<p><b>Promise to the Public:</b></p> <p>We will implement what you decide.</p>
<p><b>Example Techniques to Consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fact sheets</li> <li>● Web sites</li> <li>● Open houses</li> </ul>	<p><b>Example Techniques to Consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Public comment</li> <li>● Focus groups</li> <li>● Surveys</li> <li>● Public meetings</li> </ul>	<p><b>Example Techniques to Consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Workshops</li> <li>● Deliberate polling</li> </ul>	<p><b>Example Techniques to Consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Citizen Advisory Committees</li> <li>● Consensus-building</li> <li>● Participatory decision-making</li> </ul>	<p><b>Example Techniques to Consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Citizen juries</li> <li>● Ballots</li> <li>● Delegated decisions</li> </ul>

Prepared by International Association for Public Participation ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org))

## **Section 2**

### Addressing Complex Public Issues

## **Six Democratic Practices: Naming, Framing and Taming Public Issues<sup>3</sup>**

What transforms a collection of ordinary people into public citizens? The key may be in the way communities go about the everyday business of living together: identifying problems, deciding what to do about them, making commitments of time and resources, acting, and then evaluating what has been accomplished. In order for these activities to become public, communities don't have to do anything outside the ordinary – they just have to do the ordinary in a different way. If these routine activities are open to people so that they are engaged by the practices, then the public begins to take shape. The capacity of citizens to deal with their problems increases, public work gets done and, in the process, public relationships form. Yet in order for people to be engaged by the practices, more has to happen than announcing they are available to anyone who wants to participate. Here are the practices that helps put the public in the public's business:

1. Naming the problem
2. Framing issues to promote choice work
3. Deliberating openly
4. Getting commitments
5. Acting publicly
6. Civic learning

"Naming" and "framing" public problems help stakeholders to understand them, or "get their minds" around them. Many times public problems are so complex that people do not know where to begin to talk about them. Problems must be "named and framed" in such a way that people can "tame" them in a deliberative dialogue.

### **1. Naming problems in terms of what is most valuable to citizens**

Naming a public problem is a "political practice" because the name the public gives to the problem affects what is done to solve it. Take crime, for example. Some in the community might say "we must do something about the crime here". So a task force or community group forms, with a variety of stakeholder who have an interest in the issue. They begin to talk about having a public meeting to bring this issue to the attention of other community

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<sup>3</sup> David Matthews. *The Politics of Self-Rule: Six Public Practices*. Connections (Kettering Foundation, Winter 2005).

members. So the chairperson begins by saying "we need to talk about crime". A person who works with youth says, "Yes, the juvenile crime rate is increasing and something needs to be done". A policeman says "I thought the crimes we are going to talk about were the burglaries and robberies being committed by adults!" A third person says "Wait a minute. What about those executives at the two big factories in town that were arrested for manipulating the company's accounting books?" Another says, "what about drugs?"... and the questions about different types of crimes and different groups committing the crimes could go on and on depending on the viewpoint of the stakeholders. If this one small group can't talk about the issue, how can a large number of community members in a public forum talk about crime? Also, as you can see from the different examples, each type of crime, and the social group committing the crime, may require a different approach. This example illustrates the point that the problem MUST be "named" correctly. The community can still talk about crime but there must be a clear issue when it is presented to the public. The process for "naming" the problem requires a diversity of stakeholders.

It is important to note that one challenge is the naming of "Type III" problems because they tend to be the most difficult. Yet, because they are so difficult, it is important to try and develop some type of framework that allows people to begin working on the problem.

Another important thing to consider is when issues are "named" by public administrators and elected officials. Because of their roles, they will use terms and frameworks that are not familiar to local citizens and say "this is the problem". Yet, this type of "naming" imposes, on citizens, a way of looking at the problem that does not resonate with their experiences or concerns, nor does it suggest what they might do with other citizens.

## **2. Framing Issues to Promote Choice Work**

Once the problem is "named", people can begin to "frame" it. That is, they start to talk about the problem and form options about what can be done. Problems with only one or two options set up a very different type of discussion than when at least three are available. Just one or two options either means the problem is not sufficiently complex and it may really be a Type I or easy Type II problem OR that more work needs to be done on framing options. Also, with only one or two options, people tend to polarize on the issue. It is best if there are multiple options on the table. In the case with crime, if they identify juvenile crime, they might say there are three options for starting to resolve the problem. One might be that parents need to be more responsible for their children, a second option could

be that society—schools, churches, parents and other social entities—be more responsive to children’s needs and a third option might be that children need to be held responsible for their actions.

As you can see, once you begin to talk about these issues you see that none of the options alone are ideal, that perhaps part of each of them is relevant. If this is the case, the issue has been framed correctly. There may be no one “right” solution with complex issues but a number of combined approaches might be necessary. We will talk more about framing an issue later in the workshop.

### **3. Deliberating Openly (taming the issue)**

The taming of an issue occurs when the people begin to assess the possible consequences of one course of action or another. When people begin to weigh the possible consequences against what is valuable to them, they are deliberating. When they do this with others, it is deliberative dialogue and they are building a *collective understanding* of the issue with a move towards some type of *collective action*. The word collective is very important because it means that people can, after hearing the viewpoints and stories of others, move from “me” to “we”. We will discuss deliberation in more detail in the next section.

### **4. Getting Commitments**

Once people have deliberated on different options, they may come to an agreement, or reach a decision about some work on the problem that they may want to do together, or that they would like done by someone else such as the government, a local council or agency.

### **5. Acting Publicly in Dealing With Wicked Problems**

Public acting is when people come together as a public, or a collective group, to bring resources to work on the decisions resulting from a deliberation. They begin to work together on a problem.

### **6. Turning Evaluation into Civic Learning**

After people participate in a deliberative dialogue, they evaluate the experience of collective learning and collective action. This is called “civic learning”.

## Debate, Dialogue and Deliberation

In this section, we are going to talk about **Debate, Dialogue and Deliberation**, three different ways that people can communicate about an issue. It is important to understand how these differ and that each has its value depending on the issue.

Differences between deliberation and dialogue are more difficult to see than debate and deliberation (see chart on next page). The crucial difference is that dialogue is a discussion to increase collective understanding. Deliberation can include dialogue, but it goes further. Deliberation is about moving towards collective action based on collective understanding. It isn't about what you or I can do individually. It is about what 'we', or the public, can do together. A critical point is to understand that they all have value depending on the problem situation for which they are used.

### Characteristics of Debate, Dialogue and Deliberation

Debate	Dialogue	Deliberation
Compete	Exchange	Weigh
Argue	Discuss	Choose
Promote opinion	Build relationships	Make choices
Seek majority	Understand	Seek overlap
Persuade	Seek understanding	Seek common ground
Dig in	Reach across	Framed to make choices
Tight structure	Loose structure	Flexible structure
Express	Listen	Learn
Usually fast	Usually slow	Usually slow
Clarifies	Clarifies	Clarifies
Win/lose	No decision	Common ground

Now, let us consider the difference between **Debate and Deliberation**. The distinction between a more argumentative approach versus one where you seek common ground is clear.

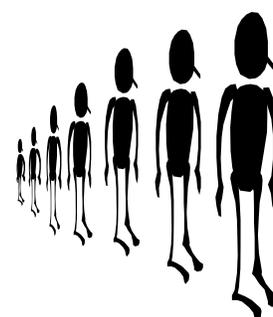
**DEBATE****Versus****DELIBERATION**

In debate, you search for weaknesses in another position	In deliberation, you search for strength in another position.
In debate, you search for glaring differences.	Deliberation involves concern for others.
Debate involves countering the other's position at the expense of the relationship.	Deliberation assumes that many people have pieces of an answer to a workable solution.
Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in your beliefs.	In deliberation, you temporarily suspend your judgment of other's beliefs.
Debate is oppositional and seeks to prove the other wrong.	Deliberation is collaborative and seeks common understanding.
The goal of debate is winning – often only for a short-term advantage.	The goal of deliberation is common ground for action, which is the basis for consistent policy.
In debate, you listen to find flaws and counter-arguments.	In deliberation, you listen to understand and find meaning in agreement.
Debate defends assumptions as truth.	Deliberation reveals assumptions for reevaluation.
Debate defends original solutions.	Deliberation opens the possibility of better solutions.
In debate, you submit your best thinking and defend its rightness.	In deliberation, you submit your best thinking in order to improve it.

## What is Public Deliberation?<sup>4</sup>

Most people think of deliberation as something juries do after hearing all the evidence. Just as juries do, each of us weighs different options for a problem then we make decisions that can affect the lives of our families, our friend and even the people we work with. For example, we might weigh carefully the costs and consequences of buying a house or starting a new project at work, and we usually discuss those decisions with others who will be affected.

But the problem is that we don't think about taking this kind of deliberation into public life, into the process of making decisions that affect our communities. Perhaps we don't see the need for public deliberation – for getting together to weigh our options before deciding what is best for our communities, regions and nation—or, we might now know who to do it in a public manner.



In community life, deliberation can help us struggle with the hard choices every problem requires. People are encouraged to share their ideas and opinions, to truly listen and understand one another – especially those whose views are very different from our own. They are encouraged to look for the common ground that is the foundation of good community decision making.

Deliberation is more than casual discussion. It is different from a debate. When deliberating, we weigh the potential consequences of various solutions to community problems. Weighting increases the chance that the choices will be sound because a diverse group of people have shared their experience and they have also explored the consequences of the actions they decide to take.

The goal of public deliberation is to make sound decisions as a community about what action is best for the public as a whole.

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<sup>4</sup> Oklahoma Public Policy Institute 2001

## **Significant Findings from Studies of Deliberation**

For 25 years, the Kettering Foundation in Dayton, Ohio, USA, has been studying public deliberation. Over the past ten years, a score of studies, conducted with a variety of research methods, found that public deliberation makes a difference. Here are some of the highlights:

- Those who take part in deliberations come from every part of society.
- Virtually everyone is capable of deliberating about important public issues. Educational level, for example, is not a barrier.
- Participants reconsider their own opinions and judgments.
- People consider the views of others and develop a greater understanding of those viewpoints.
- Participants approach issues more realistically and are willing to consider costs, consequences, and trade-offs.
- People define their self-interests more broadly.
- Deliberation leads many to feel a greater sense of confidence in what they can do politically. That is, people become more inclined to see themselves as political actors capable of making a difference.
- Participants become more interested in political and social issues.
- Deliberation in a community enhances communication among groups.

## **Section 3**

### Strategies for Promoting Deliberation

## What is an “Issue Book” or “Discussion guide”?

Issues books, or discussion guides, provide a framework for people to use when they come together to deliberate an issue. So, you might ask... just how does a framework lead to deliberation?

1. If done right, it can correctly identify what is at issue and what might be done.
2. It is authentic to people's experience (which is not synonymous with fair and balanced): there are no false or artificially made-up approaches. **The issue is framed through the lens of the public, not through the lens of politicians, academics, or journalists.**
3. The framing cuts across old arguments; it doesn't let people retreat to their usual stance. A deliberative framing always includes more than two approaches, preventing typical polarization on issues.
4. Approaches are not mutually exclusive. In well-designed issue books, there is tension between the approaches. That is, the approaches encompass a wide range of options that express commonly held positions. Often, participants realize that there are parts of two or more approaches which have value to them.
5. There will always be elements of each approach that everyone will like (if they are honest about their feelings.) This is possible because each approach may have a value we all share but with each of us it may vary in how important we consider it to be.
6. When making a choice, it requires that we accept trade-offs and consequences. All choices will lead to both intended and unintended consequences. We must confront the fact that we cannot have it all.
7. Within each approach, there are elements of the pro and con side that tug at us – difficult choices to be made. The framing forces us to face our own ambiguity. We have to acknowledge difficult choices and accept consequences for our decisions, AND we have to acknowledge our own values and how we can work with others.

8. In an issue book or discussion guide, no approach is the direct opposite of the other. It is not that easy. There is always a myriad of options. A simple "yes" or "no" vote would not force us to acknowledge the complexity of the issue nor have us confront the fact we must make choices.

## **Criteria for a Choice: What Makes a “Choice” Framework Work?**

- Choices are not mutually exclusive. There will always be elements of each choice that everyone will warm to (if they are honest about their feelings.) This is possible because each choice grows out of a value we all share but in varying degrees of relative importance.
- The difference in choices is often due to the different ranking of values or definition of the problem.
- Within each choice, there are elements of the pro and con side that tug at us. The choice forces us to face our own ambiguity. We have to acknowledge and pay the trade-offs and we have to pay with a currency that is precious to us – our values.
- The choice requires that we accept trade-offs and consequences. The choice leads to both intended and unintended consequences. We must confront the fact that we cannot have it all.
- No choice is the direct opposite of the other. It is not that easy. There is always a myriad of options and a simple “yes” or “no” vote would not force us to acknowledge the complexity of the issue.
- Choices must encompass a wide range of options that express commonly held positions.

## Structure of a forum

<b>Welcome</b>	10%	The convener or moderator introduces the program, acknowledges the host, explains the process, and reviews the guidelines.
<b>Personal Stake</b>	5%	Participants tell personal experiences related to issue. This establishes that the issue is relevant, is important and provides participants with a starting point for their conversation.
<b>Deliberation</b>	65%	Participants examine all of the approaches. The moderator directs the flow of conversation to make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak and that all sides of the issue get a fair hearing.
<b>Reflection</b>	20%	Hearing a public voice. Going from <b>my</b> voice to <b>our</b> voice. The moderator guides the participants to reflect on their own learning, then to reflect on what they learned about how others think and finally to construct statements that reflect the common ground of the group.

## **Forums change how people talk about an issue and with each other**

Forums can change the way people talk about an issue and how they talk with each other. Listed below are things that can happen when people deliberate together. You will know people are talking differently about a public issue or problem when they

- identify the range of realistic alternatives and move toward a choice;
- are able to consider positions they like as well as the positions they do not like;
- can consider choices they have not considered before;
- understand others have reasons for their choices and respect their reasons without judging them to be dumb, unreasonable, or immoral;
- realize their own knowledge is not complete until they understands why others feel the way they do about the choices;
- consider there are a number of underlying values for each choice; and
- leave the forum "thinking hard" over the choices.

## **Preparing to Experience a Forum**

### **Roles in the Forum**

During the forum process, there are three distinct roles that contribute to public deliberation:

Moderator

Recorder

Reporter

## **Section 4**

### Organizing your Forum

## Planning Public Forums

The plans we are presenting are just a guideline for organizing a forum. The urgency of the public issue will depend on how much organizing you can do. If it is an issue that requires immediate public participation, you may not have time to develop a detailed issue book. We will talk about “rapid framing” later. If it is an issue that while important, is not urgent, you will have more time to do these preparations.



## Getting started—Convening the Forum

When getting started, here are some points to consider:

1. Goals -- What is it you want to accomplish?
2. Participation -- Who should come to the forum? Should it be open to the public or do you want to make sure there is diversity of voices and have it by invitation-only? Or, a combination of both?
3. Number of participants -- What is the ideal number of forum participants?
4. Media -- How do you handle the media?

### 1. What is it we need to accomplish with this forum?

Using the IAP2 chart for public participation is helpful. What do you want to accomplish?

- a. Build “public knowledge” about an issue?
- b. Have the public reach some decision about an issue?

### 2. Who should come to the forum?

Having a committee that represents different interests in the community can help you meet one of the most important goals for the forum—to have a diversity of voices deliberating an issue.

1. Form a committee to help you to determine
  - who should participate;
  - how to reach them; and,
  - how to get them to attend.

Called a “steering” committee, this group helps you build a broad base of support to reach many segments of a community and to spread the workload! Your steering committee should include primary contacts in the community. They will work with others to network and get their job done.

Here are some helpful things to consider when forming the steering committee:

- Invite steering committee members at the earliest stage of the planning. Communicate clearly why you need them to work with you and discuss what they think the benefits are that they will receive.
  - Be inclusive. Invite others to participate who have a different point of view on the issue. Go beyond those organizations which you normally work with in the community. Successful forums represent a diversity of interests and perspectives—even from those who oppose the issue!
  - Clearly define the roles for steering committee members.
    - Be clear on what skills and resources do they bring to the table
    - Delegate tasks that best serve their needs and interests
    - Determine the kind of involvement in time and resources the member will provide
    - Establish a timetable to complete the assignment
    - Be sure to recognize their contribution in any announcements, brochures or other media you use to promote the forum.
2. Should it be open to the public? Should it be invitation-only?
- Sometimes, a deliberative forum open to the public does not have the extent of diverse viewpoints that are necessary
  - If you want to build a civic infrastructure for deliberative forums that will become an important way that people talk about issues in the community, a broad outreach is necessary. Otherwise, people will think only select groups get to participate and will feel excluded.
  - Successful forums extend their influence of civic dialogue and deliberation to schools, banks, service organizations, businesses, religious organizations, elected officials, and citizens. Inviting more members of the community to

participate in and learn from the dialogue generated through the forum process strengthens the deliberative process and fosters its continuation.

### **3. What is the ideal number of forum participants?**

An ideal number of people is between 25 and 30, so that everyone has a chance to be heard. With larger forums, you run the risk that not everyone will be able to participate. Conversely, you would not want to hold a forum with less than 8 people.

### **4. How should you involve the media?**

This will depend on the media available and your forum goals. If you hold a public meeting the media is likely to attend. Here are some important things to consider:

- The media should not attribute quotes to people's names
- Television can be very disruptive to a forum. Ask any television reporters to come before the forum, or, preferably after the forum

## Convening the Forum—A Checklist

### Moderators, Recorders, Observers

- Who will moderate?
- Who will record? One or two people?
- How about observers?



Observers can be of two types:

- To help keep track of the forum also, eliminating the need for two recorders. May take notes as a “silent” recorder.
- To listen and watch to see what goes on in a forum. This type does not usually take notes to help record the forum process.

Observers should also be kept to a minimum so as not to detract from the forum participants. They are silent, and do not participate in the process at all. They are usually seated behind the forum participants.

- Have the moderators, recorders and observers met?
- Do they have an agreement amongst themselves as to how they will interact?
  - Will recorders interrupt when they aren’t sure what a participant said?

### Logistics

- What day/night works best?
  - Your steering committee can help identify times which may work best and not conflict with other community activities.
- Where will the forum be held?
- Are facilities handicapped accessible?
- Is there public transportation to the site? How will people without cars get there?
- Room size—is it large enough to handle your group AND the seating arrangements
- Seating arrangements
  - U-shaped (many moderators prefer this)
  - With/without tables?
- Forum length (2 hrs is suggested, can go 3)
- Room details such as where the toilets are located
- Equipment
  - Microphones (will you need a “handler”? Remind the handlers—Never let go of the mike!) Try to avoid using microphones. With 25-30 people you might not need them.
  - Easels with flip charts

- Markers
- VCR and TV
- Extension cords
- Extra issue books or summary of approaches
- Sign-in Sheet
- Refreshments
- Child care
  - Where?
  - Who pays?

**Other details**

- Who will process the registration (if necessary)?
- Who designs/prints the flyers and discussion guides?

**Advance Publicity**

How will you handle publicity? Your steering committee can provide valuable assistance through their networks. Make sure publicity is well-timed AND accurate about the forum.

- Newspaper/radio/TV announcements
- Posting flyers (see example on page 29)
- Special newsletters
- Organization newsletters



## Basic Principles of Moderating

An effective moderator:

- Remains neutral about the subject of the forum.** Do not express your own opinion or evaluate the comments of the participants.
- Does not take on an “expert” role with the subject matter.** Your role is not to teach the participants about the issue even if it is a subject you know very well.
- Keeps the deliberation focused on the approaches.** When comments go astray, bring participants back to the issue book framework. Make sure that each approach receives equal consideration.
- Listens for values that motivate a participant’s comments.** In deliberation, the participant’s values and motives are just as important, if not more so, than their opinion. Sometimes people with different opinions share the same motive or value and that can form the basis for their common ground.
- Intervenes as necessary.** If the conversation begins to focus on personalities rather than issues, gently remind the group of ground rules or refocus the discussion back to the issues.
- Asks clarifying questions, if necessary.** If you are not sure what a participant means, chances are good that others are also unclear. Repeat back what you think they are trying to say and ask if you have understood correctly.
- Encourages everyone to join in the conversation.** But be careful. Comments like “that’s a good idea” may make the speaker feel welcome in the conversation, but participants who disagree may think you are being biased.
- Asks thoughtful and probing questions to surface costs and consequences.** Make sure that the participants have considered the potential outcome of their comments. Help draw out what people are willing to accept and are not willing to accept.
- Helps participants find common ground.** Participants will not always agree and may sometimes be in direct conflict with each other. Recognize it and seek to focus on “What can we do together even if we don’t fully agree.”
- Encourages deep reflection. Ask participants to share why they feel a particular way about the issue or what in particular about the issue is important to them.

## Preparing to Moderate

Everyone will prepare to moderate a public forum his/her own approach. There is no right or wrong way to prepare. However, here are some strategies that experienced moderators have found useful when preparing to moderate a forum.

### 1. Know the forum materials

If there is some type of discussion guide or issue book, be sure to read it at least twice. Then read the book and highlight the key points. Be familiar with the moderator's guide.

You can also prepare yourself by having an in-depth understanding of different elements which are present in the issue framework:

- Different perspectives or approaches to address a problem may due to a certain view of **what** is causing the problem, **who** is causing the problem, or even a different way of describing **what the problem is**.

For example, if children are becoming less respectful of their elders, is it because they are not learning respect in the home? Is it because of negative influences from other cultures or from the media? Is it because they are no longer being taught respect for elders by the institutions (schools, or religious institutions) or is it because they have lost faith in their elders because the elders may not have been good role models? To better understand the problem, ask yourself:

- What are some different perspectives on this issue or different ways that people are defining the root cause of the problem?
- How people define the problem will lead to them suggesting a set of actions to address the problem. These solutions that people propose will require particular people in particular positions to do something. Reflect on the different definitions of the problem of disrespectful youth mentioned above and, for each one, think about the answer to the following question:
  - What actions do people who hold those different perspectives think should be done?
- People often use facts or statistics to prove that they are right in their definition of the problem AND in their proposed solutions. We don't want the dialogue to focus on facts because we tend to select the "facts" that support our beliefs. However, it is useful to understand what facts people are using to support their position. The

people who have different definitions of the problem of youth disrespect have come to their different conclusions based on something that they have read or observed. For example, someone who thinks that children are no longer learning respect from the example of good leaders might have stories to tell about unethical leadership, and how they were fortunate to have grown up being respectful because of good role model in their own life. As you think about the different perspectives, think about what people might say to support their own viewpoints. You might ask yourself:

- What evidence people who support each approach use to persuade others that they have the right definition of the problem and the best solution?
- The goal of deliberation and your goal as a moderator to help bring out the different values around particular perspectives. The way we see a problem and what should be done about it is influenced by our experiences. Then, the interpretation of those experiences is driven by our values.

Sometimes it is helpful to ask a participant what led them to a particular conclusion. That is a good intermediate step toward the ultimate goal to determine what they hold valuable. When participants are able to step back from their solution they believe will solve the problem as they define it and think about their values behind their thinking, it is very helpful. When the identified a certain set of their values, and then they hear other solutions that are consistent with those values, they are more likely to consider those other solutions. We are better prepared to ask thoughtful questions to help uncover those values when we prepare ourselves by asking:

- What does their view of the problem and their ideas for what should be done tell us about what is important to them?

### **3. Prepare questions**

Prepare a personal stake question that will help participants connect to the issue personally, such as:

- How have you experienced this issue?
- Has this issue affected you personally or someone you know? How?
- Use the moderator guide and your own experience to develop suggested questions to guide the deliberation

Have some other questions prepared that you can use during the forum to encourage deliberation. Keep in mind that your prepared questions are only a resource.

- The best forums take place when the moderator listens closely to the group and adjusts questions to best fit the situation.

#### **4. Work out teamwork**

Communicate with co-moderator(s) and recorder(s) so everyone has common expectations of roles, styles and techniques during the forum.

## Opening the Forum

### Welcome

- Introduce yourself. If you like, you can BRIEFLY explain the role of the moderator (to guide the deliberations, yet remain impartial.)
- Introduce your co-moderator and/or recorder(s)
- Point out details such as toilets and water fountains
- REVIEW THE GROUND RULES

Go over basic guidelines (also called “ground rules”) and then ask if there are any others the participants would like to consider. You will have to monitor the number they suggest and be sure they still allow for good deliberation and are not too limiting. Since it takes time to write the guidelines as a group, moderators often use some standard guidelines as a starting point and then give participants a chance to add other rules that they have found effective in conducting dialogue. Some common guidelines might include:

- Talk to each other not the moderator.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one dominates.
- Everyone understands that this is not a debate. The talk is deliberative rather than argumentative.
- Everyone waits until others are speaking and do not interrupt.
- The deliberation focuses on the options.
- The major choices or options are considered and the trade-offs are examined.
- Listening as important as talking.
- Everyone works toward making a decision about how he or she acts on the problem or what policy he or she thinks best for the community or country.

### Variations and additions for the above points

You can always use your own language to explain the guidelines. For example, the following statements are other ways of establishing guidelines.

- Listen carefully to others, especially when their ideas differ from your own.
- Be open to changing your minds; this will help you really listen to others' view.
- Speak your mind freely, but don't monopolize the conversation.
- When disagreement occurs, keep talking. Explore the disagreement. Search for common ground.
- Value one another's experiences.
- Ask clarifying questions. Help to develop one another's ideas.

- Don't waste time arguing about points of fact. For the time being you may need to agree to disagree and then move on.

### **Personal Stake**

The purpose of the personal stake is to charge the group with the importance of deliberating the issue by asking them to describe why it is important to them. Telling personal stories is a good way for people to begin talking. They make connection with the issue and with each other.

## Moderator Questions With a Purpose

Perhaps one of the most important jobs of a moderator is to ask good questions. Questions like, "What do you think?" or "Do you agree with this statement?" do not encourage people to think deeply about their own opinion and the impact it might have on others. Remember the basic principles of moderating? These questions are good ways to practice those principles.

### √ **Questions that connect the policy issue to people's real lives and concerns.**

To uncover deeper concerns, people can ask one another how they came to hold the views they have, or, the moderator can raise the question. It helps to encourage people to talk about actual experiences, rather than just reciting facts or making rational arguments.

- Could you illustrate how this issue is touching the lives of most of us in the community?
- What makes this issue real for us?
- What evidence do you see that this is something that is important to all of us?

### √ **Questions that ask participants to weigh the costs and consequences of each choice.**

With these questions, participants begin to hear the perspectives of others and to acknowledge conflicting values (both within themselves and between each other). Another purpose for these questions is to help people think about how each choice that is being discussed affects what is valuable to them. Because deliberation requires evaluating the advantages and weaknesses of different choices, it is important that participants discuss both aspects of a choice.

- What might be the effects of your choice on others?
- Could you identify those things that are important to us that seem to be clashing?
- In a positive light, what seems to be most important to those who are attracted to this choice?
- Also, for those think negatively about this choice, what seems to be their concern?

√ **Questions to ensure a fair and balanced examination of all potential effects include:**

- What would be the consequences of doing what you are suggesting?
- What would be an argument against the choice you like best?
- Is there a downside to this course of action
- Can anyone think of something constructive that might come from this choice, which is receiving so much criticism

√ **Questions that ask participants to weigh the costs they are willing to accept in order to achieve the results they want.**

Often participants will feel some conflict about the choices. This illustrates the tension that exists among the approaches. These questions can assist participants in working through some of the conflict and tension.

- Can you live with the consequences?
- Would you give up \_\_\_\_\_ in order to achieve \_\_\_\_\_?
- What costs are at stake and can we live with them?
- What do you see as the tension among the choices?
- What are the gray areas? Where is there ambiguity?
- Why is this issue so difficult to decide?

√ **Questions that probe each participant's statement until others can understand what he or she believes should be done and why he or she thinks it should be done.**

- What does that mean to you?
- Why does that choice appeal to you?
- What is important about taking this direction?
- Can you give an example of how that might work out?

√ **Questions that encourage the speaker to make a connection between the actions he or she would advocate and what is important to him or her:**

- Could you live with the actions?
- Would you be willing to have that action apply to everyone?
- What is most valuable to you or to those who support that action?
- If we did what you suggested, could you illustrate how that might impact your life?

√ **Questions that promote interaction between participants instead of just between the moderator and the participants:**

- Does that bring up anything for anyone?
  - That gets us started, so how do you respond?
  - Could someone give an example that illustrates what was just said?
- And/Or
- Allow silence. Someone will respond.
  - Move back out of the circle.

**Questions that give the participants an opportunity to identify what they have heard, that reveals a shared understanding of the problem, a new notion they have created, or costs the group cannot accept:** The moderator should say during the first few minutes of a forum that the objective is to work toward a decision about how to act together. The moderator may continue to intervene from time to time with questions that move the deliberation toward a choice. These interventions should always stop 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 can test to see where the group is going by asking such questions as:

- What actions did you hear that you think we could not accept or live with?
- What trade-offs are you unwilling to accept?
- What seemed important to all of us?
- Suppose we can't have everything. What are we willing and unwilling to do as individuals or as a community in order to solve this problem?
- Is there some action we could all live with?
- Have we come to some common ground to support certain actions? What are those actions?



### Typical Questions That Promote Deliberation

In some forums, people fall into just having a casual conversation which often does not include a deliberative dialogue. In order to move people from this casual discussion or from polarized arguments (taking a position on one side or another without considering the costs and consequences of those positions), the moderator may have to use questions that will help people engage in a deliberative dialogue. The questions might be:

- ◆ I understand you don't like that position, but for those who hold it, what do you think they deeply care about? OR,
- ◆ For those who hold that position, what do they care deeply about?
- ◆ What might be the consequences of that choice for other citizens?
- ◆ What motivates that choice?
- ◆ If you were forced to respond to this problem, what would you do and why?
- ◆ What might be the results of your ideas on others?
- ◆ What is blocking our discussion?
- ◆ If we followed this course of action, what would be the effects on your life?
- ◆ What are the trade-offs you are, or are not, willing to make?
- ◆ What is most valuable to you or to those who support this choice?
- ◆ How do you separate what is a private matter and a public matter on this issue?
- ◆ Could you tell me a story to illustrate that?
- ◆ Can you make the best case for the choice you least favor?
- ◆ How would someone make a case against what you just said?
- ◆ Would someone identify the values that seem to be clashing? What is really happening here?
- ◆ What are the negative aspects of the choice you favor?
- ◆ Can someone suggest areas that we seem to have in common?
- ◆ Who else should we all be talking with? Policymakers? Neighbors?
- ◆ What were the consequences of what you said? Does that make a difference?
- ◆ Can anyone envision how their life would change if this choice became a national policy?

- ◆ How might your concerns differ if you were poor? Wealthy? A worker in an affected industry?
- ◆ What is there about this choice that you just cannot live with?
- ◆ How might others see the issue?
- ◆ Suppose you can't have everything, what would you choose?

## Ending a Forum -- Reflections

One-time forums may not always be sufficient to fully develop the possibility of common ground for action. We are becoming increasingly aware that for citizens to choose how to act together effectively they probably need a series of deliberative meetings.

Whether or not a forum is intended as part of a series, each deliberative experience should be reflected upon at the end. This reflection provides some closure to a discussion in the psychological sense. It also assesses what progress the group has made in producing public knowledge about how to act together more effectively.

The moderator can use these questions as a guide.

### Individual Reflections

- How has your thinking about the issue changed'?
- How has your thinking about other people's views changed?
- How has your perspective changed as a result of what you heard in this forum?

Letting people respond voluntarily to the above questions assists them in personally assessing what happened in the forum. The second question helps people think about how different relationships might create greater possibilities for working together on the issue.

### Group Reflections

- Can we identify any shared sense of purpose or direction for acting together? Do we detect any possibilities?
- What trade-offs are we, or are we not, willing to make to move in a shared direction?

In asking these categories of questions, the moderator **must not let the forum reopen**. Addressing possibilities for future direction where the group wants to go with the issue helps avoid pressure to develop a false sense of agreement.

Sometimes people define shared sense of purpose very broadly. Sometimes they define it very narrowly. Focusing on what might be possible in acting together leaves room for development without premature closure.

## **Next Step Reflections:**

### **From Common Ground to Public Action: Next Steps**

#### **Common Ground for Action: What Difference Does It Make?**

Participants at forums will encounter the term common ground for action. Many confuse it with consensus or compromise. The distinction between common ground for action and consensus may seem small but it does make a difference.

**Common ground for action** is based on a very different idea from consensus (total agreement) or from compromise (apportioning agreement). **Common ground for action describes the relationship we have when we must take action together, even when we do not fully agree about our convictions.**

When you think about it, much of our daily decision-making is in the area between agreement and disagreement. We usually don't fully agree with or fully disagree with others. We don't often give up our convictions to other people. But we do find ways to work with others - sometimes even if we don't particularly like them. That is the reality that common ground for action attempts to capture.

**Deliberation** is a form of talking through issues that helps us to address differences of conviction. If we differ in conviction, we can't have consensus and we are very unlikely to compromise. What we do is find overlapping self-interests that enable us to **take action together**. That behavior is **common ground for action**.

#### Next Step Reflections

- How can we use what we learned about ourselves in this forum?
- Do we want to meet again?

The first of these questions helps people connect with the number of possibilities that may be emerging from the forum. It also gives them multiple possibilities for action - both individually and with others. The second question is very important in building a deliberative habit beyond one-time, one-issue forums. Forum organizers need to be prepared to follow through on expressions of interest in additional opportunities to keep working on an issue together.

## Handling Moderator Challenges

### Dealing with participants who dominate the discussion:

Ask questions such as:

- What do others think about this?
- What ideas have not been expressed?
- How would you respond to the concerns just expressed?
- Could you tell me a story to illustrate that?
- For those who hold that position, what do they care deeply about?

### Dealing with a difficult participant

- Gradually escalate your response.
- Use body language (move close to the person)
- Gradually use more assertive verbal techniques such as interrupting to capture the points stated so far
- Refer to the guidelines (everyone participates, no monopolizing conversation)
- Redirect the conversation by saying "Thank you. What do others think about that?" or "Let's create some space for those of you who have been quieter. Someone else?"

### Handling misinformation from a participant

Ask questions such as:

- Does anyone have a different perspective on that?
- Use the issue book. Point out that "on p. xx it states"... How does that fit with the information you just gave us?
- What meaning does that information have to you?
- Would you give us an example?

Often in a forum, participants themselves will call other participants on their behavior such as dominating the conversation or giving misinformation that others know is not correct.



## Effective Recording

Along with the moderator, the recorder of a forum is a critical member of the deliberative process. The recorder basically keeps a “record” of what transpires during the forum. This requires careful listening and communication skills so that what is recorded is accurate and reflects what is being said. A good recorder captures the tensions, consequences and trade-offs in a forum and can play a valuable role in assisting the moderator with reflections at the end of a forum, whether common ground is discovered or not.

An effective recorder:

- Communicates in advance of the forum with the moderator(s) to make sure roles and expectations are clear.
- Makes sure recording materials are available and functioning.
- Demonstrates neutrality.
- Communicates with the moderator(s) and participants during the forum whenever help is needed to capture a comment accurately or slow down the conversation.
- Does not participate in the substance of the forum.
- Is flexible.
- Captures comments accurately and concisely.
- Other:

## Techniques for Recording a Forum

Here are some suggestions for fulfilling the role of a forum recorder successfully.

1. **Be familiar with the issue.** If there is an issue book, be sure to read it. If not, be very familiar with the issue. It’s important that you know the material as well as the moderator. This will aid your listening skills tremendously, ensuring that you will be able to “hear” and “distill” pros and cons, consequences, values, conflicts, tensions and trade-offs.
2. **Determine a strategy** for recording in concert with the forum moderator. Some questions the two of you should take up prior to the deliberative forum might include:
  - Will I, as recorder, participate in the forum? Your role – as neutral recorder or as participant/recorder – should be clear to the participants.
  - Should I introduce myself and explain my role or will the moderator do that?

- May I ask the participants to clarify something or to correct me if I don't capture their thought appropriately?
- Who is responsible for writing up the flip chart notes?
- Who will provide easel, flip chart, markers, tape, etc.?
- Can I tape paper on the wall at the forum site?
- Should I help the moderator during the "reflections" part of the forum to identify areas of agreement?

When recording, you may want to **provide headings or titles**. Some recorders find it helpful to write on one set of flip chart paper the three or four choices on a given issue. You can do this prior to the forum and post it. Then write a choice name and number at the top of each page. (i.e. Choice 1: Demand Citizen Responsibility.)

Be sure to **capture the pros and cons, tensions, concerns** and trade-offs in a succinct, synthesized manner. Some recorders do find it helpful to provide headings for these also. For instance for "pros" under a given choice, you might subhead it "likes", "appealing", "attractive" or "pros". For "cons" try "dislikes", "pitfalls" or "concerns" for variety. Sometimes trying different words can strike different chords.

Keep in mind that you are **recording key points**; not every comment made. You don't have to synthesize every single comment. Remember that you are listening for areas of tension, identifying trade-offs people are willing or not willing to make, noting advantages and disadvantages to each choice.

It may be helpful for the moderator or recorder to explain this, so participants won't misunderstand your job or be offended if you don't write down each statement made.

Your recording can be helpful in **supporting the moderator's role**. If participants aren't confronting trade-offs because the moderator hasn't yet introduced them, you might make a heading that says "trade-offs", as a way of gently reminding the moderator to get back on the deliberative track. *Only do this if you've worked it out strategically with the moderator ahead of time.* Write down questions people have – the great unanswerable ones that are important to confront.

Keep in mind that **not every forum needs a recorder**. There is no rule that says you must have a recorder for every forum. Remember each forum has its own distinctive character and purpose. Many feel that recording can show the participants that you value what they are doing. Others feel that recording can get in the way. You will know your audience best. Most important is that you plan your forum ahead of time.

## **Section 5**

### The Practice Forum

## **Practice Forum—Directions**

To give you an opportunity to practice moderating and recording, we will hold a practice forum. During this practice forum, group members will rotate moderator, recorder, observer and participant roles. You will wear more than one hat during the course of your practice forum.

### **Moderator:**

As moderator, you are responsible for that portion of the forum. You can either keep track of your own time or ask someone else to keep track of your time. You are also responsible for communication with your recorder. You may want to speak briefly with the other moderators in advance to coordinate your transitions. When you are not moderating your portion of the forum, you are a participant (unless you are in some other role such as observer or recorder).

### **Observer:**

When you are an observer, you are responsible for keeping track of ways that moderator and recorder are effective and suggestions you have for improvement. If you can participate in the forum and act as an observer at the same time, feel free to take on both roles. If you are more comfortable, feel free to simply observe and take notes during the portion of the forum for which you are signed up. During the rest of the forum, you are a participant (unless you are in some other role such as moderator or recorder).

### **Recorder:**

You are responsible for recording during that portion of the forum. You are also responsible for communicating with your moderator to coordinate your roles. When you are not recording your portion of the forum, you are a participant (unless you are in some other role such as moderator or observer).

### **Forum Participant:**

When you are not serving as a moderator, observer, or recorder for any part of the forum, you are always a participant and have the responsibility to consider consequences, pros and cons of the choices, listen to what others think and contribute your perspectives.

**Blank Practice Forum Sign-Up Sheet**

	<b>Moderator</b>	<b>Recorder</b>	<b>Observer</b>
<b>Opening</b>			
<b>Choice #1</b>			
<b>Choice #2</b>			
<b>Choice #3</b>			
<b>Reflections</b>			

## **Section 6**

### What the Forum Produces

## Coming to Public Judgment<sup>5</sup>

Public forums on complex issues help move people from unchallenged individual opinion to considered judgment. Publicly thinking together leads to a shared, mutual understanding of an issue and the development of more carefully weighed personal judgment. The process of coming to public judgment may be rapid through forums but may take years through an evolving process. On any issue, public opinion evolves from incoherent bits of opinion toward integrated, coherent and considered judgment.



### Public Opinion

#### Stage I—Dawning Consciousness

People become aware of an issue or an aspect of it.	Opinions are unstable, feelings may be strong but that does not mean settled views.
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#### Stage II---Greater Urgency

A sense of urgency develops.	There is a general sense of urgency and demands of "Someone do something".
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*The first two stages are "consciousness raising". People become aware of the problem without necessarily seeing the problem as important or needing any large-scale action. People do not yet connect the issue to their own lives and the concerns they have.*

#### Stage III—Discovering the Choices

People start to explore choices for dealing with the issue.	There is a focus on alternatives for dealing with the issues. Often, the proffered options are not the best choices.
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<sup>5</sup> PUBLIC JUDGMENT - This chart adapted from *Coming to Public Judgment* by Daniel Yankelovich (1991) Syracuse University Press

#### Stage IV-Wishful Thinking

<p>Resistance to facing costs and trade-offs. People want it all, wishful thinking.</p>	<p>It is easy to get expressions of approval for a wide range of things everyone wants (e.g., cheap medical care, the very best medical care).</p>
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*Media and experts do much of the work in these early stages. Leaders and experts formulate the choices. In conventional politics, they attempt to sell their solutions through contests and advertising campaigns. Public politics would have people connecting the issue to other concerns and describing how it affects their own lives and communities.*

#### Stage V-Weighing the Choices

<p>People start to weigh the pros and cons of alternatives.</p>	<p>Now the public invests effort to grasp the choices, understand consequences and wrestle with conflicts over what they value most.</p>
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#### Stage VI-Taking a Stand

<p>People take a stand intellectually.</p>	<p>People see the intellectual reasons for making one choice over others but may not be prepared for the reality of the trade-offs (free speech and censorship).</p>
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#### Stage VII—Making a Responsible Judgment

<p>Making a responsible judgment morally and emotionally.</p>	<p>The public overcomes the impulse to put their needs and desires first. The commitments to society take over. The ethical dimension asserts itself.</p>
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## Reporting the Forum – Step-by-Step

### 1. Making Preparations for a Report

Select one or two observers who will be responsible for writing the report. Don't give this job to the moderator or recorder; they have enough to do.

Make sure the observers have read the issue book.

Don't let the analysis affect the forum itself. Observers should stay in the background, out of the way of deliberation.

### 2. Next, Consider Who Will Read the Report

Think about who will read your report and its purpose. This will help you to focus your report. Also, be mindful of the criteria that may be used to evaluate the credibility of your report:

- How many forums were held?
- Was there a diverse group of participants?

### 3. Some Important Points to Include in the Report

How did deliberation influence people's thinking? The answer to this question should be the focus of the report. Where was there agreement and why do people feel as they do? Where did they disagree? What did they appear to be considering for the first time?

The report should capture the evolution of people's thinking as they considered the issue initially, and as they deliberated over the course of the forum.

Moderators often begin the forum by asking participants to tell a story about how the issue affects them. Listen carefully to such stories and try to get people's "starting point" on this issue. What do they understand and not understand about the issue? What language and terms do they use? Do they talk about the issue the way it is generally discussed in the media or among policy makers?

Assess what people say about each choice, one choice at a time. How does what they say initially change, after they have heard from others and considered the choice at greater length? Do people divide into camps, or is the disagreement more scattered? What are the principles that underlie their conclusions? Are there issues that people don't understand or need more time to deliberate about?

#### 4. Options to Consider as you prepare your report:

- Is the conventional wisdom about the public correct? Did the people in your forums see the issue in the way the public's attitudes are portrayed in polls and media reports?
- Does the public connect to the issue as conventional wisdom presents it? Did the people in your forums have the concerns that "the public" is reported to have?
- How did forum participants approach the issue?
- Are there dimensions of the issue participants saw that officeholders or experts didn't?
- In other words, what is valuable to citizens and how did it come into play in the deliberations?
- What effect did deliberation have?
- How did people deal with the conflicts among the many things that were valuable?
- Was there any common ground for action?
- What did the participants think needed to happen next?

#### Listen for what is not said.

Some of the most important findings may involve ideas that people did not mention. For example, some forums on governance there was little spontaneous interest in public financing of political campaigns. Even though this is a prominent reform proposal that has been advocated by "good-government" organizations for decades, it was most conspicuous by its absence. If key issues are not addressed, consider doing post-forum interviews with participants and moderators to follow up on them.

Don't let an especially articulate or passionate voice overly influence the analysis of what people generally said.

Is there common ground for action? By the end of most forums, people will have reached some general agreement in some areas. What can everyone live with? Are they comfortable with the agreement areas? Where do they continue to disagree?

### **After the report is written: Some ways to validate results**

Review preliminary conclusions with at least two other people who attended the forum. If they don't agree with the analysis, make every effort to understand why they hold a different view.

Does the analysis make sense in light of everything else that is known about the issue?

### **Remember, what you are trying to capture is public judgment, NOT public opinion.**

"Opinion" refers to views about what should be done and "public judgment" means shared and reflective views, which are more mature, or fully developed, than opinion. Popular opinion is often contradictory and doesn't account for what would happen if a policy was followed over the long term. Popular opinion, for example, says that the government should provide more services, yet insists that taxes should not be raised. This is shortsighted: Lower taxes would mean more disposable income in the near term but schools, social services, and highways would eventually deteriorate without financial support. Are people willing to accept those consequences? No one can know what the judgment will be until people face up to the contradictions and the long-term effects. Deliberation helps them do this.

### **Reporting on a Forum: validating the public's knowledge**

Public deliberation produces its own kind of knowledge. It is different from what is usually thought to "educate" citizens – different from the information provided by professionals, experts, and officeholders. Scholars call it socially constructed knowledge. You might call it "public knowledge" because it consists of things people can know only when they engage one another – and never when they are alone. What you have learned about everything from the way citizens approach issues to their willingness to act is public knowledge. It is knowledge about the public that comes from a deliberative practice.

### **Claims that can and can not be made about what happens in forums**

- Forums reveal the values people draw on and the considerations they deem important as they deliberate about a complex issue. Forum results are much richer and more

complex than a snapshot of what people think, which is what comes from an ordinary public opinion poll. Forums shed light on people's thinking about the trade-offs for each potential course of action. They reveal the evolution of people's thinking as they hear from others and consider the issue at some length.

- Forums point the way toward common ground for action by illuminating the trade-offs people find acceptable in dealing with the complex public issue.
- Forums help people reach a more informed, considered judgment about an issue, instead of a quick opinion.
- Forums enable people to speak in a "public voice". By helping people see an issue in a broader context than their own immediate self-interest and to recognize that others may have a point of view quite different from their own, forums help people assess an issue in a national or communitywide context, and to weight their own self-interests along with the interest of the larger community. By the end of the forums, people are usually willing to take other points of view into consideration, thereby speaking in a "public voice".
- Forums lead to "public making", in that they are a mechanism to help people learn to act as citizens in a democracy, or as members of a public in a community.
- Forum results are not poll results. Forum participants are a self-selected or invited group; they are not selected by an rigorous research method.
- Forums are not focus groups. While both involve open-ended conversations, focus groups are managed, narrowly directed discussions, designed to explore how people react to an idea. They are often used to learn how to influence people's thinking through advertising. Focus group participants are paid to attend. They are not self-selected, but are chosen by the researcher or moderator.