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**Introduction & Ground Rules \_\_\_ minutes**

**Purpose: Look at Alternative Approaches to the Issue and Hear Different Points of View**

* This is not a debate; we’re not here to “win” an argument.
* We’ll look carefully at alternative approaches—all of them with trade-offs and drawbacks.
* At the close of the forum, we’ll reflect on what we’ve heard, looking for common ground, but also recognizing remaining areas of tension or ambivalence.
* We’ll try to think about what matters most to us and what we are willing to give up to make progress on resolving this issue.

**My Role: Serve as Impartial Facilitator**

* I’m here to help us have a conversation that is as deliberative as possible.
* I’ll encourage everyone to consider different viewpoints.
* I’ll watch the time to ensure we talk about all the options and have time for reflections at the end.
* From time to time, I may point to specific questions and ideas in the guide, especially if they represent voices not in the room or trade-offs we haven’t talked about.
* This is your conversation. Please talk to and listen to each other.

**Structure: The Four Parts of a Deliberative Forum**

* Ground Rules
* Personal Stake
* Deliberating on the Options: Option 1, Option 2, Option 3
* Closing Reflections

**Ground Rules \_\_\_ minutes**

**Some sample ground rules used by forum moderators.**

* Listen to other voices. Listening is as important as speaking.
* Consider each approach fairly, looking at its benefits and its trade-offs.
* Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one or two individuals should dominate.
* It’s okay to disagree, but do so with curiosity, not hostility. Learning more about how others think is one of the most interesting parts of a forum.
* Keep an open mind. Avoid coming to conclusions until we’ve deliberated on all the options.
* Are there additional ground rules we would like add?
* Do we all agree to follow these ground rules and hold one another accountable to them?

**Personal Stake: \_\_\_ minutes**

**Some questions moderators often use to encourage participants to talk about their personal stake in the issue.**

* Why did you come out to the forum today?
* What aspect of the issue concerns you most?
* How has this issue affected you, your family, or your community?
* When you think about this issue, what bothers you?
* How does this problem impact the things in your life and community that are most important to you?

**Option 1: Recap and Questions for Deliberation \_\_\_ minutes**

The major problem, according to this option, is that too many Americans don’t vote. More than 92 million eligible voters didn’t vote in the last Presidential election, and the numbers are even higher in state, local, and city elections. Voting should be quick, easy, and straightforward. People shouldn’t have to wait in long lines or work their way through complicated procedures. And fighting any attempt to make voting harder for low-income and minority voters is fundamental to our democracy.

**BUT** are the voting rules really so burdensome? Pushing unmotivated, uninformed people to vote won’t improve the democratic process or lead to better government.

* The U.S. hasn’t experienced much voter fraud to date. Doesn’t that suggest our current voting rules and regulations are actually working well?
* Many suggestions for making voting easier—mail-in ballots, extended poll hours, etc.—are quite costly. Given that government budgets are enormously strained at all levels, what would you be willing to cut to pay for these changes?

**Option 2: Recap and Questions for Deliberation \_\_\_ minutes**

The major question we face, according to this option, is whether our elections are secure. US intelligence officials have warned that Russia, China, and other nations are trying to meddle, and experts advise that our system has many vulnerabilities, including the relative ease of hacking voting machines, out-of-date registration lists, mismanagement of mail-in ballots, and inadequate staffing and resources at polling places. Our top priority must be to ensure that elections are lawful, accurate, and secure.

**BUT** won’t more rules and safeguards make voting more complicated for ordinary voters and local election boards. This might end up making elections less inclusive and representative.

* People show IDs to get on planes and rent cars, and there are alternative IDs for people who don’t drive. Wouldn’t this be a straightforward and minimally intrusive requirement for voting. Why or why not?
* More federal involvement in safeguarding elections would offer expertise and resources for strapped local election boards. But could the federal government use its power to steer outcomes and/or discourage opposing party members from voting?

**Option 3:** **Recap and Questions for Deliberation \_\_\_ minutes**

This option argues that expanding voter participation and securing elections will not fix the deeply flawed and unrepresentative nature of our system. We need to pass a constitutional amendment to end the Electoral College which allows candidates who lose the popular vote to become president. And we need to take steps to reduce the extreme partisan nature of our system which is driving away too many voters.

**BUT** isn’t this upending a traditional system that people understand and has worked well for new, unproven methods? We should work on improving the system we have, not inventing a new one.

* What could be the unanticipated consequence of ending the Electoral College and allowing commissions to draw Congressional districts? Are we willing to take these risks?
* Changing the way we vote is always difficult and controversial. Could focusing on these broader, longer--term changes pull attention away from more urgent problems like backing up voting systems and ensuring that eligible voters can cast ballots in fair and effective ways?

**Closing Reflections \_\_\_ minutes**

Acting on the ideas and proposals presented here will bring about changes affecting all of us, in every city and town—whether we are attuned to politics or not. And changes to complex regulatory and technical systems often go wrong in ways that are unexpected. It is important to think carefully about how these changes would work and what the advantages and risks might be.

* We can’t, and probably shouldn’t, make too many changes all at once. What’s more important overall? Increasing turnout, or making sure all votes are legitimate, or fixing the underlying system?
* Voting is a cornerstone of our democracy, but how much will a better voting system do to improve education, provide racial justice, and/or make our economy fairer? On the other hand, can we address those problems without a fair and effective voting system?
* Public discussion of voting often revolves around elections for the president and Congress, but the results of local and state elections affect schools, policing, and our local economies and neighborhoods. Take a moment to revisit some of the key questions here and talk about them specifically in terms of state and local elections.
* Many people say they don’t vote because they “aren’t interested in politics” or because they don’t like any of the candidates or parties. Should we address these issues, and if so, how would we do it?

**Other important questions to consider.**

* Now that we have deliberated, are there ideas or viewpoints you hadn’t considered before?
* Can you now identify any shared concerns or hopes we have discovered in our conversation?
* How has what you heard affected your thinking?
* What could you do as an individual? What could the community do? What do we want our elected officials at the local, state, and national level to do?
* Can you identify any tensions that came up during the forum?
* What questions remain? What work do we still need to do?