



MODERATOR GUIDE

1999-2000

A Different Kind of Talk, Another Way to Act

Making choices about how to deal with community issues is difficult because different people favor different approaches, and the options for action may contradict or conflict with one another. Certainly any strategy for action will have costs that have to be taken into consideration and consequences that have to be anticipated, as best we can. At the root of the questions of costs and consequences, and behind each approach, lies a range of concerns that, while common to many people, nonetheless pulls them in different directions both individually and collectively. People have to “work through” these conflicts and deal with the trade-offs until they come not necessarily to full and complete agreement, but 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 problem. Often we live all our lives somewhere between complete agreement and complete disagreement. Public action becomes possible when citizens discover where their interests are interconnected.

ALCOHOL

CONTROLLING THE TOXIC SPILL

These choices are discussed in detail in the NIF Issue Book by this title, ISBN 0-7872-5764-8 and (abridged edition) ISBN 0-7872-5829-6 available from Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company at 1-800-228-0810.

Choice 1: Demand Citizen Responsibility

Most Americans enjoy alcohol and use it responsibly in compliance with laws. Today’s problem is that our halfhearted enforcement of alcohol control laws not only makes a mockery of law and moral order, but actually encourages underage drinking as well as irresponsible and illegal alcohol use. To deter alcohol abuse, the nation must draw the line on irresponsible use of alcohol and provide swift, certain, and severe punishment to those who cross that line.

Choice 2: Treat the Public Health Epidemic

The abuse of alcohol is not a law enforcement problem, but a public health epidemic that the practice of medicine can cure. Alcoholism itself is a disease, often inherited, that is shrouded in stigma, confusion, denial, and ignorance. Many more programs for prevention, early detection, counseling, and treatment are needed to address the range of alcohol problems leading up to and including addiction.

Choice 3: Educate for Societal Change

Progress in enforcing laws or in curbing an epidemic will remain elusive until Americans personally confront the problems of alcohol abuse — much the way they did with smoking and cancer. We should use the antismoking campaign as a model. We should undertake societywide educational efforts to dispel falsehoods and ignorance about alcohol and, at the same time, generate popular social norms and public policies for responsible behavior.

THE MODERATOR'S ROLE

Deliberation with fellow citizens is necessary when we have to make decisions on matters that are very important to us, when there are competing approaches to solving a problem. Deliberation occurred in America's earliest town meetings. Privately, we deliberate when we have a difficult decision to make about an important matter in our lives and have to weigh several options carefully. In our private lives we have learned that we can seldom have everything and we must make choices. Likewise, in public life citizens must choose among options, all of which may be attractive. That, in a nutshell, is what deliberation is — weighing carefully the various approaches, the pros and cons of each option, and the views of others about what should be done. A deliberative dialogue is a chance to explore, to test ideas, and to look at the ambiguities or gray areas rather than seeing only the stark black and white of polar opposites.

Deliberation requires the moderator to:

- Move the conversation beyond the sharing of stories to looking at costs and consequences of the options.
- Make sure the best case/positive side of all options are considered and understood. To diminish an option is to stop deliberation. There are major differences about which options would be best or which direction to take. These differences must be clear and not covered over. To fail to consider an option or diminish an option keeps important differences from surfacing.
- Stay with deliberation until participants see that the issue is framed on what is valuable to people and until they have identified the conflicts among the approaches.
- Recognize that forums seldom end in total agreement or total disagreement. Forums frequently end in a discovery of a shared sense of purpose or recognition of how interests are inter-connected.

To Hold Counsel
With One Another

*The whole purpose
of democracy is that
we may
hold counsel with
one another,
as not to depend
on the understanding
of one person
but to depend
on the counsel
of all.*

Woodrow Wilson 1912

Forums do change people's opinions of others' opinions. Those changes in perception create new possibilities for acting together, generating the political will to move ahead.

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR A NIF FORUM OR STUDY CIRCLE

WELCOME

Let participants know who is sponsoring the forum/study circle. Stress the cosponsorship if several organizations are involved.

QUESTIONNAIRE (PRE-FORUM)

Remind people that the Pre-Forum Questionnaire is a way to get everyone focused on the issue and a way for each participant to take inventory of initial feelings on the issue. Tell them there'll be another questionnaire for them after these deliberations end.

(Pre- and Post-Forum Questionnaires are found at the end of the issue book. You may want to provide copies to participants separately if they do not want to tear these pages out of their issue books. If you distribute separate copies, it is wise to make the Pre- and Post-Forum Questionnaires on different colored paper so that they easily may be kept separate.)

GROUND RULES

MAKE CLEAR THAT THE FORUM IS NOT A DEBATE. Stress that there is work to do, and that the work is to move toward making a choice on a public policy issue. The work will be done through deliberation. Review the chart "How do we do it?" (see page 7). The responsibility for doing the work of deliberation belongs to the group. Deliberation is necessary because there are competing approaches to solving the problem.

STARTER VIDEO

Explain that the video reviews the problems underlying the issue, then briefly examines three or four public policy alternatives. In so doing, it sets the stage for deliberation. *(Starter videos for each issue book are available from Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company at 1-800-228-0810.)*

PERSONAL STAKE

Connect the issues to people's lives and concerns — in the first few minutes — by getting participants to talk about their personal experiences with the issue, and to tell their stories. This makes the issue genuine, human rather than abstract. Some questions you might ask include: "Has anyone had a personal experience that illustrates the problems associated with this issue?" "Within your family, or circle of friends, is this an important issue?" "What aspects of the issue are most important to you?" "How does the issue affect people?"

THE FORUM/STUDY CIRCLE DELIBERATION

Consistent with what deliberation is, moderators ask four basic questions in a forum:

1

What is valuable to us? This question gets at why making public choices is so difficult: the options turn on things that people care about very deeply, such as being secure or being treated fairly. This question can take many forms:

- How has this issue affected you personally? (Usually asked at the beginning.)
- What things are most valuable to people who support this option?
- What is appealing about this option?
- What makes this option a good idea — or a bad one?

2

What are the costs or consequences associated with the various options?

This question can take as long as it prompts people to think about the likely effects of various options on what is valuable to them. Examples include:

- What would result from doing what this option proposes?
- What could be the consequences of doing what you are suggesting?
- Can you give an example of what you think would happen?
- Does anyone have a different estimate of costs or consequences?

3

What are the tensions or conflicts in this issue that we have to “work through”?

As a forum progresses, moderators will ask questions that draw out conflicts or tensions that people have to “work through.” They might ask:

- What do you see as the tension between the options?
- Where are the conflicts that grow out of what we’ve said about this issue?
- Why is this issue so difficult to decide?
- What are the “gray areas”?
- What remains unsolved for this group?

4

Can we detect any shared sense of purpose or how our interdependence is grounds for action?

In the very first few minutes of a forum, the moderator should remind people that the objective is to work toward a decision. Then, as the tensions or conflicts become evident, as people see how what they consider valuable pulls them in different directions, the moderator will test to see where the group is going with questions like:

- What direction seems best, or where do we want to go with this policy?
- The moderator can follow-up to find out what people are or are not willing to do or sacrifice to solve a problem with such questions as:
 - What trade-offs are we willing to accept?
 - What trade-offs are we unwilling to accept?
 - What are we willing to do as individuals or a community to solve this problem?

ENDING A FORUM/STUDY CIRCLE

Before ending a forum take a few minutes to reflect both individually and as a group on what has been accomplished. Questions like the following have been useful:

I. 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?

II. Group Reflections

- What didn't we work through?
- Can we identify any shared sense of purpose or direction?
- What trade-offs are we, or are we not, willing to make to move in a shared direction?

III. Next-Step Reflections

- What do we still need to talk about?
- How can we use what we learned about ourselves in this forum?
- Do we want to meet again?

QUESTIONNAIRE (POST-FORUM)

The Post-Forum Questionnaire is a way to face the conflict within ourselves. Often we discover aspects of each choice we hold most valuable. Yet, the things we care deeply about are often in conflict. The questionnaire, along with other information, is important in discovering a Public Voice. Send both the Pre- and Post-Forum Questionnaires to:

**National Issues Forums Research
100 Commons Road
Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777**

Suggested Time Line

Stages of a Forum/Study Circle

15% for Opening

- Welcome** — The convenor or moderator introduces NIF program.
- Questionnaire** — Participants complete Pre-Forum Questionnaire, discussion begins.
- Ground Rules** — Participants review desired outcomes of forum.
- Starter Video** — The starter video sets the tone for the discussion.
- Personal Stake** — Connect the issue to people's lives and concerns.
- The Deliberation** — Participants examine all the choices.

65% for Deliberation

20% for Discovering the Shared Sense of Purpose and Ending the Forum/Study Circle

- Ending the Forum** — Reflect on what has been accomplished.
- Questionnaire** — Participants complete Post-Forum Questionnaire.

LEADING A FORUM OR STUDY CIRCLE ON THE NIF ISSUE BOOK

Alcohol: Controlling the Toxic Spill

Relevance of the Issue

How does a free society cope with something like alcohol? It is at the same time a civilized food and an addictive drug. About 100 million adults use it legally, setting role models for illegal use by 11 million minors. Yet, nearly 14 million meet criteria for chronic abuse or addiction. As more researchers, social scientists, and physicians examine the problems, new discoveries are informing public discussions, infusing them with fresh optimism — and greater urgency.

Today, drinking is an accepted fact of American life, serving social functions and satisfying personal appetites. Most Americans enjoy alcohol without any problem. And science pours out studies lauding its health benefits. Moderate consumption of alcohol (one drink per day for women and two for men based on weight differences and water content) can reduce cardiovascular disease among middle-aged and older men and postmenopausal women. And since the 1980s Americans have been drinking less, resulting in correspondingly lower rates for associated problems, such as traffic fatalities.

But bad news abounds. Alcohol abuse is involved in 30 percent of suicides, 48 percent of robberies, 50 percent of homicides, 52 percent of rapes and sexual assaults, and 68 percent of manslaughter cases. Alcohol can harm virtually every tissue and organ in the body. A government panel recommended in 1998 that it be listed officially as a human carcinogen. One in four urban hospital patients is being treated for an ailment linked to alcohol. Alcohol use during pregnancy can cause birth defects, including mental retardation. Among all causes of death, alcohol-related deaths rank third or fourth, from year to year. At least, 1 percent of all drivers at any time are legally drunk. On weekend nights that rate rises to 3 percent. The estimated cost of all alcohol-related problems is \$148 billion annually, representing \$1.09 in societal costs for each drink Americans consume. Most young people begin drinking before age 13 and do the heaviest drinking of their lives between the ages of 18 and 21. In 1997, 32 million Americans engaged in binge drinking, and 11 million were heavy drinkers.

Americans have some difficult questions to ponder. Why aren't laws controlling alcohol more effective? Why don't treatment programs have more impact on the problem? Why aren't education programs having more impact?

And how do we deal with the trade-offs? Are we willing to give police more power and reduce individual rights by calling for stricter laws and enforcement? Are we willing to spend the time and money involved in focusing on research, prevention, and treatment? Would an entirely negative view of alcohol result in more restrictions than many Americans want? Would it simply make drinking more appealing to those who defy conventions?

Using the Issue Book

For a complete discussion of the background for this issue, study the NIF issue book, pp. 2-5 or (abridged edition) pp. 2-4.

Forums are much more effective if the moderator has studied the issue book. The purpose of this study is so the moderator understands all facets of the issue and can draw from forum participants a full deliberation of all pros, things held valuable, cons, costs, and trade-offs. The purpose of this study is NOT so the moderator can reveal her or his knowledge of the book. Remember the objective of the moderator is to assist development of full deliberation **among** participants in the forum. Forums and study circles are also much more productive if participants have also read the issue book. Convenors of forums and study circles must work imaginatively to promote reading of an issue book before engaging in deliberation.

Remember as moderator that you are assisting your forum participants in answering the question of how your community should address the issue of controlling the negative effects of alcohol.

Look at your issue book. You will find a complete discussion of Choice One on pp. 6-10 or (abridged edition) pp. 5-9. Choice Two is discussed on pp. 11-15 or (abridged edition) pp. 10-14. Choice Three is discussed on pp. 16-20 or (abridged edition) pp. 15-19. A summary of the choices, what can be done on each, supporting and opposing views, likely costs, and trade-offs that must be considered is found on pp. 21-23 or (abridged edition) pp. 20-22.

Develop the pros, things held valuable, cons, and costs of each choice. Give each choice equal weight in the discussion. Participants will normally take longer to address the first choice because aspects of the other choices will be brought up. Equal weight does not necessarily mean equal time. Work especially hard on the trade-offs among the choices. How far people are willing to go or not to go in implementing a choice is an important element in discovering common ground for action. This sense of what people are struggling with in addressing the issue is an important goal of the reflective questions asked at the end of a forum or study circle.

Planning for Your Next Forum or Study Circle

Your participants may be interested in deliberating other NIF issue books. Several involve tensions over things held valuable similar to those encountered in a choice about alcohol. For example, issue books are available on choices of direction involving similar things held valuable in dealing with *Gambling: Is It a Problem?* *What Should We Do?* and *The Drug Crisis*.

NIF FORUMS AND STUDY CIRCLES

1 Why are we here? What are we going to do?

We are here to move toward a public decision or CHOICE on a difficult issue through CHOICE WORK.

3 How can we know if we are making progress?

By constantly testing your group:

Can your group make the best case for the option least favored?

Can it identify the negative effects of the option most favored?

2 How do we do it?

Through a deliberative dialogue in which we:

- Understand the PROS and CONS of every option, its COSTS AND CONSEQUENCES.
- Know the STRATEGIC FACTS and how they affect the way the group thinks about each option.
- Get beyond the initial positions people hold to their deeper motivations — the things people consider to be most valuable in everyday life.
- Weigh carefully the views of others; appreciate the impact various options would have on what others consider valuable.
- WORK THROUGH the conflicting emotions that arise when various options pull and tug on what people consider valuable.

4 What will be the effects of deliberation?

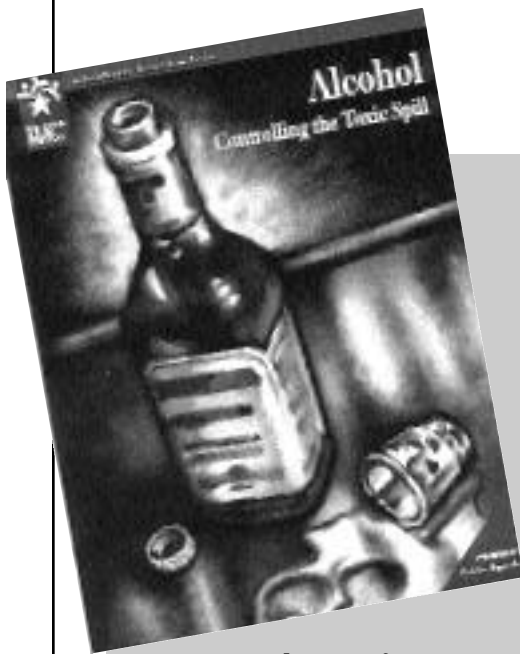
Movement from first reactions and mass opinions toward a more shared and stable PUBLIC JUDGMENT.

The emergence of a PUBLIC VOICE, one different from the voice of personal preference or special interest pleadings.

Increased COMMON GROUND FOR ACTION found in a greater ability to:

- Identify how people came out on the conflicts, contradictions, and trade-offs, and what they were willing, and not willing to do to solve the problem.
- Identify any shared sense of purpose or policy direction and a range of actions that were consistent with one another.
- Understand the implications of how citizens sensed their interdependence on the issue and its implications for community action.

NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS RESEARCH
100 COMMONS ROAD
DAYTON, OHIO 45459-2777
1-800-433-7834



Alcohol: Controlling the Toxic Spill

How does a free society cope with something like alcohol? It is at the same time a civilized food and an addictive drug. About 100 million adults use it legally, setting role models for illegal use by 11 million minors. Yet, nearly 14 million meet criteria for chronic abuse or addiction. As more researchers, social scientists, and physicians examine the problems, new discoveries are informing public discussions, infusing them with fresh optimism — and greater urgency.

As with other NIF issue books, this booklet also provides an overview of the issue and, to promote public deliberation, outlines several perspectives. Each perspective speaks for one set of American views and priorities and, drawing ideas from across the political spectrum, advocates a unique and consistent approach to the issue.

NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS RESEARCH
100 COMMONS ROAD
DAYTON, OHIO 45459-2777
1-800-433-7834