



National Issues Forums Workshop for Academic Libraries

Participant Workbook

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The materials contained in this handout are primarily drawn from Martin Carcasson's CSU Center for Public Deliberation student workbook and material that was originally created by members of the National Issues Forums network and the International Deliberative Democracy Workshop Faculty (particularly Betty Knighton, Taylor Willingham, and Sandy Hodge) and reflect over three decades of research and practice.

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There are many ways to spark deliberation (see the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation Engagement Stream document as well as the sample deliberative techniques section at the end of this workbook). At the Center for Public Deliberation (CPD), we utilize “NIF-style” forums as the base process model for our training program. Not all CPD events use this format—each project is different and calls for different styles—but the NIF model is a great starting point since it’s a useful and flexible model that can be applied in a number of situations.

NIF is a nonpartisan, nationwide network of locally sponsored forums for the consideration of public policy issues. They are rooted in the simple notion that people need to come together to reason and talk—to deliberate about common problems. Democracy requires an ongoing deliberative dialogue.

Each year, major issues of concern are identified. Issue books, which provide an overview of the subject and present several choices, are prepared to frame the choice work. Forums are sponsored by thousands of organizations and institutions within many communities. They offer citizens the opportunity to join together to deliberate and make choices with others about ways to approach difficult issues. Programs for NIF conveners and moderators are conducted each summer in Public Policy Institutes (PPIs) in communities across the country. They provide participants, both NIF newcomers and veterans, with a background on the program as well as skills for sponsoring, organizing and moderating forums.

	<p>The convener or moderator introduces the program. In some cases, pre-forum questionnaires may be used (either online or at the start of the event).</p>
	<p>Facilitator reviews ground rules for the discussion, as well as the desired outcomes of the forum. This discussion often allows the facilitator a chance to establish key aspects of the deliberative perspective as well as create the necessary environment for the process.</p>
	<p>A starter video may be used to set the tone for dialogue, or the moderator can introduce the choices themselves.</p>
	<p>As an icebreaker, participants share personal experiences related to the issue. This sets the stage and allows all participants to talk at least once, making it easier for them to talk later. (May be completed before the video, so that the participants do not simply react to the video in their comments.)</p>
	<p>NIF-style forums are typically focused on a common problem, with 3-4 approaches to addressing that problem. Participants examine all the approaches, spending specific time focusing on each one. Typically, 15-20 minutes per approach if time allows. NIF-style discussions often focus on the _____ and _____. Notes are taken on easel pads focused on developing a list of the appreciations and concerns for each approach. Discussions often begin with appreciations (“ What do you like about this approach?”) but then shift to concerns during the discussion as participants respond to each other and facilitator prompts. Facilitators should ensure that the participants have ample, but not necessarily equal, discussion of both. If the discussion focuses primarily on one or the other, they should ask specific questions to make sure the participants fully consider each. (“ We seem to be focusing primarily on concerns with this approach, does anyone have any particular appreciations? Why do people support this approach?”)</p>
	<p>Once each approach has been discussed, the remaining time can be used in a variety of ways, depending on the purpose of the event (see the Goals and Consequences information from earlier). Questions should be developed that allow the participants to</p>



Deliberation is more likely to take place if some guidelines are laid out at the beginning; they can help prevent difficulties later. Often these rules are posted somewhere in the room (perhaps on a flip chart and then displayed on a side wall). We tend to use ground rules; other processes may use guidelines, covenants, norms or protocols, based on the desire to get away from "rules," which are perceived as imposed or to emphasize mutuality of the behavioral understandings

Ideally, the groups come up with the rules themselves through a process, but we often don't have the time to do that. There is a very real tension about using these rules. We want to create a productive, safe environment, but we also do not want to cut off discussions, unduly suppress ideas or unnecessarily favor particular communication styles.

Moderators find it useful to ask the group to ratify these rules verbally or by a show of hands rather than just announcing them. A wide variety of potential ground rules for deliberation exist, so individual moderators need to decide which rules to use and how to frame them before the forum. Some moderators also allow the audience to suggest additional rules for the discussion.

- < Be honest and respectful
- < Listen to understand
- < It's ok to disagree, but do so with curiosity, not hostility
- < Be brief so everyone has an opportunity to participate

When we go over these rules at the beginning of a forum, we use the time to help us explain the overall philosophy. For example, we talk about the importance of listening and its critical role in deliberative politics as compared to adversarial politics.

Another function of ground rules is to provide the participants with examples of norms and behaviors that they will hopefully find value in beyond the forum itself. The hope is that once they realize the higher quality of conversation that occurs under these conditions, they will become a habit for them that impacts their communication style in multiple settings.

The way any forum begins is an open question to be answered by those planning the forum. These are some potential elements that may be incorporated into the welcome portion of the forum.

Overall, the welcome should be rather short. Participants are there to talk to each other, not listen to the organizers. Provide enough background to explain the process and goals for the meeting, but otherwise move quickly into the process.



< How can we use what we now know?

One type of question we like to ask at the CPD, particularly if the report will be provided to decision-



< x Can you tell me a little more about that?

< Keep going.

< Can you give me an example of that?

< How do you think we can do that? What steps do you suggest?

< So, whose responsibility would that be? How is it done?

< So how do you think that could apply more broadly?

< What insights do you think are most important from that example?

< x Why? Why is that important to you?

< So,



- < Who, maybe even people not in the room right now, might disagree with this and why?
- < Let's put someone in the "empty chair" that would disagree. What might they say?

- < If a business owner/social worker/teacher was in the room, what might they say?

- < If a business owner was here, I imagine they may express strong concern about such regulations. How would you respond?

When moderating, facilitators need to make sure to allow space for disagreement and encourage it in some ways. One of the best products of deliberation is clarification of key tensions, tradeoffs and tough choices. You can only get those if you bring them out or allow them to surface. "Stacking" is the action of establishing an order of speakers. If you ask a question and several people want to speak, you create a queue verbally: "Ok, we'll start with Joyce, and then go to Mark and Samantha." Or sometimes you simply just use directions ("We'll start here and go to the left").

Stacking allows people to relax and be more likely to listen, as they are not focused on trying to get your attention to speak. The problem is that if you simply follow the established order, you may undermine interaction. People in the stack decided what to say before the current speakers, therefore are unlikely to respond to them. As a result, you get an individual collection of opinions, not deliberation.

So

- < Helps them evaluate their own feelings (your paraphrase may actually teach them about themselves – “ yeah, I guess that is what I meant...”)
- < Helps notetakers capture a summary
- < Can help shift the discussion to a deeper level (move from positions to interests)
- < Can help shift the discussion from a tense/emotional level to a more understanding level (especially when you paraphrase and take out “ inflammatory statements”)
- < Helps you keep present in the conversation and paying attention

- < You can easily get too caught up in paraphrasing everything, making it more about you than them
- < Paraphrasing encourages more back and forth between you and the speaker, rather than the speaker and the rest of the group
- < People may get the impression that you are implying you speak better than they do
- < You may only capture part of what they are trying to say
- < You may miss the main point and they may not feel comfortable correcting you

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- ◁ Question asking will depend on the overall goal/purpose for the event.
- ◁ Be careful of starting a forum with specific questions. People may have something pressing they want to share, and a specific question may not give them that chance. If you start with a detailed question about a specific topic, participants may not be prepared to answer it.
- ◁ Preparing questions beforehand can be helpful, but also be prepared *not* to use them.
- ◁ At times there will be some questions you *need* to ask because you are gathering specific information on that question from all the groups. There is nonetheless an important tension here between too much and too little structure. Asking specific questions of all groups will provide good information on that question, but it is also somewhat forced. The topic did not come up naturally in all groups; it was introduced by the facilitator. A more open process may bring more interesting results because you will be able to observe what issues arise naturally in the groups. The tradeoff is that by allowing the natural process, you may not get feedback on a particularly important issue. All in all, you need to be careful when introducing specific discussion questions and be transparent in reporting the data about what questions were asked. Impartiality can be questioned if questions are loaded or directs participants in particular ways.
- ◁ Most questions will be reactive clarification/follow-up questions.
- ◁ Asking too many questions can be as bad as asking too few.
- ◁ Ideally, participants are asking each other good questions by the end of the forum.

1. This question gets at the reason that making public choices is so difficult—namely, that all the approaches are rooted in things about which people care very deeply. This key question can take many different forms. To uncover deeper concerns, people may ask one another how each came to hold the views he or she has. Talking about personal experiences, rather than simply reciting facts or stating rational, impersonal arguments, promotes a more meaningful dialogue.

◁



3.



In their classic work, *Getting to Yes*, Roger Fisher and William Ury discussed the importance of moving participants from a focus on their positions to one that focused on their interests. This move was critical to the Harvard negotiation method that sought to discover "Win/Win" solutions to conflict rather than the typical "Win/Lose" nature of competition, or even the "Lose/Lose" nature of compromise and bargaining.

are concrete proposals about specific plans of action, such as hiring more teachers, damming a river, banning cell phones in cars or increasing the penalty for a crime.

are the underlying needs, desires, concerns and fears that lead people to support particular positions. Interests connected to the positions listed above may include the need for high-quality education for one's children; being proactive and adequately prepared for future growth; the safety of children, bicyclists and other motorists; and the need to increase deterrence.

Fisher and Ury argued that interests define the problem, not positions, but most conflict focuses on position differences, and the underlying interests often remain hidden or misunderstood. "Behind opposed positions," they explained, "lie shared and compatible interests as well as conflicting ones." Similar to the points made concerning values on pp. 8, most people hold rather reasonable interests, and when those interests are surfaced and understood, the negotiation—or deliberation—is much easier.

Surfacing interests—both those that are shared and competing—helps with the next task Fisher and Ury discuss in the book: Inventing options for mutual gain. Interests are much easier to combine, or find creative ways to satisfy, than positions.

The easiest way to move from positions to interests is for facilitators to simply ask "Why" (or, at times, "Why not?"). The question must be framed or clarified so participants understand you are not belittling their position or simply asking for justification for their opinion, but that you are seeking better understanding of the needs, hopes, fears or desires that it serves.

Another tactic that helps move from positions to interests is to have participants focus on what they want in the future (and why) rather than playing the blame game about what happened in the past.

Finally, facilitators can make the shift from positions to interests themselves, by paraphrasing a position statement made by a participant, and moving it to more of an interest statement (while, of course, giving the participant clear opportunity to disagree with the new framing).

PARTICIPANT: We need to install additional speed bumps in our community!

FACILITATOR: Are you wanting to slow down traffic because of a concern for your children's safety?



Overall, it is important to consider that deliberation is difficult, and at times participants will struggle. Sam Kaner describes this as the "Groan Zone" that groups must go through as they work on difficult issues. So, challenges are not failures or evidence of something going wrong; they may very well mean things are going as they should. In many cases, when someone is being difficult, the best remedy is not to focus on the individual, but the rest of the group. If one person is dominating, the rest of the group is not active enough, for example.



The need for good notes and to stay on time are two important tools for you to use to address difficult situations. If someone is rambling, intervene based on the need to have a clear summary of their point. If a conflict starts escalating, you can intervene to make sure you clearly understand each side for the notes. If time is short, jump in to establish that and the need to hear other people or to move on. Each of these interventions can be "blamed" on the need for notes or to stay on time, making it easier for you to pull them off without seeming heavy-handed.

If one or two people dominate, you may want to adjust the process to ensure other voices are being heard. Do a round (asking everyone in the group to briefly reply to a question), ask everyone to write down an answer on a notecard or Post-It note and then to share, or ask them to work in groups of two or three briefly and then report out.

For many difficult situations, there is no perfect technique to resolve it. The best move may be to be honest with your own struggle, and simply ask the group. This can be used if something does or doesn't seem to be working or needs adjustment ("It seems to me we only have about two or three people doing most of the talking, do you think that is a problem?" or "This seems to be a bit of tangent, but I could be w



Facilitating deliberative practice has many connections to the field of conflict management. Conflicts are inherent to democracy, and communities need to learn how to deal with inherent conflicts more productively, rather than seek to resolve, or avoid, them. The first step to managing conflict is understanding the conflict.



The activities and characteristics listed below pertain to a forum observer who will collect information useful for creating a follow-up report:

- < Is alert and attentive
- < Arrives early and observes participants as they gather
- < Observes participants' body language
- < Listens carefully and takes legible notes
- < Records a few key actual statements word-for-word that could be used in a report
- < Keeps track of the context in which recorded statements are given
- < Recognizes and notes group dynamics
- < Notices and records shifts in direction (e.g., comments that signaled a shift away from agreement and toward conflict or ones that shift away from tension toward common ground)
- < Identifies and lists what expressions or statements contributed to a breakdown, greater confusion or a breakthrough to deeper understanding, even common ground

Participating in deliberation allows citizens to expose themselves to a greater range of viewpoints, be open to learning and reconsider previous viewpoints (Ryfe & Stalsburg, 2012). Moreover, by attending a deliberative event, participants are more likely to engage in civic behaviors in the future (Gastil, Deess, Weiser, & Simmons, 2010; Fishkin, 1995; Price & Capella, 2002).

Participating in diverse groups can encourage traditionally marginalized individuals to speak up. For example, a study by Toosi et al. (2012) found that in all-white groups, women "spoke less than white men, and were considered less persuasive" (Toosi et al., 2012, p. 1154). In groups that included people of color, women's confidence grew over time and they spoke as often as male participants (Toosi et al., 2012).

Participants gauge the legitimacy of a forum based on the inclusion of stakeholders (Kahane, Loftson, Heriman, & Hardy, 2013; Karpowitz & Raphael, 2014; Carcasson & Sprain, 2010).

This spells trouble, because one of the other key tenants of deliberation is governance. Deliberative practitioners trust the wisdom of the crowds to come up with innovative solutions but moving from talk to action also requires that the larger community have a hand in making those visions come to life.

As a result of these potential consequences, previous studies have called for future research into engaging the hardest-to-reach participants and sustaining this participation over time (Su, 2014).

Who will *moderate*? How many people will moderate?

Who will *record*? How many people will record?

Will you utilize *observers*?



Do you intend for people to complete a registration process?

Who will handle registration?

How will you handle latecomers?

Who is responsible for designing promotional materials?

Who is responsible for copying and distributing promotional materials?

Who is responsible for securing issue guides?

Will you be using a survey? What demographic information would be useful for the report? What questions would be useful for the report?

