

**MODERATOR  
DEVELOPMENT  
HANDBOOK**



## A Guide to Deliberation<sup>1</sup>

**M**aking decisions 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 people must take into consideration and consequences that people should anticipate, as best as they can. However, behind each approach lies a range of concerns and values that, while common for many people, nonetheless pulls them in different directions, creating tension, and influencing how they weigh costs and consequences. People therefore must work through these conflicts and deal with the trade-offs until they develop a shared sense of direction. While people may not reach full and complete agreement about what course of action they should take to address a community issue, they have a better grasp of what they are and are not willing to do to solve the problem. This mutual understanding paves the way for cooperation and collaboration.

The goals of coming to public judgment and inspiring community action require a particular kind of dialogue and a process of reasoning together that is called deliberation.

Interestingly enough, we deliberate all the time in our daily lives. When we have a difficult decision to make about an important matter and have to weigh several approaches carefully, that, in a nutshell, is deliberation. Deliberation is the process of weighing carefully various approaches to a situation, examining the pros and cons of each option, and reflecting upon the views of others about what should be done. Deliberation provides the opportunity to explore, to test ideas, and to look at ambiguities or gray areas rather than seeing only the stark black and white of polar opposites.

What follows are a few simple recommendations for bringing the kind of deliberating we all do privately into a public setting – where we have to dialogue, not just with friends and family members, but with people we scarcely know.

### **Establishing guidelines**

Effective deliberation is more likely to occur if certain guidelines are outlined at the beginning. Establishing such guidelines ahead of time may help prevent difficulties later.

- The purpose of deliberation is to work toward a decision and committing to act.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one should dominate.
- Actively listening is as important as speaking.
- Participants should address one another, not just the moderator.

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<sup>1</sup> This document is adapted, with permission, entirely from the West Virginia Civic Life Institute's Participant Guidebook. Pp. 16-40.

- Participants may intervene occasionally to keep the dialogue on track or to remind participants to stick with the current approach under consideration.
- Participants should consider fairly each approach and examine fully all the tradeoffs involved in an approach. A diversity of perspectives is essential. Even if no one in the group seems to favor a certain option, someone should raise the question, “What would someone who favors this approach say about it?”

## Key questions

Four basic questions are asked in forums to prompt deliberation.

1. ***What is valuable to us?*** 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.

- How has this issue affected us personally?
  - When we think about this issue, what concerns us?
  - What is appealing about the first option or approach?
  - What makes this approach acceptable – or unacceptable?
2. ***What are the consequences, costs, benefits and trade-offs associated with the various approaches?*** Variations of this question should prompt people to think about the relationship that exists between each approach and the values people have. Because deliberation requires the evaluation of pros and cons, it is important to ensure that both aspects are fully considered. Questions to promote a fair and balanced examination of all potential implications include:
    - What would be the consequences of doing what we are suggesting?
    - What would be an argument against the approach we like best? Is there a downside to this course of action?
    - Can anyone think of something constructive that might come from the approach that is receiving so much criticism?

3. ***What are the inherent conflicts that we have to work through?*** As a forum progresses, participants should consider the following:
  - What do we see as the tension between the approaches?
  - What are the “gray areas”?
  - Where is there ambiguity?
  - Why is reaching a decision on this issue so difficult?
  
4. ***Can we detect any shared sense of direction or common ground for action?*** After saying during the first few minutes of a forum that the objective is to work toward a decision, the moderator or someone else may continue to intervene from time to time with questions that move the deliberation toward a choice, always stopping 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:
  - Which direction seems best?
  - Where do we want this policy to take us?
  - What tradeoffs are we willing and unwilling to accept?
  - If the policy we seem to favor had the negative consequences some fear, would we still favor it?
  - What are we willing and unwilling to do as individuals or as a community in order to solve this problem?

**At the heart of deliberation is the question of whether we are willing to accept the consequences of our choices.**

## Stages of a Large Group Forum

<b>Welcome</b>	The convener or moderator introduces the program.
<b>Questionnaire</b>	Participants may be asked to complete a pre-forum questionnaire before discussion begins.
<b>Guidelines</b>	Participants review desired outcomes of the forum.
<b>Starter Activity</b>	A starter video may be used to set the tone for dialogue, as well as a small sketch.
<b>Personal Stake</b>	As an icebreaker, participants share personal experiences related to the issue.
<b>Deliberation</b>	Participants examine all the approaches.
<b>Reflection</b>	Hearing a public voice. Going from my voice to our voice.
<b>Questionnaire</b>	Participants may be asked to complete post-forum questionnaires.

## 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 opinions and the impacts they might have on others. Instead, questions should serve specific, intended purposes. Consider the following types of questions and the examples provided.

### Questions that connect the policy issue to the lives and concerns of real people

- 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 approach

- What might be the effects of your approach 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 approach?
- Also, for those who think negatively about this approach, what seems to be their concern?

### Questions to ensure a fair and balanced examination of all potential effects

[NOTE: “Balanced” does not necessarily mean listing an equal number of advantages and disadvantages for each approach. An approach could have many disadvantages but still have greater value because of one or two accompanying advantages.]

- 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 approach, 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**

- 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 approaches?
- 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 being considered?
- 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 have suggested, could you explain how that might impact your life?

**Questions that promote interaction among 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 to illustrate what was just said?
- Allow silence. Someone will respond.
- Move back out of the circle.

**Questions that give the participants an opportunity to identify what they have heard, to recognize a shared understanding of the issue, and/or to acknowledge a common ground for action**

- 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 cannot 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?
- Which direction seems best?
- Where do we want this policy to take us?

## **2. Basic Principles of Moderating**

An effective moderator:

- Remains neutral about the subject of the forum.** Avoid expressing your own opinion or evaluating 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 similarity can form the basis for common ground.
- Intervenes as necessary.** If the conversation begins to focus on personalities rather than issues, gently remind the group of guidelines or refocus the dialogue back to the issue.

- **Asks clarifying questions, if necessary.** If you are not sure what a participant means, chances are good that others are unclear also. You may ask participants to clarify what they are trying to say and ask if you have understood correctly [if absolutely necessary, but be aware that people can get the impression that they are not being articulate.]
- **Encourages everyone to join in the conversation.** Be careful. Comments like “that’s a good idea” may make the speaker feel welcome in the conversation but are not the best choice of words because 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 deeper reflection.** Ask participants to share what is important to them about the issue or why they feel a particular approach is valuable.

## Key Moderating Skills

- Reflecting & Clarifying
- Summarizing
- Shifting Focus
- Asking Probing or Follow-Up Questions
- Managing Conflict
- Using Silence
- Using Non-Verbal Signals (Body Language)

**Reflecting and Clarifying**—feeding back or restating an idea or thought to make it clearer.

> “Let me see if I’m hearing you correctly....”

> “What I believe you are saying is....”

**Summarizing**—briefly stating the main thoughts.

> “It sounds to me as if we have been talking about a few major themes....”

**Shifting Focus**—moving from one speaker or topic to another.

> “Thank you, John. Do you have anything to add, Jane?”

> “We’ve been focusing on views 1 and 2. Does anyone have strong feelings about the other views?”

**Asking Probing or Follow-Up Questions**—using questions to help people explore disagreements, understand multiple perspectives, and uncover common ground.

- > “What are the key points here?”
- > “What would someone with a different point of view say?”

**Managing Conflict**—helping conflict and disagreement to be productive.

- > “Let’s refer to our ground rules.”
- > “What seems to be at the heart of this issue?”
- > “What do others think?”

**Using Silence**—allowing time and space for reflection by pausing between comments.

**Using Non-Verbal Signals (Body Language)**—recognizing and understanding how people communicate without using words.

- > “What signals am I sending with my body?”
- > “What signals am I reading from others?”
- > “How do I signal encouragement?”
- > “How do I invite others to participate?”

Source: *A Guide for Training Public Dialogue Facilitators*, Everyday Democracy  
[www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org)

<b>Good Signs</b>	<b>Signs the moderator should make a move</b>	<b>Tips to get back on track</b>
People listen to what others are saying.	People are just waiting their turn to “have their say.”	
People are talking to each other, asking questions of each other.	All comments are directed to the moderator.	
Everyone is listening with respect; no one is dominating.	There are “sidebar” conversations or interruptions.	
Alternate viewpoints get aired.	The group mainly concurs on each approach.	
Consequences of each approach are addressed.	The pro arguments have no negative consequences.	
People share personal experiences.	People speak theoretically or analytically.	
People express emotion around what is important to them.	The forum is cerebral and lacks feeling.	
The dialogue builds on any prior work by the group.	Comments ignore prior considerations.	

## **Recording**

### Purpose of Recording

- To remind forum participants of their comments, agreements, and action items
- To serve as a reference document for future forums
- To inform stakeholders, or a wider audience, of dialogue, decisions, and actions

### Qualities of Effective Recording

- Brief
- Clear
- Legible
- Accurate
- Well organized
- Uses active verbs
- Reports the appropriate amount of information
- Captures the tensions, trade-offs and common ground for action
- Notes are distributed soon after the forum

### Tips for Organizing Information at the End of a Forum

- Save document and immediately email to person in charge of processing recorded notes.

## Checklist for Moderators, Recorders, Feedback Leaders

### MODERATOR

- Set a tone for participation.
- Clarify your role at the start of the forum.
- Be an active listener.
- Stay neutral.
- Help the group explore the deeper dimensions of the issue, including trade-offs and consequences.
- Allow pauses and silences.
- Do not allow the group to get stuck on “facts” or assertions that cannot be proven.
- Move the discussion along so that all major points are considered.

### RECORDER

- Capture the key points that are appealing and not appealing about each approach.
- Ask for clarification when necessary.
- Be brief.
- Be careful to use words that clearly communicate the intended meaning. (Will your notes be understood days after the forum?)
- Avoid trying to write everything - some comments are discussions of prior points.

### FEEDBACK LEADER

- Lead feedback for each section, asking moderator and recorder first for their own reflections on how they did.
- Provide constructive feedback to the moderator, recorder, and participants about the effect of their individual and group efforts to focus on deliberation.
- Did the moderator remain neutral?
- Did the moderator ask questions that encouraged the participants to deliberate?
- Did the participants take responsibility for coming to terms with the key issues?
- Did the recorder capture the essence of key points addressed by the deliberation?

### 3. Tips for Dialogue Participants

**Listen carefully to others.** Make sure everyone has a chance to speak. Don't interrupt people. When you show respect for other people, it helps them show respect for you.

**Keep an open mind.** This is a chance for you to explore ideas that you have rejected or didn't consider in the past.

**Do your best to understand other points of view.** It is important to understand what other people think and why they feel the way they do. This will help you find solutions that work for everyone.

**Help keep the discussion on track.** Make sure your remarks relate to the discussion.

**Speak your mind freely, but don't take over the discussion.** If you tend to talk a lot in groups, leave room for quieter people. Being a good listener shows respect for others. This makes it easier for quiet people to speak up.

**Talk to the group rather than to the facilitator.** Try to look around the group when you talk. That will show others that they are part of the conversation.

**Talk to individuals in the group.** The dialogue should feel like a natural conversation. Try to involve everyone. If you feel someone has something to say, draw him or her out. Ask them questions about their ideas.

**Tell the facilitator what you need.** The leader guides the discussion, sums up key ideas, and helps to make things clear. If something is not clear, say so. Others might have the same concern.

**Value your life stories and opinions.** Everyone in the group, including you, is unique. All our lives have been different. This is what makes this process interesting. Make sure your voice is heard. Your wisdom and ideas are important.

**It's OK to disagree.** Even when we all come from the same group or culture, we are still different. These differences keep the group lively. If you do not agree with an idea, ask questions, but don't get carried away. Be respectful.

**Remember that humor and a pleasant manner will help.** When you keep your sense of humor, people will like listening to you. You can disagree with someone without making a personal attack.

**Body language is important.** When you talk, your body "talks," too. Pay attention to your "body language," and the messages you are sending.

## **4. Preparing to Moderate**

### **Suggested Guidelines for Deliberative Dialogues**

- The purpose of the forum is to work toward a decision on an important issue.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate and to listen to one another.
- All the major approaches on the issues are considered fairly.
- There is a careful examination of the costs and consequences of each option.
- The moderator, who will remain neutral, will open up the forum, lead discussion, and ask for outcomes at the end.
  
- Plus other guidelines agreed upon by the group.

Approach:

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1. What is the problem?

2. What is the main argument of this approach?

3. What are some key facts?

4. What are some actions or opinions in this approach?

5. What do proponents say? What do they value?

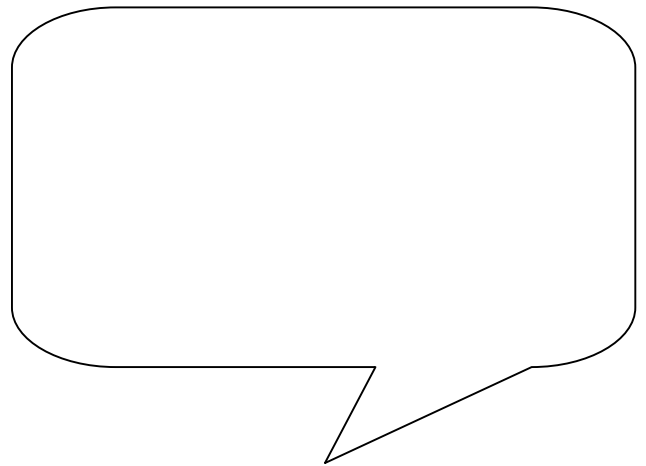
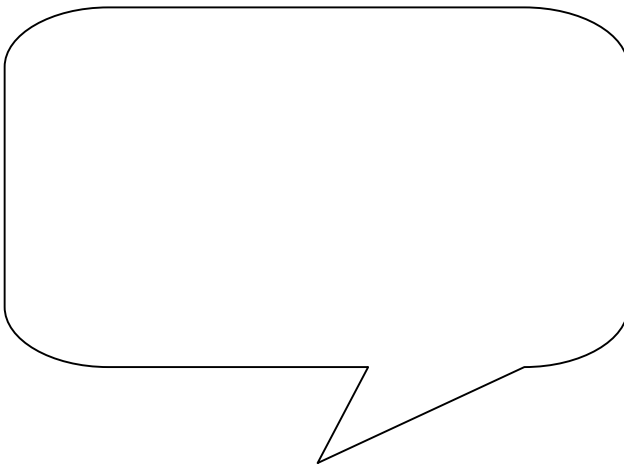
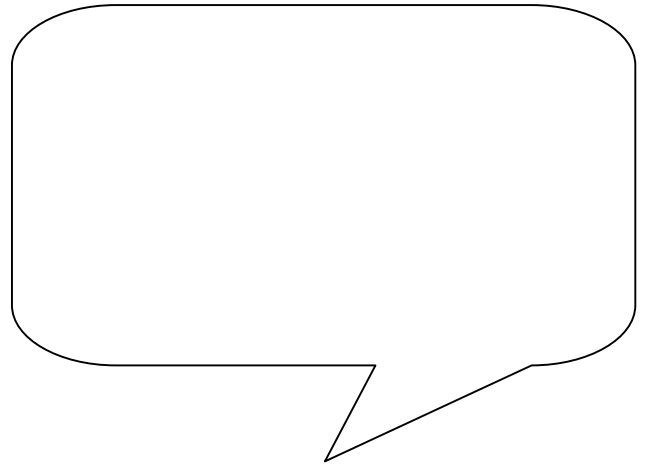
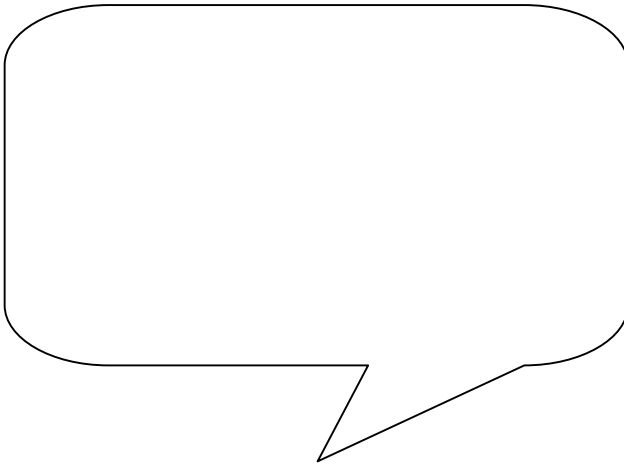
6. What do critics say? What do they value?

7. What are the risks or trade-offs?

## **An Exercise in Crafting Questions**

Directions: In the balloons, write questions that, if used during a deliberation, would do one or several of the following things:

1. Connect the issue to the lives and concerns of real people
2. Make clear the reason someone supports a position
3. Cause participants to make a positive case for each position
4. Bring out the cons of the position
5. Identify the tensions within a position
6. Ensure all positions are heard
7. Encourage participants to deal with trade-offs



## **Questions to Stimulate Deliberation**

- Could you share a story to illustrate that point?
- I understand you do not like that position, but what do you think people who favor it deeply care about?
- How would someone make a case against what you said?
- What is there about this approach that you just cannot accept?
- How may your ideas affect other people?
- Can someone suggest areas that we seem to have in common?
- Would someone identify the values that seem to be clashing? What is really happening here?
- Who should we include in this dialogue that is not already represented?
- If we followed this course of action, what would be the effects on your life?
- What values might people hold who support this position?
- What are the consequences of what you said? Do they make a difference?
- How do you separate what is a private matter from a public matter in this issue?

## **Reflections on Our Discussion**

The moderator asks the group to consider a range of questions after a full examination of each approach.

## **What did we accomplish?**

### **Individual Reflections**

- How has your thinking about the issue changed?
- How has your thinking about other people and their views changed?

### **Group Reflections**

- Can we detect any shared sense of direction or any common ground for action?
- What did you hear the group saying about tensions in the issue?
- What trade-offs were the group willing or not willing to make?

### **Next Step Reflections**

- What do we still need to talk about?
- How can we use what we now know?

## **Handling Moderator Challenges**

### **Dealing with participants who dominate the discussion**

- What do others think about this approach?
- What ideas have not been expressed?
- How would anyone else in the group respond to the concerns just expressed?
- Could someone tell us a story to illustrate that point?
- 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 one monopolizes 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**

- Does anyone have a different perspective on that?
- Use the issue book. Point out that “on page 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?

<b>FEEDBACK LEADER</b>					
<b>RECORDER</b>					
<b>MODERATOR</b>					
	Opening	Approach 1	Approach 2	Approach 3	Reflections

## Tips for Moderating Public Dialogues

### 1. Come Prepared

- Read over the discussion guide to get a feel for the content and approaches.
- Prepare yourself for how people may respond to the issue.
- Have an idea of your event's timetable.

### 2. Give an Overview / Set Guidelines for Deliberation

- Give the participants an overview of the issue and the structure of the discussion.
- Review the guidelines.
- Set a positive tone for equal participation.

### 3. Provide Introductions and Transitions into the Next Area of Deliberation

- Identify opportunities to transition. Smooth transitions between approaches make the dialogue more productive.

### 4. Ask Open-ended Questions that Encourage a Deliberation of All Sides

- Prepare a list of open-ended questions for each approach that would be important to ask.
- Keep the dialogue moving so all major points are considered and the deep dimensions of the issue are examined.

### 5. Ask Follow-up Questions

- Always be prepared to ask follow-up questions to stimulate further dialogue about the ideas and comments.
- Why do you value that idea?
- What would be the consequences to what you're suggesting?
- Does anyone have a different perspective?
- Responsiveness builds trust.

### 6. Avoid Dominating

- The moderator facilitates the deliberation but should not let herself or anyone else dominate the meeting.
- Encourage the equal participation of all.

### 7. Always Remain NEUTRAL

- Moderators should avoid showing any bias.
- Respond to clarify - avoid giving your own opinion.

### 8. Wrap-up

- Reflect on the deliberation.
- Begin to address next steps.
- Complete questionnaires, record notes, and close the meeting.



If you would like more information about the Mathews Center, please check out our website at <http://mathewscenter.org/> or give us a call at: 205-665-9005.