

the
**Active Citizen's
Field Guide**
to deliberative democracy



INTRODUCTION

Who is this guide for?

Do you care about a particular issue? Do you want to see your community thrive? Maybe you want to do more than vote or sign a petition. Perhaps you've realized no one person, no single group has the answer to society's toughest problems. Are you interested in being a part of acting with others to make a positive change in your town, but you're wondering where to start? ***Then this guide was created for you!***

This guide is for those interested in working with others in their communities to talk with one another, not at each other. It's for folks who want to work together to solve problems. And to act together for real, meaningful change.



What is this guide for?

This guide provides an overview of deliberative discussions as a way of bringing people together for a new way to talk and a different way to act together. The guide is designed to help community members move from “I’m concerned about _____ issue. Where do I start?” to “Our community is acting together to address _____ issue.” Deliberative discussions aren’t a silver bullet solution; they’re one way to help community members talk, decide, and act together.

The goal behind deliberative discussions is not merely to draw a crowd and fill a room with opinionated people. The purpose is much bigger and more powerful. When people talk together about common concerns, they take ownership of problems. They talk about what they can do, not just what others ought to do. They act out of a sense of mission and passion. Our democracy is healthier when citizens deliberate and act together.

Is deliberation suitable for all public issues?

No, deliberation isn’t suitable for all public issues. Deliberative discussion is best suited to those public problems that force us to answer the question, “What should we do?” Problems that do not have a clear-cut solution and where choices must be made. According to the Kettering Foundation’s [Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums](#), a problem is suited to public deliberation when:

- The issue is of broad concern to the community.
- There is a decision that must be made about the issue.
- There is lack of agreement about what is at issue.
- There is disagreement on the cause of the problem, or the cause is not clear
- There is no definitive solution to the problem, but a decision needs to be made.
- Every solution involves tradeoffs or downsides that involve things held valuable.
- The problem is intractable, ongoing, or systemic.
- People will face moral disagreements in deliberating on the issue.
- Any solution will take multiple actors (e.g., community groups, individuals, and government).

Do any of the above bullet points describe an issue your community is grappling with? Are you interested in helping your community work through that issue and work better together?

The following pages will provide strategies and examples for doing just that.





NAVIGATING THIS GUIDE

This guide is organized chronologically, and each successive step outlines an important component of building deliberative engagement.

Click on a section below to jump around between content.

Click on underlined resources throughout the guide to view them on the web!

1. START WITH PEOPLE

Don't know how to begin? Start with people.

2. BUILD A TEAM

Building a committed team is essential to success.

3. LISTEN AND LEARN

Understand the issues relevant to your community.

4. PREPARE CONVENERS

Conveners are trusted individuals who bring people together.

5. EQUIP MODERATORS

What is the role of the moderator in a deliberative discussion?

6. HOST DISCUSSIONS

This is where the deliberative magic happens.

7. PLAN FOR ACTING

What comes after the deliberative discussions?

8. CONTINUE LEARNING

Time to reflect on the process and gather wisdom.

9. ONE EXAMPLE: COLLEGE DRIVE

Trace one community's deliberative journey from talk to action.





1.



START WITH PEOPLE

Where do I begin?

Deliberative discussions should not be attempted alone. Start by finding other people who care about your community and the issue at hand. Begin with the people you know and then seek out those you don't yet know. Ask "Who else do I know that cares about this issue?" Talk with them. Then ask them who they know who may also be interested in the issue and in improving the community.

Then, widen your circle to find others who also care about the issue and your community, even those you disagree with. Regularly ask yourself and others "Who else is affected by this issue?" and "Who has a stake in addressing this issue in my community?" Reach out to those individuals and have a conversation with them about the issue and your desire to engage others in deliberative discussion.



Relationships are Key

When you discuss the issue and continue talking with other people who care, focus on building a relationship first and then gauge their willingness to commit to being a part of deliberative discussions and action to address the issue. Are they willing to help plan deliberative discussions? Might they be interested in connecting you with potential partners? Are they well suited to serve as trusted messengers to invite their neighbors and friends to participate? **Remember to ask yourself the questions below.**



What groups are already discussing this issue in my community?

What perspectives are held about this issue in my community?

Where are people discussing this issue and might I join their conversations?

Am I talking to people who hold different perspectives than I do?

Am I meeting people where they are and not expecting them to come to me?

Who else needs to be a part of the conversation?



What if I struggle with identifying who to talk to?

If you brainstorm who to talk to and the list is very short or even empty, consider mapping your community to better understand who might be affected by the issue and how people are connected. Public Agenda shares tools in “**Keeping People Connected**” that provide step-by-step instructions for mapping community stakeholders, as well as a tool for mapping power and proximity around a particular issue. As you map your community and identify who else to talk to about the issue, don’t forget to look for leadership in what some may consider unlikely places. Don’t discount anyone.

The **Asset Based Community Development Institute** summarizes this point well: “Every individual has assets that can contribute to community well-being.” Each person, even if they don’t realize it, possesses skills necessary for making deliberative discussions flourish. Help others see how their perspective, expertise, and skills are essential to the effort. Calling out the good in others and extending a simple invitation can be powerful.

What about the hard-to-reach folks?

Go where people socialize.

Just because groups are primarily social doesn’t mean their members aren’t interested in public issues. Consider bridge clubs, bowling leagues, sports clubs, youth groups, sewing circles, and ethnic organizations.

Go where people work.

In some communities, businesses give time off to employees who want to take part in a deliberative discussion or community event. Try seeking out civically-minded businesses to find opportunities for collaborating.

Use clubs and organizations.

Work through the grass-roots organizations and groups that folks belong to. Go where people worship, study, and socialize to find interested folks.

Try family groups, also.

In a place where lots of people are related, use family groups as a recruitment path. Deliberation is a great way for families to be civically engaged.

Reaching those who have never been involved in a community effort is challenging. Their voices, however, are essential. Start by meeting people where they are through their existing connections or networks. When you meet people where they are, you can play an important role as a door-opener in your community.

MORE RESOURCES

Click on a resource below to learn more.

1. “**Keeping People Connected**”
2. “**Asset-Based Community Development Values**”
3. “**Tips for Working With Neighbors**”



2.



BUILD A TEAM

No one can do this work alone. Your team is essential.

As you connect with other people who care, you will begin building a diverse team, or coalition. Continually ask as you form this team, “Who in our community is not represented on our team and how can we reach them effectively?” This question is foundational to deliberative discussions and should be asked every step of the process as you plan for and host deliberative discussions and engage in action planning.

Diversity matters in your team. From the very beginning, it is important for the organizing team to reflect the diversity of the community. A diverse coalition can attract a more diverse group of participants, and its decisions are more likely to be sound and workable because it reflects a wider range of community-based knowledge and experience. Additionally, because they model the principles of inclusion and openness, diverse teams help to establish the credibility of deliberative discussions. Finally, building a diverse team distributes the workload and can prevent burnout of committed volunteers.

Building this kind of collaborative team takes time and effort, but it’s worth the investment. Lots of evidence suggests the most effective deliberative discussions are initiated and sustained by broad-based, cross-sector coalitions that keep learning and growing.





I’ve never developed a team before. Where do I start?

● **Identify key people and organizations to recruit to the team.**

Create a list of the kinds of people and groups you want to include in the conversations (consider race, income, religion, age, gender, views, geography, old timers/newcomers, political affiliation, occupation, etc.). For each category, create a list of people and organizations that can help you reach that group. Consider informal leaders (may not have a title or be affiliated with a group, yet they are trusted, and people turn to them), grassroots leaders, and highly visible leaders. Keep asking yourselves, “Who is missing?”

● **Invite team members and partner organizations at the earliest stages.**

What skills and resources do they bring to the table that will improve the capacity for deliberative discussion? Delegate tasks that best serve the partners’ needs and interests, so that both parties feel rewarded for their efforts. Who is the partner’s contact? What is their task? What kind of involvement in time and resources will the partner provide? What is the timetable to complete the assignment? How will their contribution be recognized?

● **Invite team members and partner organizations at the earliest stages.**

Explain why they should get involved, and how. Create a simple “pitch” that explains why the people or organizations should get involved, and what you’re asking them to do. A good pitch describes the initiative in brief and says what you believe it will accomplish. Think about their mission and goals. Identify any aligned interested. What do they care about? Help them consider how being involved could help them advance their mission or meet their needs.

Include these basic ideas:

- This is a nonpartisan effort—you’re not pushing one view over another.
- You’re working to involved people from different backgrounds, views, and experiences.
- The discussions are intended to set directions for positive community actions.

● **Use a variety of recruitment methods.**

The most effective method is a personal invitation. Consider one-on-one meetings, phone calls, and letters (a combination works best). Ask members of the team that have already committed to use their connections to help reach a broad cross-section of the community. When inviting people, don’t count on a letter or email alone. You’ll need to make follow-up phone calls so people will know you’re genuinely interested in their participation.

● **Ensure teams and partners understand the goals of the discussions.**

Communicate clearly why the discussions need their participation. Ask the partner what their expectations are and how they hope to benefit. From this discussion you can build a mutually beneficial relationship that will be long-lasting.

● **Clearly define roles for team members and partner organizations.**

What skills and resources do they bring to the table that will improve the capacity for public dialogue? Delegate tasks that best serve the partners’ needs and interests, so that both parties feel rewarded for their efforts. Who is the partner’s contact? What is their task? What kind of involvement in time and resources will the partner provide? What is the timetable to complete the assignment? How will their contribution be recognized?



“Whether it occurs as part of a short-term initiative or a long-term plan, public participation should be championed, convened, and supported by a diverse coalition of groups and organizations.”

-Tina Nabatchi & Matt Leighninger

Remember that every person has a skill or gift that can contribute to making the deliberative discussions a success and that can help define their role on the team. For example, some members of the team may be ideally situated to get the word out and extend personal invitations. Others may have connections to suitable venues for hosting the discussions.

Additional skills that may be helpful include researching the issue and assisting with drafting a discussion guide, creating promotional materials, working with the media, moderating the discussions, serving as greeters and connectors at the event to make sure everyone feels welcome, or organizing to assist with acting together following the discussions. As you build a team, look out for these and other skills in each person!

MORE RESOURCES

Click on a resource below to learn more.

1. “Convening and Moderating Forums”

From the American Library Association.

2. “The Divided State of America”

From the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress

3. “Partnering for Inclusion”

From the CSU Center for Public Deliberation

3.



LISTEN AND LEARN

Understand the issues relevant to your community.

To choose or create a discussion guide for deliberative discussion in your community, begin by listening and learning more about the issue and how it affects your community. Conduct research. But most importantly, talk to people. Ask members of the team to share their concerns related to the issue. Talk to others in the community about their concerns. As you listen and learn, a stronger sense of what specifically people in your community want to deliberate related to the issue will emerge. That knowledge will help you choose (or create) the appropriate framework or discussion guide.



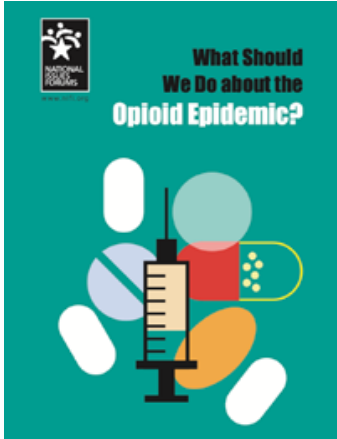
What type of discussion guide should I use?

As you continue listening and learning, you will begin to identify the type of discussion guide most useful for your deliberative discussions. Helpful diagnostic questions include:

- **Where is my community in talking through this issue? Are we just now beginning to discuss it?**
We may need to identify a [discussion guide](#) with a lot of data, examples, and information.
- **Are tensions high around the issue? Is it better to start with dialogues aimed at increasing understanding or bridging divides before diving into a deliberation?**
Consider [resources for dialogue](#) like those offered by the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD).
- **Is the consensus in our community that it's now time to act? Should the actions outlined in the discussion guide be specific to our community?**
We may want to [localize a national guide](#) with actions specific to our community.
- **Is the issue unique enough to our community, or is mistrust of outsiders high enough to make framing our own discussion guide essential?**
We may want to consider [creating our own](#) local or regional discussion guide.
- **Is the issue broad enough to require a series of discussions that help identify our primary concerns and our top priorities?**
We may want to consider creating an [open-ended discussion guide](#) with deliberative questions.

If the issue at hand is widespread and the community also wants to engage in shared learning, you may consider a discussion guide developed by a national organization, like the [National Issues Forums Institute](#) (NIFI). These guides are based on perspectives and ideas gathered from diverse Americans. They offer introductory essays and materials that assist communities in learning more about the issue.

If you select a national discussion guide, consider localizing it with community-specific information and examples. Check out [this addendum](#) created by the Center for Civic Life at Ashland University and their partners to localize NIFI's [Opioid Epidemic guide](#). Another example is the David Mathews Center for Civic Life's issue guide on [preventing bullying](#) that was created by and for Alabamians. NIFI developed a version of the [same issue guide](#) for a national audience. Other local and regional examples can be found from centers for civic life across the country.

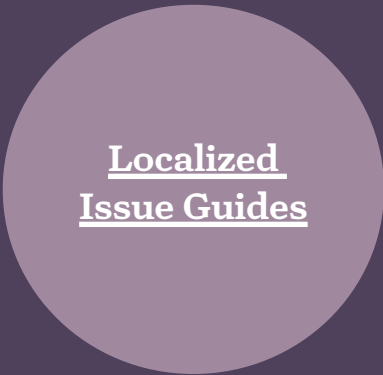


What are the steps for creating a local discussion guide?

If you're interested in framing a local discussion guide, *Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums* by Brad Rourke for the Kettering Foundation is the definitive source and step-by-step overview. According to Rourke, "three key questions drive the development of a framework for public deliberation:

- What concerns you about this issue?
- Given those concerns, what would you do about it?
- If that worked to ease your concern, what are the downsides or tradeoffs you might then have to accept?

More Issue Guides from NIFI



MORE RESOURCES

Click on a resource below to learn more.

1.

"Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums"

From the Kettering Foundation

2.

"A Concise Overview of Framing for Deliberation"

From The Deliberative Voice

3.

"Reframing Framing"

From Public Agenda

4.

"A Guidebook for Issue Framing"

From the West Virginia Center for Civic Life





4.



PREPARE CONVENERS

Conveners are trusted individuals who bring people together.

They serve as hosts and recruiters for deliberative discussions. Small groups of individuals or partner organizations can act as conveners. Think about who you want to participate in the deliberative discussions. Then ask yourself, “Who do those groups and individuals trust in my community?” Make a list. Your list may include trusted nonprofits, informal associations, faith groups, civic clubs, and others. Double check your list to ensure all groups and demographics within the community are represented. If not, keep building your list and ask others for recommendations.

Trust is essential to effective convening. Effective conveners build trust through a track record of working to improve the community and dealing honestly with others. They should demonstrate a willingness to work across differences and should already serve as connectors. Conveners are already working for the betterment of their town and to involve others in the community. They may also already be organizers and catalysts for action.



I have a group of conveners recruited. Now what?

Conveners take on the logistics of setting up and preparing for the deliberative discussions. They identify suitable spaces for the discussion, select dates and times, and then recruit participants to attend. The conveners also begin initial planning for keeping folks connected after the deliberative discussion.

The right place...

When selecting a venue, conveners consider which community spaces are welcoming and accessible. The space should hold the anticipated number of participants comfortably, and the room should allow for folks to sit in a circle or at round tables so participants can hear everyone equally and make eye contact. The room set up should deemphasize the focus on the moderator(s), placing them on an equal level rather than elevating them on a stage.

Consider places where community members already gather—schools, churches, libraries, community centers, etc. These are great spaces for hosting a deliberative discussion as potential participants are likely already familiar with and comfortable within the space. Remember to consider the suitability of the space to the issue at hand and who you hope participates. Ask yourself:

- **Where do people in my community feel comfortable gathering?**
- **Is the space suitable for our discussion? For example, are we asking folks who dropped out or had a bad experience with the education system to gather at a school? Or hosting a discussion about justice right next to a police station?**
- **Have we considered hosting multiple discussions in different venues across the community to increase accessibility for a larger number of community members?**

...and the right time.

After selecting appropriate venues for the discussions, select dates and times. Think through the groups and individuals you hope to engage. Should you consider the local school, city, or sports calendars? If possible, offer weekday and weekend options and daytime and evening time slots to accommodate diverse work and family schedules. Additional logistical questions to consider include:

- **Would providing food help folks attend? Is there a business or group who could sponsor refreshments for the discussion?**
- **If we're hoping to attract parents, might we partner with a group to provide childcare onsite?**
- **How will you help folks stay connected? Have you prepared a sign-in sheet for participants to utilize? What contact information are you hoping to collect?**

What are some effective strategies for recruiting conveners?

Decide how many and what kinds of people you are trying to reach.

Who are the different kinds of people we need to recruit to make it diverse?

Why would people from each of these groups want to participate? Or what would keep them from participating?

Figure out who can reach out to these diverse participants.

Are there groups or individuals on the team who can reach out to different kinds of people? If not, who can help bring them on board? Don't be afraid to tap into the existing social networks of your team members.

Plan outreach strategies.

Use a multi-faceted approach, combining personal invitations and general publicity. Remember, people need to hear the same message at least three times before it begins to register. A personal invitation is the best recruiting strategy. There is no substitute!

Consider outreach tools.

Think about the people you're trying to reach. Do they read the newspaper, or are they more likely to read a church bulletin? Do they listen to the radio? Do they use email?

Use a variety of tools so that people will hear your message several ways.

Give team members recruiting assignments.

Arm them with the advice and tools they need, like talking points, sign-up forms, basic flyers, and contact information for follow-up. Ask them to reach out to people in their networks, workplace, or congregation.

Work hard to recruit the unaffiliated.

Recruit unaffiliated where people socialize, where they work, through their clubs and organizations, and through family networks.

MORE RESOURCES

Click on a resource below to learn more.

1. “Strengthening and Sustaining Public Engagement”

From Public Agenda

2. “Convening Deliberative Forums”

From the National Association of Environmental Educators (NAAEE)

3. “Convening/Moderating Forums at Your Library”

From the American Library Association





5.



EQUIP MODERATORS

What is the role of the moderator in a deliberative discussion?

Before understanding the role of the moderator, it's important to understand the role of the participant in a deliberative discussion. Many community members show up expecting a presentation or three minutes at a microphone, at best. Instead, deliberative discussions prioritize the role of the participant. They are encouraged to share their perspectives, ask questions, listen actively, weigh choices, and hopefully identify next steps for acting.

The role of the moderator is to help make that happen. As a result, the moderator shouldn't be the center of attention. Moderators don't serve as expert presenters and don't do most of the speaking. Instead, they are a resource to help folks engage productively with one another and stay focused on the issue at hand. To do that effectively, moderators are guided by a few core principles.



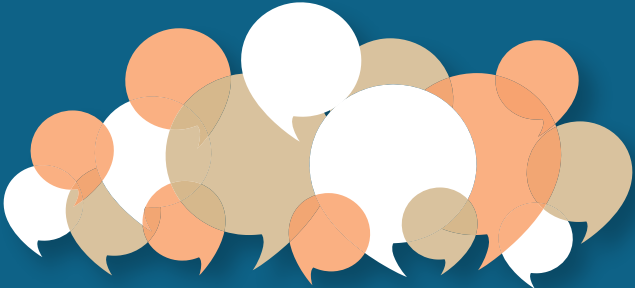
Principles of Moderating

- **Be prepared.**
Effective moderators are familiar with the discussion materials and think ahead of time about the directions in which the discussion might go.
- **Establish guidelines.**
Effective moderators should establish or help the group establish guidelines at the beginning of the discussion.
- **Set a relaxed and open tone.**
Effective moderators welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Humor is always welcome.
- **Remain neutral.**
Avoid expressing your own opinion or evaluating the comments of the participants. Also, try to avoid taking an expert role the issue. Your role is not to teach the participants—even if it is a subject you know well.
- **Stay focused and keep track.**
When comments go astray, bring participants back to the issue at hand. Make sure that each question or option receives equal consideration. Keep track of how group members are participating—who has and hasn’t spoken, what points have and have not been heard. Moderators don’t let anyone dominate and try to involve everyone.
- **Ask thoughtful questions.**
If you’re 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. Make sure that the participants have considered the potential outcome of their comments. Help draw out what people are or aren’t willing to accept.
- **Give it time.**
Effective moderators understand that people need time to reflect and respond. They do not talk after each comment or answer every question, but rather allow participants to respond directly to each other. Effective moderators try to intervene in discussions as little as possible but recognize when intervention is necessary.
- **Encourage everyone to speak.**
Avoid normative statements when encouraging participants to join the conversation. Comments such as “good idea” may make a speaker feel comfortable, but also may cause those who disagree to view the moderator as biased.



Sample Guidelines

- Everyone is encouraged to participate.
- Consider perspectives respectfully.
- Ask questions.
- Listen to one another.
- The moderator remains neutral.



The group has gathered and they’re ready to talk. What comes next?

Start by arranging the room so that participants can look one another in the eye, ideally in a circle or semi-circle. **Then** introduce the purpose of the forum. Highlight that deliberative discussions are different from debate as the goal is not to identify a “winner” or “loser.” Instead, the intention is to explore the issue, learn from one another, weigh choices and tradeoffs, and find common ground.

Begin the discussion by asking participants to introduce themselves and answer a question that helps them connect the issue to their lives or the lives of others. For example, you could ask “How has this issue impacted your life or your community?” After participants connect the issue to their lives and community, the moderator asks intentional questions to spark deliberation. Basic moderator “moves” to encourage deliberation include:

Ask follow up questions.

Ask participants questions to get clarification or to dig deeper. For example, “Why is that important to you?” “What do you think the consequences of that perspective would be?” “Are there any drawbacks to that position?”

Solicit reactions from others.

Ask a question that seeks to have others respond to the last speaker’s comments. For example, “Does anyone have a different view or experience?” Or, “What do other folks think about that idea?”

Ask a transition question.

A transition question may be crucial to moving the conversation forward by refocusing on a key point or reflecting on what has not yet been discussed. For example, “Many argue that one important tradeoff of this approach is x. What are your thoughts on this?”

Paraphrase when necessary.

It can be useful to paraphrase a participant’s comment to summarize a key point or to ensure that the comment has been clearly understand. It is important not to overuse paraphrasing by restating every comment, but can be an important tool for clarification.

The moderator tracks the time throughout to ensure each question or option is given its fair due and that no one participant dominates the discussion. Moderators should also leave time at the end for reflection and next steps. Reflection questions help the group identify common ground and plan for next steps. A single discussion will never solve an issue, so setting aside time at the end to plan future conversations is essential.



Handling Moderator Challenges

Challenges inevitably arise throughout deliberation. Effective moderators can keep the conversation respectful and productive by using some of the following strategies when participants are...



Domineering

When dealing with participants who dominate the discussion:

- Ask “What do others think about this approach?” Or, “Has anyone else here had a similar or different experience?”
- When the dominating participant takes a breath or begins a new train of thought, gently interject, summarize what they’ve said, and ask for responses from other participants. This can show respect for their contributions while also redirecting the question to those who haven’t spoken.

Misinformed

When handling misinformation from a participant, ask:

- Does anyone have a different perspective on that?
- What does that statistic/information mean to you?
- Can you give us a concrete example of that?
- Even if we can’t reach consensus about the data, do we still think this is an important issue to address?
- Remember that your role is not an expert one. You can, however, steer the conversation in a more informed direction.

Difficult

When dealing with a particularly difficult participant:

- Escalate your volume and use body language (move closer to the participant). This is a gentle sign to grab the attention of the participant and redirect the discussion.
- Refer to the guidelines (everyone participates—no one dominates). Reminding everyone of the guidelines is a great strategy for getting the conversation back on track.
- Redirect the conversation by saying “Thank you. What do others think?” Returning to the group is often a great way to mitigate the effects of a difficult or dominating participant.

Emotional

People come first, not the meeting agenda. If someone becomes emotional, stay compassionate and acknowledge what’s happening. Remember to:

- Let them finish what they’re saying. Be calm, make eye contact, and allow them to regain composure. Be ready to make a brief affirmative response (“thank you for sharing,” “I hear you,”).
- Give the discussion back to the group. Make sure what you do next doesn’t invalidate the emotion shared. Consider offering the group a chance to respond: “Before we continue, would anyone like to add to what’s been shared?”

MORE RESOURCES

Click on a resource below to learn more.

1. “Moderating Deliberative Discussions”

This recorded webinar from NIFI is a great starting point for aspiring moderators.

2. “Stages of a Deliberative Discussion”

This resource from NIFI breaks down what happens in each stage of a real deliberative discussion.

3. “Asking Intentional Questions for Deliberation”

Knowing the right question to ask at the right time can be tough, but it’s essential to great moderating. This resource is vital for asking questions that spark thoughtful deliberation.

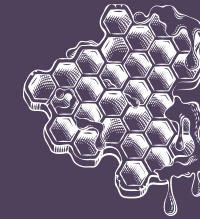
4. “Taking the Conversation Virtual”

In-person deliberation is preferred, but not always possible. So, how can you get the most out of a virtual conversation? This resource can help you do exactly that.





6.



HOST DISCUSSIONS

Your hard work and preparation has been leading up to this.

The team of conveners has identified suitable spaces to meet and recruited diverse groups of participants. Now what? How do we work to ensure the deliberative discussions are, in fact, deliberative? And how can we host the discussions in a way that encourages folks to do more than talk—to work together to improve our community? During the discussions, three individuals play an important role in preparing the group to act together following the discussions: the moderator, the notetaker, and the convener.

The moderator asks questions that get the group thinking and talking about action and next steps. The notetaker documents the major themes, common ground, action ideas, and next steps during the discussion. Following the discussion, the notes should be shared with all participants and used as a reference document for next steps and future discussions.

The convener has one of the most important roles for preparing the group to act together following the discussions: they keep people connected and involved and assist the team in planning next steps. Conveners collect contact information and keep participants connected following the discussion through emails, phone calls, or personal interactions. They may start by sharing the notes and following up with an email or phone call thanking participants for attending the discussion. They should also share dates for future discussions or any upcoming action summits with participants and help encourage their continued participation.

Is there a checklist I can use?

Yes! The following checklist will help make sure the team and venue are ready for the deliberative discussion.

- How will we ensure everyone feels welcome? Will there be greeters at the door to welcome everyone and communicate what to do when participants arrive?
- Is the space set up to encourage deliberation? Will participants sit in a circle or at round tables?
- What is our plan for capturing the themes and ideas shared? Have we posted flip charts or created a Word document to project? Who will write or type notes?
- If we're providing food and/or childcare, have we communicated all logistics with the caterers and the childcare providers?
- Are our moderators ready to facilitate the discussion? Do we have enough discussion guides for every participant? Are there any additional documents or information sheets we plan to provide?
- Is our event accessible to all? Have we secured interpretation services, if needed?
- Who will set the tone for a productive, civil discussion? Will the convener or conveners provide a welcome or will the moderator introduce the purpose?
- How will we stay connected with folks after the discussion? Email? Phone calls? Are we collecting the information we need on our sign-in sheet?
- If we're distributing a post-form questionnaire or survey, have those been printed? Who will print them and bring enough pens?



What does an effective deliberative discussion look like?

There is no one right way to host a deliberative discussion. However, the following chart provides an overview of key elements of a deliberative discussion. Each segment of the discussion should be designed to promote continued learning, engagement among participants, and, of course, deliberation.

Segment	What Happens?	Question Answered
Welcome	The convener or moderator introduces the discussion.	Why are we here?
Guidelines	Participants review desired outcomes and set a tone for civil conversation.	How will we interact with each other?
Starter Activity	Engage in shared learning on the issue by reviewing data, a starter video, etc.	What do we need to learn together before deliberating?
Personal Connection	Participants introduce themselves and share their personal experiences with the issue.	What makes this issue real for us and our community?
Deliberation	Participants work through the options or questions in the discussion guide to weigh choices.	What should we do to address this issue?
Reflection	During the reflection, the group moves from “my” voice to “our” voice. The group identifies common ground /next steps.	Where do we go from here?

The reality is that not everyone who participates in a deliberative discussion will be willing or able to contribute to follow-up actions. However, conveners should pay close attention to who expresses interest in being a part of future discussions and action. And conveners should ensure they are given the opportunity to be a part of the action teams that form.

MORE RESOURCES

Click on a resource below to learn more.

1. “Checklist for In-Person Forums”

From the Deliberative Voice
2. “Taking the Conversation Virtual”

From Public Agenda
3. “Deliberation in the Classroom”

From the Mathews Center



7.



PLAN FOR ACTING

We've finished our deliberative discussions. What's next?

Deliberative discussions can serve as the first step in laying a foundation for people to act together to improve their community. The discussions help citizens better understand the complexity of community problems. This deeper understanding and an appreciation for the emotions and values that are in tension when facing tough choices is necessary to build common ground to address the issue or problem. These insights can serve as the basis for community action planning processes that can effect significant change.

Ideally, your deliberative discussions highlighted themes, raised potential options for action, as well as accompanying tradeoffs, and identified common ground for acting together that will inform your action planning. Begin by gathering the team together, including all moderators and conveners. Review the notes from each discussion together and highlight themes, concerns, and ideas most often mentioned. Ask conveners and moderators to share their reflections on the discussions.



Reflection Questions to Consider:

- What words or phrases came up repeatedly?
- Were there any turning points where the conversation shifted, or participants had an “aha” moment? What connections, if any, were made during the discussion?
- Which parts of the discussion created the most energy or enthusiasm?
- Where was there still disagreement at the end of the discussion? Where did the greatest tension lie? What tradeoffs were participants willing & unwilling to accept?
- What did participants identify as their next steps? Did any action ideas emerge? If so, which action ideas received the most support?

After reflecting together, compile a list of the major themes, the key tensions, and what still needs to be discussed. Then write out the action ideas that emerged and received the most support. Ensure the action ideas include multiple actors. For example, list out actions that citizens, community organizations, and informal associations can take as well as what government and institutions can accomplish.

How do we effectively reconvene community members and move forward?

The big question then is how to enact the common ground and move to action. To do so, reconvene discussion participants to plan for acting. The reconvening can be several meetings or a large action summit to bring participants from all discussions together. The design of the action meetings or summit should be decided by your team based on what emerged during the discussion series.

Everyday Democracy has several resources and recommendations for effective dialogue to action change processes. They recommend a process of identifying the community’s assets, brainstorming action ideas, connecting action ideas to assets, and finally setting priorities for acting together. Everyday Democracy even provides an action summit planning document and sample agenda. Both documents overview effective questions and ideas adaptable to many communities and issues.



As action ideas emerge, remember the simple acronym IDEAS to frame questions and keep the conversation focused:

- I**ssue — Will the action address the key concerns of the group?
- D**oable — Is the action practical?
- E**ffective — Will the action create a desirable change?
- A**ssets — Are resources available to help implement the action?
- S**ituation — Does the action make sense in our community?

*We have our action ideas.
Who will do the work?*

As part of your action summit agenda, include plenty of time to create action teams to drive each idea forward. Ensure sustainability by asking each team to select a leader or leaders to keep the group on track. Before the summit ends, ask action teams to identify at least one concrete next step, a recruitment strategy for growing their team (if needed), and their next meeting date.

The action teams will evolve, grow, and change as they begin working together. Consider monthly updates and regular meetings, perhaps quarterly, to keep action teams connected and collaborating if appropriate. Finally, begin working together and continue learning alongside one another!

MORE RESOURCES

Click on a resource below to learn more.

- 1. “Setting Priorities for Action”**
From Everyday Democracy
- 2. “Effective Public Engagement Processes”**
Adapted from Everyday Democracy
- 3. “Action Summit Examples”**
From West Virginia
- 4. “Cradle to Career: Action Summit”**
From the David Mathews Center for Civic Life





8.



CONTINUE LEARNING

Time to reflect on the process and gather wisdom for the future.

As your community begins acting to address the issue deliberated on during the discussion series, reflect on what you learned together: about the issue, about your community, and about each other. The discussion series likely included “successes” and “failures.” Reflect on and capture both. Evaluate what participants learned and how they’re thinking differently. And then keep the conversation and learning going.

The lessons learned and connections made will, hopefully, inform how your community talks about community problems, engages with one another, and acts together to address future issues. Communities that engage in continued learning and conversation are less likely to forget the lessons learned and return to “politics as usual” when a new issue arises. May this be the start of “a new kind of talk and a new way to act” for your community.

To continue learning, capture and share public thinking around the issue, evaluate the discussion series and its impact, and find additional ways to keep the conversation going.



Why and how should we capture and share public thinking?

Convening and moderating deliberative discussions are important steps in supporting an engaged public, but much of the value could be lost unless the insights revealed in the discussions are captured and reported back to the participants, the community, and appropriate organizations and officials.

Capturing and sharing public thinking, usually through a report or reporting-out event, holds the discussion organizing team accountable to the discussion participants by sharing with them a summary of their deliberations. It also engages people who did not attend the discussions to join in ongoing dialogue about the issue. Furthermore, it informs policymakers about how the public views the issue and the tradeoffs they are and are not willing to accept. Finally, it illustrates the nature and benefits of deliberative dialogue as a way for people to work together on a wide variety of public problems in their communities.

A useful report, or reporting-out event, will:

- **Represent the diverse perspectives that people bring to the issue in a fair and respectful way.**
- **Describe shifts in people's thinking as they talk with one another.**
- **Examine what people think should be done about the issue as they consciously recognize the difficulties and trade-offs in all approaches.**
- **Summarize any shared sense of direction, as well as areas of disagreement.**

Reports on discussion series from the [National Issues Forums Institute](#), the [West Virginia Center for Civic Life](#), and the [David Mathews Center for Civic Life](#) provide useful examples. “[Capturing Public Thinking: Authentic Reporting on Public Forums](#)” by Julie Pratt and the West Virginia Center for Civic Life gives an overview of what to include and how to craft a report on a deliberative discussion series.

Are there resources for evaluating the impact of deliberation?

Absolutely! But first, why evaluate? Evaluation helps determine whether deliberative practices advance the goals of discussion organizers (and funding organizations, if applicable). Additionally, evaluations can demonstrate that deliberative practices contribute to social change and can furnish evidence of impact or effectiveness. Evaluations enhance the legitimacy of the deliberative process and enable continuous improvement of deliberative practices. However, as a cautionary note, evaluation can yield the above desirable outcomes but can also alienate participants if they feel studied.

Evaluation methods and adaptable tools that may help you plan and design assessments include:

Several examples of evaluation methods and adaptable tools may help you plan and design the assessments that are right for your community. Helpful resources include:

- [Post-Forum Questionnaires from National Issues Forums Institute](#)
- [A Field Guide to Ripple Effects Mapping from University of Minnesota Libraries](#)
- [Engagement Scorecard from the National Conference on Citizenship \(NCoC\)](#)
- [A Manager's Guide to Evaluating Citizen Participation by Tina Nabatchi](#)
- [Assessing Public Engagement Effectiveness from the Institute for Local Government](#)
- [The Civic Index from the National Civic League](#)

What are some strategies for keeping the conversation going?

First, while your community moves forward with acting together, keep action teams connected through regular updates and occasional meetings. During meetings, ask reflective questions that help the group continue the conversation and learning. For example, “What do we know now that we didn’t when we began?” or “What new connections and opportunities have we discovered through this process?”

Second, following the conclusion of the discussion series, keep track of the issues and challenges identified by participants as areas warranting further discussion. Consider planning and hosting future discussion series around those issues. If your team has enough on their plate with follow-through from the first discussion series, consider asking other partners in town to take on the challenge of the additional issues community members are interested in deliberating through. Utilize the lessons from the first series to plan the next!

MORE RESOURCES

Click on a resource below to learn more.

1. Together: Building Better, Stronger Communities

By Dr. David Mathews

2. Evaluation Resources

From Deliberative Dialogue Practitioners

3. Assessment Tools

From the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation



START TO FINISH

Trace one community's deliberative journey from talk to action.

The College Drive Deliberative Initiative Clay County, Florida

College Drive is a 2.5-mile road in the geographical center of Clay County, Florida. St John's River State College, the Thrasher Performing Arts Center, several nonprofit organizations providing support for homeless persons, free health and dental care, support for adolescent women, and serving other purposes are located on the road. Commercial businesses and residential neighborhoods are also located along College Drive.

Neighborhood leaders sought a way to renovate the drive in order to maximize its economic potential and better serve the community. Connie Thomas, former Mayor of Orange Park and Mike Cella, Clay County Commissioner, sought assistance with community engagement and deliberative dialogues throughout the process.

This final section will provide an overview of the deliberative process used by the citizens of Clay County to create a redevelopment plan for College Drive that incorporated the concerns and hopes of the community.

2021

April - June



Capturing Community Views: The Future of College Drive in Clay County

Organizers used a concern-gathering tool to interview and survey the community and began naming and framing an issue guide thereafter. Small groups drafted issue guide options with actions and drawbacks. The community was asked:

- What concerns do you have about College Drive?
- Five years from now, what would you like to see?
- What are the most difficult barriers or choices we face to improve College Drive?

July - September

Deliberative Dialogue was introduced to Clay County citizens, businesspeople, nonprofit leaders, county commissioners and county staff members. Representatives of each group helped name and frame the College Drive issue, create an issue guide, and promote forums. The issue guide was tested using a trial forum and a survey listing potential actions. Subsequently, in-person and online forums were held.



Elected leaders recognized the unique and effective way in which deliberation brought people together for constructive dialogue and choice work. One year beyond the forums, efforts to implement the outcomes and progress are being made.



October - December



Following the final October forums, a report was prepared. Eight requests were submitted and approved by the Clay County Board of Commissioners. CCBC subsequently presented a resolution to the College Drive Initiative recognizing citizen engagement.



2022

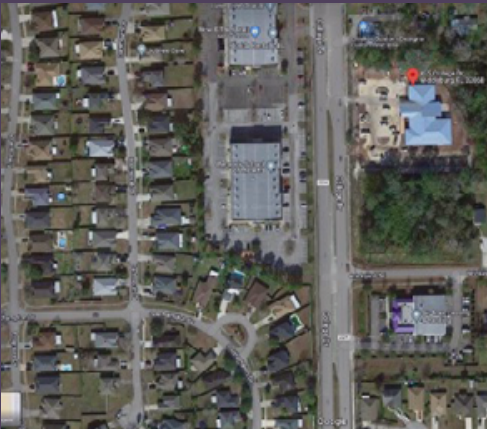
January - March

The County Manager assigned working groups of county staff members to which CDI members were invited. Project implementations commenced.

The first of five Friday Food Truck Nights was held at the Thrasher Horne Performing Arts Center on the St. John’s River State College campus.



April - June



Project groups worked on branding and PR for College Drive, connecting a college road to make a four-way intersection, creating a small community park, improving pedestrian paths and crosswalks, and landscaping medians on the four-lane road. Two more Food Truck Nights attracted over 350.



July - September

CDI and County staff met with the Urban Land Institute to explore a master plan consulting process.

CDI soon secured a Lowes Neighborhood Improvement Grant designed for two College Drive improvement projects in 2022 and 2023.



October - December



The final two Food Truck Nights were successful with football and Halloween themes on consecutive months.

On Nov. 4, Lowes supplied trees, plantings, and fencing and employees from four stores worked with citizens to create a small community park.



2023

The College Drive Initiative is now integrated into Impact Clay, a nonprofit that brings together four community sectors – private/business, nonprofit, public/government, and faith-based – to address community challenges.

Work continues to make College Drive a destination as well as a helping highway.





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