
DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE LEADERS

PARTICIPANT'S PACKET

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PUBLIC DELIBERATION



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Introduction and Background

Citizens can create a strong community through communication on issues. Taking a stand by developing working partnerships among citizens and supporting community issues improves the quality of life and economy in your community. This handout includes exercises and helpful information to help you improve your community for your family and friends. “Citizen Engagement through Public Deliberation” is one of several Leadership Development modules developed to help citizens better their communities.

Making choices about how to deal with community issues is difficult. Different people favor different approaches, and these approaches may contradict one another. The common problems communities face are best understood and addressed by the citizens themselves through deliberation. “Public deliberation” evaluates the consequences of various options. By understanding the views of others and finding a shared sense of direction, citizens can develop a common ground for action. This module will introduce the concept of public deliberation and give ideas on how you and your organization can become involved.

No other country knows democracy like America. As a country, we have had a democratic government for more than 200 years. Democracy allows all citizens to take part in decisions. It is a form of government where everyone’s opinion counts. The challenge is how to collect and organize those opinions into usable information.

Over time things have changed in our country. You may hear stories of angry or frustrated citizens who feel they have little power to influence important decisions affecting their lives. Politicians and media spokespersons often reassure themselves by characterizing citizen frustration as intolerance, ignorance, or even apathy. Instead these individuals need to look deeper at the public’s desire to express their views on community issues and the public’s need to believe they have a way to do so.

Why do citizens feel frustration? A range of reasons can be:

- Negative campaigning.
- Erosion of family and community values.
- The power of special interest groups.
- Government's inability to deal with the real problems of real people.
- Government bureaucracy and lack of touch with the people.

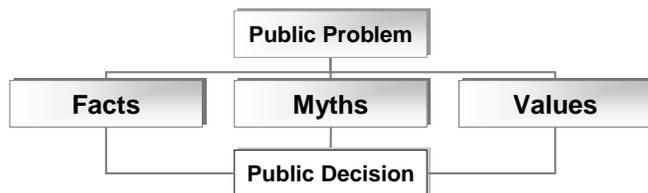
The aim of public deliberation is to give citizens a way to be involved in democracy and to let their voices be heard by those in public office.

Objectives

By engaging in this module, participants will:

- Increase their knowledge of public deliberation and how it can be used to engage citizens in public decision making.
- Become actively involved in fostering public deliberation as a means of resolving challenging public problems.

The Public Decision-Making Process



The ways citizens make their decisions about public issues vary. Some individuals may base their opinions on facts, while others base their opinions on myths that they think are facts. People are also influenced by their values. As a community leader, it's important that you sharpen your skills at separating facts, myths, and value judgments.

A **fact** is a verifiable statement of what is. For example, last year 17 people died in automobile accidents in Smith County. None of these victims was wearing a seatbelt. Evidence generally accepted by the scientific community is another way of describing facts.

A **myth** is what people think is fact. People believe a myth is true, but in actuality, it is inaccurate, incomplete, or false. Example: “Seatbelts cause more deaths than they prevent.”

Values are standards of desirability or strong beliefs of what should be. They’re often stated in terms of good or bad, beautiful or ugly, or in opposite terms that scientific methods cannot prove right or wrong. One person’s ugly is another person’s work of art, and there is no objective way to choose between them.

One major challenge to community leaders is to establish facts and discredit myths in the public decision-making process. A second challenge is to create a safe environment that recognizes and respects that people bring a variety of values to the decision-making process that help shape the public will.

Activity: The Case of the Ugli Orange

The Instructor will give handouts and instructions for this activity.

Addressing Public Issues

For democracy to function, citizens must accept responsibility in making decisions to solve societal problems. The government alone cannot solve all issues. Citizens' views often differ from those of officeholders. Many ways exist in our society to gather, express, and observe the public opinion on a particular issue, including polling, demonstration, debate, and letters to the editor. Democracy works best when citizens come together to solve public problems.

Coming Together as a Community

We can easily find stories of American citizens coming together to discuss challenges in their communities. Here's an example.

Birmingham, Alabama recently addressed a youth-at-risk dilemma. In this case, many students were expelled from school and some roamed the streets with nothing to do. A team of school officials, parents, and students convened forums all over the city to discuss the problem and possible solutions.

Forum moderators encouraged participants of all ages to carefully weigh a variety of approaches to deal with the problem. The goal was to create some common ground for action or some consensus and direction towards a solution.

Some forum participants decided on a direction leading to a program called CARES, run by young people at eight high schools. Three hundred and fifty young people began serving on advisory councils with weekly meetings. Other programs that grew out of the forums include a teen employment program and a youth-run camp for low-income youngsters. Ultimately, the number of students expelled from school greatly decreased, and students had a voice in their school and community.

The greatest success of this effort is that it gave young people a chance to learn how to make difficult decisions together. School officials and parents now have a better understanding of what young people think and how to help them solve their problems. The participant's involvement provided beneficial solutions.

The approach used to address the youth-at-risk problem is called **public deliberation**. Now, let's learn more about public deliberation and how you might become involved.

Public Deliberation

Public deliberation is a method members of a community can use to come together to make tough choices about the basic purpose and direction for their communities and their country. More specifically, public deliberation is a way for people to reason and talk about a chosen issue in a secure environment that respects the perspectives and values of others. It is neither a partisan argument where opposing sides try to win, nor a casual conversation conducted with polite civility.

In most cases, people deliberate in what is called a “deliberative forum” or “study circle” where they gather in a group to discuss a selected issue and weigh alternatives for solving the problem. In a deliberative forum, participants consider the costs, consequences, and benefits of alternative solutions to a public problem. Deliberative forums require people to weigh the views of others, learn about the concerns others have, and share knowledge and perspectives. After conducting a forum, the participants can then organize to act on their decisions. Public deliberation provides a means for finding common ground and securing commitment to work together.

Deliberation may reveal new possibilities for action that neither citizens nor officeholders saw before. The ultimate goal of these processes is to help participants move toward shared, stable, well-informed public judgments, based on what is valuable to them about important issues. Through deliberation, participants move from making individual choices to making choices as a public.

Public Deliberative Forums

Public deliberation centers around a public problem, NOT a particular solution a group is trying to advance. The problem must be complex and without easy answers. There must also be time for deliberation, so the problem cannot be an emergency. The more diverse the participants in the forum, the better the group will be able to view multiple perspectives on the issue.

During a deliberative forum, about 15 - 20 participants sit in a circle and discuss a public issue using an **issue book** to guide the discussion while a trained **moderator and recorder** facilitates the forum. Forums generally last around 2 - 2½ hours.

Issue Books

Deliberative forums utilize a structured dialogue, usually in the form of an issue book, that offers 3 to 4 policy approaches to a challenging public problem. Participants use the issue book to learn about the issue and then discuss the costs and alternatives it contains. These issue books are available, sometimes for free, from various organizations interested in forwarding public deliberation (discussed later in this packet). Just a few topics include:

- Social Security
- Immigration
- Police Relations
- Education Reform
- Urban Sprawl
- Building Strong Neighborhoods
- Racial Tensions
- Crime and Justice
- Economic Issues

Moderators and Recorders

Deliberative forums are conducted by trained moderators and recorders. Each year, more than 30 Public Policy Institutes (PPIs) are held at institutions all across the country to train moderators and recorders to help organizations hold deliberative forums. In Oklahoma, the PPI is called the Oklahoma Moderators and Recorders Academy (more on the OMRA later in this packet).

There are currently more than 200 trained moderators and recorders in the state of Oklahoma. To find someone in your area, visit www.OKdeliberates.org, and click on Moderators and Recorders.

After the Forum

After the forum, moderators from multiple forums report the results to national public deliberation organizations who prepare national reports. For example, the National Issues Forums Institute produces “A Public Voice,” a PBS special, and may present the report to the National Press Club or even Congress.

Locally, forum outcomes are compiled and shared with the community and officeholders via public community meetings, news releases, and/or printed materials. The public and officeholders can then take action on the issue.

Studies of Public Deliberation

In 1927, the Kettering Foundation was founded with a mission to learn how to strengthen the effectiveness of democracy. Since the 1980s, the Kettering Foundation has been studying public deliberation. Numerous studies conducted with a variety of research methods found that public deliberation makes a difference in communities.

Here are some of the highlights of these studies:

- Deliberative forum participants come from every part of society. Virtually everyone is capable of deliberating about important public issues. Educational level, for example, is not a barrier.
- Forum participants reconsider their own opinions and judgments.
- Participants approach issues more realistically and are willing to consider costs, consequences, and trade-offs associated with various possible policy directions or approaches.

Studies also indicate that:

- Forum participants reconsider the views of others and develop a greater understanding of those viewpoints.
- People who participate define their self-interests more broadly.
- Deliberation leads many to feel a greater sense of confidence in what they can do politically. That is, people become more inclined to see themselves as political activists capable of making a difference.
- Participants become more interested in political and social issues.

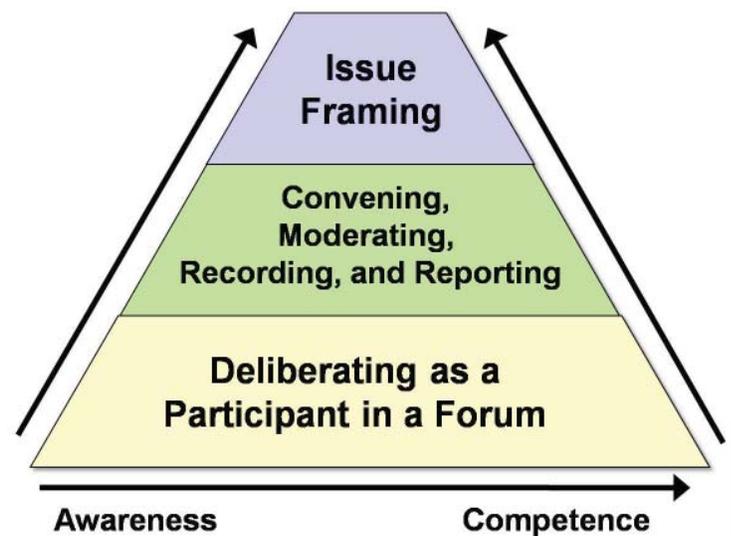
Deliberation in a community has been shown to enhance communication and help people to make decisions about public issues.

Developing a Habit of Public Deliberation in Communities

For a community to develop public deliberation, it needs people who have the skills and knowledge of the process to guide forums and report on results. To engage citizens in public decision making through public deliberation, it is useful to think in terms of three skill levels of public deliberation:

1. The participant who deliberates in public forums.
2. The trained “Moderator and Recorder” who convenes, moderates, records, and/or reports on the forum.
3. The expert, who participates in “issue framing” or creating an issue book to use during deliberative forums.

It may help to picture these skills on a continuum (See the pyramid chart). Being skilled at **deliberating in public forums** is basic and is the goal of many states, communities, and organizations looking to have a substantial number of individuals with this skill set. The next essential skill level is that of **convening, moderating, recording, and reporting** deliberative forums and a smaller number of people would aspire to this skill set. Finally, **framing issues** for deliberative forums is the culminating skill set.



Deliberating as a Participant in a Forum

This skill set involves learning how to deliberate with other citizens in a public forum on challenging public issues using a framed issue book and starter video from the National Issues Forums.

In becoming familiar with the public deliberation process, people learn to:

- Listen to other perspectives in a respectful, attentive way.
- Reflect on what others say and consider how that may impact one’s own perspective.
- Consider various possible public policy approaches and actions to address a given issue.
- Identify facts, feelings, values and tensions.
- Identify the benefits and costs of various alternatives.
- Weigh choices and identify trade-offs.
- Determine common ground for action.
- Determine what they can do as a group or as individuals to resolve the problem.

Convening, Moderating, Recording, and Reporting Deliberative Forums

This skill set involves learning how to conduct effective deliberative forums and report the outcomes of those forums.

Those with this skill set can:

- Organize local steering committees from various segments of the community.
- Build commitment within the community to convene and support public deliberation.
- Use various moderating techniques effectively in forums to foster deliberation.
- Use probing/questioning, paraphrasing, neutrality, encouraging, etc.
- Record forums using techniques identifying feelings, values, tensions, trade-offs, common ground, next steps, etc.
- Report forum outcomes to the public, decision makers, and office holders.

Framing Issues for Deliberation

This skill set involves learning to frame issues for deliberation in public forums. After learning this skill set, people will be able to:

- Recognize which issues/problems are good candidates for framing and deliberation.
- Implement the process of issue framing.
- Identify the problem or issue.
- Gather information, with focus groups, surveys, and interviews, to determine how people think and talk about the issue.
- Identify concerns and look for themes within those concerns; cluster according to themes.
- Identify 3-4 possible policy directions and various actions that could be undertaken in each.
- Pilot test the framing in public forums.
- Write an issue book.

To learn each set of skills, a person begins with developing an awareness of the skill and its purpose. Through practice and experience individuals move toward competence and a high level of expertise.

National Organizations Supporting Public Deliberation

In the 1980s, the Kettering Foundation developed the **National Issues Forums Institute** (NIF) to foster public deliberation. The primary focus was to get citizens engaged in shaping the destiny of their communities, states, and country. NIF is a non-partisan, nationwide network of locally sponsored deliberative forums for the consideration of public policy issues. In other words, local organizations sponsor forums with the guidance and assistance of the NIF.

Forums are organized by civic, service, and religious organizations as well as by libraries, colleges, high schools, literacy and leadership programs, prisons, businesses, labor unions, and senior groups. The network of convening institutions is large and diverse. Each year, NIF publishes issue books and reports on deliberative forums. For a complete listing of issue books available visit the National Issues Forums Institute Website, www.nifi.org.

Like the NIF, **Everyday Democracy** (formerly the Study Circles Resource Center) is dedicated to finding ways for all kinds of people to engage in dialogue and problem solving on critical social and political issues. Everyday Democracy helps communities by giving them the tools to organize productive dialogue, recruit diverse participants, find solutions, and work for action and change.

The Topsfield Foundation created the Study Circles Resource Center in 1989, and in 2008, the name was changed to Everyday Democracy to reflect the organization's ultimate goal: communities that work better for everyone, every day. In addition, many colleges and high schools are organizing study circles to engage young people in dialogue and problem solving.

Like NIF, Everyday Democracy puts out issue books to guide study circles. For more information about study circles and a complete list of issue guides, visit www.everyday-democracy.org.

Oklahoma Partnership for Public Deliberation

The Oklahoma Partnership for Public Deliberation (OPPD) is a statewide partnership developed to encourage a habit of public deliberation in Oklahoma and promote the mission of the National Issues Forums project in Oklahoma. Each organization within the partnership identifies a representative to the OPPD. Currently, the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service coordinates the partnership. Several cities and states have similar organizations.

Mission and Vision

The mission of the OPPD is to foster participation in reasoned and informed decision making for the public good. The vision is that Oklahoma embrace a culture of public deliberation.

To achieve this mission, the OPPD uses these three strategies.

1. The Oklahoma Moderators and Recordors Academy (OMRA) - The purpose of the OMRA is to teach people to conduct issues forums at the local level using NIF materials. OMRA participants learn to:
 - Convene and promote a forum or forums.
 - Moderate and record local forums for the purpose of coming to common ground and identifying possible individual and public actions on an issue.
 - Organize a local network to support public deliberation.
 - Use NIF materials.
 - Report citizen perspectives expressed at local deliberative forums to local, state, and national decision-makers.
 - Appreciate the importance of deliberation in identifying the public's perspective on public policy issues.
2. Local issue forums - OMRA participants return to their communities to organize and work with local steering committees to plan and conduct local issues forums.
3. The Framing Issues for Deliberation Workshop provides the framing of local, regional, and Oklahoma issues for deliberation in local public forums.

OPPD Partner Organizations

At any given time the OPPD has about 15-20 partner organizations actively involved in the work of the partnership. Partners include organizations, such as:

- Colleges and Universities
- Government agencies
- Professional associations
- Civil rights/civil liberties organizations
- Civic organizations
- Faith-based and Youth organizations

Contact the authors of this module or visit the OPPD online at www.OKDeliberates.org for more information on conducting deliberative forums. If you live outside Oklahoma, also check with your state's Cooperative Extension Service, or contact National Issues Forums at 1-800-433-7834 or www.nifi.org.

How to Get Involved

1. Go to www.nifi.org or www.everyday-democracy.org and review topics that are of interest to you and represent an issue in your community.
2. Recommend that one or more topics be featured at a deliberative forum hosted by your community leadership group.
3. Oklahomans may obtain a list of moderators and recorders in their area by visiting www.OKDeliberates.org. Outside of Oklahoma, contact NIF or Study Circles for assistance with ordering materials and organizing your forum.
4. Conduct the forum and report the results to people and leaders in your community.
5. Become a moderator or recorder by attending a training. For a list of trainings:
 - A. Visit www.nifi.org,
 - B. On the homepage, click on "Calendar,"
 - C. On the "Calendar" page, scroll down to "Workshops."

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed that is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

Few of us will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.

Robert F. Kennedy

1. Overall, how would you rate this module?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
I learned something new	1	2	3	4	5
I learned something I can use	1	2	3	4	5
Materials were clear	1	2	3	4	5
The module met my needs	1	2	3	4	5

2. What did you get from the module? (Check any that apply)

- Answers to questions Insight and support from others
 Resource materials Other (specify) _____
 Help in decision making _____

3. As a result of this module, I

	Not At All	Slight Extent	Fair Extent	Great Extent
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A. View public deliberation as an opportunity for community involvement and public policy engagement.	1	2	3	4
B. Understand that public forums are made up of a variety of issues and people.	1	2	3	4
C. Have a better understanding how to become involved in public deliberative forums.	1	2	3	4
D. Appreciate that public deliberation allows individuals to come together so resolutions may be reached by finding a common ground for action.	1	2	3	4
E. Have a better understanding of the variety of roles one can perform when getting involved in public deliberation.	1	2	3	4
F. Have a better understanding of how my participation in deliberation is imperative to my community.	1	2	3	4
G. Learned techniques for facilitating citizen involvement in addressing issues.	1	2	3	4

4. As a result of this module, I plan to become actively involved in public deliberation. (circle)

Definitely Not Probably Not Undecided Probably Will Definitely

Please Explain:

5. Further needs or comments: (on back)