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# “All of Politics”

By David Mathews

There are certain things that no democratic government-federal, state, or local-can do. Governments can't define their own purposes, set the standards by which they operate, or chart the basic directions they are to follow. Governments lack authority to create their own citizens and the power to supply the public motivation needed for political action.

These tasks are the non-delegable responsibilities of the public. We can delegate to governments all kinds of responsibilities - national defense, monetary policy, the maintenance of roads - but we cannot delegate to governments the decisions we must make about purpose and direction. There is, in the broadest sense, political work to be done before governing-electing officials, passing laws-can be effective. Even today, with governmental politics heavily influenced by the adversarial transactions of powerful interest groups, the public still has the same essential work to do.

The National Issues Forums were designed for the public to use in doing those things that the public alone can do-and must do-for democratic government to work.

Who is the public? It's a body of people who are connected by their efforts to create a good life in the places where they live. Their shared purposes call for joint action on matters affecting their common welfare.

The work the public has to do can be divided into three categories: 1) the work of establishing purpose, setting standards, and choosing directions, 2) the work of generating the will to act and the energy to sustain action, 3) the work of transforming private individuals into public citizens.

To begin with, if purposes are going to be established, choices are necessary. Making choices is the basic work of the public. This requires that we understand the motivations that underlie the choices open to us. What makes political choice difficult is the pull and tug that competing motivations have on us when we are confronted with a political issue. We not only face choices as a public, but also as individuals. That makes choosing hard.

In politics it is *common* ground that is essential. Governments require a foundation of common ground. Creating common ground requires recognizing, preserving, and even building on our differences, not just tolerating them.

Common ground often has to be *created*. The ground isn't very common if 51 percent of the community likes it but 49 percent doesn't. We are prone to forget that decision by majority vote is not democracy's first resort; it is the last resort. There has to be a more creative integration of people's motivations to create new interests that did not exist before. The ability to integrate a variety of different interests, to transform them into shareable interests, is the ability to have a stronger and more inclusive sense of what is common than any conceivable aggregating of particular interests.

Choosing and eventually acting together obviously require citizens who have the commitment and skill to do the work of the public. Citizens are not born, but are created by other citizens who engage them

in the difficult work of doing the public's business. The experience of acting like a citizen makes a citizen.

For people to be effective citizens they have to have a sense of their own competence, their own powers. Those powers begin in the most fundamental of all political instruments: our voices. What we say, how we say it, and to whom we say it have powerful effects on others. People have to experience and understand their voices as political instruments. That's where a sense of political self-efficacy begins.

For citizenship to develop there must be places and occasions for people to join their voices. Citizens have to be able to say more than what they want individually - they have to be able to describe what they have decided is in their common interest. They have to be able to speak with a public voice. Make no mistake-making tough choices and generating a public voice is hard work. Citizens have to create forums where this kind of work can be done and where, by doing it, they can learn the skills of citizenship.

When citizens are at work they are putting the public back into politics. They are carving out a place for themselves in a political system that often seems beyond their control. They are recapturing the real meaning of democratic politics.

Why does "politics-as-usual"-that is, the way we practice politics in our communities and society today-fail to make better progress in solving the problems that trouble us most? Why are we so fragmented politically? Why is political debate so hostile and unproductive? Why do people feel shut out of the decision-making process? Why do we have such difficulty agreeing on effective policies? Why do interest groups dominate the policy making process? Why do candidates for office rely on opinion polls and marketing consultants more than they rely on discussions with voters? Why are people repeatedly disappointed with the decisions their elected representatives make?

There is no simple but complete answer to these questions. But we can make a start by realizing that the fundamental problem could be the way we think of and practice politics itself. Even more fundamentally, the problem may be the way we think of *ourselves*.

To some extent, each of us inevitably has a distinctive perspective on life and the events that occur in the world around us. We are, after all, individuals. In America, however, we tend to think of ourselves almost exclusively as individuals, rather than as citizens - as members of the public. Because we're so accustomed to thinking of ourselves in this way, it's often hard to imagine, let alone adopt, a perspective that encompasses each of our individual outlooks. In other words, it's difficult to see things from a *public* point of view.

The tendency to let our individual views overshadow the need we have for a public perspective makes politics more like a competition for private advantage than a collaborative effort to build a way of life that's good for everyone. Because we think of the public as a loose collection of individuals and groups, it's hard to see the public good as anything other than simply what most individuals or groups want. This is why we try to resolve conflicts over policy by majority rule.

Majority rule works fine in many situations. For a growing number of issues, however, it generates a lot of dissatisfaction-especially for those who aren't in the majority. In these instances, politics as usual aggravates the normal differences that exist between us. It sets us against each other, fragmenting the public to which we all belong, and leading us to pursue our private interests to the exclusion of the public interest. The result is constant, unproductive, and hurtful conflict.

Is there a better way to conduct politics? There is Public Deliberation to help us regain control over decisions concerning problems that affect us all by enabling us to overcome the fragmentation that characterizes our public life.

In other words, Public Deliberation helps us think and act together, not just as individuals or members of a group, but as citizens, as members of *the public*. To achieve this, Public Deliberation encourages us to form a *public perspective* on the problems we face and the choices open to us. Then, on the basis of this perspective, we can deliberate and reach a *public judgment* about what we, as a public, should do.

# Applications of Public Deliberation in Oklahoma: Twelve Personal Experiences

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# Applications of Public Deliberation in Oklahoma: Twelve Personal Experiences

## Background:

After the Oklahoma Partnership for Public Deliberation (OPPD) conducted Public Policy Institutes for a few years, the OPPD wanted to examine the impact of these workshops. A study was conducted in several phases to determine how people who attended Public Policy Institutes (now called Oklahoma Moderator and Recorder Academies) were using deliberative concepts in their lives. The studies revealed that participants used the concepts of public deliberation in a variety of settings, including: university classes, high school social studies programs, community meetings and neighborhood forums. The majority of interviewed participants said that common ground was found during the public dialogue. In addition, sixteen participants reported that they had an interesting anecdotal story about their experience with public deliberation that they were willing to share with the investigators in a personal interview.

Phase 2 of the study focused on the interesting anecdotal stories. Specifically, the purpose of this phase was to discover what the sixteen participants learned about public deliberation in the stories of interest that they volunteered to share outside the telephone interview and develop case statements documenting the multiple applications of public deliberative forums using the National Issues Forums model and materials.

The study used in-depth personal interviews. The interviews were conducted by an OSU student who attended the OMRA as a freshman in 2001 and after graduation served as a research associate on this project. The research associate conducted the interviews in a location in Oklahoma convenient to the interviewee. Interviews averaged approximately one hour in length. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded.

A total of thirteen individuals agreed to complete an in-depth interview. Three persons were unable to be interviewed due to relocation out of state or unavailability during the four-week duration of the interview portion of the study. Those interviewed included six men and seven women, ranging from 20 to 65 years-old. Two individuals were undergraduate students, two worked for the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, six were involved with the Oklahoma Early Settlement Volunteer Mediation program, two were employed by the two land-grant universities in Oklahoma, and one worked for the State of Oklahoma Department of Education.

In-depth interviews were condensed to a one- or two-page statement that captured the individual's public deliberation experience. The case statements were written in third-person form, using pseudonyms to conceal the subjects' identities. In general, the case statements included the following:

- why public deliberation was employed in the particular circumstance;
- how many people participated in the deliberative experience;
- the setting of the dialogue;
- what concepts of public deliberation were used; and
- common ground and/or outcome of the experience.

Each case statement described the subject's personal account of the public deliberation experience and his or her feelings, thoughts, challenges, and accomplishments. Statements suggested how public deliberation had and can be used in everyday situations. Following are the case statements capturing actual experiences of people who have participated in moderator and recorder training and have gone on to use deliberative concepts in their everyday lives.

## Experience # 1: Land Use Battles

Wearing blue jeans and cowboy boots, Carl leaned back in his chair, hands behind his head, making himself as comfortable as possible. His desk paraded a proud alma mater mascot and other college paraphernalia. Office walls displayed with agriculture education and 4-H awards. Carl was proud to be a native Oklahoman and explained how his career in agriculture, animal science, and sales had led him to his current position with Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service.

One day, Carl received a frantic call from a county Extension educator asking him if he would facilitate a forum on land use planning. A large cooperation had purchased land in the county and planned to build a multi-house poultry operation. The community was in turmoil. Some residents wanted the land zoned due to growing concerns that the pollution from the operation would lower property values in the surrounding community. Other residents did not want government zoning laws interfering with future property and land usage. Carl agreed to moderate the forum and used the National Issues Forums “Land Use Conflict: When City and Country Clash” discussion guide. “I felt that through the training I had received from the Public Policy Institute I could handle the volatile situation and have a good discussion,” said Carl.

The heated debate had already started before the 25 participants had filed into the small conference room. County commissioners, farmers, city managers, a newspaper reporter, and residents made up the diverse crowd that would fuel the discussion. Before the forum began, the Extension educator informed Carl about a particular participant that had a tendency to cause trouble. “Does he have a gun?” Carl asked sarcastically. “Well, no,” replied the educator. “Well then, we’ll be okay,” said Carl.

Carl decided ground rules would be necessary. “We’re here to deliberate this issue, not to argue it,” Carl said. He explained the NIF guidelines, and with little persuasion, the participants—including the “troublemaker”—agreed to follow the rules.

As participants discussed each choice, they were able to understand each other’s opinions and concerns. “You could almost see, individual by individual, the change come over them [participants] when they’d hear the other person’s side to the issue and gave it some thought,” explained Carl.

Participants examined the costs and benefits of each choice. “They didn’t necessarily agree on everything, but they understood where each other stood and why,” said Carl. By the end of the forum, common ground had been found. Participants agreed to form a task force to continue discussing the issue. The group decided not to zone the land, but instead developed some county ordinances that were suitable to both sides.

The group had several meetings following the forum. “They may have come to a reasonable conclusion without having this initial forum,” said Carl, “but my feeling is that it would have taken them a long time to get there, and there would have been a lot of hurt feelings and controversy that ensued.”

The participants and the community were able to see the effects of public deliberation. “I think the surrounding communities are better off because they now have something [deliberation] to base their policies on,” said Carl.

Carl stated that the Cooperative Extension Office received recognition for the deliberation services provided. “People now know we [Cooperative Extension] can come in and help conduct forums, not just provide the traditional Extension services—agriculture, 4-H, and family and consumer sciences,” said Carl.

Carl plans to continue introducing the concept of public deliberation to his Extension educators and encouraging them to seek formal deliberation training. He would also like to frame issues that are facing rural Oklahoma—lack of water and health care.

## Experience # 2: Dirty Work

An office full of trash greeted Tim at 7:58 a.m. on a Monday morning. To a clean-cut, professional business man like Tim, it was just another day at work. As the program manager for a state university issue management program, no job was too big nor task too dirty for Tim. He worked with industry leaders, municipalities, organizations, and communities helping them manage agriculture and natural resource problems in the state. His new project was facilitating the development and growth of landfills and waste management in a large Oklahoma community.

Corporations in this particular community were dumping waste out of compliance with the law. Sixteen entities, including landfills and waste collection companies, were involved in the case. The operations of these organizations were creating concerns within the community. Water quality, traffic problems, and environmental impacts from odor and dust were issues that needed to be addressed. Tim decided that deliberating the issues among the entities was the best way to solve the problems before lawsuits became involved.

Ironically, the entities involved that needed to deliberate the issues were business rivals. “They were competitors deliberating on what they could do better to compete with each other!” said Tim.

The managers and owners of the corporations have met six times over an eight month period to discuss the problems. Tim established ground rules for the discussions and created a purpose and mission statement for the meetings.

“These people, who are typically business, for-profit thinkers, are now developing a community- or social-based interest in their work,” said Tim.

Tim admitted that keeping the group focused on the mission of the meetings was challenging. Competing interests between the public sector and the profit sector brought differing opinions to the table.

Although deliberations are not over, the group has made progress. The corporations have taken ideas and suggestions generated in the discussions and implemented them into their management strategies.

“Profits have gone up for some of these entities, and so far they have avoided lawsuits,” said Tim. “They [corporations] made their operations more efficient by hearing other people talk about similar activities in the same industry setting.”

“People respect the process of deliberation,” said Tim. “They trust it.”

Tim will continue to work with the entities until all waste management issues are addressed. Tim’s agency is also in the process of planning deliberative forums in communities across the state on a number of issues, including drug abuse, health care, and employment.

### **Experience #3: Wanted: Female Roommate**

Heaps of books, piles of clothes, and the smell of leftover Chinese food greeted fellow college students who stopped by to say hi. Crawling over her bed, one of the university's finest young leaders apologized for the mess and explained her incredibly hectic schedule that had absorbed her time, neglecting her of a moment to tend to daily household—dorm room—tasks.

As a junior at one of the state's largest universities, Marie had made a name for herself. She was a community facilitator for student residents who lived in the on-campus apartments. Working daily with students in a living situation, deliberating was second-nature to her.

On one occasion, two young women, residents Marie advised as a community facilitator, were concerned with their other roommate who did drugs and threw parties in the apartment. The two students did not want their other roommate to know that they had a problem with her extra curricular activities. The ally roommates wanted the issue resolved without being “tattle tails” and came to Marie for help.

Marie brought the three roommates together to develop a “roommate contract,” guidelines for the apartment agreed upon by the roommates. Immediately, chaos broke out. The roommates were blaming each other for not cleaning and being loud. Marie calmed the situation by letting each roommate state her point of view. This communication allowed each person to understand the others' concerns. The roommates learned why one wanted the apartment quiet at 10 p.m. for studying; why one liked the apartment cleaned; and why one wanted the space to socialize. The roommates then understood the consequences of each others' actions.

By developing a “roommate contract” using deliberation, Marie was able to help the roommates establish quiet hours for the apartment, which stopped the parties and drug use.

“I think it would have been better if I could have used public deliberation to address the drug problem specifically,” said Marie, “but because it was not appropriate in this instance, public deliberation allowed me to handle the situation in the most effective and efficient manner.”

“Deliberation allows participants to take a problem piece by piece rather than tackling one large problem,” said Marie.

Marie said using public deliberation has helped her become more open-minded. “Deliberation forces you to understand where the other person is coming from,” she said.

Marie plans to use public deliberation in the future. She wants to become a professional mediator and focus on medical malpractice cases.

## Experience #4: Youth Voice Changes

Not a hair out of place, sitting very elegantly in her suit, Beth finished a long conversation and hung up the phone. She had just committed herself to working on a new project that would consume any of her spare time. That was Beth's way of doing business—always up for a new challenge, not able to say no. Wearing many hats, Beth was not only a business woman but also a teacher, a mother, and a hopeful soon-to-be politician.

From the classroom to the Oklahoma State Department of Education, Beth had committed her work and life to improving the lives of others by educating students and teachers about community service. Her new endeavor: involved coordinating a national high school civic engagement program, Project 540.

Project 540 taught students deliberative democracy through a series of dialogues. During the dialogues, students were asked to express their concerns about their school, community, and nation. Students were then led through a sequence of problem-solving techniques to resolve the top issues identified by their peers. Student facilitators led dialogues in small groups of 20 to 25 students. Each school established a student leadership team with the responsibility of collecting the students' issues, creating a top issues list, and developing a civic action plan—the students' recommendation for change. Thirty-five Oklahoma high schools participated in Project 540, engaging more than 20,000 students in public deliberation.

Beth integrated several public deliberation strategies into Project 540. “Ground rules were established at the beginning of the process that created an atmosphere of respect,” said Beth. “This allowed students to feel that their ideas were valid.”

Students' issues ranged from unclean school bathrooms to the war in Iraq. “High school students were shocked by Project 540,” said Beth. “It was the first time anyone had asked for their opinion on real issues.”

Students listed the consequences and benefits of their proposed solutions before civic action plans were finalized. This developed a sense of common ground among the students.

“Students recognized that most issues can be resolved by listening and talking, and they have decided that it [deliberation] is an effective means to solving problems in their own schools and communities,” said Beth.

Several of the students' civic action plans were implemented. At one school, students identified a need for a safe place to “hang out.” So the students, with the help of the school and community partners, refurbished the tennis courts.

School administrators have also seen the positive impact of Project 540, and some schools have implemented the program into the curriculum. Beth stated students realized deliberating was a “different type of talking.” One teacher said, after Project 540, students would come to class and say, “Okay, Ms. Wilson, we have an issue, and now we've got to have a dialogue to discuss the problem.”

Beth attributed her success as a public deliberation facilitator to her training at the Public Policy Institute. “The training at the PPI has imbedded in my thinking that we must always consider multiple perspectives of the issue and we must also consider the “empty chair” perspective—the perspectives of those who are not represented in the forum or dialogue,” said Beth.

Beth said she will continue to use public deliberation and will support public forums in her district if elected to the state legislator.

## **Experience #5: Cowboys and Indians**

A lone voice echoed down the empty corridor of the university hall. Gail's high heels clicked loudly along her tile office floor as she shut her old wooden office door. Only a few short weeks ago, students and faculty had filled the college campus going about their daily business. However, in the middle of June, the campus seemed like a ghost town. But Gail's unique work kept her busy year round. As the director of Early Settlement in her region of the state, Gail managed 26 volunteers who provided mediation services for people who wanted to resolve civil cases outside the court system.

On a college campus enriched with Native American culture, Gail was involved with planning several conferences, including the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium on the American Indian. Gail, who had just attended the Public Policy Institute, decided to coordinate a forum for the symposium using the National Issues Forums "Racial and Ethnic Tensions" discussion guide.

All symposium participants were invited to attend the forum as a breakout session. Some college professors gave students extra credit for attending the forum. Sixty people arrived to participate—more than Gail had anticipated. Tensions were high in the packed room. Racial tensions had risen on the campus in the past few years. Two participants, a Native American student and a Caucasian student, began arguing about their ancestors' rights and treaties that had failed. Throughout the dialogue, the two students had the opportunity to listen to each others' opinions and understand the "other side." The two students walked out "arm in arm" at the end of the forum.

One professor whose students attended the forum said that the class dynamics had changed. Before the forum, the professor sensed animosity among some of the students, but after the deliberative dialogue, the students were positive toward one another.

Gail said the forum gave participants an opportunity to vent their frustrations and opinions. "Participants realized that this issue [racial tensions] was not a local issue—it's a national issue," said Gail.

Gail explained that the most challenging part of the forum was listing all the issues and having enough time to talk about them. "There are a lot of issues that people have that they never sit down and talk to other people about," said Gail.

Because of this experience Gail realized she needed to become more involved in her community. She joined a local leadership club and is now an officer for the Chamber of Commerce.

## Experience #6: Learning about Service

At least eight phone calls and five students dropped by Kathy's office in one hour—a normal day for the university's only volunteer director. Working on at least 20 projects at once, Kathy passionately motivated thousands of college students to become actively involved in their community. "I match students' talents with opportunities to make a difference in the community," said Kathy, "and in order to do that, there needs to be a lot of dialogue exchanged between the students and myself."

In her 11 years as volunteer director, Kathy had developed a nationally recognized volunteer program and had mobilized students, faculty and administration to make community service a part of their daily lives. Kathy's next endeavor was to create a service-learning program on campus. Kathy knew from past conversations with faculty and administrators that a new paradigm, or pedagogy in teaching, may not be favorable to all faculty members as a tool for learning. So, Kathy invited faculty members from each of the colleges as well as some administrators to a forum to discuss service-learning and the trade-offs of implementing the process.

Sixteen out of the 24 invitees attended the forum. The agenda was to allow for each faculty member to describe how they had used service-learning in the classroom and the impact the process had on the students. Sitting around a conference table, each faculty members shared their service-learning experiences, good and bad. The participants asked other faculty members how they implemented service-learning, and some requested more information and resources to learn about service-learning at other institutions. Kathy said that the presence of administrators made faculty members feel that their opinions and ideas were being heard.

Common ground was found. The participants agreed that the service-learning issue was more widespread than they realized. "They all agreed they had a job to do so students could learn," said Kathy. "They had different beliefs about how they could accomplish this goal, but all participants agreed they wanted to do what was best for students."

"At the end of the discussion, there was the question, 'Where *can* we go from here?' not, 'Where do we *have* to go from here?'" said Kathy.

Kathy admitted the forum was not flawless. One of the administrators present, who had some authority in implementing the service-learning process, did not participate in the discussion, which made it difficult to develop future plans. With the participants' busy schedules, the forum only lasted one hour.

Overall, Kathy felt the forum was a success. "By the end of the forum, participants were using the word 'we' not 'I,'" said Kathy. The faculty members and administrators agreed to attend more forums to discuss service-learning.

Kathy stated she plans to conduct more forums on campus and wants to coordinate forums at conferences she attends.

## Experience # 7: A Small Town's Prosperity

Holding hands, two young children looked both ways and scampered fast across the street to the Dollar Store. The warm summer sun embraced the town as neighbors greeted each other at the post office and café. Small town life was alive in this southern Oklahoma community of 4,000 people. Then, the unexpected happened—the only manufacturer in town left, leaving 300 people without jobs.

As a county Extension educator, Carol felt the need to reach out to the community. The Extension office decided to hold a forum to discuss the issue. Carol chose the National Issues Forums discussion guide “Pathways to Prosperity” to “calmly help citizens take this negative situation and make it a positive.”

The forum was held in the park, and the 25 participants—city officials, members of community organizations, the county leadership team, policemen, and teachers and youth—enjoyed a picnic prior to the discussion. “[Public deliberation] gave everyone a chance to say what they thought, to submit ideas, and also listen to others,” said Carol.

According to Carol, city and county officials benefited most from the forum because they had the opportunity to listen to many opinions. Participants felt their ideas were being heard because the forum was recorded.

Carol said that the participants did not realize they were deliberating until the end of the forum. “[Participants] couldn’t believe that a meeting could run this smoothly—and when everyone still had an opportunity to voice their opinion,” said Carol. “Anytime you can learn how to conduct any kind of meeting, and it can be effective, I think you’ve learned something very valuable.”

With only a short time to deliberate, the participants did not solve the community’s problem concerning job loss, but they did come to common ground. The community members agreed that these forums needed to be conducted in other communities throughout the county that were also affected by the recent employment decline.

Carol admitted that although the participants were diverse, she felt the lower-income class was not represented. “I think it is important to have the input from people who never say anything,” said Carol. “When I conduct another forum, I’m going to try to make every effort to be sure that I have someone there from different social-economic backgrounds.”

Carol is planning two other Pathways to Prosperity forums in the county. She would also like to conduct forums focusing on water usage in the area.

## Experience #8: Breaking Barriers

Sitting still had never been an easy task for Dale. An Oklahoman at heart, Dale's zest for adventure and love of traveling had taken him around the world. As one of the first Peace Corps volunteers in the 1960s, Dale was sent to the jungles of Colombia to lend aid to the third-world country. He spent two years working with the local Colombians engaging in conversations that broke the barriers and created bonds between the natives and the Americans. Dale's experiences in the jungle were life lessons that shaped his future education and career aspirations. After forty years of public service and a successful law career, Dale retired from the professional world and became a mediator for the alternative dispute resolution program in his Oklahoma community.

Dale had heard that the local Alcohol Anonymous group had outgrown its facilities. The AA group, with more than 200 members, was looking for a new place to meet. As an active community member, Dale knew that a neighboring church's facilities could hold large groups—like the AA's.

Dale approached the two parties, the AA group and the church, individually to see if either entity would be interested in the endeavor. Each party expressed interest in cooperating, but both sides were apprehensive. The church feared two hundred "alcoholics" would cause damage to the facilities. The AA group was concerned that the facilities would not be available 52 weeks a year for required meetings.

To ease any fears, Dale brought the two parties together, not for a formal deliberative dialogue, but for a tour of the facilities and an opportunity to meet each other. Ministerial staff and church members greeted 75 AA group members at the church steps. The church representatives were amazed that the AA group members were "clean-cut" people. For the first time, the church members saw the "alcoholics" as normal people trying to recover from a disease. The AA group members were impressed with the church facilities and excited that the church was willing to open the doors to them. By the end of the tour, the two parties inner-mingled with each other and struck up conversations.

"Public deliberation allowed both sides to lay aside their preconceived ideas and notions and look at each other with fresh eyes," said Dale.

Within a four month period, an agreement had been reached between the two parties. The church agreed to allow the AA group to meet at the church 52 weeks a year, and the AA group agreed to keep the facilities clean and follow the rules. "Each side came in with its own beliefs," said Dale. "But each party was willing to look at the others as human beings with interests and concerns." Several deliberations and small meetings resulted from the initial meeting.

Problems did arise in the process of reaching an agreement. Dale stated that sometimes the two parties wanted to move too quickly. "You have to give people an opportunity, all the information they need, and a secure place to talk about the issue," said Dale.

As a result of the deliberations and the new partnership, the church decided to devote special programs to the AA group, including providing child care for the AA group members during meetings.

Dale says he will continue to use public deliberation "in any place and every place" he can.

## **Experience #9: The Veteran's Voice**

The flower-wallpapered dining room was a safe haven from the storm brewing outside the window. Terri had just finished the final touches of her newly rebuilt house after a tornado destroyed it in one of the state's worst disasters. Still dressed in her suit from a long day's work, Terri sat down to catch a breath as rain drops began speckling the window.

As a program director for Early Settlement, a program that provides mediation services for people who want to resolve civil cases outside the court system, Terri was considered an expert in her field of deliberation. Though, she admitted not all deliberative dialogues had been easy to moderate.

At an annual Early Settlement conference, Terri decided to introduce the deliberative process to her volunteers. "We are always looking for training and other avenues to reward our volunteers," said Terri.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Terri chose to use the National Issues Forums "Terrorism: What Should We Do?" discussion guide. Forty Early Settlement volunteers—retirees, professionals, and students—attended the forum.

From the beginning of the forum, Terri felt like she had lost control of the dialogue. Although participants were eagerly sharing their opinions, Terri was not able to get them to think about the "other side" of the issue. Terri said the group was willing to surrender several freedoms to gain safety. No matter how hard Terri tried to ask open-ended questions to guide the discussion, participants did not want to consider other options.

Then, when the forum was concluding, a man in the back stood up. "I am a Vietnam veteran," he proclaimed. "And I have sat here today and listened to you [participants] voluntarily surrender freedoms that we have fought for. I carry shrapnel in my body that I obtained in fighting for the United States."

The participants were in awe by the man's remarks. "You could almost see this collective realization come over all of them," Terri said. Participants finally were able to think about the consequences of their choices.

Terri felt the forum was a success. "Just the fact that the man felt safe enough to share his disagreement with the group was an accomplishment," said Terri. "I think they all walked away with something else to think about."

According to Terri, the Early Settlement program benefited from the forum. "We train people to realize there are two sides to every problem," said Terri, "and this gave them an opportunity, a vivid demonstration, that there is always another perspective."

Terri plans to work with local governments encouraging them to use public deliberation in their decision-making process.

## Experience # 10: Justice For All

The bookcase walls were lined with 3-inch thick books. A faint smell of a cigar scented the room—par for a lawyer's office. But the assumption that all lawyers were selfish, money-hungry crooks quickly vanished after speaking with Tom. Sinking back in his leather chair, Tom described how his nine years of volunteer experience with Early Settlement, a program associated with the Oklahoma Supreme Court, had fulfilled his career and helped dozens of families save money and time without going to court. Through the Early Settlement program, Tom was able to provide mediation services to a wide variety of disputants who wanted to try and resolve issues outside of court. Tom described the numerous hours he expended helping families with disabled children and parents with child custody battles work through their problems.

Tom had spent much time over the years honing his deliberation skills and working with clients through the judicial system; however, his participation in a National Issues Forum discussion at a Public Policy Institute changed his perspective of his law practice and taught him a new way to deliberate.

At the PPI Tom attended, participants practiced deliberating using the National Issues Forums “And Justice for All” discussion guide. As one of the 15 forum participants, Tom was able to hear a variety of opinions and thoughts about the judicial system from citizens, not lawyers.

Tom described the frustrations of one Hispanic participant who explained that language barriers prevented some defendants from getting fair trials in English-speaking courtrooms. Other forum participants felt that making English the nation's official language would solve the problem. “This forum educated the participants to what the real issue was more than anything,” said Tom.

Although participants did not agree on how to solve the problem, Tom stated that the forum was a success because people were able to express their opinions. Participants examined the consequences and benefits of each choice. “People actually have common views; I mean, the more you set aside the positional aspects, people actually share a lot of values that reinforce the validity of the process [deliberation],” said Tom.

“The most appealing thing about using the deliberative process is that your feedback has impact,” said Tom. “I now have a better understanding of what people face in dealing with the legal system.”

Tom stated that the NIF model of deliberation has strengthened his role as a leader. “A leader is not so much representing himself but representing the views of those people he serves,” said Tom. “The beauty of a forum allows you to find out what issues are of concern and what the options are for solving those issues.”

Tom is planning to moderate other forums. He is organizing a terrorism forum at his alma mater's homecoming.

## Experience # 11: Students and Administrators

Taking another sip of Dr. Pepper, Sara slung her heavy bag on the bench outside the library and sat down for a five minute break between classes. The college senior's day planner was packed with meetings and projects due—a normal day for Sara. She thrived on staying busy and involved at her beloved university. As the campus coordinator for a national collegiate civic engagement campaign, Raise Your Voice, Sara had undertaken the incredible task of engaging as many of her peers as possible in community service and civic engagement opportunities. Sara had been introduced to the concept of public deliberation as a college freshman and was excited to implement forums into the Raise Your Voice campaign.

Sara had heard a number of students complain about the lack of communication between students and administrators on campus. She thought that this issue would be a great topic to deliberate in a forum. Although Sara considered herself to be a well-trained moderator, she had never facilitated a forum that was not framed like the National Issues Forums. Feeling confident, Sara decided to develop a framework during the forum. She planned to have the participants list issues concerning the topic of communication. Sara then intended to help the group focus on one or two problems that could be discussed in-depth and create a list of possible solutions.

She invited 30 students and six administrators to the forum. The group was split into two forums of 18 participants. As the moderator for one of the forums, Sara began the discussion by describing the purpose of the forum and listing ground rules for deliberation. She explained the agenda: list issues, focus on one or two main concerns, and then develop solutions.

However, Sara's hopes of creating a framework soon vanished. The students were extremely eager to discuss the topic. Sara found herself in the midst of chaos. The list of issues and problems was never-ending! Sara could not get the group to focus on one issue at a time.

Sara tried to gain control of the situation by developing a sense of common ground. By the end of the forum, students and administrators both agreed to go the "extra mile" to improve communication. Students said that they would be willing to go to administrators' offices to meet with them personally. Administrators agreed to make an extra effort to attend as many student organization meetings as possible.

Although the forum was not a complete success, both students and administrators felt comfortable expressing their concerns and opinions. Students realized that administrators had many responsibilities. Administrators were able to discuss issues of concern face-to-face with students. "I've had several students ask me when we're going to have another forum!" said Sara. "I think that the forum opened the eyes of students and administrators alike that there is another way to solve problems besides complaining. Both students and administrators had the opportunity to discuss issues in a non-confrontational, face-to-face setting."

"If the forum had not been conducted," said Sara, "these two groups would have never discussed this issue. That's why the forum was a success."

Sara hopes to get a job promoting public deliberation. She also wants to continue to moderate and record NIF forums.

## Experience # 12: Domestic Violence

Ed was not a man of few words—he liked to exaggerate a little. He could take a fish story and make it a shark tale. As Ed crossed his arms around his broad chest, a toothpick in his mouth, he settled in for a long debrief of his public deliberation experience.

Although he was a bit sarcastic, Ed's job was nothing but serious. As the program developer for the Criminal Justice Resource Center, Ed was able to see his projects come to life. Before legislators decided to propose a new law, Ed would often implement a test pilot program in a controlled environment. After the conclusion of the test, legislators would determine if the program would become replicated across the state.

Ed was in charge of developing a domestic violence brutality review board. The board's specific purpose was to identify systematic changes that could be made to lower the state's domestic violence mortality rate. A diverse group of 11 was assigned to the board—a legislator, a judge, a women's advocate, a member of the community, a domestic violence victim, and health professionals. Ed knew that each of these people brought their own strong opinions and biases to the table.

This was not a normal forum—the board met over several months to discuss not just one topic, but all problems and issues associated with domestic violence. Ed made sure that guidelines and ground rules were established at the beginning of the process. The board met at least once every month for a year and a half, and each meeting brought new issues and challenges to the table. “Getting the board to understand that this was not a blame game but fact finding took almost 16 months!” exclaimed Ed.

Ed and his assistant used several of the processes and principals of deliberation. He made lists of positives, negatives, and trade-offs of all choices that were suggested. “By the end of the process, everyone saw that there were different ways of looking at an issue,” said Ed. The board was eventually able to “meet in the middle.”

The legislature used the board's suggestions and developed legislation that targeted domestic violence issues. The Department of Mental Health also employed the board's recommendations and reevaluated its tracking methods of domestic violence perpetrators.

Ed credited the public deliberation process and procedures for the board's success. “It [deliberation] gave us a road map to keep them [board members] between the white lines and focused on the goal,” said Ed.

Ed stated that he plans on using public deliberation throughout the rest of his career. “I figure we have a chance to change public policy at the grass roots,” said Ed. “And I think that a small group of people that are dedicated is the only chance that we have at making that change. That's what I think public forums are all about.”