

**For
Convenors and
Moderators**

**Organizing for Public Deliberation and
Moderating a Forum/Study Circle**

**NATIONAL
ISSUES
FORUMS**

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NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS NETWORK

WHY NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS?

If American democracy is to fulfill its promise, citizens must take responsibility and act together. They can act directly or through their representatives but they must act. The first order of business then is to come together to make choices about what actions they can agree to take. Sound choices come from our most reflective and shared judgments, not the first reactions so often documented by pollsters. What is required is public deliberation, a process through which people talk with one another about public issues that concern them, weigh the advantages and consequences of alternative courses of action, and seek a shared sense of direction for creating public policy. This process is carried out in deliberative forums across the country.

Today, thousands of civic and educational institutions in the U.S. are loosely linked in a network known as National Issues Forums (NIF). These deliberations are locally sponsored, controlled, and financed. Over the years, NIF has linked up with all kinds of groups in America.

Those organizations include a large number of schools and colleges that use the NIF materials as a part of a course or educational program. Another group of national organizations uses it in local chapters to carry out institutional missions, which range from developing leadership skills to increasing community problem-solving capabilities. Still others are independent, local forums/study circles begun by energetic citizens who are concerned about a number of public issues that face their communities. Examples of NIF partners who organize and conduct forums/study circles are churches/synagogues, Cooperative Extension services, libraries, leadership groups, senior centers, correctional facilities, a variety of educational programs, including continuing education and adult basic education, community groups, and youth groups.

There are certain organizing principles that have facilitated the growth of those organizations using NIF to more than 5,000 participating institutions in 18 years. They are:

1 Each Organization Participates for Its Own Reasons and Operates Independently

If public deliberation is seen as a means for accomplishing important institutional missions, it has a valid claim on time. If those organizing and conducting the local NIF program do not see how NIF is valuable to the organization, institution, community, and members, then NIF is soon gone.

Few people want to “do” or conduct someone else’s program. Those organizing NIF and those attending are far too busy to engage in forums or study circles over time unless they see a reason or value in the experience. Experienced convenors say, “Be ready to explain and help others understand why NIF is important to them and the community.”

2 Local Ownership and Capacity

Each of the forums controls and finances its own program. There is not one National Issues Forum, but many diverse forums. Everything that is done is to reinforce the local forums’ sense of their own capacity and importance. NIF is not an organization itself, but a network of civic and educational organizations that have their own programs of public deliberation, which they control and finance to meet their objectives. The NIF network is Internetlike rather than hierarchical.

3 Partners for Tasks Beyond the Capacity of Local Forums

Certain tasks require help from nonforum partners with specialized capacities. For example, when issue books were needed, Public Agenda and the Kettering Foundation joined the venture to produce them. Today, many educational institutions around the country are conducting Public Policy Institutes to provide an opportunity to learn about the concepts needed to convene and moderate a deliberative meeting. These partners, like those conducting forums, participate for their own reasons; and their independence is understood and respected.

4 Division of Labor

When there are common programs of all the partners, each participant in this enterprise decides on his or her involvement in NIF. No central authority oversees local programs and no one tries to direct the way a nonforum partner makes a contribution.

5 Everyone Participates

The selection of three or four issues each year is done by having each local forum steering committee express its preferences — not by a “committee” that tries to represent everyone in making the decision. Everyone represents himself or herself.

6 Diverse Local Forums/Study Circles United by Common Purposes

Those characteristics that are held in common are:

- Issues are framed in public terms.
- The work of the forums/study circles is to struggle with the hard choices that every issue entails.
- The choices are made through public deliberation.
- Work toward a shared sense of direction and what trade-offs they are willing or unwilling to accept.

“If American democracy is to fulfill its promise, citizens must take responsibility and act together. They can act directly or through their representatives but they must act.”



TIPS FROM NIF CONVENORS ON HOW TO GET STARTED

"New groups should remind themselves daily that there is no right way to format their programs. This was very hard for us to realize. We spent several months researching other groups, asking how they did it, looking for THE answer. It finally hit us that there was no answer. We reached agreements among ourselves about how we wanted to do it, keeping our community situation and resources in mind, and went for it. Once you do it, you can always improve on your methods next year."

"Establishing a solid network and a base to build on is important. One thing most helpful is to begin with an established group; NIF fit beautifully into it. That would be my advice for any new NIF convenor. Start small, identify the people whose interests you share. Don't be afraid to be the only one pushing NIF. Once it gets out into the community, it does catch on. We remind ourselves we are not just holding an event, but building an institution."

"First, we asked ourselves, Who would most likely care about issues facing our nation? Who would want to engage in public talk? Next, we contacted existing groups that we felt would be interested."

"Ours are not communitywide forums. We go to organizations in the community. The forums are more likely to have a good response if they are held in conjunction with an already existing group. Build on already established efforts or practices that have the potential for fostering deliberation."

"Be sure your first forum is a manageable size and includes a diverse audience. A diverse audience helps make deliberation easier. I would start with a group of 20 to 30 people. Leadership and participants are inclusive."

"It is so important that everyone remember that he or she must get out of the role of the teacher and get into the moderator role. A person new to NIF should take

moderator training. If training is not possible, moderate your first forum with an experienced moderator."

Recommendations to new convenors as to how to proceed are:

- "Get organized into an advisory committee and assign specific responsibilities."
- "Tailor the format to the community or to the audience you are trying to reach."
- "Promote the study circles through the constituency of the people there. Use them to expand. Get them interested in deliberating the issues and not worrying about numbers. The alternative to a large forum would be to pick an organization and get them to adopt one or more of the issues as part of their fall or winter program and make it part of the regular programming. The key is the ability to adapt NIF to what ever group or organization you are working with. Then, just go ahead and do it!"
- "Start with an existing group in the community. Think about audiences who would see it as being in their self-interest to engage in choice work and deliberation about specific issues."
- "Just get started. You will keep developing your moderator skills."

"NIF is an ongoing part of our basic and adult education programs in correctional facilities education. Successful NIF efforts relate to the self-interest of various organizations."

"I was an active volunteer with the Literacy Council and had participated in NIF study circles in my church. There seemed to be a natural fit between the two. Eventually, NIF became a part of the work of the Literacy Council. I keep looking for connections."

ORGANIZING A FORUM/STUDY CIRCLE

What is the difference between a **forum** and a **study circle**? Very little. Study circles and forums are characterized by choice work, deliberation, and working toward common ground for action or a shared sense of purpose.

What may be different is in the size of the group and the number of times the group meets. Essentially, they are the same. Individuals tend to call a large group that meets only for one session a **FORUM**. They typically refer to a small group, 5 to 20 people, who meet one or more times on the same issue a **STUDY CIRCLE**.

In a typical study circle, a group of 5 to 20 people meet several times to discuss one of the critical issues facing our society. Each deliberative dialogue session commonly lasts about two hours and is led by a moderator whose role it is to focus the discussion and help the members engage in deliberation. Issue books and other reading materials are given to the participants prior to the discussion. The tasks and purposes of forums and study circles are the same.

Study Circles in Action

Think about a dozen people seated around a living room or meeting room in a church, library, civic/senior center, or school. The participants are all active. Everyone assumes responsibility for the group. All participants weigh carefully the views of others and understand the impact various choices would have on what they and others consider valuable. They are engaged in "working through" the conflicting emotions that arise when various options pull and tug on what others hold most valuable in their everyday lives.

Organizing a Forum/Study Circle

Often two individuals, the **CONVENOR** and the **MODERATOR** are central to the creation and success of a study circle (one person can do both tasks).

The **CONVENOR** recruits the participants, arranges logistics of the meeting, and orders issue books. The **MODERATOR** guides the discussion, explains the guidelines, and helps the group engage in deliberation rather than "just talk."

1 Start by Starting

A frequent question for experienced convenors/moderators is, "How does one start or organize his or her first forum/study circle?" The most common response is, you start by starting. Start small, something manageable and get under way. As deliberative dialogue and choice work becomes valuable to others in the community, a network will develop. Think of existing groups."

2 Develop Around a Set of Ideas

NIF is not a "program" to do and is not a discussion to promote better understanding. NIF forums/study circles become a way to make decisions that allows citizens to act together. In forums/study circles, people are challenged to face the costs and consequences of their options and to "work through" the often volatile emotions that are a part of making public decisions.

3 Networks Grow as People Begin to Experience the Benefits

Some of the benefits often mentioned by convenors are:

- helps people get a handle on complex public problems;
- helps one understand different points of view before he or she acts;
- others say they feel less isolated, more a part of the community;
- over a period of time, it changes the way their community approaches decision making and problem solving;
- gives people confidence they can eventually change their political life; and
- most always changes the way people view others.

4 Leadership and Participants Are Inclusive

If you are organizing beyond a very small group with established leadership you will want to organize a steering committee. A steering committee is really just a way to spread ownership and encourage multiple leaders. If one person assumes all the responsibility, NIF will probably be gone in a short time.

A steering committee is a group of people who believe that the deliberative process should be a part of politics and that deliberation should be one way people in the community do the public's business.

5 Keep Making Connections

Public politics is a politics of connections or relationships, not only of those with similar self-interests but those with very different self-interests. A public is a diverse body of citizens, not a homogeneous group. So good organizing follows the principle of ever-expanding associations. One of the most important questions organizers can ask is: Who is not in this room who needs to be here if we are to have an array of forums? That question should be followed by: Why aren't they here? How can we bring them to the table? What room are they in? Can we get where they are?

The principle of association shouldn't be interpreted to mean there has to be just one table, one central organization that sponsors all forums. One of the best deliberative programs is in a community where between 30 and 40 different civic and educational organizations all hold their own forums.

6 Take Advantage of the Potential for Creating Public Space in Everyday Life

Forums don't have to be special events that take people away from their normal routine. In fact, some of the strongest forums are embedded in the established programs of community institutions. They are part of a course in the community college, part of the educational program of a church or synagogue, part of the decision making in a neighborhood association. The principle is to take the forums where the people are. It is based on the conviction that "politics" isn't a special arena but a dimension of everyday life.

7 Build on What Grows

Surely, the most difficult task in organizing forums is the first step. Somebody or a small group has to decide who to talk to first. The more successful organizers appear to have followed the principle of building on an already-established effort or practice that has the potential for fostering deliberation. This principle is based on the assumption that some community organizations may have already sensed the need for citizens to come together and make choices together. It takes a good deal of investigation to find these likely allies, but the time is well spent. Allies will usually say, "We have been looking for something like a different kind of forum" or "We have begun thinking about something like this."

8 Relate to Self-Interests

While organizers may have had the larger interests of the community as a whole in mind, they usually recognize that institutions in the community wouldn't really commit their resources unless they see forums as a way of carrying out their missions. So organizing is based on relating to the self-interests of institutions. These self-interests vary widely because they grow out of the different missions of libraries, prisons, churches, and schools. Because institutions may not readily see how using forums can be a different way of relating to a community of constituency, organizers have to allow time for institutions to clarify their self-interests.

9 Learn from Similar Institutions in Other Communities

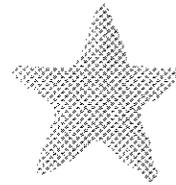
Local institutions sometimes turn to similar institutions that have held forums in other communities to see if promoting public deliberation does, in fact, serve institutions' goals or help reinterpret those goals. Leadership organizations tend to check out new ideas with other leadership organizations; literacy programs call other literacy programs, leagues talk to leagues, and so on.

"... start with people who feel outside the community and are looking for a way in."

“...perhaps the most important corollary of public organizing is to be patient.”

Certain corollaries seem to grow out of these principles. Maybe one is to start small; don't begin by calling a large meeting. Another is to start with people who feel outside the community and are looking for a way in. This may be a clue to finding people who are “looking for something just like this.” Established leaders and established organizations may have turf problems that keep them from cooperating in a forum initiative.

You have probably noticed that all of these principles take time to follow. There seems to be a certain gestation period for establishing ownership. So perhaps the most important corollary of public organizing is to be patient. Public space is space that people make. It is a series of do-it-yourself projects rather than third-party interventions. And the making takes time.



Suggestions

Experienced convenors suggest nine things to be sure to do:

- **Clarify the unifying purpose. This is essential for a single group or a network.**
- **Maintain independence and autonomy. Few individuals and groups are looking for somebody else to report to and tell them what to do.**
- **Create volunteer links. People learn from each other and seek ways to connect. This connecting is best done in a natural fashion and not forced.**
- **Recognize the power of multiple leaders.**
- **Stay connected at all levels and keep making connections.**
- **Create public space that is used by persons in their everyday lives.**
- **Build on what grows.**
- **Relate to self-interest.**
- **Learn from others.**

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR A DELIBERATIVE PUBLIC DISCUSSION GROUP

Welcome!

Let participants know **who is sponsoring** the forum/study circle. Stress cosponsorship if several organizations are involved.

Questionnaire (Pre-Forum)

Remind people that the Pre-Forum Questionnaire is a way to get everyone **focused on the issue** and a way for each participant to **identify initial feelings** on the issue. Tell them there'll be another questionnaire for them after these deliberations end.

Ground Rules

- **Make clear that the discussion will not be a debate.** Stress that there is work to do, and that the work is to move toward making a shared choice on a public policy issue. The work will be done through deliberation.
- **Charge the forum/study circle to do choice work.** "Charge" the forum, in the beginning, with the responsibility of helping the country and communities make sound decisions on critical issues. Not doing this imperils the effectiveness of forums and study circles. It is almost impossible for a moderator to get a group to do choice work unless it is explained initially and the group commits itself to this task. Forums wander, responses are random and unconnected when there is no sense of working to meet a common goal.

Emphasize that your forum is not just any forum. It will be distinguished by its deliberative character, its emphasis on the need to do the hard work of recognizing that a choice has to be made, that consequences have to be weighed and trade-offs balanced. Democratic politics requires that we hold ourselves, and not just officials, accountable.

"Connect the issue to people's lives and concerns."

Starter Video

Explain that the video **reviews the problems** underlying the issue, then briefly **examines three or four public policy alternatives** that are reviewed in depth in the issue books. The starter video sets the stage for deliberation.

Personal Stake

Connect the issue to people's lives and concerns. In the first few minutes, get participants to talk about their personal experiences with the issue and tell their stories. This makes the issue real and genuine, human rather than abstract. Some questions you might ask include:

"Has anyone had a personal experience that illustrates the problems associated with this issue?" "Within your family, or circle of friends, is this an important issue?" "What aspects of the issue are most important to you?" "How does the issue affect people?"

The Deliberation

This is the actual forum/study circle experience. It is absolutely critical that the moderator remain neutral. Your task is to guide the deliberation. There are four basic questions that the moderators ask:

Questions:

- 1 What is valuable to us in this issue?
- 2 What are the costs or consequences associated with the various options?
- 3 Where are the conflicts in this issue that we have to work through?
- 4 Can we detect any shared sense of direction or common ground for action?

Ending Your Forum/Study Circle

Before ending a forum, take a few minutes to reflect both individually and as a group on what has been accomplished. These types of questions have been useful:

- How has your thinking about the issue changed?
- How has your thinking about other people's views changed?
- What didn't we work through?
- What do we still need to talk about?
- How can we use what we learned in this forum?
- What, if anything, do we want to do next?
- What do we have to say that is different from the usual debate on this issue?

Questionnaire (Post-Forum)

The Post-Forum Questionnaire is a way to face the conflict found within ourselves. Often, we discover aspects of each choice that we hold valuable. Yet, the things we care deeply about are often in conflict. The questionnaires along with other information, will be important in gaining a full sense of a PUBLIC VOICE after the forums are over.

Send both Pre-Forum and Post-Forum Questionnaires to:

**National Issues Forums Research
100 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459-2777**

Suggestions

“Deliberation is weighing the costs and consequences of a variety of possible actions....”

Suggested Time Line

15% for Welcome

Questionnaires

Ground Rules

Starter Video

Personal Stake

65% for Deliberation

20% for Discovering the Shared Sense of Purpose and Ending the Forum/Study Circle

Stages of a Forum/Study Circle

Welcome — The convenor or moderator introduces the NIF program.

Questionnaires — Participants complete Pre-Forum Questionnaires before discussion begins.

Ground Rules — Participants review desired outcomes of forum.

Starter Video — The starter video sets the tone for the discussion.

Personal Stake — Connect the issue to people's lives and concerns.

The Deliberation — Participants examine all the choices.

Ending the Forum — Reflect on what has been accomplished.

Questionnaires — Participants complete Post-Forum Questionnaires.

MODERATING FOR DELIBERATION

Many people who attend deliberative forums may not know what to expect. If they've attended a public meeting before, it's probably taken the form of a hearing about proposed governmental action, a political debate involving candidates, or a general discussion about some problem that has surfaced in their community.

When these people enter a deliberative forum, they find something altogether different. The purpose of this kind of forum is for citizens to make, or at least work toward, a decision about how they will act on a problem or what policy they think is best for their community or the country. Deliberation is weighing the costs and consequences of a variety of possible actions or discovering (1) that the various things that are valuable to them pull them in different directions as they consider their options, and (2) that these conflicts have to be worked through. Deliberation doesn't result in absolute agreement, but it can reveal the general direction in which people want to move, the range of approaches to a problem that would be acceptable, and what people are or are not willing to do to solve a problem.

Consistent with what deliberation is, moderators ask four basic questions in a forum:

1 What is valuable to us? This question gets at why making public choices is so difficult: the options turn on things that people care about very deeply. This question can take many forms:

- How has this issue affected you personally? (Usually asked at the beginning.)
- What things are most valuable to people who support this option?
- What is appealing about this option?

- What makes this option a good idea — or a bad one?

To uncover their deeper concerns, moderators will often ask participants how they came to hold the views they have and to ground what they say in their experiences, and not just in facts or rational arguments. They might ask these questions:

- How do you see this option?
- What experiences have led you to this perspective?
- Could you tell a story illustrating that view?
- How might others see this option?
- Does someone have a different experience, another perspective?

Notice that throughout, in every series of questions, the moderator will try to draw out different perspectives in an effort to ensure a complete and balanced discussion. That is the only way that a forum can do its job — to examine fully and weigh carefully all the possibilities.

2 What are the costs or consequences associated with the various options? This question can take any number of forms as long as it prompts people to think about the likely effects of various options on what is valuable to them. Examples include:

- What would result from doing what this option proposes?
- What could be the consequences of doing what you are suggesting?
- Can you give an example of what you think would happen?
- Does anyone have a different estimate of costs or consequences?

Deliberation requires weighing the “pros” and “cons” of different options so it is important to be sure that both are fully aired. A “pro” is simply a positive consequence, a “con” a negative one. Questions to ensure a fair and balanced examination of all potential effects include:

- What would be the argument against the option you like best?
- What would someone say is good about the option that you oppose?
- Can anyone think of something constructive that might come from this policy?
- Is there a downside to this course of action?

3 What are the tensions or conflicts in this issue that we have to work through?

As a forum progresses, moderators will ask questions that draw out conflicts or tensions that people have to work through. They might ask:

- What do you see as the tension between the options?
- Where are the conflicts that grow out of what we've said about this issue?
- Why is this issue so difficult to decide?
- What are the "gray areas"?
- What remains unresolved for this group?

Throughout the forum, a moderator will intervene with questions that move the deliberations toward a choice but always stop short of pressing for a consensus or agreement on a particular solution. The objective of a deliberative forum is to chart a direction or articulate shared purposes that can be the basis for specific programs or detailed policies.

4 Can we detect any shared sense of purpose or how our interdependence is grounds for action?

In the very first few minutes of a forum, the moderator should remind people that the objective is to work toward a decision. Then, as the tensions or conflicts become evident, as people see how what they consider valuable pulls them in different directions, the moderator will test to see where the group is going with questions like:

- What direction seems best, or where do we want to go with this policy?
- The moderator can follow up to find out what people are or are not willing to do or sacrifice to solve a problem with such questions as:

- What trade-offs are we willing to accept?
- What trade-offs are we unwilling to accept?
- What are we willing to do as individuals or a community to solve this problem?

At the heart of deliberation is the question of whether we are willing to accept the consequences of our choices. That might lead to a question like this:

- If what we seem to favor had some of the consequences several of our colleagues worry about, would we still favor this policy or course of action?

Ending a Forum

Before ending a forum it is usually a good idea to take a few minutes to reflect both individually and as a group on what has been accomplished. Questions like the following have been useful:

- How has your thinking about the issue changed?
- How has your thinking about other people's views changed?
- Tell the rest of us how your perspective changed as a result of what you heard in this forum.
- What didn't we work through?
- What do we still need to talk about?
- How can we use what we learned about ourselves in this forum?

These questions prompted enough testimonials to demonstrate one of the most powerful effects of deliberation: It changes people's opinions of others' opinions. Those changes in perception create new possibilities for acting together, generating the political will to move ahead.

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

EXPERIENCED MODERATORS REPORT THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO:

- Move the conversation beyond sharing the stories to looking at costs and consequences of the options.
- Make sure the best case/positive side of all options are considered and understood. To diminish an option is to stop deliberation.
- Stay with deliberation until participants see that the issue is framed on what is valuable to people and until they have identified the conflicts among the approaches.
- Recognize that forums seldom end in total agreement or total disagreement. Forums frequently end in a discovery of a shared sense of purpose or recognition of how interests are interconnected.

Forums do change people's opinions of others' opinions. Those changes in perception create new possibilities for acting together, generating the political will to move ahead.

“Recognize that forums seldom end in total agreement or total disagreement. Forums frequently end in a discovery of a shared sense of purpose or recognition of how interests are interconnected.”

Tips on Moderating

Deliberation is more likely to take place if some ground rules are laid out at the beginning; they can help prevent difficulties later on in the forum.

- Everyone is encouraged to participate, but no one should dominate. (By giving that warning ahead of time, moderators find it easier to cut off someone later, if they are taking over the discussion.)
- Listening is as important as talking.
- Participants are encouraged to speak to each other, rather than just to the moderator. (If the group is too large, participants may have to raise their hands to be recognized, but otherwise the deliberations go more smoothly if they simply respond to each other's comments.)
- Participants must fairly consider every option and fully examine all the trade-offs involved in a choice. (If no one in the group seems to favor a particular option, the moderator or someone might raise a question like, “What would someone who favors this approach say?”)

The moderator is not constantly intervening. To the contrary, the essence of good moderating is to encourage people to engage one another. The responsibility for doing the work of deliberation is the group's responsibility and the moderator should make that clear from the beginning. Above all, the moderator also must remain impartial so that the group can do its job.

“Do citizens see the issue in any way different from experts or officeholders? Do they have a shared definition of the problem? Do they agree on the causes? Do they see connections to other issues?”

Officeholders and NIF Forums

Experienced convenors report the following “dos” and “don’ts” when inviting officeholders to a forum:

- Do invite the officeholder to attend a forum to listen to the deliberation.
- Do provide some suggestions about what the officeholder might listen for. (Examples being (1) what matters most to people; (2) how did they deal with the conflicts and trade-offs; (3) was there any sense of possibility?)
- Do “protect” the officeholder. If you invite the officeholder to the conversation, make it clear to the participants they are not to demand answers or create situations that change the ground rules. Forums should be a “safe place” for officeholders to meet with the public.
- Do invite them to share how they are struggling or wrestling with the conflict and trade-offs in the issue.
- Don’t invite officeholders to have a “debate” with other officeholders.
- Don’t expect or allow officeholders to become the experts to tell participants what should be done.
- Don’t demand they justify their position.

Tips on Local Reporting of Your Public Voice

What you have valuable to report to others are the effects of deliberation on the issue. Remember you organized and participated in a deliberative discussion not a fact-finding session, goal setting, or a search for the perfect solution. The following questions will help you focus on the effects of your deliberation

1. Do citizens see the issue in any way different from experts or officeholders? Do they have a shared definition of the problem? Do they agree on the causes? Do they see connections to other issues?
2. Did deliberation change anything?
3. How did people come out on the conflicts, contradictions, and trade-offs? What were they willing or not willing to do to solve the problem?
4. Did any general sense of policy direction emerge? Was there a range of actions, which were consistent with one another, that had public support?
5. What unique information came out of forums that officeholders need to know? What implications do the results have for community action?

“What matters most to people? How did they deal with the conflicts and trade-offs? Was there any sense of possibility?”

NIF FORUMS AND STUDY CIRCLES

1

Why?...

Why are we here? What are we going to do? We are here to move toward a public decision or CHOICE on a difficult issue through CHOICE WORK.

How can we know if we are making progress?

By constantly testing your group:

- Can your group make the best case for the option least favored?
- Can it identify the negative effects of the option most favored?

2

How?...

How do we do it? Through a deliberative dialogue in which we:

- Understand the PROS and CONS of every option, its COSTS AND CONSEQUENCES.
- Know the STRATEGIC FACTS and how they affect the way the group thinks about each option.
- Get beyond the initial positions people hold to their deeper motivations—the things different people consider to be most valuable in their everyday lives.
- Weigh carefully the views of others; appreciate the impact various options would have on what others consider valuable.
- WORK THROUGH the conflicting emotions that arise when various options pull and tug on what people consider valuable.

3

What?...

Movement from first reactions and mass opinions toward a more shared and stable PUBLIC JUDGMENT.

- The emergence of a PUBLIC VOICE, one different from the voice of personal preference or special interest pleadings.

Increased COMMON GROUND FOR ACTION found in a greater ability to:

- Identify how people worked through the conflicts, contradictions, and trade-offs, and what they were willing, and not willing to do to solve the problem.
- Identify any shared sense of purpose or policy direction and a range of actions that were consistent with one another.
- Understand the implications of how citizens sensed their interdependence on the issue and its implications for community action.

GUIDELINES FOR STUDY CIRCLE/FORUMS

- The moderator will guide the deliberation yet remain impartial. Citizens engage one another not the moderator.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one or two individuals dominate.
- Everyone understands that this is not a debate. The talk is deliberative rather than argumentative.
- The deliberation will focus on the options.
- The major choices or options are considered and the trade-offs are examined.
- Listening is as important as talking.
- Everyone works toward making a decision about how he or she will act on a problem or what policy they think best for the community or country.

24" x 36" Poster Available from NIF Research

BE CERTAIN THAT...

After Our Forum/Study Circle, Everyone Is Able to:

- identify the range of realistic alternatives and move toward a choice;
- make a good case for those positions one dislikes as well as the position one likes, and consider options one has not considered before;
- realize that one's own knowledge is not complete until one understands why others feel the way they do about the choices;
- consider what is important or valuable to different individuals about each choice;
- reconsider one's own judgment and reconsider the views of others; and
- understand how the deliberation has changed people's opinions of others' opinions and how those changes in perception create new possibilities for acting together, generating the political will to move ahead.

REFLECTIONS

On Your Forum: (What did you accomplish?)

I. Individual Reflections

- How has your thinking about the issue changed?
- How has your thinking about other people's views changed?

II. Group Reflections

- What did you hear the group saying about a shared sense of the problem and the tension in the issue?
- Can we detect any shared sense of direction? How did the issue create a recognition interdependency?
- What trade-offs are we, or are we not, willing to make to move in a shared direction?

III. Next-Step Reflections

- What do we still need to talk about?
- How can we use what we know?
- What implications do the results have for community action?

24" x 36" Poster Available from NIF Research

NIF ISSUES AND MATERIALS

How the Issues Are Selected

The NIF issues are selected by the network members. Each NIF community has a voice in determining the issues for the NIF series.

Convenors are asked to suggest the issues for the following year. The NIF network's collective judgment has proven to be absolutely vital in selecting timely, engaging issues that are at the top of the nation's agenda.

The community steering committees/other cooperating groups then talk over the suggested choices, add others as appropriate, and select their top three choices. The communities also comment on how they feel the issues should be addressed and make known what is really on people's minds.

The Issue Books

What citizens typically lack in consideration of public issues is the one indispensable element in a representative democracy: an informed basis for making choices by first addressing implications of the issues for their individual lives. People need a way of relating their choices to what is important and valuable to them and to their own life's experience. Accordingly, a goal of the NIF is to provide a non-threatening setting where public deliberation about national issues as public choices is encouraged. That means helping the participant understand the personal implications of issues and choices.

Issue books are generally divided into five or six sections. The introduction provides an overview of

the issue. Then, three or four sections illustrate the basic policy options, choices, or points of view that might be adopted in making decisions. A conclusion summarizes the choices arrayed in the previous sections, suggesting the various trade-offs associated with each.

The order form (listing all issue book titles) and NIF issue books is available from:

Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company
4050 Westmark Drive
PO Box 1840
Dubuque, IA 52004-1840
1-800-228-0810
1-800-772-9165 FAX
Price: \$3.60 per issue
(Discounts are offered for larger orders.)

"People need a way of relating their choices to what is important and valuable to them and to their own life's experience. Accordingly, a goal of the NIF is to provide a nonthreatening setting where public deliberation about national issues as public choices is encouraged. That means helping the participant understand the personal implications of issues and choices."

To request copies of this publication and our publications catalog, you may use our toll free number, 1-800-600-4060, send a fax to 1-937-435-7367, or write:

NIF Research Order Department
P.O. Box 41626
Dayton, OH 45441-9801

NIF MATERIALS

Moderator Guides

Specially prepared moderator guides are available for each NIF issue booklet. This guide offers background, insights, and suggestions about moderating the NIF forums/study circles.

Single copies are available at no charge. Contact:

NIF Research Order Department
P.O. Box 41626
Dayton, OH 45441-9801
1-800-600-4060

Starter Videotapes

The NIF starter videotape helps NIF moderators lay the groundwork for open, fair-minded deliberation. These videotapes present NIF issues, setting out in a clear and straightforward manner the pros and cons of the choices involved with each issue. Convenors and moderators report that over time they have found the starter tapes "a must" for opening the forum. Often citizens attend the forum/study circle without having read the issue booklet. The starter tape provides a solid base and common experience for all participants. The videotapes starting in 1996, are available on one NIF issue per video. The cost for a single tape is \$12.00. This is done so that the starter videos will be available as they are produced. Prior to 1996, all three issues for a year were on one video at a cost of \$35.00. Tapes may be ordered from:

Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company
4050 Westmark Drive, PO Box 1840
Dubuque, IA 52004-1840
To order direct, call 1-800-228-0810.

NIF Questionnaires and Your Community Voice

Each year, the results of forums are reported to the nation in several ways. "NIF Reports on the Issues" include in-depth analyses of how citizens were thinking and talking about an issue in NIF forums during the past year. These reports are presented in briefings, press conferences, and are distributed through the mail to officeholders, media, and other interested citizens. Researchers and NIF moderators help explain the results at these briefings, which can take place at all sorts of settings, from Capitol

Hill and the National Press Club in Washington to the town square and the high school auditorium in hundreds of communities.

Copies of the reports are available to folks in the NIF network and summaries can also be found on the NIF Web site (www.NIFI.org). These reports are complemented by shorter "Network" reports on the issues and by the annual television show, "A Public Voice."

In order to have comprehensive reports on the issues—and ones that reflect public thinking in your community—the questionnaires from your forums are important and valuable. Please return your questionnaires to:

NIF Research
100 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459-2777

A Public Voice

"A Public Voice" is a series of public affairs television programs that reveal striking differences between the way citizens, the media, and political leaders think and talk about pressing issues on the nation's agenda.

The Public Voice series contrasts the voices of ordinary American people, in serious deliberation around the nation (at the National Issues Forums), with sound bites and headlines from talk shows, newspapers, and the floor of the U.S. Congress. On the issues deliberated in NIF forums and study circles, the difference is striking. In informal but sometimes intense conversation, a distinguished panel of nationally known political leaders, commentators, and columnists, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., reflect on what this "public voice" means for those who care about America in the future.

A Public Voice Series is produced by Milton B. Hoffman Productions.

Copies of the "A Public Voice" are available from:

NIF Research Order Department
P.O. Box 41626
Dayton, OH 45441-9801
1-800-600-4060

PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTES

Public Policy Institutes (PPIs) located throughout the country bring together those who are experienced in organizing forums and study circles and those who are new to NIF. Attending a PPI affords an opportunity to gain background in the concepts needed to convene and moderate a deliberative meeting. New and experienced convenors together look at aspects of the practice of NIF: sponsoring and organizing an NIF forum or study circle; getting it off the ground; letting people know about it; getting them to attend.

These Public Policy Institutes, held at more than 26 sites around the country, will do more, however, than show you how to organize and run public forums. They will show you how you can work effectively through NIF with your fellow citizens, to make sound choices about the issues of policy that accompany any serious public problem. The institutes' curriculum is designed to give prospective forum and study circle convenors and moderators a basic grounding in the ideas, principles, and practical experience needed to lead their fellow citizens in deliberating on issues of public policy. Through a variety of exercises conducted in full group ("plenary") and smaller ("homeroom") sessions, **the institutes explore the following concepts about the public and how the public might act together.**

What Is a Public?

Think of a public not as a crowd but as a diverse array of citizens who share certain problems or concerns and are connected in ways that allow them to act together as they face those problems. Being connected is key to being a public. Publics exist through the ongoing relationships citizens have with one another.

How Publics Form

Public relationships form in particular ways. They grow out of people seeing connections between what is happening to them, on the one hand, and what is valuable to them, on the other. They form around a sense of a common fate, interdependence, and overlapping purposes.

Naming and Framing Public Problems

Who gets to name a problem and the issue behind it, even the type of language used, is critically important. If experts name the problem and frame choices in technical language, a public isn't likely to form. Citizens often have a different "take" on issues than experts or institutions. They respond to issues described in public terms, in terms of everyday experience, and what they consider valuable.

Making Choices through Deliberation

Naming problems in public terms and framing issues for public action sets the stage for another critical step in creating public relationships — making choices about how to act.

Making difficult choices requires deliberative dialogue. Deliberation differs from popular expression (sounding off), information gathering, and debate. To deliberate, people have to talk citizen-to-citizen and face-to-face rather than just listening to expert presentations. They have to be able to explore, test ideas, weigh the pros and cons of all of their options, and consider the costs and consequences of possible actions. That is what deliberation is — weighing carefully options against what is truly valuable.

Public Actions

In the final analysis, publics are created or public relationships are formed when we act—through common work or public action. By "public action" we mean a particular kind of action different from what an institution does. Institutional action is uniform, linear, and usually coordinated by some administrative agency. Public action, on the other hand, isn't linear, beginning at one point and ending at another. It is a more organic, ever-repeating series of efforts—richly diverse with many people involved. Public action is neither carefully planned action such as strategic planning nor is it spontaneous or magical. It grows out of deliberation that, if it goes well, results in a sense of direction for action. Deliberation sets the stage for identifying where interests overlap and purposes can be joined.

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NIF PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTES (PPIs), CONTACT:**

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Contact National Issues Forums web site at

www.nifi.org

For current contact information for
NIF Public Policy Institutes (PPI)

*For current Public Policy Institute dates, visit the
National Issues Forums Web site at www.nifi.org*

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS FROM STUDIES OF PUBLIC DELIBERATION

Over the past ten years, there have been more than a dozen studies, conducted with a variety of research methods, including an increasing amount of attention in the past two years to the effects of citizen deliberations.

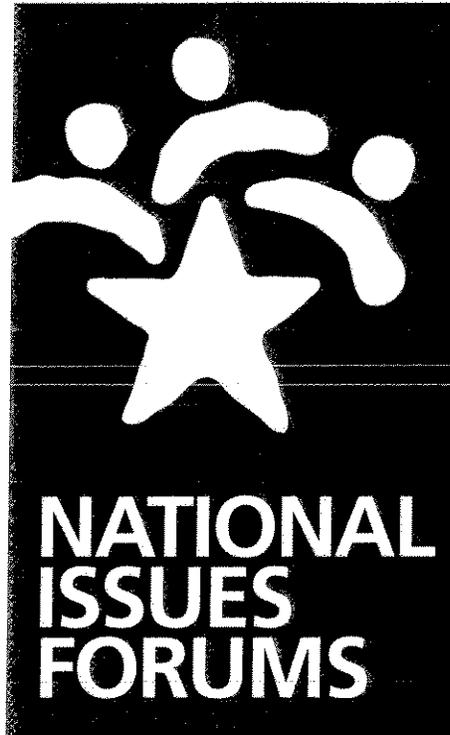
In a nutshell, the studies indicate that public deliberation makes a difference. Not only does it change the way individuals understand an issue, it changes the way people talk with each other, and it improves a community's (society's) ability to deal with its issues, concerns, and problems.

Here are some of the other highlights:

- Every kind of person seeks out and takes part in citizen deliberations.
- Virtually everyone is capable of deliberating important public issues.
- People reconsider their own opinions and judgments.
- People reconsider the views of others and develop a greater understanding of those viewpoints.
- People approach issues more realistically and are willing to consider costs, consequences, and trade-offs.
- People come away with a greater sense of efficacy, self-worth, and confidence (including increasing their image of themselves as political actors who are capable of participation and action).
- People become more interested in political and social issues.
- People define their self-interests more broadly.
- People increase their activity around issues.
- Deliberation in a community establishes and enhances communication between groups.

“In a nutshell, the studies indicate that public deliberation makes a difference.”

“...makes a difference.”



*A Different Kind of Talk,
Another Way to Act*

**NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS RESEARCH
100 COMMONS ROAD
DAYTON, OH 45459-2777
1-800-433-7834**