

Deliberation – The Work of Making Choices

To join together as citizens to act and/or set direction for government, we need to make tough choices so our solutions to public policy issues reflect what is important to us. Making these choices, or **choice work**, requires individuals and the group to grapple with underlying values and the tensions among values. *Framing of an issue and the choices in public terms is vital to effective choice work.*

The Need to Choose Between a Number of Good Things that People Care About

In every public problem there are several options to solving the problem. In most cases, there is something desirable about each approach. The question of priority arises because the things people care about typically conflict with each other. They frequently prove incompatible in the sense that it's impossible to obtain or enjoy one thing without sacrificing something else that has value. Which should you assign greater importance: clean air and your health or the convenience and freedom of driving to work? Which should you give priority: the jobs that a new factory would provide or the green belt that shields your home from the harshness of asphalt and skyscrapers? The satisfaction of raising children or the freedom to lead your life without having others dependent on you? The security of working for a well-established company or the independence that comes from self-employment? In each case you face a predicament -- a hard choice. Which of two good things should you choose?

Such conflict is an inescapable fact of life. Sometimes conflict occurs because we simply do not have the resources to "have our cake and eat it, too." For example, you might want a new car and a new house. As it happens you cannot afford both. Because your resources are limited, you have to make a choice. Similarly, it might be desirable for our country to have both a strong national defense and a social "safety net" that ensures that not one will suffer from lack of adequate food, housing, medical care or education. But no society is wealthy enough to achieve both of these aims simultaneously and to the fullest extent possible. Trade-offs are inevitable. And that means that we face a hard choice between good things that we care about.

Sometimes, however, conflict occurs because the good things we value are, in their very nature, incompatible. It's not that we cannot afford to pursue them equally. Rather, it's that the good things in conflict are qualitatively different, like apples and oranges (or apples and computers). For example, by choosing to protect the freedom of a person to speak freely, we unavoidable slight the value of being able to live without being exposed to disturbing or offensive talk.

The need to choose -- individually and collectively -- thus lies at the heart of politics.

Choice Work IS Work!

The job of forum participants is to move toward a CHOICE by:

- Understanding how the issue affects people.
- Understanding the key facts.
- Accessing the pros and cons of every option and weighing the options' costs and consequences against what is most valuable to people.
- Hearing, with respect, the perspectives of others.
- Finding out what makes the choice so difficult.
- Working through conflicting emotions.

Ways to test your progress:

Can you make the **best** case for the option **least** favored?

Can you identify the **negative** effects of the option **most** favored?



2236 Avenida de la Playa
La Jolla, CA 92037
Phone: (858) 551-2317
Fax: (858) 551-0375
info@ViewpointLearning.com
www.ViewpointLearning.com

THE TRADITIONAL "EXPERT INFORMATION" MODEL

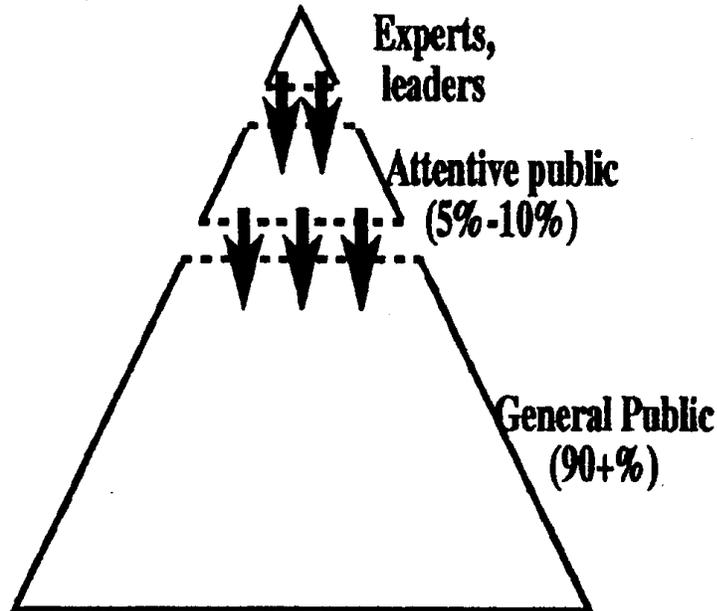
VS.

THE NEW "PUBLIC LEARNING" MODEL

Viewpoint Learning, Inc.
Daniel Yankelovich
May 2001

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The Traditional "Expert Information" Model



- Favored by experts, the government and the press
- Top-down and one-way
- The public is expected to learn, not contribute
- Focuses on information rather than values
- Focuses on creating awareness
- Assumes awareness leads to resolution
- Assumes that a *well-informed* public is the "Holy Grail" of democracy

A Nest of Flawed Assumptions

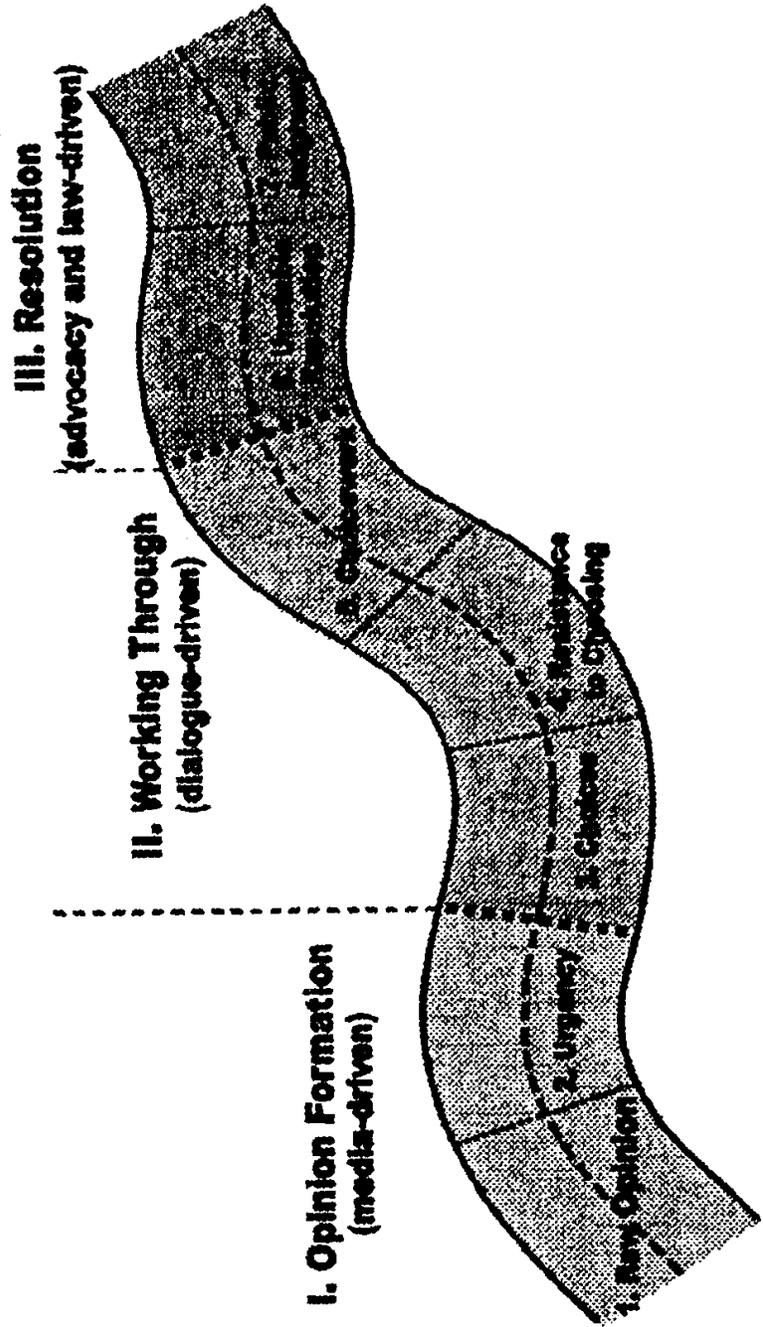
The traditional model falsely assumes that...

- **Information is the key to public learning**
- **People make up their minds once they receive relevant information**
- **The public interprets information in the same way that experts do**
- **Experts know what information the public needs and how to convey it**
- **Experts who debate their opposing views help the public to learn**
- **Technology can compensate for deficiencies in the model**
- **There is no need to base the model on how people actually make hard choices**

CONCLUSION:

THE TRADITIONAL MODEL WORKS ONLY WHEN THERE ARE NO HARD CHOICES TO MAKE

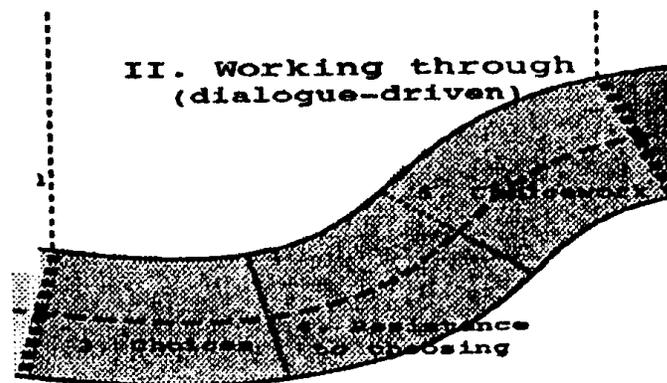
The New "Public Learning" Model



Major Features of the New "Public Learning" Model:

- **Requires three stages (Awareness + Hard choices + Resolution) rather than two**
- **Accounts for how people actually resolve hard choices**
- **Interactive: people learn from one another**
- **Total process varies from days and weeks to months, years, decades**
- **Requires people to struggle with conflicting values (information is often secondary)**
- **The public's wisdom adds value to the experts'**
- **Different communication strategies apply to each stage**
- **Our society has institutions for the two-stage model but not the new three stager**

Choice-work Dialogues



- Choice-work Dialogues are designed to help people work through the hard choice phase
- This is where issues typically bog down and strong feelings break out
- When possible, people avoid hard choices, preferring to take refuge in wishful thinking
- In this stage, people confront painful trade-offs and conflicting values
- Dialogue is the most efficient method for moving people through this stage
- Choice-work Dialogues compress into a single day a process that might otherwise stretch over months and years

Coming to Public Judgment: Seven Stages

Issue Forums move people from unchallenged individual opinion to considered judgment. Publicly thinking together leads to a shared, mutual understanding of an issue and the development of more carefully weighed personal judgment. The process of coming to public judgment may be rapid through forums but may take years through an evolving process. On any issue, public opinion evolves from incoherent bits of opinion toward integrated, coherent and considered judgment.

Public Opinion

Stage I – Dawning Consciousness

People become aware of an issue or an aspect of it.	Opinions are unstable, feelings may be strong but that does not mean settled views.
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Stage II – Greater Urgency

A sense of urgency develops.	There is a general sense of urgency and demands of “Someone do something”.
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The first two stages are “consciousness raising.” People become aware of the problem without necessarily seeing the problem as important or needing any large-scale action. People do not yet connect the issue to their own lives and the concerns they have.

Stage III – Discovering the Choices

People start to explore choices for dealing with the issue.	There is a focus on alternatives for dealing with the issues. Often, the proffered options are not the best choices.
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Remember, events can cause people to return to a previous stage.

Stage IV – Wishful Thinking

Resistance to facing costs and trade-offs. People want it all, wishful thinking.	It is easy to get expressions of approval for a wide range of things everyone wants (e.g., cheap medical care, the very best medical care).
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Media and experts do much of the work in these early stages. Leaders and experts formulated the choices. In conventional politics, they attempt to sell their solutions through contests and advertising campaigns. Public politics would have people connecting the issue to other concerns and describing how it affects their own lives and communities.

Remember, events can cause people to return to a previous stage.

Stage V – Weighing the Choices

People start to weigh the pros and cons of alternatives.	Now the public invests effort to grasp the choices, understand consequences and wrestle with conflicts over what they value most.
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Remember, events can cause people to return to a previous stage.

Stage VI – Taking a Stand

People take a stand intellectually.	People see the intellectual reasons for making one choice over others but may not be prepared for the reality of the trade-offs (free speech and censorship).
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Remember, events can cause people to return to a previous stage.

Stage VII – Making a Responsible Judgment

Making a responsible judgment morally and emotionally.	The public overcomes the impulse to put their needs and desires first. The commitments to society take over. The ethical dimension asserts itself.
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Remember, events can cause people to return to a previous stage.

Adapted from: Daniel Yankelovich’s *Coming to Public Judgment* (1991) Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 13244-5160.

To Frame or Not to Frame? That Is the Question

Determining if the Issue Is Appropriate for Framing

When is public deliberation necessary and appropriate? Before you try to frame an issue or problem, work through this checklist to determine if public deliberation on the problem is what your community needs.

- **Do citizens know and care about the problem? Do they feel that something must be done about it?**
If citizens do not know anything about the issue, do not really know if it concerns them, or do not feel that it needs to be addressed, then a public information or consciousness raising campaign may be necessary first. People will not engage in dialogue if they do not know anything about the issue or really do not understand why they should care about it.
- **Has the issue already been decided?**
If citizens just want to vent after a decision is made or if citizens are being asked to merely “rubber stamp” a decision, there is no need for deliberation, nor is it an honest tool for overturning a decision.
- **Does your group have a particular approach to advocate?**
If so, even if you take extra care to maintain the neutrality needed for deliberation, others may suspect that you are pushing an agenda.
- **Who needs to act on the problem: government alone or a wide range of citizens and groups?**
Community politics is about citizens working on public problems. In some cases, the role of citizens may be limited to advising public officials or other decision makers about what should be done. This is part of Community Politics, but not all. Many problems, especially those that are persistent, interrelated, and deeply embedded in the fabric of society, cannot be solved by government or any one group alone. When problems that require the combined, sustained efforts of many are framed, possibilities for public action emerge.
- **Are there only two answers to the question: yes or no?**
“Yes or no” or two-sided issues are better candidates for debate than for deliberation. However, often a deeper issue underlies problems that are seen on the surface as two-sided. The underlying, broader problem may be one on which citizens need to deliberate.
- **Is the issue a technical matter that is appropriately within the realm of professionals?**
If so, determine if there is an underlying or related problem that needs to be considered by citizens. If not, leave the technical matters to the experts.

Summary. Issues that are appropriate for framing for public deliberation generally have some of the following characteristics.

- Choices must be made but there are no clear answers.
- There is a moral struggle about what is best for all citizens.
- The issue is of broad concern within the community.
- The public conversation is not moving forward and new approaches may allow the community to move forward on it.
- Citizens have not considered the implications of different courses of actions, either for a segment of the population or for long-term consequences.
- A range of people and groups must act in order for the community to work on the issue.
- Officeholders’ decision-making needs to be informed by public knowledge and understanding of the issue.

Framing an Issue for Deliberative Forums

Once assured that the criteria described in *To Frame or Not to Frame* have been met, framing can begin. The **purpose of issue framing** is to create a framework or issue guide about what should be done about problems or issues facing the community or state. The framework should invite people to explore a range of approaches to a problem AND to weigh the advantages, drawbacks, and trade-offs inherent in each. To foster true public deliberation, the framework must reveal the tensions that are within each approach, and among all the approaches. To stimulate new possibilities for action, the framework must trigger people to think about actions they can take, not only what actions they think others should take.

Developing a framework or issue guide for a deliberative forum takes time and thought. Issue framers seek to engage the public in deliberative dialogue, not to advance their favorite solution. Objectivity and neutrality are crucial.

Framing an issue is a significant effort. Successful issue framers generally have a good deal of experience in moderating and recording deliberative forums and a thorough understanding of deliberation, as well as complete a training workshop on issue framing. Issue-framing training is available in several states in the National Issues Forums network.

Steps in Issue Framing

1. **Develop a framing team.** One way to achieve objectivity and neutrality is to develop a framing team with persons of diverse backgrounds, perspectives and skills. A diverse framing team lends integrity to the process and final product. Because developing a framework includes several tasks, having a framing team with various skills is essential.

Tasks will include: interviewing; organizing people and events; researching at the library and on the internet; analyzing input from interviews and questionnaires; clustering input into themes and approaches; writing, editing, and revising a framework for deliberation; pilot-testing the framework in an actual deliberative forum setting; and publishing the framework.

2. **Name the issue in public terms.** Naming in public terms means using language that people from many perspectives and backgrounds will be able to recognize and will see that the issue has relevance to them. Effective issue naming draws people into reading the issue guide and participating in the forum.
3. **Get people's perspectives on the issue.** How do people in the community or state talk about the issue? Framing teams discover people's diverse perspectives by using short personal interviews and/or questionnaires available on paper, on line or via email. For a community issue, it's good to get interviews or questionnaires from 200-300 persons of varied backgrounds and perspectives. For a state issue, recommended input is 800-1,200 persons. Few questions are needed; most framing teams use the following:
 - a. When you think about the issue, what concerns you? How are you and your family being affected? (*These questions call to mind the things that people consider most valuable*).
 - b. Given your concerns, what actions would you take or want to see taken that would address these concerns? (*The actions should have a direct and logical connection to the concerns.*)
 - c. What consequences might follow from the action you favor that could adversely affect something else you consider valuable? (*This question should expose tensions or dilemmas, sometimes reflecting conflicting values. These are the sources of moral disagreements.*)

4. **Analyze the varied perspectives from the interview/questionnaire step.** Framing teams do this work in numerous ways and the work can take several hours or days. One tried-and-true method begins with analyzing the many responses to each question and eliminating duplicate responses. Each response is then put on separate slips of paper or index cards to prepare for the “clustering” step.
5. **Cluster responses into themes / Develop the 3-4 approaches.** This step can take 1-2 days. There are various ways of clustering. Many framing teams use a room with ample wall space, where a group of 10-30 people read the responses on the slips of paper or index cards and begin to put them on the wall grouped together by a theme or common perspective. This clustering process is continued and refined until the group ends up with only 3-4 clusters that will become the 3-4 approaches of the framework.

What makes an approach work? Below are several **criteria for an effective approach** that promotes deliberation and causes forum participants to think deeply about this issue:

- a. Approaches are not mutually exclusive. There will always be elements of each approach that everyone will warm to (if they are honest about their feelings). This is possible because each approach grows out of a value we all share but in varying degrees of relative importance.
- b. Within each approach, there are elements of the pro and con side that tug at us. The approach forces us to face our own ambiguity. We have to acknowledge and pay the trade-offs and we have to pay with the currency that is most precious to us—our values.
- c. No approach is the direct opposite of the other. It is not that easy. There are always a myriad of options and a simple “yes” “no” vote would not force us to acknowledge the complexity of the issue.
- d. The differences in approaches are often due to the different ranking of values or definition of the problem.
- e. The approach requires that we accept trade-offs and consequences. The approach leads to both intended and unintended conclusions. We must confront the fact that we cannot have it all.
- f. Approaches must encompass a wide range of options that express commonly held positions.

6. **Write the deliberative framework / Decide on the format (booklet, place-mat, on-line, etc.).**

This step requires a good writer with a solid understanding of how to construct a deliberative framework. As the writer translates the clusters into approaches, the following questions are helpful (completing these for each approach):

The problem behind the problem	“Well, if you ask me, the real reason we have this problem is...”
Broad remedy	“And the only way to fix it is...”
Specific actions	“Specifically, I think we are going to have to...”
Arguments in favor and key facts	“Well this answer is clear because everyone knows that...”
Arguments against	“Yes but what about the fact that...”
Values	“When all is said and done, what we’re really talking about is...”

7. **Test the framework in actual deliberative forums.** Framers usually test a framework in 5-10 forums. Observers can sit outside the circle to take notes on whether the approaches work well to encourage deliberation.

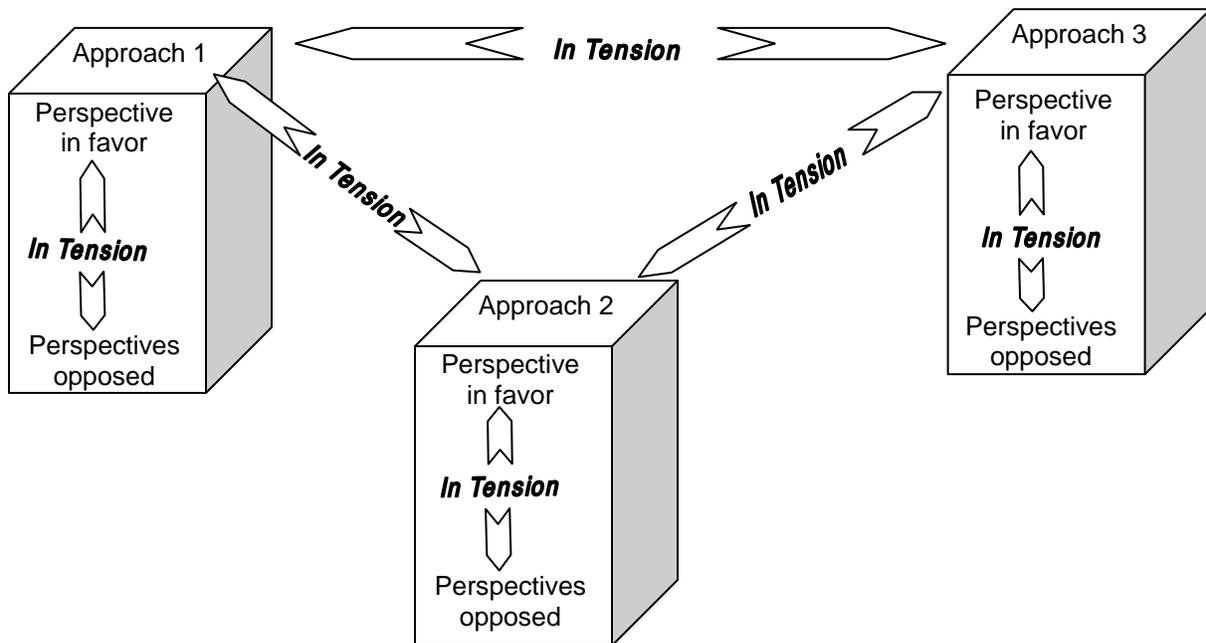
8. **Publish the framework.**

In summary, developing a framework involves several steps and many people. The goal is to have a framework that spurs peoples’ thinking. The chart below lists concepts that should be in every deliberative framework.

Essential Concepts of Issue Framing

- Several distinctly different approaches to the problem, each driven by different underlying “deep motivations”
- Tensions **among** the framed approaches
- Tensions **within** each framed approach
- Inclusion of “who isn’t in the room”
- Trade-offs that convey the real-world costs and consequences of the approaches

About “Tensions/Dilemmas” in Deliberative Frameworks



As used here, the word “tensions” refers to the conflicts, struggles, or feelings of “being torn” over an issue or having a dilemma. It can help to think of these as “on the other hand” situations. For example, when it comes to violent kids, we may have a soft spot for youth, desiring to offer counseling and other help to give troubled kids a second chance, **but on the other hand**, to protect our safety, we may want to see youth with violent histories locked up. Often, we can individually, within ourselves, feel torn by these differing perspectives. At other times, these differing perspectives lie at the heart of tension or conflict between people. For an issue-framing to foster real deliberation, each of the three or four approaches must reflect a different and distinct perspective that people have on the issue. In this graphic, these tensions/dilemmas are represented by the arrows running horizontally between the approaches.

“Tension” also refers to the conflict and struggle we feel when we consider the costs and consequences of each different approach to a problem, even for an approach we may strongly favor. For example, if we (individually or as a group) favor the approach of making more “preventative” services available to violent kids, we have to consider the costs and consequences of this approach, including intrusions into family privacy, worry that some child may hurt someone in the meantime, and greater monetary costs to provide such services. The sort of tensions that surface within each approach when we consider its costs, consequences, and trade-offs (even for the approach we like best), are represented in the graphic by the vertical arrows. Real deliberation requires that people work through these tensions as well as the tensions among the different approaches.

Hallmarks of Good Frameworks for Community Issues

1. The title immediately conveys the issue's precise focus, complete neutrality, and inclusiveness of diverse views on the issue via an open-ended question.
2. The introductory problem statement conveys why the issue needs to be addressed via deliberation.
3. Each of the 3-4 approaches in a framework represents a different view about what can be done about the problem. Each approach must be distinct – each must be driven by different underlying motivations or perspectives about what is most central to the problem.

The approaches are *not* distinguished by who will implement them (i.e. individuals, government, or community). Instead, all the different actors in the community, from individuals, to organizations, to government officials, should be able to recognize actions that they could take within EACH approach.

Accomplishing this hallmark assures there will be the necessary tension among the approaches to provoke deliberation.

4. Each approach is presented “best-foot forward,” with examples of actions that fall within it. The examples of actions should illustrate how the whole community could address the issue under the approach and help ensure citizens grasp what the approach would really mean.
5. The voices and perspectives of those who are worried about or opposed to each approach (including those who seem to be a “cause” of the problem) are included by expressing how each approach threatens or impacts what they hold valuable. ***Accomplishing this hallmark assures the inherent tensions within each approach are available to provoke deliberation.***
6. Brief, real-life scenarios are included in each approach to illustrate the trade-offs different people would face if the approach is implemented. ***Accomplishing this hallmark helps citizens grasp the tensions within each approach.***
7. The framework does not contain statements that can derail deliberation rather than promote it. These include opinion- or fact-fights; rhetorical arguments; and statements not directly responding to the approach being presented or to the precise focus of the issue that is framed.

Questions for Reflection on Our Issue Framing Efforts (Judging our Progress)

Instilling the practice of judging our progress, individually and collectively, into all of our work is essential for fostering learning and deepening the practices of community politics.

After completing each issue framing exercise, plan about an hour for the issue framing group to consider these questions, and record them so they can be attached to the team reflection paper. [If your team uses both issue framing exercises, discuss these questions separately after each experience. In other words, if you use both exercises, have this discussion twice.]

1. Describe your initial reactions upon completing the issue framing exercise.
2. What parts of the effort seemed:
 - a) easiest, and why?
 - b) most difficult, and why?
 - c) most valuable, and why?
 - d) least valuable, and why?
3. How did the group do in staying well focused on the specific issue or problem selected for framing?
4. Were there any points at which you second-guessed the selected issue's focus? If so, how did you resolve the question?
5. How does the group as a whole feel about its comfort level with issue framing?
6. Are there any concepts of framing that still seem elusive?
 - Different deep motivations driving the approaches and their opposing voices
 - Tension among the approaches
 - Tension within the approaches
 - Trade-offs
7. Assess your framework in light of the criteria on *Hallmarks of Good Frameworks for Community Issues*.
8. How do you describe the best qualities of your new framework? What are its weaknesses?
9. Would the group want to use this exercise again to frame another issue? Why or why not?
10. If you were to do this again, what would you do differently?

NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS

Issue Selection & Development

Through the National Issues Forums network, issues are developed each year for public deliberation in forums around the country. We need your help in determining which issues are of critical importance to your community and to the nation.

- Think of national issues that are crucial to your community. Which one of these issues would you most like to see developed for public discussion in National Issues Forums? (If you have more than one issue, please use additional response sheets.)

- When you hear people talking about this issue in your community, what conflicting perspectives do you hear? (What concerns people most about the issue?)

- What factors make this issue so difficult? What tensions do you notice?

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____ Date: _____

*Please feel free to use the reverse side of this form for additional comments.
Thank you for your input.*

return this form to
**National Issues Forums Research
100 Commons Rd.
Dayton, OH 45459**