National Issues Forums

Workshop for Academic Libraries

Participant Workbook

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The National Issues Forums Model[1]

Introduction

Why focus on National Issues Forums (NIF)?

There are many ways to spark deliberation (see the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation Engagement Stream document as well as the sample deliberative techniques section at the end of this workbook). At the Center for Public Deliberation (CPD), we utilize "NIF-style" forums as the base process model for our training program. Not all CPD events use this format—each project is different and calls for different styles—but the NIF model is a great starting point since it's a useful and flexible model that can be applied in a number of situations.

What is NIF?

NIF is a nonpartisan, nationwide network of locally sponsored forums for the consideration of public policy issues. They are rooted in the simple notion that people need to come together to reason and talk—to deliberate about common problems. Democracy requires an ongoing deliberative dialogue.

How does it work?

Each year, major issues of concern are identified. Issue books, which provide an overview of the subject and present several choices, are prepared to frame the choice work. Forums are sponsored by thousands of organizations and institutions within many communities. They offer citizens the opportunity to join together to deliberate and make choices with others about ways to approach difficult issues. Programs for NIF conveners and moderators are conducted each summer in Public Policy Institutes (PPIs) in communities across the country. They provide participants, both NIF newcomers and veterans, with a background on the program as well as skills for sponsoring, organizing and moderating forums.

Who participates?

Forums are organized by civic, service and religious organizations as well as by libraries; colleges, universities and high schools; literacy and leadership programs; prisons; businesses; labor unions; and senior groups. The network of convening institutions is both large and diverse. NIF participants vary considerably in age, race, gender, economic status and geographic location. Studies of NIF deliberation tell us that every type of citizen seeks out and participates in these public forums. Each year, more than 20 PPIs are held at institutions across the country to train NIF moderators and conveners. PPI participants receive training and practice in moderating forums, become acquainted with NIF materials, discuss how to organize NIF programs in their communities and learn to appreciate the importance of deliberation in identifying the public's perspective on public policy issues.

So what?

Citizens cannot act together until they decide together. By making choices, the public defines what it considers to be in the public interest and finds common ground for action. By offering citizens a framework for deliberative forums, the NIF network helps the public take an active role in policy decision-making. And the health of this nation's democratic enterprise depends on the active participation of responsible citizens who take the initiative to deliberate about public policy choices to set the public agenda.

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[1] More information about the National Issues Forum Model is available at www.nifi.org

Basic Features and Theory According to the CPD

- Designed for one-time 2-3-hour meetings of small- or medium-sized groups (8-30 people).
- Works best when multiple small groups are held, and data is compared across them.
- Issues are focused on a common problem most would agree is an issue (start from common ground). People may certainly disagree about the nature and cause of the problem, but generally most would agree *something* needs to be done about that issue.
- Uses background material (discussion or issue guides) that establish the importance of the problem and explores at least three different **approaches** to addressing it.
- NIF publishes national issue books for use, but often local centers develop discussion guides[2].
- Discussion of the approaches is focused on having participants **explore the appreciations and concerns, with dedicated time to each approach**. The approaches are specifically set up with the realization that there is **no magic bullet or perfect solution**, every approach will have positive consequences, along with difficult tradeoffs.
- The approaches are **not mutually exclusive**. Any community action would likely combine the choices in some manner. The "reflections" time at the end of a typical NIF forum is designed to combine and go beyond the approaches. In other words, they are set up to ensure a broad conversation and a dedicated focus on the different approach, but **participants are not asked to "pick your favorite."**
- A strength of the NIF approach is that it **supports broad discussion across multiple perspectives**. By having dedicated time to examine pros and cons along with a focus on listening, participants hear new aspects they haven't considered before. Focusing on a common problem and multiple approaches inherently forces participants to get beyond simple pro/con views, as well as beyond the typical process of criticizing individual solutions. By providing a range of solutions, participants are faced with the tough choices and realization that any solution will have tradeoffs that must be accepted. If we are faced with a range of solutions, we are more likely to realize we have to make a decision and act. Certain solutions also become more viable when examined in conjunction with others, especially when perceived "obvious" solutions turn out to be not so obvious.
- Another strength is the **simplicity** for facilitators. Inexperienced facilitators can utilize a well-framed discussion guide and host a meeting with minimal training.
- The overall framing of a common problem with three or four potential approaches helps participants **move away from the blame game** concerning the problem, and more toward what they would like to see in the future, which is generally a more productive conversation. The approaches essentially provide a diverse set of entry points into the issue, helping assure a broad range of issues will be discussed.
- The approaches can often help participants **consider a broad range of actors** and their role in reacting to the problem. At times the approaches may even be particularly framed to focus on the various actors, with each approach essentially focused on a different primary stakeholder and what they could do.
- Two of the **key limits** of the NIF approach are: a short one-time meeting is difficult to transfer to action, and the approaches may limit discussion. As a result, the basic NIF model is often combined with other strategies.

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[2] For a list of all the NIF guides, visit www.nifi.org. For similar materials from Public Agenda, visit www.publicagenda.org

Stages of an NIF Forum

Welcome	The convener or moderator introduces the program. In some cases, pre-forum questionnaires may be used (either online or at the start of the event).
Ground Rules and Goals	Facilitator reviews ground rules for the discussion, as well as the desired outcomes of the forum. This discussion often allows the facilitator a chance to establish key aspects of the deliberative perspective as well as create the necessary environment for the process.
Introduce Framework	A starter video may be used to set the tone for dialogue, or the moderator can introduce the choices themselves.
Personal Stake	As an icebreaker, participants share personal experiences related to the issue. This sets the stage and allows all participants to talk at least once, making it easier for them to talk later. (May be completed before the video, so that the participants do not simply react to the video in their comments.)
Deliberation	NIF-style forums are typically focused on a common problem, with 3-4 approaches to addressing that problem. Participants examine all the approaches, spending specific time focusing on each one. Typically, 15-20 minutes per approach if time allows. NIF-style discussions often focus on the **Appreciations** and **Concerns**. Notes are taken on easel pads focused on developing a list of the appreciations and concerns for each approach. Discussions often begin with appreciations ("What do you like about this approach?") but then shift to concerns during the discussion as participants respond to each other and facilitator prompts. Facilitators should ensure that the participants have ample, but not necessarily equal, discussion of both. If the discussion focuses primarily on one or the other, they should ask specific questions to make sure the participants fully consider each. ("We seem to be focusing primarily on concerns with this approach, does anyone have any particular appreciations? Why do people support this approach?")
Reflection	Once each approach has been discussed, the remaining time can be used in a variety of ways, depending on the purpose of the event (see the Goals and Consequences information from earlier). Questions should be developed that allow the participants to build on the overall conversation and move toward accomplishing the purposes of the event. Time may also be used to allow the participants to look back over all the notes that had been captured during the discussion, as well as perhaps use "dot voting" to identify the key points they support in the discussion.
Questionnaire	Participants may be asked to complete post-forum questionnaires or surveys to gather additional data.

Setting the Ground Rules

Deliberation is more likely to take place if some guidelines are laid out at the beginning; they can help prevent difficulties later. Often these rules are posted somewhere in the room (perhaps on a flip chart and then displayed on a side wall). We tend to use ground rules; other processes may use guidelines, covenants, norms or protocols, based on the desire to get away from "rules," which are perceived as imposed or to emphasize mutuality of the behavioral understandings.

Ideally, the groups come up with the rules themselves through a process, but we often don't have the time to do that. There is a very real tension about using these rules. We want to create a productive, safe environment, but we also do not want to cut off discussions, unduly suppress ideas or unnecessarily favor particular communication styles.

Moderators find it useful to ask the group to ratify these rules verbally or by a show of hands rather than just announcing them. A wide variety of potential ground rules for deliberation exist, so individual moderators need to decide which rules to use and how to frame them before the forum. Some moderators also allow the audience to suggest additional rules for the discussion.

CPD basic ground rules
- Be honest and respectful
- Listen to understand
- It's ok to disagree, but do so with curiosity, not hostility
- Be brief so everyone has an opportunity to participate

When we go over these rules at the beginning of a forum, we use the time to help us explain the overall philosophy. For example, we talk about the importance of listening and its critical role in deliberative politics as compared to adversarial politics.

Another function of ground rules is to provide the participants with examples of norms and behaviors that they will hopefully find value in beyond the forum itself. The hope is that once they realize the higher quality of conversation that occurs under these conditions, they will become a habit for them that impacts their communication style in multiple settings.

Moderating the Welcome

The way any forum begins is an open question to be answered by those planning the forum. These are some potential elements that may be incorporated into the welcome portion of the forum.

Overall, the welcome should be rather short. Participants are there to talk to each other, not listen to the organizers. Provide enough background to explain the process and goals for the meeting, but otherwise move quickly into the process.

Potential Components of a Welcome

- Introduce your team
- Thank sponsors
- Thank participants
- Explain any logistics (bathrooms, refreshments, etc.)
- Explain deliberation
    - Define
    - Compare "politics as usual" and deliberation
    - Compare debate and deliberation
- Address the "so what" question and the goals of the event
- Explain what information will be captured and what will be done with the information
- Preview the structure of the forum
- Go over ground rules and garner buy-in from participants
- Explain the roles of the facilitator and notetakers
- Encourage and answer questions

Moderating the Reflection

The reflections time at the end of the forum can often be the most productive time. This period is precious and should be used wisely.

How the reflection period is used depends on the goals for the event. For example, if the goal was primarily learning about the issue, then the reflections time should focus on the issue itself and what people learned. If the goal was to improve relationships and democratic attitudes, then questions should be asked connected to that goal (such as asking participants how their thinking has changed about other people, or what they learned about others). If the goal was action, this time should be used to identify and gain some commitment on individual and group actions. The basic NIF format for reflections is below, but feel free to adjust these to the needs of your event.

Overall Question
- What did we accomplish?

Individual Reflections
- How has your thinking about the issue changed?
- How has your thinking about other people and their views changed?

Group Reflections
- Can we detect any shared sense of direction or common ground for action?
- What did you hear the group saying about tensions in the issue? What key values we hold seem to be in conflict?
- What trade-offs were the group willing or not willing to make?

Next Step Reflections
- What do we still need to talk about?
- Who else needs to be here? What voices were missing that could have added to the discussion?

- How can we use what we now know?

One type of question we like to ask at the CPD, particularly if the report will be provided to decision-makers, is something along the lines of, "Now that you've had a chance to think about this issue from multiple perspectives and listen to your fellow community members, what is the one thing you would tell [insert most relevant decision-maker here, such as school superintendent, governor, city council, etc.] if they were here right now?"

An Effective Facilitator

Balancing Responsibilities
An effective facilitator must balance many responsibilities including:

1. **Remaining impartial about the subject of the forum.**

    Deliberative facilitators avoid expressing their own opinion or evaluating the comments of the participants based on their own perspective. However, moderators are not "neutral" or disengaged, and in fact they should be passionate about democracy and the process. Facilitators should be invested in helping the community and supporting democracy.

2. **Allowing the participants to own the process and topic as much as possible, balancing that need with the deliberative goals of the event.**

    Facilitators facilitate (i.e. help others achieve their goals more productively); they don't control or dominate. Based on other responsibilities, they must intervene as necessary, but should also realize that doing too much may be worse than not doing enough. As much as possible, facilitators should allow participants to direct the conversation, as they will then take more ownership of its results. Deliberation is about bringing the voice back to the people. They need to feel heard and in control. Ideally, the group deliberates on its own and the facilitator is only necessary to keep time. That all being said, groups rarely do the hard work of deliberating on their own, so the deliberative facilitator is often busy making interventions tied to the other responsibilities.

3. **Keeping the deliberation on track in terms of time and subject matter.**

    Facilitators serve as timekeepers, making sure the time is used well, and the pace is appropriate for notetaking and the participants. They also work to ensure group transitions to new questions or sessions move ahead as necessary, based on the process plan. In addition, when comments go too far astray they bring participants back to the process (though at times what seems to be a tangent may be useful).

4. **Managing the group well, encouraging everyone to join in the conversation and ensuring no one dominates.**

    Facilitators must attend to both the task and relationship dimensions of the group's work. Communicate with the participants so people know the order of speaking and do not get frustrated with procedural issues, seeking the right balance between having too much and too little structure to the conversation. Facilitators should be aware of who has spoken and who has not, assure that all voices get heard, if possible, and no voices dominate the discussion (such as strong advocates or experts). Getting everyone to participate is important, not just for the deliberation, but for those individuals as well. People need to be heard and validated, and it is the facilitator's job to ensure that those things happen.

5. **Modeling and encouraging democratic attitudes and skills.**

    By exhibiting strong listening skills and asking good questions, facilitators can model the behaviors they are hoping the participants will develop. This includes maintaining a safe and respectful environment and keeping the floor open to all perspectives and ideas. Deliberative facilitators can also praise certain participant behaviors (the sharing of a difficult story, the asking of a high-quality question, etc.), while remaining impartial to the actual content/perspective of the information shared.

6. **Not taking on an "expert" role with the subject matter and seeking to maintain a productive balance in the discussion between facts being irrelevant and facts being too much of a focus.**

    The facilitator's role is not to teach the participants about the issue—even if it is a subject they know very well. Facilitators need to think like non-experts in the room, and if jargon is used, ask for clarification as a service to less informed participants. Facilitators need to be prepared for their events, but they cannot assume that everyone has the same background or understanding regarding the issue. One of the main tensions within deliberative work is between experts and data being too much or too little of the focus, and facilitators can play a key role in helping negotiate that natural tension.

7. **Helping participants identify the values and underlining interests that motivate their perspectives.**

    In deliberation, participants' values, motives and underlying interests—their reasoning—are just as important, if not more so, than their positions and opinions. Sometimes people with different opinions share the same motive or value, and that similarity can form the basis for common ground. Facilitators should train themselves to listen for the underlying values and bring them out in the conversation for discussion. Since participants would rarely cite values, the facilitator can play a key role in making the implicit values more explicit.

8. **Helping participants develop mutual understanding and consider a broad range of views, particularly the drawbacks of their perspective and the benefits of opposing views.**

    Facilitators ask thoughtful and probing questions to surface costs and consequences (whether intended or unintended) and play devil's advocate, as necessary. Facilitators in particular should serve as a pathway for the underrepresented opinions and perspectives. If there is an issue that is closely tied to the conversation at hand and no one brings it up, it falls to the facilitator to highlight the potential issue and allow the participants to decide if it merits more conversation.

9. **Helping participants identify and work through key tensions within and between their perspectives.**

    At the center of deliberative processes, particularly for the CPD, is the need to negotiate tensions and paradoxes that lie at the heart of the problems we face. Doing such "choice work" and "working through" is hard work, and rarely happens on its own. Therefore, facilitator interventions may be critical to helping participants complete such tasks.

10. **Managing several deliberative tensions, seeking the ideal middle ground (for example, idealism v. realism, complexity v. simplicity, depth v. breadth, etc.).**

    When groups slide too far toward any extreme, the facilitator should intervene to help them move back towards the other pole.

Primary Facilitation Styles

Facilitating is an art, not a science. Like deliberation itself, it involves trying to find the perfect balance between various, often competing, goals. For example, moderators seek to remain impartial, but must also ensure all views are considered. Facilitators are charged with guiding the discussion and making sure the group stays on track time-wise, but also do not want to dominate or force the discussion into too strict a structure. The best facilitators are *flexible yet consistent*, another tricky balance. Overall, there seems to be at least four primary facilitating styles:

The Referee – Only interferes when necessary to enforce rules and time constraints. A good moderator, from this perspective, is barely noticed. They introduce a topic and let the participants take over. They may only say "So, what do you think?" and then step back until it's time to consider a different approach.

The Interviewer – Prepares specific questions beforehand and pushes participants on particular issues. A good moderator, from this perspective, helps the participants dig deeper and do the hard work that the group may not naturally do on their own.

The Devil's Advocate – Works to present views that are not represented in the forum. Can be particularly important if the room is not diverse, or if the deliberation is particularly one-sided. A good moderator, from this perspective, can introduce alternative voices without seeming to lose their impartiality.

The Weaver – Focused on helping participants identify and build upon common ground. A good moderator, from this perspective, can dig deeper into participant comments, identify underlying motives and values, and connect those values to others. The weaver may also focus more on strengthening the interpersonal relationships between participants.

No one style is best. It depends on the subject matter, the participants and the goals of the deliberation. Good facilitators are likely able to play all four roles, as necessary.

Recognizing Deliberation

A good facilitator also recognizes when deliberation is occurring and nurtures it. Signs of a deliberation are:

- Discussion considers several points of view—a range of views
- People are talking about what is valuable to them
- The group recognizes that the issue is complex
- People are talking about consequences and weighing the trade-offs
- People are struggling within themselves and *with* each other
- "I" becomes "we"

A Quick Starting Guide to Facilitating Forums

Facilitation is essentially about supporting a productive, respectful conversation that helps participants better understand the issue and each other. While there are many advanced facilitation skills that you can work on as you get more experience, the basics of deliberation are rather simple.

Deliberative conversations begin with "starting questions," open-ended questions that get people talking about an issue. For NIF-style forums, the starting question for each approach is often, "So, does anyone have any particular things you like about this approach?" Once you ask an initial starting question, the deliberation begins when someone starts talking. As the facilitator, you must listen carefully to what is being said *and* plan your next move. Your next move will generally be one of the following:

The Five Basic Facilitator Choices

1. **Move on** to the next speaker by simply pointing to the next person in line or asking the group for additional comments. People like to talk, and in many cases, you will often have a line of people ready to talk and can simply move from one to another (after ensuring the previous comment has been captured by the notetakers).

2. **Paraphrase** what that person said to clarify the point, help the notetakers, and/or move the conversation to a deeper level. When paraphrasing, always do so in a way that makes it easy for the speaker to correct you. ("So, what I'm hearing is … is that right?") You would rarely do this for every speaker, but it likely will be used frequently during a discussion because of the many functions it serves.

3. **Ask a "probing" or "follow-up"** question to the *same speaker* to get clarification or dig deeper. For example, "Why is that important to you?" "What do you think the consequences of that perspective would be?" "Are there any drawbacks to that position?"

4. **Ask a "reaction" question** that encourages *other* people to respond to the last speaker's comments. For example, "Does anyone else have a different view?" "What do others think about that idea?" "Let's stick with this topic for a minute, how would you respond to that?"

5. **Ask a transition question.** Depending on the design of the forum, you may have a set of questions you are supposed to ask, or certain issues you want to discuss, that you may just jump in to take the conversation a different direction. Based on the responses, you can develop a question on the fly that works to highlight a tension or combine and compare opinions that were shared. A transition question may be particularly important if the deliberation got off track and the participants need to be redirected to the issue.
   For example, "Many argue that one of the key topics with this issue is X. What are your thoughts on its importance?" "Looking back at the document, what else do we need to talk about?"

Examples of Probing and Reacting Questions

Probing Questions

When people are vague, probe to clarify.

- Can you tell me a little more about that?
- Keep going.

When people are too broad, probe to get specific.

- Can you give me an example of that?
- How do you think we can do that? What steps do you suggest?
- So, whose responsibility would that be? How is it done?

When people are too specific, probe to broaden.

- So how do you think that could apply more broadly?
- What insights do you think are most important from that example?

When you want to bring out an underlying value (especially when they focus on a position, and you want to identify the value/interest behind it).

- Why? Why is that important to you?
- So, it sounds like safety is particularly important to you then, right? Can you talk a little more about that?

When people are too negative, probe to push them back into more positive areas.

- Let's assume things change and get better, what needs to happen?

When people are too positive/simplistic/one-sided, probe to push them to see the alternative view.

- Can you anticipate any difficulties or unintended consequences to your plan?
- People that would disagree with you, how do you think they would respond? What is important to them?
- I imagine ___ would disagree with your point (potentially with "because __"). How would you respond to them?

When people setting for an "easy middle ground"/ "we just need balance," probe them to struggle with that balance.

- You say we need balance. What does that balance look like for you compared to what we are doing now? Are we currently out of balance?

Reaction Questions

Basic

- What do others think?   Any reactions to that?
- Let's stick with this idea of ___ for a couple minutes. Other thoughts?

Seeking affirmative/supporting reactions

- What do you think? Who else agrees with Joe? Why?

Seeking negative/dissenting reactions

- What do you think? Anyone see it differently that would like to share?

Opening space for disagreement (particularly when many agree) - Generic

- Seems like most of you like this idea. What are we missing? Who might disagree with this and why? Can anyone make the case against this?
- What problems may come up if we do this?

Opening space for disagreement – Generic perspective taking
- Who, maybe even people not in the room right now, might disagree with this and why?
- Let's put someone in the "empty chair" that would disagree. What might they say?

Opening space for disagreement – Specific perspective taking
- If a business owner/social worker/teacher was in the room, what might they say?

Opening space for disagreement – Specific arguments from a perspective
- If a business owner was here, I imagine they may express strong concern about such regulations. How would you respond?

Learning to Stack Deliberatively

When moderating, facilitators need to make sure to allow space for disagreement and encourage it in some ways. One of the best products of deliberation is clarification of key tensions, tradeoffs and tough choices. You can only get those if you bring them out or allow them to surface. "Stacking" is the action of establishing an order of speakers. If you ask a question and several people want to speak, you create a queue verbally: "Ok, we'll start with Joyce, and then go to Mark and Samantha." Or sometimes you simply just use directions ("We'll start here and go to the left").

Stacking allows people to relax and be more likely to listen, as they are not focused on trying to get your attention to speak. The problem is that if you simply follow the established order, you may undermine interaction. People in the stack decided what to say before the current speakers, therefore are unlikely to respond to them. As a result, you get an individual collection of opinions, not deliberation.

So, in a deliberative forum, the stacking works differently. Do your stacking like normal (pointing out who is next), but after someone has talked, you must decide to continue the stack or delay it briefly to ensure interaction. Before you go to the next person in the stack, you may say something like this, "Ok, you are next (point to the person who is next), but before we go to the next topic, does anyone have a quick response to what was just said? Do you agree/disagree?"

This can get messy, but basically you want to allow time for people to talk to each other on that point before moving on to the next point, because otherwise all we are doing is gathering a laundry list of individual pros and cons.

The Art of Paraphrasing
Purposes of Paraphrasing
- Shows you are listening and thus shows them that what they are saying is important
- Helps solidify your role as impartial facilitator (so your paraphrases need to be fair and nonjudgmental)
- Checks meaning and interpretation of a message
- Helps people clearly express themselves
- Helps equalize contributions (those that are more eloquent do not gain as much an advantage)
- Helps others understand each other better (your paraphrase may be the key to others getting what the original speaker meant)
- Gives them a chance to clarify their points (they realize they aren't explaining themselves well)

- Helps them evaluate their own feelings (your paraphrase may actually teach them about themselves – "yeah, I guess that is what I meant...")
- Helps notetakers capture a summary
- Can help shift the discussion to a deeper level (move from positions to interests)
- Can help shift the discussion from a tense/emotional level to a more understanding level (especially when you paraphrase and take out "inflammatory statements")
- Helps you keep present in the conversation and paying attention

Perils of Paraphrasing

- You can easily get too caught up in paraphrasing everything, making it more about you than them
- Paraphrasing encourages more back and forth between you and the speaker, rather than the speaker and the rest of the group
- People may get the impression that you are implying you speak better than they do
- You may only capture part of what they are trying to say
- You may miss the main point and they may not feel comfortable correcting you

Be sure to paraphrase in a manner that allows the participant to feel comfortable disagreeing with your paraphrase. Do not paraphrase matter-of-factly ("You mean that..."); always paraphrase with qualifiers ("What I am hearing is ... is that right?"; "So do you mean that ...?"; "Would you say then that ...?"; etc.). Facilitators can also utilize the participants, the notetakers or the other members to help, particularly by relying on the need to capture the thought well in the notes. You can ask the person to summarize for the notes ("How could we write that briefly and still capture your concerns?") or ask others ("Could someone try to paraphrase that for me, so we can get that down?"). If you, as the facilitator, are not following a comment—and you think it is important—be honest. Ask for help to make sure the comment is captured and appreciated.

How to Ask Good Questions

> "The quality of our lives is determined by the quality of our thinking. The quality of our thinking, in turn, is determined by the quality of our questions, for questions are the engine, the driving force behind thinking."
>
> Elder and Paul, *The Foundation for Critical Thinking*

The following pages discuss the kinds of questions facilitators can ask during forums. Asking good questions is a critical part of facilitating, as is knowing when *not* to ask questions. Forums can often progress well without specific questions; all participants may need is some initial prodding to react to the background material. This fact makes it somewhat easier for novice facilitators, because they can learn on the job by simply letting things go on their own and picking and choosing when to intervene. If the participants are doing well on their own, the need for the facilitators and their questions is diminished, so don't feel the need to force questions.

Introduction to Questions

- Question asking will depend on the overall goal/purpose for the event.

- Be careful of starting a forum with specific questions. People may have something pressing they want to share, and a specific question may not give them that chance. If you start with a detailed question about a specific topic, participants may not be prepared to answer it.

- Preparing questions beforehand can be helpful, but also be prepared *not* to use them.

- At times there will be some questions you *need* to ask because you are gathering specific information on that question from all the groups. There is nonetheless an important tension here between too much and too little structure. Asking specific questions of all groups will provide good information on that question, but it is also somewhat forced. The topic did not come up naturally in all groups; it was introduced by the facilitator. A more open process may bring more interesting results because you will be able to observe what issues arise naturally in the groups. The tradeoff is that by allowing the natural process, you may not get feedback on a particularly important issue. All in all, you need to be careful when introducing specific discussion questions and be transparent in reporting the data about what questions were asked. Impartiality can be questioned if questions are loaded or directs participants in particular ways.

- Most questions will be reactive clarification/follow-up questions.

- Asking too many questions can be as bad as asking too few.

- Ideally, participants are asking each other good questions by the end of the forum.

NIF's "Four Key Questions of NIF Forums"

1. **What is valuable to us?** This question gets at the reason that making public choices is so difficult—namely, that all the approaches are rooted in things about which people care very deeply. This key question can take many different forms. To uncover deeper concerns, people may ask one another how each came to hold the views he or she has. Talking about personal experiences, rather than simply reciting facts or stating rational, impersonal arguments, promotes a more meaningful dialogue.
   - How has this issue affected us personally?
   - When we think about this issue, what concerns us?
   - What makes this approach acceptable—or unacceptable?

2. **What are the consequences, costs, benefits and trade-offs associated with the various approaches?** Variations of this question should prompt people to think about the relationship that exists between each approach and the values people have. Because deliberation requires the evaluation of pros and cons, it is important to ensure that both aspects are fully considered. Questions to promote a fair and balanced examination of all potential implications include:
   - What would be the consequences of doing what we are suggesting?
   - What would be an argument against the approach we like best? Is there a downside to this course of action?
   - Can anyone think of something constructive that might come from the approach that is receiving so much criticism?

3. **What are the inherent conflicts that we have to work through?** As a forum progresses, participants should consider the following:
   - What do we see as the tension between the approaches?
   - What are the "gray areas"?
   - What are you struggling with? What are you not sure about?
   - Why is reaching a decision (or moving forward) on this issue so difficult?
4. **Can we detect any shared sense of direction or common ground for action?** After saying during the first few minutes of a forum that the objective is to work toward a decision, the moderator or someone else may continue to intervene from time to time with questions that move the deliberation toward a choice, always stopping short of pressing for consensus or agreement on a solution. Then, as the tensions become evident, as people see how what they consider valuable pulls them in different directions, the moderator tests to see where the group is going by asking such questions as:
   - Which direction seems best?
   - Where do we want this policy to take us?
   - What tradeoffs are we willing and unwilling to accept?
   - If the policy we seem to favor had the negative consequences some fear, would we still favor it? What are we willing and unwilling to do as individuals or as a community to solve this problem?

Questions with a Purpose

Perhaps one of the most important jobs of a moderator is to ask good questions. Questions like, "What do you think?" or "Do you agree with this statement?" often do not encourage people to think deeply about their own opinions and the impacts they might have on others. Instead, questions should serve specific, intended purposes. Consider the following types of questions and the examples provided:

Questions that connect the policy issue to the lives and concerns of real people
- Could you illustrate how this issue is touching the lives of most of us in the community?
- What makes this issue real for us?
- What evidence do you see that this is something that is important to all of us?

Questions that ask participants to weigh the costs and consequences of each approach
- What might be the effects of your approach on others?
- Could you identify those things that are important to us that seem to be clashing?
- In a positive light, what seems to be most important to those who are attracted to this approach?
- Also, for those who think negatively about this approach, what seems to be their concern?

Questions to help ensure a fuller examination of all potential effects
- What would be the consequences of doing what you are suggesting?
- What would be an argument against the choice you like best?
- Is there a downside to this course of action?
- Can anyone think of something constructive that might come from this approach, which is receiving so much criticism?

Questions that ask participants to weigh the costs they are willing to accept to achieve the results they want

- Can you live with the consequences?
- Would you give up _____ in order to achieve _____?
- What costs are at stake, and can we live with them?
- What do you see as the tension among the approaches?
- What are the gray areas? Where is there ambiguity?
- Why is this issue so difficult to decide?

Questions that probe each participant's statement until others can understand what they believe should be done and why they think it should be done

- What does that mean to you?
- Why does that choice appeal to you?
- What is important about taking this direction?
- Can you give an example of how that might work out?

Questions that encourage the speaker to make a connection between the actions they would advocate and what is important to them

- Could you live with the actions being considered?
- Would you be willing to have that action apply to everyone?
- What is most valuable to you or to those who support that action?
- If we did what you have suggested, could you explain how that might impact your life?

Questions that promote interaction among participants instead of just between the moderator and the participants

- Does that bring up anything for anyone?
- That gets us started, so how do you respond?
- Could someone give an example to illustrate what was just said?
- Allow silence. Someone will respond.
- Move back out of the circle.

Questions that give the participants an opportunity to identify what they have heard, to recognize a shared understanding of the issue and/or to acknowledge a common ground for action

- What actions did you hear that you think we could not accept or live with?
- What trade-offs are you unwilling to accept? What seemed important to all of us?
- Suppose we cannot have everything. What are we willing and unwilling to do as individuals or as a community in order to solve this problem?
- Is there some action we could all live with?
- Have we come to some common ground to support certain actions? What are those actions? Can someone say what the common ground might be? Can someone take a shot at summarizing any common ground we have? And the actions that are indicated from the common ground?

Moving from Positions to Interests

In their classic work, *Getting to Yes*, Roger Fisher and William Ury discussed the importance of moving participants from a focus on their positions to one that focused on their interests. This move was critical to the Harvard negotiation method that sought to discover "Win/Win" solutions to conflict rather than the typical "Win/Lose" nature of competition, or even the "Lose/Lose" nature of compromise and bargaining.

Positions are concrete proposals about specific plans of action, such as hiring more teachers, damming a river, banning cell phones in cars or increasing the penalty for a crime.

Interests are the underlying needs, desires, concerns and fears that lead people to support particular positions. Interests connected to the positions listed above may include the need for high-quality education for one's children; being proactive and adequately prepared for future growth; the safety of children, bicyclists and other motorists; and the need to increase deterrence.

Fisher and Ury argued that interests define the problem, not positions, but most conflict focuses on position differences, and the underlying interests often remain hidden or misunderstood. "Behind opposed positions," they explained, "lie shared and compatible interests as well as conflicting ones." Similar to the points made concerning values on pp. 8, most people hold rather reasonable interests, and when those interests are surfaced and understood, the negotiation—or deliberation—is much easier.

Surfacing interests—both those that are shared and competing—helps with the next task Fisher and Ury discuss in the book: Inventing options for mutual gain. Interests are much easier to combine, or find creative ways to satisfy, than positions.

Facilitator Tactics

The easiest way to move from positions to interests is for facilitators to simply ask "Why" (or, at times, "Why not?"). The question must be framed or clarified so participants understand you are not belittling their position or simply asking for justification for their opinion, but that you are seeking better understanding of the needs, hopes, fears or desires that it serves.

Another tactic that helps move from positions to interests is to have participants focus on what they want in the future (and why) rather than playing the blame game about what happened in the past.

Finally, facilitators can make the shift from positions to interests themselves, by paraphrasing a position statement made by a participant, and moving it to more of an interest statement (while, of course, giving the participant clear opportunity to disagree with the new framing).

> PARTICIPANT: We need to install additional speed bumps in our community!

> FACILITATOR: Are you wanting to slow down traffic because of a concern for your children's safety?

Handling Moderator Challenges

Overall, it is important to consider that deliberation is difficult, and at times participants will struggle. Sam Kaner describes this as the "Groan Zone" that groups must go through as they work on difficult issues. So, challenges are not failures or evidence of something going wrong; they may very well mean things are going as they should. In many cases, when someone is being difficult, the best remedy is not to focus on the individual, but the rest of the group. If one person is dominating, the rest of the group is not active enough, for example.

Dealing with Participants Who Dominate the Discussion

- What do others think about this approach?
- What ideas have not been expressed?
- How would anyone else in the group respond to the concerns just expressed?
- Could someone tell us a story to illustrate that point?
- For those who hold that position, what do they care deeply about?

Dealing with a Difficult Participant

- Gradually escalate your response
- Use body language (move close to the person)
- Gradually use more assertive verbal techniques such as interrupting to capture the points stated so far
- Refer to the guidelines (everyone participates, no one monopolizes conversation)
- Redirect the conversation by saying "Thank you. What do others think about that?" or "Let's create some space for those of you who have been quieter. Someone else?"

Handling Misinformation from a Participant

- Does anyone have a different perspective on that?
- Use the issue book. Point out that "on page xx it states …" How does that fit with the information you just gave us?
- What meaning does that information have to you?
- Would you give us an example?

Often in a forum, participants themselves will call other participants on their behavior such as dominating the conversation or giving misinformation that others know is not correct. In general, here are some other tips for dealing with moderator challenges:

Preview/pre-empt and prepare for your weaknesses
If it is difficult for you to interrupt someone who dominates, explain that up front when you introduce yourself. It makes it much easier to intervene later ("You're making me interrupt you …"). If, based on experience, you struggle with particular interventions, ask other facilitators how they handle such situations and prepare specifically for them.

The notes and process are your friend

The need for good notes and to stay on time are two important tools for you to use to address difficult situations. If someone is rambling, intervene based on the need to have a clear summary of their point. If a conflict starts escalating, you can intervene to make sure you clearly understand each side for the notes. If time is short, jump in to establish that and the need to hear other people or to move on. Each of these interventions can be "blamed" on the need for notes or to stay on time, making it easier for you to pull them off without seeming heavy-handed.

Process adjustments (rounds, writing, smaller groups)

If one or two people dominate, you may want to adjust the process to ensure other voices are being heard. Do a round (asking everyone in the group to briefly reply to a question), ask everyone to write down an answer on a notecard or Post-It note and then to share, or ask them to work in groups of two or three briefly and then report out.

Be honest/Ask the group

For many difficult situations, there is no perfect technique to resolve it. The best move may be to be honest with your own struggle, and simply ask the group. This can be used if something does or doesn't seem to be working or needs adjustment ("It seems to me we only have about two or three people doing most of the talking, do you think that is a problem?" or "This seems to be a bit of tangent, but I could be wrong. What do you all think?"). If a problem participant is requesting process adjustments, rather than deal simply with them, open it up to the group ("What do people think, should we move on now to action steps?"). Of course, it depends on the process and how much control you, as a facilitator, have to make adjustments, but asking the group can help you find the balance between letting the group own the process and achieving the task. If participants are "Debbie Downers," shooting down all ideas or pushing conspiracy theories, facilitators can simply ask the group ("So what do you think, is this exercise futile?"). It's likely that people will think differently and defend the process, which tends to work better than you having to defend it.

Shifting from past to future ("Imagine …"). If participants are stuck in conflicts or actions from the past, shift the discussion to the future. Rather than dwell on past transgressions, ask them how they would want to be treated in the future and what they would hope to happen.

Moving from positions to interests/Perspective taking

If certain perspectives are dominating and it seems opposing views may be reluctant to speak up, make it easier for them by making room for alternative perspectives ("If ___ were here, what would they say?" or "Let's think about the other key stakeholders or groups that care deeply about this topic that we haven't heard from yet. What may they say if they were here?")

Dealing with Conflict

Facilitating deliberative practice has many connections to the field of conflict management. Conflicts are inherent to democracy, and communities need to learn how to deal with inherent conflicts more productively, rather than seek to resolve, or avoid, them. The first step to managing conflict is understanding the conflict. In particular, understanding at what level the conflict may reside is critical for facilitators to understand how to address them. One way to categorize conflicts uses a four-level typology:

Conflict based on different facts: These conflicts are perhaps the most difficult to address in deliberative forums. If opposing views are working with fundamentally different facts, and there is no clear way to resolve those differences with the resources available during the forum, then at times the best the facilitator can do is bracket the discussion and have the participants simply agree to disagree, and perhaps seek out the answer—if there is one—after the forum for the report. Thankfully, well designed deliberative forums with high-quality background material and framing should not get derailed by any particular factual conflicts.

Conflict based on misunderstandings: At times, what appears as differences in facts are actually misunderstandings. Here the process and the facilitator can help address the conflict by making sure the opposing sides have a clear opportunity to explain themselves and listen to each other.

Conflict based on value differences: Many conflicts are fueled by value differences. The process of clarifying those value differences, and having participants struggle with their actual value differences rather than false, perceived differences is very important. While serious differences may still exist, they are typically much more manageable when understood. The key to addressing these conflicts is to isolate the values and help participants identify underlying values and work through the differences. If the conflict is particularly heated, it may be useful for the facilitator to lay out what they see as the conflict, or perhaps even ask a third participant to do so ("Would anyone want to try to characterize the differences between these two perspectives?").

Conflict based on outside issues: Sometimes, conflicts arise that are the result of personalities, past history or other factors irrelevant to the issue (such as political goals). These conflicts are also difficult to address during the forums and often require a deeper intervention. The primary response for facilitators in these cases are to try to bring the group back to the issue at hand, in part by directing attention away from those participants.

Facilitators should also remember that in most deliberative settings, they do not need to resolve the conflict. Consensus is rarely necessary for a deliberative forum to be useful and successful. Once the conflict is clarified, and the opposing views clearly captured in the notes, it may simply be time to move on. Do not let a personal conflict dominate a discussion.

Dealing with Emotion

Emotions are not detrimental to deliberation. Indeed, the lack of emotions is much more of a problem. Some early theorists of deliberation sought to create purely "rational" discussions that were devoid of emotion, but current deliberative practitioners understand that dealing with emotions is a critical aspect of high-quality deliberation. The surfacing of emotions represents an important teaching moment that facilitators should welcome.

One function of deliberation is to allow participants to express their emotions in a productive manner. Another is for participants from opposing perspectives to see the emotions present in others in a respectful, safe environment, so those emotions can contribute to increased understanding.

Facilitators can react to emotion in different ways. Most often, you simply allow the participant a chance to vent (as long, of course, as no one feels threatened). The expression of emotion is often a clear opportunity to help participants move from positions to interests and reveal powerful underlying values and concerns. Paraphrasing may be particularly useful, especially for the other participants, who may get caught up in the emotion and not be really listening to the message. Restating an argument made by an emotional participant in a less emotionally-laden manner—taking out, for example, particularly inflammatory statements that may distract others—can be a valuable technique. Overall, these ideas are connected to a key mediation idea: the power of acknowledging feelings and values. Without agreeing or assenting, one can acknowledge how another is feeling thus recognizing their humanity.

Other Suggestions from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Include:

- Don't interrupt, be defensive or argue

- Respect their opinion and their right to it

- Try not to take their anger or emotion personally

- Use active listening skills

- Ask questions to clarify the source of their anxiety, concern, fear or anger

- Summarize what you have heard so they are sure they are being understood (often anger comes from repeated failed attempts to get their opinion across)

- Get their agreement on the summary, and be sure to have their concerns clear on the notes

- Ask them what they would like done to address their concerns (shift from past to future)

- Check to make sure that you have accurately recorded their comments and concerns

Helping Moderators Stay on Track

Good Signs	Signs the moderator should make a move
People listen to what others are saying.	People are just waiting their turn to "have their say."
People are talking to each other, asking questions of each other.	All comments are directed to the moderator.
Everyone is listening with respect; no one is dominating.	There are "sidebar" conversations or interruptions.
Alternate viewpoints get aired.	The group mainly concurs on each approach.
Consequences of each approach are addressed.	The pro arguments have no negative consequences.
People share personal experiences.	People speak theoretically or analytically.
People express emotion around what is important to them.	The forum is cerebral and lacks feeling.
The dialogue builds on any prior work by the group.	Comments ignore prior considerations.

Notetaking and Recording

Purpose of Recording

- To help establish that what the participants say is valued and being listened to
- To remind forum participants of their comments, agreements and action items; particularly during the reflections time
- To support the importance of equality and inclusion. Comments are captured regardless of the source, and the author is not identified
- To serve as a reference document for future forums
- To facilitate the writing of the report that will inform a wider audience of the discussion, decisions and actions

Qualities of Effective Recording

- Brief
- Clear
- Legible
- Reports the appropriate amount of information
- Notes are distributed soon after the forum

- Accurate
- Well organized
- Uses active verbs
- Captures the tensions, trade-offs and common ground for action
- Treats each person's contribution with equal respect. (It is not the recorder's role to determine the value of a comment, but rather capture the discussion.)

The Reporter/Observer

The activities and characteristics listed below pertain to a forum observer who will collect information useful for creating a follow-up report:

- Is alert and attentive
- Arrives early and observes participants as they gather
- Observes participants' body language
- Listens carefully and takes legible notes
- Records a few key actual statements word-for-word that could be used in a report
- Keeps track of the context in which recorded statements are given
- Recognizes and notes group dynamics
- Notices and records shifts in direction (e.g., comments that signaled a shift away from agreement and toward conflict or ones that shift away from tension toward common ground)
- Identifies and lists what expressions or statements contributed to a breakdown, greater confusion or a breakthrough to deeper understanding, even common ground

Deliberation and Diversity

Why is Diversity So Important in Deliberative Forums?

Participating in deliberation helps to promote civic health.

Participating in deliberation allows citizens to expose themselves to a greater range of viewpoints, be open to learning and reconsider previous viewpoints (Ryfe & Stalsburg, 2012). Moreover, by attending a deliberative event, participants are more likely to engage in civic behaviors in the future (Gastil, Deess, Weiser, & Simmons, 2010; Fishkin, 1995; Price & Capella, 2002).

Including diverse groups improves the quality of conversation.

Participating in diverse groups can encourage traditionally marginalized individuals to speak up. For example, a study by Toosi et al. (2012) found that in all-white groups, women "spoke less than white men, and were considered less persuasive" (Toosi et al., 2012, p. 1154). In groups that included people of color, women's confidence grew over time and they spoke as often as male participants (Toosi et al., 2012).

When forums aren't inclusive, people call the process unfair and disregard results.

Participants gauge the legitimacy of a forum based on the inclusion of stakeholders (Kahane, Loptson, Heriman, & Hardy, 2013; Karpowitz & Raphael, 2014; Carcasson & Sprain, 2010).

Doubts about the process will make people less likely to adopt changes.

This spells trouble, because one of the other key tenants of deliberation is governance. Deliberative practitioners trust the wisdom of the crowds to come up with innovative solutions but moving from talk to action also requires that the larger community have a hand in making those visions come to life.

That can turn into a distrust of deliberation over time.

As a result of these potential consequences, previous studies have called for future research into engaging the hardest-to-reach participants and sustaining this participation over time (Su, 2014).

What Sort of Diversity Should be Targeted?

The primary goal should be to attract true diversity of thought. Such diversity includes, but also goes beyond, typical notions of diversity (race, gender and ethnicity) and also incorporates diversity of age, geography, education level, occupation, political views, etc.

The "Diversity Dilemma"

Clearly, considering the information above, attracting a diverse crowd can be critical to a successful and legitimate forum. On the other hand, the more diverse the audience, the more difficult the job of the moderator can be. If a deliberation degenerates into a polarized argument, deliberation can be much more harmful than beneficial, leading to participants leaving with a negative opinion of deliberation as well as hardened negative assumptions concerning those that think differently than them. The diversity dilemma, therefore, is that while a diverse room offers greater potential for positive consequences, at the same time it offers the opposite potential (said differently, a diverse audience offers high risk, high reward).

Barriers to True Diverse Participation[3]

Ensuring a representative room is critical to a successful, legitimate deliberation, but attendance does not guarantee participation and consideration. During the deliberation, those with minority views often will not feel comfortable speaking, may have language issues or may not be taken as seriously by other participants. Indeed, finding the right balance between "impartiality" and "ensuring minority views are heard and considered" is perhaps the most difficult challenge of moderating deliberative forums.

External Barriers These determine whether someone was able to attend the forum.	Internal Barriers These determine whether someone was able to participate effectively in the forum.
• Did they receive an invite?	• Were they the only person of a given identity in the room?
• Did they have transportation?	• Did some participants dominate the conversation more than others?
• Did they have time to attend?	• Was there a facilitator present?
• Would attending the event mean giving up something else (e.g. work or childcare)?	• Was the forum offered in their primary language or communication style?
• Did they trust the organization/location hosting the event?	• Did they believe their voice would make a difference?
• Were they interested in/affected by the issue?	• Did they have enough knowledge to form an opinion?
• Did they feel they would make a difference?	• Did they feel safe participating?
• Did they consider their potential contributions to be of value?	• Were their contributions affirmed and taken seriously?

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[3] Ryfe, D. M. & Stalsburg, B. (2012). *Democracy in motion: Evaluation the practice and impact of deliberative civic engagement.* Nabatchi, T., Gastil, J., Weiksner, G. M., & Leighninger, M. (Eds.) New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Stakeholder Analysis

Below, list the key stakeholders relevant to this issue	To the right, list the key interests of the various stakeholders														

Convening the Forum – A Checklist

Moderators, Recorders, Observers

- ❑ Who will *moderate*? How many people will moderate?
- ❑ Who will *record*? How many people will record?
- ❑ Will you utilize *observers*?
- ❑ Have the moderators, recorders and observers met?
- ❑ Do they have an agreement amongst themselves as to how they will interact? (For example, will recorders interrupt if they are not sure what a participant said?)

Logistics

- ❑ What date and timeframe will work best?
- ❑ Where will the forum be held? How flexible is the space? How many different groups could it hold?
- ❑ Are facilities handicapped accessible?
- ❑ Is public transportation to the site available? If not, how will people without transportation get there?
- ❑ Is the meeting space large enough to accommodate all participants?
- ❑ Consider the seating arrangement
    - o U-shaped/circled?
    - o With/without tables?
    - o Arrange the room so you have a good spot for easels, and to put the paper up
- ❑ Room details, e.g., location of bathrooms
- ❑ Equipment
    - o Microphones (**Note:** Try to avoid using microphones unless it is difficult for people to hear. With 15-25 people you might not need them.)
    - o Easels with flip charts
    - o Markers
    - o DVD/VCR and TV
    - o Extension cords
    - o Dot stickers
    - o Extra issue guidebooks
- ❑ Sign-in sheet
- ❑ Will you provide refreshments?
- ❑ Will you provide child care?

Other Details

- ❑ Do you intend for people to complete a registration process?

- ❑ Who will handle registration?

- ❑ How will you handle latecomers?

- ❑ Who is responsible for designing promotional materials?

- ❑ Who is responsible for copying and distributing promotional materials?

- ❑ Who is responsible for securing issue guides?

- ❑ Will you be using a survey? What demographic information would be useful for the report? What questions would be useful for the report?