

Phases of a Deliberative Forum

Courtesy of Virginia York

1. Opening

- **Welcome.** Thank the participants for coming. Thank the sponsors and conveners. Introduce the moderators and the recorders. Describe the issue for the forum.
- **Ground Rules.** Set the stage with the idea that the moderator is neutral. All participants are encouraged to speak, but not dominate; listen and speak with respect for others; adhere to the format, and weigh the advantages, tradeoffs, and consequences of each option.
- **Explain Format.** Show the starter video, which describes each option. Introduce the timekeeper who will indicate to the moderators when the time is up for each option—each option will be given equal time.
- **Connect with the Issue.** Ask participants a personal question concerning the topic. Request they keep their answers and stories brief so many can share their experiences in the allocated time. This starts the conversation on a personal level.

2. Examining Options

- **Approach One.** The moderator guides the deliberation by asking questions and allowing the participants to randomly answer.
 - The moderator keeps the dialogue moving forward and introduces other views to spur serious consideration of the issue.
 - A recorder or co-recorders write down the key ideas either on a computer or a flip chart so the participants can see what has been said. The notes also provide a history of the forum as well as comments or quotes for the write-up of the forum.
 - The moderator provides a smooth transition into the next approach.

- **Approach Two.** Either the same moderator or a co-moderator asks the questions for this approach.
 - The moderators delve deeper when an answer is given to reveal the underlying values and to encourage everyone think about the reason for certain beliefs.
 - Moderator is not opinionated, but is even-handed and keeps the discussion focused.

- **Approach Three.** The moderator continues in like fashion and tries to have attendees see the tradeoffs to their position as well as the advantages.
 - Tension is built into each approach and between approaches.
 - There is no right or wrong response.
 - Moderator encourages, but does not force, everyone to speak. The moderator is impartial.

3. Reflection

- **Individual Reflections.** Moderator asks a question such as:
 - Even though you may agree with or disagree with a statement said during the forum, did the response make you think differently?
 - Did any statement make you better understand where someone else is coming from?
 - Has your thinking about other people’s views changed?
 - What is a trade-off you are willing to make?

- **Group Reflections.** Moderator may ask;
 - Why is this issue so difficult?
 - Were there common threads running through our discussion of all three approaches?
 - Does the group have any shared sense of direction?
 - Were there trade-offs the group seemed willing to make?

- **Next Steps.** Depending on the purpose of the particular forum, this varies. All forums are the *beginning* of the conversation. That may be where they end—with greater awareness and openness. Appropriate questions might be: “What do we still need to talk about?” “Do we need more forums?” “What can we do as individuals?”

4. Questionnaire

- Distribute questionnaires for everyone to complete. Thank everyone for coming and participating.
- Take time then or after the forum to complete your moderator response form.