



# The Divided State of America:

How can we get work done even when we disagree?

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A Guide for Forum Conveners  
and Moderators



A Project of the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress  
[www.CongressCenters.org](http://www.CongressCenters.org)

Moderator's Guide





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## *A Guide for Forum Conveners and Moderators*

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# INTRODUCTION





## About the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress



This Guide for Forum Conveners and Moderators accompanies the discussion guide for community dialogue that was prepared by the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress (ACSC) in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation. The partnership fulfills an ACSC goal to provide its member institutions training and experience in establishing civic engagement programs that foster public deliberation on important issues that come before Congress and the nation. As a three-year project, Phase I provided training and helped establish National Issues Forums through various ACSC-member congressional centers. In Phase II, the participating congressional centers named and framed an issue of importance to ACSC through the deliberative dialogue process. Project products are the discussion guide and support materials for public deliberation that can be shared with ACSC members and others.

In 2003, ACSC was founded as an independent alliance of institutions and organizations that support a wide range of programs designed to inform and educate students, scholars, policy-makers, and members of the general public on the history of Congress, the legislative process, and current issues facing Congress. ACSC encourages the preservation of material that documents the work of Congress, including the papers of representatives and senators, and supports programs that make those materials available for educational and research use. The association welcomes the participation of institutions and individuals committed to the goal of promoting a better understanding of Congress.

The work of this project furthers the study of Congress and its relationship with those it represents and nurtures robust public dialogue and deliberation, pillars of representative democracy. At the same time, the project has brought ACSC members together for a common purpose, and together they have accomplished more than they might have achieved as individual organizations. The overarching desire is for ACSC congressional centers to build something together with potential to be enduring and valuable. In addition to their own objectives, most of the centers participated to support ACSC in this goal.

Seven centers completed both phases of the project—Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center (University of Oklahoma), John Joseph Moakley Archive and Institute (Suffolk University), Claude Pepper Library (Florida State University), W. R. Poage Legislative Library (Baylor University), Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies (University of Georgia), South Carolina Political Collections (University of South Carolina), and John C. Stennis Center for Public Service (Mississippi State University). Geographically, the centers represent the states of Oklahoma, Massachusetts, Florida, Texas, Georgia, South Carolina, and Mississippi.



This work is the result of a collaboration with the Charles F. Kettering Foundation. Any interpretations and conclusions are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, its staff, directors or officers.

### Ordering Information

Copies of this book and support materials may be ordered from the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress at [www.congresscenters.org](http://www.congresscenters.org). The discussion guide may also be downloaded from the association's website.



# Purpose of Community Dialogue Forums



## ***“Why are we doing this?”***

It's a good question to ask when convening or attending a community forum. People lead busy lives and want to make sure they are spending their time in worthwhile ways. They like to have a sense of “what they're getting into.”

**Deliberative public forums seek to accomplish many goals:**

- ***Help people better understand the issue.*** This understanding comes not only from the information provided in the discussion guide, but also from listening to and learning from fellow community members.
- ***Examine different approaches to dealing with the issue.*** Forums encourage thoughtful consideration of a variety of perspectives in a respectful manner, emphasizing that there is no one right answer.
- ***Weigh the benefits and trade-offs of each approach.*** Forums help people identify the positive aspects of each approach, as well as the trade-offs or sacrifices that might have to be made.
- ***Identify common ground and areas of disagreement.*** By the end of a forum, people will have discovered where they agree, where they disagree, and why. This helps set the stage for people to work together on the issue.
- ***Explore possible actions, individually and as a group.*** There are no quick and easy solutions for complex public problems, but there are steps that people can begin to take to address them. Forums give people the opportunity to share their ideas and decide what they want to do next, individually and/or together.

**Deliberative forums are nonpartisan and do not advocate a particular perspective or solution to any public issue.** Instead they allow diverse groups of citizens to determine together what direction they want to take, what kinds of actions and policies they favor or oppose, and what they are able to do, individually and as a community.



# What is Public Dialogue?

**Public dialogue is a process whereby participants:**

- Identify multiple approaches to a central issue.
- Weigh the costs and consequences of each approach.
- Determine community values.
- Develop a common ground for collaborative action.
- Decide on what kind of future the community desires for itself.

**Identify multiple approaches to a central issue**

Most public issues are complex problems. They affect a wide-range of individuals and impact many different aspects of community life. Issues such as how to stimulate economic growth or provide comprehensive healthcare seldom have simple solutions. Instead, such situations require a range of responses resulting from multiple approaches to the issue.

**Weigh the costs and consequences of each approach**

Since decisions about community issues will affect such a diverse group of people, dialogue encourages participants to examine fully the implications of each approach. Each approach has pros and cons. Each approach has benefits and drawbacks. Each approach has costs and consequences that citizens may or may not have considered.

Upon reflection, forum participants may realize that they are unwilling to accept the consequences of an approach they once highly favored. On the other hand, participants may determine that the benefits of a particular approach outweigh the costs and the drawbacks associated with it. For example, forum participants may or may not decide that restrictions on gun purchasing and ownership are acceptable limitations on the right to bear arms if they also serve to reduce the number and frequency of gun-related crimes. The primary tension here is one of security versus personal liberty. Ultimately, how individuals weigh the costs and consequences of each approach depends largely upon what they value most.

**Determine community values**

The underlying values held by decision-makers significantly affect which approaches they choose to take in order to address a particular concern. What a person holds most valuable impacts what costs and consequences one is willing or unwilling to accept. Yet, even the most opinionated and outspoken person may not truly recognize the values and the emotions that influence her perspective. The process of dialogue therefore enables people to identify what they value and why. People who have a deeper understanding of how they think and feel about an issue are better situated to make sound decisions.



## What is Public Dialogue (continued)

Moreover, individuals who participate in dialogue gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for how other people view the same concern. While people may not change their view of the issue, they undoubtedly will change their perception of one another. The community begins to define itself based on commonalities rather than differences. Members of the community identify with one another, and people gravitate toward a common purpose. They cultivate a sense of shared values.

### **Develop a common ground for collaborative action**

Behind every approach to an issue lies a range of concerns, values, emotions, and personal experiences that influence the choices people make. Even individuals who share similar concerns may experience conflict when asked to deal with the costs and consequences of a particular approach. People must confront the complexities of the issue and work through the tensions that exist. As people identify their personal values, as they focus around a common purpose, and as they struggle with the difficult processes of dialogue and coming to public judgment, individuals establish a foundation of mutual understanding, respect and trust.

It is important to recognize that individuals may not develop consensus; they may not come to full and complete agreement. However, because dialogue strengthens ties among people who hold similar views and bridges the divide between people with differing perspectives, collaboration becomes a true reality. Dialogue builds strong relationships. It promotes a shared sense of direction and develops the common ground necessary for community action.

### **Decide what kind of future the community desires for itself**

Dialogue opens people to new ways of thinking about community issues. It creates new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration. Dialogue helps people to see new possibilities.

When people see new possibilities, they can see steps to take together that can transform their community's future. This process of getting citizens together to talk about what's important to them, assessing community capacities and assets, and making a plan of action is a roadmap for community development that any concerned group of citizens can use. The model on the next page shows the cycle of community development. If people can't understand each other enough to work together, they won't be able to improve their community.



# How Authentic Public Opinion Really Works

According to much social science research, the public's thinking on issues progresses through seven predictable stages. Public opinion is in fact less like a physical process than a biological one, evolving in seven stages. Public opinion on any issue develops slowly over a long period—at least ten years for a complex issue.

## PHASE ONE – CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

- Stage 1:       **Dawning Awareness**  
*People begin to become aware of an issue.*
- Stage 2:       **Greater Urgency**  
*People develop a sense of urgency about the issue.*

## PHASE TWO – WORKING THROUGH

- Stage 3:       **Discovering the Choices**  
*People start to explore the choices for dealing with the issue.*
- Stage 4:       **Wishful Thinking**  
*Resistance to facing costs and trade-offs kicks in, producing wishful thinking.*
- Stage 5:       **Weighing the Choices**  
*People weigh the pros and cons of alternatives.*

## PHASE THREE – RESOLUTION

- Stage 6:       **Taking a Stand**  
*People take a stand intellectually.*
- Stage 7:       **Making a Responsible Judgment**  
*People make a responsible judgment morally and emotionally.*

Source: Daniel Yankelovich, "How Public Opinion Really Works," *Fortune*, October 5, 1992.







# A Guide to Public Dialogue

**We deliberate all the time in our daily lives.** When we have a difficult decision to make about an important matter and we weigh several approaches carefully, that, in a nutshell, is dialogue. Dialogue is the process of weighing carefully various approaches to a situation, examining the pros and cons of each option, and reflecting upon the views of others about what should be done. Dialogue provides the opportunity to explore, to test ideas, and to look at ambiguities or gray areas rather than seeing only the stark black and white of polar opposites.

Making decisions about how to deal with community issues is often difficult because different people favor different approaches, and the options for action may conflict with one another. Behind each approach lies a range of concerns and values that might pull people in different directions, creating tension, and influencing how they weigh costs and consequences. **People must work through these conflicts and deal with the trade-offs until they develop a shared sense of direction.**

While people may not reach complete agreement about what course of action they should take to address a community issue during dialogue, they often do have a better grasp of what they are and are not willing to do to solve the problem. **This mutual understanding paves the way for cooperation and collaboration.**

What follows are a few simple recommendations for bringing the kind of deliberating we all do privately into a public setting—where we have to dialogue, not just with friends and family members, but with people we scarcely know.

## Establishing Guidelines

Effective dialogue is more likely to occur if certain guidelines are outlined at the beginning. Establishing such guidelines ahead of time may help prevent difficulties later.

- The purpose of dialogue is to work toward a shared understanding.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one should dominate.
- Listening is as important as speaking.
- Participants should address one another, not just the moderator.
- Moderator may intervene occasionally to keep the dialogue on track or to remind participants to stick with the current approach under consideration.
- Participants should consider fairly each approach and examine fully all the trade-offs involved in an approach. A diversity of perspectives is essential. Even if no one in the group seems to favor a certain option, someone should raise the question, “What would someone who favors this approach say about it?”



## A Guide to Public Dialogue (continued)

### Key Questions

These four basic kinds of questions are useful in prompting meaningful dialogue.

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 is appealing about the first option or approach?
  - 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 dialogue 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”?
    - Where is there ambiguity?
    - Why is reaching a decision on this issue so difficult?

## A Guide to Public Dialogue (continued)

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 dialogue toward a choice, always stopping short of pressing for consensus or agreement on a particular solution. Then, as the tensions become evident, and as people see how what they consider valuable pulls them in different directions, the moderator can test 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 trade-offs 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 in order to solve this problem?

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



# Planning Your Community Forum





# Convening a Community Dialogue

## Potential Roles of the Convener

- Develop a steering team to coordinate the local dialogues.
- Convene meetings; handle meeting logistics; document meetings.
- Conduct broad outreach and publicity about the dialogues in the community.
- Recruit citizens to serve as moderators and recorders (note takers) of forums.
- Recruit co-sponsors for dialogues that will reach a wide representation of citizens.
- Recruit participants for the forums so that ideas and action steps that emerge represent a broad range of perspectives from your community's citizens.
- Share ideas and outcomes from the dialogues with the local audiences and with the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress, so that its members may share via blogs and other social media.

## Logistics to Consider

- What date and timeframe will work best?
- Where will the forum be held? Are facilities easily accessible to the disabled?
- Is the meeting space large enough to accommodate all participants? Should there be additional rooms for breakout sessions for a larger group?
- Is it possible to arrange seats in a circle or U-shape in the meeting room or use tables for breakout sessions?
- Is equipment available to screen the starter video for the forum participants? If not, can you identify someone to provide an overview or introduction to the issue?
- Will you serve refreshments?
- Will you provide professional childcare?

## Who will do what?

- Will there be a sign-in process? Who will handle it?
- Who is responsible for designing and distributing promotional materials?
- Who will help with outreach and invitations to the community?
- Who is responsible for securing discussion guides and other materials?
- Who will moderate the forum? Who will record (take notes)?
- Who will return information from the forum to the ACSC?

## Equipment/Materials

- Discussion booklets, starter video, questionnaires, moderator's guide
- Easels with flip charts, markers, tape
- DVD player and monitor OR laptop with projector and screen, if the meeting room has Internet access (Starter video will also be posted on [www.congresscenters.org](http://www.congresscenters.org).)
- Extension cords, if necessary; microphones (only if group is quite large, usually not needed)
- Pens or pencils for completing questionnaire



## Tips for Creating Partnerships

Building a broad base of support for local public issues forums not only ensures participation from many different segments of the community but also serves to distribute the workload and prevent burnout of committed volunteers.

Following are some guidelines for creating positive partnerships that will ensure the success of local forums:

- **Be inclusive.** Look for partnerships including and beyond those organizations that already understand the importance of public dialogue. Successful forums represent a diversity of interests, resources, and perspectives.
- **Invite partners to participate at the earliest stages of planning a forum.** Give them ownership in the forum and the opportunity to contribute their special skills, resources, and points of view. They will be far more likely to participate fully if they are part of the planning process as well as the forum implementation.
- **Clearly define the roles for partners.** What skills and resources do they bring to the table that will improve the capacity for public dialogue? Delegate tasks that best serve the partners' needs and interests, so that both parties feel rewarded for their efforts. Who is the partner's contact? What is his task? What kind of involvement in time and resources will the partner provide? What is the timetable to complete the assignment? How will the contribution be recognized?
- **Make sure your partners understand the mission and goals for the local public issues forum.** Communicate clearly why the forum needs their participation. Ask the partners what their expectations are and how they hope to benefit. From this discussion you can build a mutually beneficial relationship that will be long-lasting.

## Inviting the Public to Your Community Dialogue



- **Personalize, personalize, personalize.** The most effective way to get people to come to your forum is to ask them personally. Most people lead busy lives, and it helps to let them know how much you value their perspectives and participation. Face-to-face invitations are great, but you might also use email or a handwritten note on a postcard through the regular mail. Since you can't invite everyone yourself, ask partners to invite others personally. **For example, ask a local pastor to invite his/her parishioners to the forum; ask a parent-teacher group to invite its members; ask a teacher to invite students; ask your friends to invite their friends.**
- **Publicize early.** When possible, send out a first round of announcements several weeks prior to the forum to allow organizations (civic groups, schools, faith groups, etc.) to include the information in their newsletters, bulletins, and mailings (email and regular mail).
- **Publicize often.** Advertising experts say that it can take 5-6 tries before your message “sinks in” with the people you are trying to reach. Don't assume that one letter or flyer will make enough of an impression on people that they will actually show up for your forum.
- **Use varied media.** People have many different learning and communication styles, so you need a variety of avenues to reach them. If your newspaper has a “community calendar,” send in an announcement. See if you can interest a local reporter in doing an article prior to the event or write a letter to the editor. Many local stations have early morning or noontime shows where you can invite the community to your forum on the air. Some local newspapers might print the basic outline of the discussion guide in the paper, so their readers can think about the issue before attending the forum.







## Do You Have Broad Community Representation?

When you are considering audiences for your local dialogues, strive for broad representation of people in the community who might be interested in discussing

*The Divided State of America: How can we get work done even when we disagree?*

**For example:**

- Civic organizations and service clubs
- Chambers of Commerce and business associations
- Nonprofit organizations
- Faith-based groups
- Community volunteers
- Youth groups
- Organizations for senior citizens
- Elected officials
- Government agencies
- High school students and teachers
- Higher education students and faculty
- News outlets and users (print, broadcast and online)



**Who else in your community?**

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## Sample Press Release

[Date]

[Contact: Name, Phone, Email]

(Your organization) Sponsors Community Forum,  
*The Divided State of America:*  
**How can we get work done even when we disagree?**

Americans today are divided on many fronts. We are increasingly partisan in our politics. We are prone to spending time with people who think like we do. Our lawmakers are increasingly stymied in their attempts to reach agreement on critical bills that affect our jobs, safety and future. Our deep divisions seem intractable at times.

Yet many Americans believe that we can and must find ways to address pressing public issues that affect our quality of life and the future of our nation. Toward this end, the (INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME) is sponsoring a community forum to explore the divided state of America and deliberate on this question: How can we get work done even when we disagree?

The forum will be held on (INSERT DATE) at (INSERT TIME) at (INSERT LOCATION).

The forum will bring together members of our community in a thoughtful conversation about what can be done. A neutral moderator will lead participants in a discussion of several options in an atmosphere that encourages respectful sharing of differing perspectives. A discussion guide will be available at the forum and can be downloaded at [www.congresscenters.org](http://www.congresscenters.org).

The forum is open to the public and all forms of media. For more information, please contact \_\_\_\_\_.

###

# Sample Partner Invitation

## ***The Divided State of America:*** **How can we get work done even when we disagree?**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Americans today are divided on many fronts. We are increasingly partisan in our politics. We are prone to spending time with people who think like we do. Our lawmakers are increasingly stymied in their attempts to reach agreement on critical bills that affect our jobs, safety and future. Our deep divisions seem intractable at times.

Yet many Americans believe that we can and must find ways to address pressing public issues that affect our quality of life and the future of our nation. You are invited to join with (INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME) in co-sponsoring a community forum to explore the divided state of America and deliberate on this question: How can we get work done even when we disagree?

The forum will bring together members of our community in a thoughtful conversation about what can be done. A neutral moderator will lead participants in a discussion of several options in an atmosphere that encourages respectful sharing of differing perspectives. A discussion guide will be available at the forum and online.

The goal of the forums is for people to consider diverse points of view and deliberate on how we can work across our differences to get work done in our communities and nation, even when we disagree. We think your organization would add important insights for tackling this critical issue.

Please contact (INSERT NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION) to join as a sponsor for the dialogue or for more information.

Sincerely,

[Convener]



## Sample Participant Invitation

### *The Divided State of America:* **How can we get work done even when we disagree?**

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Americans today are divided on many fronts. We are increasingly partisan in our politics. We are prone to spending time with people who think like we do. Our lawmakers are increasingly stymied in their attempts to reach agreement on critical bills that affect our jobs, safety and future. Our deep divisions seem intractable at times.

Yet many Americans believe that we can and must find ways to address pressing public issues that affect our quality of life and the future of our nation. Toward this end, the (INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME(S)) is/are sponsoring a community forum to explore the divided state of America and deliberate on this question: How can we get work done even when we disagree?

The forum will be held on (INSERT DATE) at (INSERT TIME) at (INSERT LOCATION).

The forum will bring together members of our community in a thoughtful conversation about what can be done. A neutral moderator will lead participants in a discussion of several options in an atmosphere that encourages respectful sharing of differing perspectives. A discussion guide will be available at the forum and can be downloaded at [www.congresscenters.org](http://www.congresscenters.org).

Please join us for this important conversation and invite friends, family and others you know who are concerned about this issue. If we are going to be successful in getting work done even when we disagree, the first step is to listen to and learn from each other.

Please contact (INSERT NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION) if you would like more information.

Sincerely,

[Convener]

# Please join us. . .

for a community forum on

## *The Divided State of America:* **How can we get work done even when we disagree?**

Americans today are divided on many fronts. We are increasingly partisan in our politics. We are prone to spending time with people who think like we do. Our lawmakers are increasingly stymied in their attempts to reach agreement on critical bills that affect our jobs, safety and future. Our deep divisions seem intractable at times.

Yet many Americans believe that we can and must find ways to address pressing public issues that affect our quality of life and the future of our nation. The forum is open to the public and will bring together members of our community in a thoughtful conversation about what can be done. A neutral moderator will lead participants in a discussion of several options in an atmosphere that encourages respectful sharing of differing perspectives. A discussion guide will be available at the forum and can be downloaded at [www.congresscenters.org](http://www.congresscenters.org).

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsors: \_\_\_\_\_



## Moderating and Recording Community Forums



# Stages of a Community Dialogue

**WELCOME.** Let the participants know who is sponsoring the discussion, and acknowledge co-sponsorship if several organizations are involved. Depending on the number of people present, you may want to ask participants to introduce themselves. If you have a particularly large group, you can ask participants to identify themselves the first time they speak in the discussion.

**GUIDELINES.** Review the suggested guidelines for the discussion. (See page 26.)

**INTRODUCTION OF TOPIC.** Play the starter video, which will provide an overview of the issue and the approaches that will form the framework for your discussion.

**PERSONAL STAKE.** Before you begin deliberating together, take a few minutes to connect the issue directly to people's lives and concerns. There will not be time for everyone to offer a concern at this time. You are really looking for a range of comments that reveal the breadth of the issue. Some questions you might ask:

- What concerns you most about this issue?
- When you hear people discussing this issue, what makes it so difficult?
- Have any of you had a personal experience that illustrates what's at stake here?

**DIALOGUE ABOUT THE APPROACHES.** Provide a structure for people to examine each approach as fully as possible by encouraging them to consider questions such as these:

- What ideas do you have for addressing the problems?
- What might be the effect of your idea on others?
- What is there about this approach that you just cannot live with?
- What makes addressing this problem so difficult? What stands in the way?

**REFLECTIONS AND MOVING TO ACTION.** Turn the participants' attention to the insights and directions that have emerged in the forum. The types of questions you might ask:

- How has your thinking about the issue changed during the forum?
- What new insights or information did you gain?
- What were the greatest areas of concern?
- Where did we agree? Disagree?
- What might you do personally about this issue? What might we do together?
- Are there next steps we want to take?

**QUESTIONNAIRE.** Ask participants to complete the post-forum questionnaire (inserted) as a way to capture their final thoughts and impressions. Collect the post-forum questionnaires and send copies to the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress.



## Suggested Discussion Guidelines

At the beginning of the discussion, most moderators review the following guidelines with participants. Some moderators write the guidelines on a flip chart and post them in the room. **You might also ask the participants if they agree with the guidelines or if they have their own suggestions for the group to consider.**

The moderator will guide the discussion yet remain neutral.

Everyone is encouraged to participate.

No one or two individuals dominate the conversation.

The discussion focuses on the issue.

All the major approaches or positions on the issue are considered.

An atmosphere for discussion and an analysis of the alternatives is maintained.

Everyone listens to each other.

Other ideas agreed upon by the group.

# Advice on Moderating Forums

## The Moderator's Role

- To provide an overview of the process of dialogue—the rationale for the kind of work the participants are getting ready to do.
- To introduce briefly the issue and the options for addressing the issue as outlined in the issue guide, using a starter video when available.
- To support the dialogue process by reviewing the suggested guidelines at the beginning of the dialogue, allocating enough time for each part of the dialogue, and asking probing questions that encourage deliberation.
- To remain neutral throughout the discussion, while encouraging participants to explore all facets of their own and others' opinions.

## TIPS FOR MODERATORS

**You do not have to be an expert on the issue.** Reading the discussion guide thoroughly, considering questions that get to the heart of the issue, and thinking through the essence of each approach are the critical parts of preparation. Your natural curiosity and your interest in understanding diverse views will be your greatest assets.

**Encourage people to talk to each other.** Dialogue hinges on people engaging one another, versus directing their comments to the moderator. The moderator can encourage dialogue by not speaking more than is necessary to keep the conversation moving. Avoid commenting on people's comments, and don't jump in every time there's a pause in the conversation. This encourages the participants to take responsibility for the dialogue.

**Consider all of the options.** If no one in the group seems to favor a particular option, the moderator might raise a question like, "What would someone who favors this approach say?" In other cases, people may have more to say about an option than time allows, and the moderator needs to step in and move people along so that all options are considered.

**Invite people to delve deeper.** Ask people to consider the pros and cons of each option and to weigh the trade-offs of different actions that could be taken. While the options aren't mutually exclusive, they offer different ways of thinking about and acting on the issue.

**Reserve ample time for reflections at the end of the forum.** It's easy to find yourself with little time left at the end of the forum to reflect on what's been said. But, in many ways, this is the most important work the group will do—IF they have time to do it. Recognize that forums seldom end in total agreement or total disagreement. Forums frequently end in a discovery of a shared sense of purpose or recognition of how interests are interconnected.



# Roles of the Recorders

## Roles of the Recorders

The roles of the recorders are extremely important ones during a deliberative forum. Many recorders coordinate with the moderator ahead of time to plan effective strategies for working together during the forum. The purposes of recording are to:

- Remind forum participants of their key concerns, the areas of greatest agreement and disagreement.
- Provide a written record of the group's work that might feed into future meetings of the group or additional forums.
- Help inform other members of the community about the outcomes of the forum.
- Contribute insights from the forums to form a foundation for action planning.



### 1. Group Recorder

*(works at a flip chart in front of the group)*

- Use brief phrases to capture main ideas. Don't try to get down every word.
- Capture the tensions and trade-offs that surface.
- Write clearly and legibly. Use dark markers and print large enough to be seen in the back of the room.

### 2. At-the-seat Recorder

*(takes notes at his/her seat in addition to the group recorder—this role is optional)*

- Capture direct quotes that reveal the deep concerns or emotions that surface.
- Record comments that reflect the spirit of the conversation.
- Summarize stories that are told that illustrate tensions or main ideas.
- Record specific ideas for dealing with the issue.

# Moderator's Agenda for Community Dialogue

This is an agenda for a 90-minute discussion. Make adjustments to fit your timeframe and priorities, making sure to leave time for the "Reflection" at the end.

TIME	TASK
As people arrive	<b>SIGN IN</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greet people, provide nametags, ask people to sign in (name/email).</li> </ul>
5 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome; host and moderator introductions, participant introductions</li> <li>Purpose of the dialogue</li> </ul>
10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conversation starter video</li> </ul>
10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review process and discussion guidelines (pages 25 and 26).</li> <li>Ask "What concerns you most about this issue?"</li> <li>Ask "How is this issue impacting our community?"</li> </ul>
15 minutes	<b>REVITALIZE COOPERATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What public spaces/processes do we currently have for collaboration and relationship building? What new spaces can we imagine?</li> <li>What might improve the way current public meetings/input sessions are carried out?</li> <li>The approach says we must invest in non-partisan resources for information. Do we believe that these sources exist currently? If not, how could we build consensus on the reliability of these sources/institutions?</li> <li>The guide suggests that a drawback to this option is that it can lead to compromises that keep the peace in our relationships at the expense of making tough decisions about what's really best for the community or country. Is building common ground ever a mistake?</li> <li>See additional questions, page 31.</li> </ul>
15 minutes	<b>STAND UP FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How should we balance compromise and ideals?</li> <li>How much autonomy should educators have about what and how they teach?</li> <li>Should companies or unions be able to provide incentives to or pressure on their employees or members to support specified programs or policies or candidates?</li> <li>How could college and university campuses encourage greater diversity of opinions and circumstance?</li> <li>Can PACS and super-pacs and less regulation on campaign finance help the country to surmount gridlock over issues?</li> <li>See additional questions, page 31.</li> </ul>



## Moderator's Agenda for Community Dialogue

TIME	TASK
15 minutes	<b>BRING MORE PEOPLE IN</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do barriers to participation vary by age or gender or economic status?</li> <li>• This approach suggests that we need to reinvigorate civic education in schools. Do you think tweaks to the current curriculum could lead to changes in civic behavior down the road?</li> <li>• Is it ever a bad idea to encourage increased civic participation on the part of individuals? For instance, if those individuals promote ideas of hate?</li> <li>• Can dedicated individuals realistically play a role in making changes on a local, state, or national level?</li> <li>• See additional questions, page 31.</li> </ul>
15 minutes	<b>REFLECTION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has your thinking about the issue evolved or changed?</li> <li>• How has your thinking about other people's views changed?</li> <li>• Share any new information, approach, or perspective in the forum that resonate with you strongly?</li> <li>• What action or actions described in the forum (if any) are you willing to accept despite the tradeoffs associated with doing so?</li> <li>• Where do we agree and disagree?</li> <li>• What were the biggest areas of tension during the forum?</li> <li>• What do we still need to talk about?</li> <li>• How would you summarize the group's deliberation of this issue?</li> <li>• What actions might we take, individually and/or collectively?</li> </ul>
5 minutes	<b>PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE</b>

# Moderator Questions to Promote Deliberation

As you moderate each approach, three basic questions will move the discussion toward action:

- What is already being done in this area?
- What more could be done?
- What actions would have the greatest impact?

As you examine this issue together with dialogue participants, you (and they) will undoubtedly think of other questions that need to be explored. Many of these questions will arise during the course of the discussion. Most moderators find it helpful, though, to consider ahead of time some of the basic broad questions that need to be addressed about each approach. Here are some possibilities:

## **Revitalize cooperation.**

- Are there opportunities to build mutual respect and understanding in your community?
- Do decisions for the “greater good” have a place in society?
- What is your sense of how we ought to revitalize cooperation?
- One suggested action of this option is to seek out and consider views different from your own. What are some simple ways to find these new viewpoints? Is it easier said than done?
- Is building common ground an effective means of working across differences in your community? If so, who are the key players in creating this common ground?
- Your own questions: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Stand up for what you believe.**

- Does compromise have a role in standing up for what we believe?
- How can we get more comfortable with arguing or disagreement?
- What’s the most effective way to get people to change their minds?
- What rules if any should govern our efforts to achieve our ideals?
- What should kids today learn about the technique and ethics of argument?
- Do we have a problem of “political correctness” in society?
- Your own questions: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Bring more people in.**

- In your daily activities, are you aware of not associating with others and why?
- In a world of increasing self-isolation, how do we attract people to the political arena?
- What prevents people from actively engaging in public life?
- Is apathy or disillusionment a new challenge to engagement?
- What does being an active and engaged person mean in today’s society?
- What would alleviate disillusionment?
- Your own questions: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Moderator Response Sheet

## ***The Divided State of America:*** **How Can We Get Work Done Even When We Disagree?**

### *Moderator Response Sheet*

After the forum, please respond to these questions about the forum you moderated. Use the reverse or additional sheets, if needed. Send completed sheet to Association of Centers for the Study of Congress.

Moderator's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Date and location of forum \_\_\_\_\_

Number of participants \_\_\_\_\_ Age range \_\_\_\_\_

Diversity \_\_\_\_\_






1. What seemed to be the participants' main concern about the issue?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Which approaches and actions had the most support within the group?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What aspects of the issue seemed most challenging for participants?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What next steps or plans of action did the group discuss?



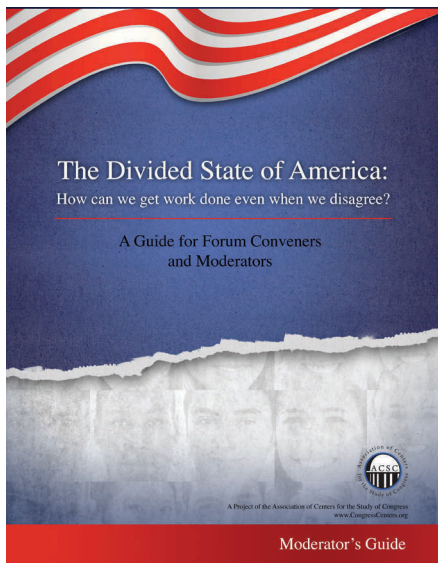
## After the Forum: A Checklist for Conveners and Moderators

It is important to capture the insights from your forum in order to create an authentic report that summarizes the complexities of the public's thinking and the richness of the individual conversations in your communities.

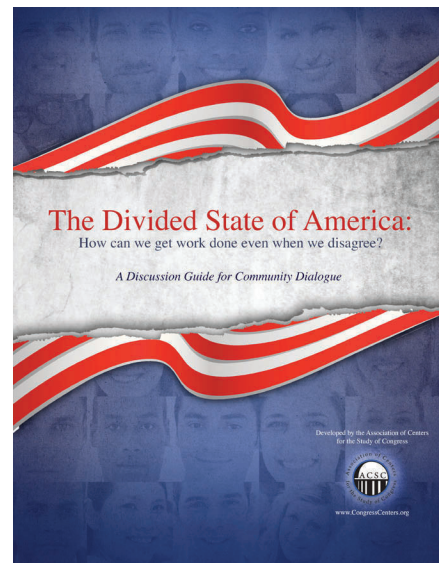
### *Please do the following after your forum:*

-  **Gather completed participant questionnaires.** These questionnaires provide very useful insights from individual participants that will reveal themes, trends, and areas of broad concern when they are analyzed with questionnaires from other forums.
-  **Complete the moderator's response sheet.** Try to do this soon after the forum, while ideas are still fresh in your mind. During the reflections period of your forum, the group will work through most of the questions on the moderator's response sheet.
-  **Prepare recorder notes from the forum.** Better yet, ask the recorder to do this for you. If you can have the "at the seat" notes typed up, that would be very helpful. If not, send a copy of the handwritten notes.
-  **Prepare contact list** (name and email) for forum participants in order to stay in touch for follow-up action planning sessions and to share the report on the forums with them.
-  **Share reporting with partners.** By sharing forum results with partners, you will build your base of stakeholders for future forums or programs.

Soon after the forum, return the participant questionnaires, the moderator's response sheet, and the group and at-the-seat recorder notes to the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress.

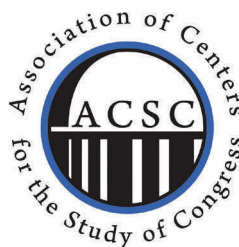


*Moderator's Guide*



*Discussion Guide*

Copies of this book and support materials may be ordered from the *Association of Centers for the Study of Congress* website.



[www.congresscenters.org](http://www.congresscenters.org)

The discussion guide may also be downloaded from the association's website.



