

# Choices Guidelines for Deliberation

## What is deliberation?

Deliberation is not foreign; it is very familiar to us all. When we have to make an important decision we deliberate. We will consider the merits of a range of alternatives and weigh the advantages as well as the tradeoffs of each. After thinking the issue through, we will try to make the best possible choice, the one that best answers our particular needs. It may not be perfect, but it is informed by all of the information that we can bring to the decision at that time.

When we deliberate with others the process is collaborative and involves more than just one person's experience, needs, and perspective. At its best, this is what a jury is expected to do. Deliberation requires a commitment on the part of all who enter into the process to listen to the perspectives and the knowledge of all who are participating and to try to learn from one another.

## How is deliberation different from debate?

In a deliberation everyone expects to end up in a different place as a result of the discussion. You contribute your knowledge and perspective to the whole, listening to one another and building on the contributions of others. By engaging in shared ideas, everyone grows in his or her knowledge and understanding. In a debate, you hold onto your position with the intent that you will "win" the argument and everyone else will end up in a different place. Debate is a competitive process in which there are winners and losers. Ideas are not built; rather, they are contested. Deliberation is a collaborative process. The aim of deliberation is to share perspectives and knowledge and to build ideas, not to defend them.

## Why is it important to know how to deliberate?

We all know why debate skills are useful. We use these skills when we want to persuade another of the merits of our ideas. But what if our ideas are not fully formed? What if the issue is complex and involves multiple interests? How do you generate new approaches that address multiple needs? This calls for careful listening and an openness to the knowledge and the views of others. It requires building new ideas and new approaches together. This is deliberation. Deliberation is a cornerstone of democracy. Learning these skills increases the capacity of students to participate fully in democracy.

## Tips for Participants

- Speak your mind freely, but don't monopolize conversation.
- Listen carefully to others. Try to really understand what they're saying and respond to it, especially when their ideas are different from your own.
- Avoid building your own argument in your head while others are talking. If you are afraid you will forget a point, write it down.

