

# 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.



- Remember that deliberation is about sharing ideas and building new ones. It is not a contest to see whose ideas are best.
- Try to put yourself in someone else's shoes. See if you can make a strong case for an argument with which you disagree. Are there things you appreciate about that perspective?
- Help to develop one another's ideas. Listen carefully and ask clarifying questions. For example, "Can you explain further what you meant by ..."
- Paraphrase each other to confirm understanding of others' points. For example you may say, "So are you saying..."
- Build off of each other. Refer specifically to other deliberators and their ideas. For example you might start your comment by saying, "As \_\_\_\_\_ said, I think we need to look at the issue of..."
- Be open to changing your mind. This will help you really listen to others' views.
- When disagreement occurs, don't personalize it. Keep talking and explore the disagreement. Look for the common concerns beneath the surface.
- Be careful not to discredit another person's point of view. For example you may raise a new concern by asking, "I share your concern that..., but have you considered...?"
- Remember that, although you are trying to listen to and build on each other's ideas, it doesn't mean that everyone has to end up in the same place.
- Do not be afraid to say you don't know or to say you've changed your opinion.

## **Tips for Facilitators**

- Listen actively.
- Engage everyone in the discussion.
- Don't speak after each comment or answer every question.
- Encourage participants to talk to each other, not to you.
- Help the group to look at the issues from many different points of view.
- If one or more perspectives are not getting a fair hearing, ask if someone in the group can make a case for that view.
- Help the group to identify and summarize commonality as the discussion moves forward but don't force it; you don't want to unwittingly silence more reticent contributors.