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## Interactivity Foundation

## Facilitation Guidebook For Small Group Citizen Discussions

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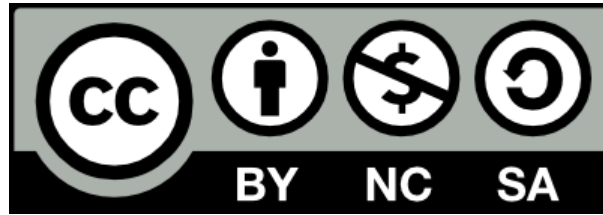
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# Facilitation Guidebook
# For
# Small Group Citizen Discussions

By Jack Byrd, Jr.

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# Preface

The Interactivity Foundation is a non-partisan foundation whose goal is to stimulate and enhance public discussion and thinking about public policy. It seeks to do this, initially, in discussion projects involving the combined interactions of expert and citizen panelists. These interactions result in the articulation of several contrasting policy possibilities for complex area of issues. The selected areas of concern typically address emerging public. The discussion process initially engages participants in a conceptual exploration of the area or concern. It encourages broad thinking reasoning about the overall goals and values that might shape public policy. It also encourages the discussion of dimensions of public policy that are often overlooked (such as ethical, psychological, social, and cultural dimensions). The process is not intended to engage in narrow technical discussion about how to enact legislation or how to fix current policy. The policy possibilities that emerge from the process are not intended to be highly detailed administrative or legislative plans, but broad conceptual approaches. That could be useful for citizens to discuss with others.

The panel interactions unfold through a discussion process guided by a non-participating facilitator who is also the project director. The sanctuary discussion process relies on the work of two independent citizen panels: one of lay citizens and one of expert citizens (they may also be described as a panel of "generalists" and a panel of "specialists"). The two panels work independently of one another for most of the process but meet in joint session near the close of the project. The panel rosters are intentionally kept small (roughly six to eight participants), so as to best facilitate interactive discussion and intensive thought.

The panel process concludes its work with a "Citizen Discussion Report" that describes several contrasting conceptual public policy possibilities for the selected area of concern. The Report presents the overall area of concern, and various possible ways to respond to that concern. But it does not make specific recommendations. The goal of this process is not to advocate any particular policy possibility, but to stimulate and enhance citizen discussion of the area of concern.

Once the Citizen Discussion Reports are published, the Interactivity Foundation (or "IF") initially engages small groups of citizens in discussion s of the contrasting possibilities. The primary purpose of these "Small Group Citizen Discussions" is to help each citizen develop his/her own thinking about the area of concern and the possibilities for addressing it. These discussions are not intended to produce consensus, or any group decision. Rather, the goal of the discussion is for each participant to leave with a better developed and deepened understanding of the area of concern, its dimensions, and the policy possibilities, for dealing with the area of concern.

Facilitators support the discussions and keep them flowing. Their role is critical in keeping these small group citizen discussions focused. This guidebook is for the facilitators of these "IF-sponsored" citizen discussions. The topics that follow take the facilitator from the planning of a discussion program through to its assessment. This is a general guide and not a specific instructional manual. Each facilitator will need to adapt the suggestions contained in this Guidebook to his/her own circumstances and approach.

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# Section A - Designing the Program

## The Desired Outcome

The desired outcome of an IF- sponsored citizen discussion is that every participant develop a better understanding of the contrasting conceptual policy possibilities for an emerging area of concern.   Such an understanding is developed through an interactive sharing of reactions to the conceptual policy possibilities presented in a Citizen Discussion Report.  The discussion itself is not designed to reach consensus.  Rather, the discussion is designed to actively engage citizens in interactive and collaborative discussions about an area of concern, encourage their exploration of the area of concern, and to both broaden and deepen their understanding of the issues and the conceptual policy possibilities for addressing them.

The keys to achieving this outcome include—

- An experienced discussion facilitator who can help keep the discussion flowing without taking sides

- A discussion strategy designed to develop the participants' understanding of the possibilities and to discourage debate, and

- The selection of discussion participants who genuinely want to learn about the conceptual policy possibilities and share their developing thoughts with each other

- A time and setting that are conducive to thoughtful interactive discussion.

- Each participant's thoughtful examination of the conceptual policy possibilities presented in the Citizen Discussion Report

## The Citizen Discussion Strategy

An IF-sponsored discussion needs an effective discussion strategy.  If a facilitator does not have an effective strategy, the discussions can easily lose focus and fail to be very useful.

The facilitator's first task in developing an effective strategy is to set the context for the discussion.  Here, the basic question is, "How can we introduce the discussion topic so that the participants have a common frame of experience for reference?"  A facilitator can do this by —

- Asking the participants to read the Citizen Discussion Report in advance of the discussion

- Giving a brief recap of the Citizen Discussion Report and its conceptual policy possibilities at the beginning of the discussion

- Giving the participants an outline of how the discussion will be conducted

- Guiding the participants through an exploration of the area of concern.  So they understand its dimensions, and

- Discussing each of the possibilities

The facilitator's second task is to identify major discussion perspectives.  "Discussion perspectives" refer to concepts and concerns that the participants regard as critical to their understanding of the possibilities.  A facilitator can identify discussion perspectives by asking each participant, "What is most important to you about the topic we are discussing?"

The facilitator's third task is to explore the connections between the participants' discussion perspectives and the conceptual policy possibilities presented in the Citizen Discussion Report.  The facilitator can explore these connections by asking the participants, "How does this conceptual possibility address the issues that you regard as most important?"  This phase of the discussion can help participants to internalize the possibilities presented in the Citizen Discussion Report.  The facilitator will need to take care to maintain the discussion of the possibilities at a conceptual level in order to keep the discussion from getting bogged down in specific details or debate.

The facilitator's last task is to encourage the participants to continue to explore how their thinking was shaped by the discussion and what they individually gained from it.

A facilitator can accomplish the four tasks outlined above in many different ways, and an experienced facilitator will adjust his or her specific discussion strategy to the needs of the particular discussion situation.

## Citizen Discussion Program Sponsorship

We use the term "IF-sponsored" citizen discussion to indicate that the discussion focuses on one of the IF Citizen Discussion Reports. IF may also support the discussion by directly or indirectly training the facilitator who conducts it. In some cases, IF may also provide modest financial support for the discussion.

Typically IF is not looking for co-sponsors for these discussions. There may, however, be occasions when co-sponsorship may be desirable. Having a co-sponsor may —

- increase participation (if the co-sponsor is respected),

- provide financial support for the discussion program, and

- assist with venues, the recruitment of participants, and other logistical details.

IF will not consider co-sponsorship if it is likely to —

- give the impression that the discussion will have an advocacy tone or agenda,

- exert undue influence over the substance of the discussion itself, or

- discourage participation due to either or both of the above two factors.

Co-sponsors can be useful as hosts for a discussion, for nominating discussion participants, and for providing financial support. But co-sponsors can be more of a hindrance than a help if they do not support the concept of open and honest public discussion, or if they are not willing to let an experienced facilitator do what is needed to provide a rewarding experience for the citizen participants. Thus, before agreeing to work with a co-sponsor, IF must consider the co-sponsor's possible influence upon the discussion format, the selection of participants, and the discussion itself. These issues can all be resolved if all of the following conditions are met:

- Co-sponsors may be involved in the discussion program in the capacity of host, but should not have influence over the discussion format and should not be inclined to steer the direction of the discussion.

- Co-sponsors may nominate participants, but they should not use their nominations as a way of controlling the direction or flow of the discussion.

- Co-sponsors may compensate the facilitator, so long as such compensation does not exert (or imply) control over the way the facilitator leads the discussion.

## An Overview of the Discussion Program

While each discussion will be different based upon the participant and the facilitator, the citizen discussion program typically follows a format as shown below

|  |  |
|---|---|
| **<u>Session One</u>** | Introductions |
|  | Overview of the Discussion Program |
|  | A Discussion of the Area of Concern |
|  | Exploration of 1 - 2 of the Possibilities |
| **<u>Session Two</u>** | Exploration of Additional Possibilities (Generally 2-3) |
| **<u>Session Three and Four</u>** (Possibly) | Exploration of Additional Possibilities (Generally 2-3) |
|  | Discussion Wrap Up and Assessment (if this is the last session) |

Session One starts with an introduction of the participants and an overview of the discussion program.  Generally this includes a short description of the Interactivity Foundation and its interest in the citizen discussion.  These introductions typically will take 15-20 minutes.  Next the facilitator will help the participants explore the many dimensions of the area of concern so they will appreciate the possibilities that will be discussed.  This exploration will typically take from 30 – 45 minutes.  The discussion will then move to an exploration of at least one of the possibilities.  The first session concludes with a preview of the next session.

Session Two primarily focuses on a discussion of 2-3 possibilities.  By this time, the participants have "warmed up" to the discussion process and become very engaged in the exploration.

Session Three will resemble Session Two in that the main focus will be a discussion of additional possibilities.  If Session Three is the final session, the session will conclude with a discussion wrap up and assessment.  In most discussion programs, the discussion wrap up and assessment is deferred to Session Four.

Each of these discussion program components will be reviewed in more detail in subsequent sections of this Guidebook.

# The Use of the Discussion

IF-sponsored discussions are primarily for the participants.  Effective citizen discussions can lead to personal development and insights.  IF-sponsored discussions are not primarily designed to influence non-participants since they will not have had the benefit of interacting in discussion with others and gaining the understanding of alternative perspectives to which such interactions can lead.

The question that the facilitator needs to explore is, "Could others who don't participate in the discussion benefit in some way from the discussion?"  This is a difficult question.  But there are clear answers as to how the discussion and its results should ***not*** be used.

An IF-sponsored citizen discussion should always maintain its focus on interactivity and on developing individual understanding.  Discussions should not be used for advocacy since this tends to fundamentally alter the discussion from an exploration of possibilities to a debate in which the object is to persuade others about the merits of a position.  The discussion should not be used to shape a consensus or group position statement designed to influence non-participants.  Electronic recordings and transcripts should not be made, since they tend to dampen the discussion by making participants self-conscious and less open.

A discussion may nonetheless have positive uses that go beyond the personal insights gained by the participants.  A summary of the discussion may be of use to others.   Such a summary should focus upon the development of the insights that came about from the discussion.  Summaries should present only generalized comments that do not reveal the identities of the individuals who made them.  The readers of the discussion summary should be able to see how the discussion unfolded and how the participants' thinking evolved.  The readers may, by following the discussion in this way, be able to develop personal insights of their own.

The discussion summary should also be beneficial to the facilitator.  The facilitation of public discussion is a skill that is developed through experience, and a facilitator needs to review each discussion that he or she facilitates in order to see what can be learned about the discussion strategy, discussion logistics, selection of participants, and the facilitation process in general.

Finally, the discussion may have positive value as a 'laboratory' for the social sciences.  While the discussion is not a controlled experiment, it may nonetheless provide useful insights for the social sciences regarding the discussion topic and the discussion process.

# Media Coverage

The participants in an IF-sponsored citizen discussion should feel free to express their thoughts, to challenge all of the ideas that they develop, and to think as openly as they can in order to further develop their own personal insights. These citizen discussions should not be open to media coverage, since media coverage would almost certainly have a dampening effect upon the participants' willingness to openly express their thoughts. Media coverage also encourages some of the panelists to debate the possibilities instead of exploring and developing them.

There are, however, some other questions that a facilitator should consider regarding media participation.

1. Should the media be provided with a summary of the discussion? Discussion summaries are intended to describe how insights were shaped by the discussion. Discussion summaries could be provided to the media. There is, however, a serious risk that reporters will report the discussion inaccurately by taking comments out of context. <u>As a general rule, the facilitator should avoid providing the media with discussion summaries</u>.

2. Can members of the media serve as discussion participants? Members of the media are citizens and they can, as such, be valuable contributors to a discussion. But if they participate, <u>they should understand that they are participating as citizens, not as reporters</u>. While they may certainly use the personal insights that they gain from the discussion as background for their reporting, they should not report on the discussion itself.

3. Should the facilitator or sponsor prepare a news release of the discussion for the media? A news release might not advance the purposes of the discussion itself. But, in certain cases there may be reasons why a news release may be desirable, or even necessary. If the facilitator or sponsor does prepare a news release, they should be very careful to prepare it as a description only of the discussion *process* and <u>not</u> as a summary of its *results.* A summary of the discussion results would almost certainly be misinterpreted as a position statement—advocating for or against certain possibilities or policies.

<u>In general, facilitators of IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions should avoid media coverage if at all possible</u>. While citizen discussions are generally intended to stimulate and enhance public discussion of an emerging area of public policy concern, IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions are focused on an early stage in the policy process - on exploring and developing the multiple contrasting policy possibilities in the Citizen Discussion Report and on the individual insights that may gained by such interactive discussions.

# Section B - Planning the Program

## The Number of Participants

IF-sponsored citizen discussions are designed to give everyone who attends an opportunity to participate and contribute.  The number of participants in the discussion thus has a direct impact on the opportunity for discussion.  Why is this?  One reason is simply the limited amount of time available.  The more people involved the less opportunity any one individual will have to contribute.  A second reason is more social.  Some people are just not comfortable speaking in a larger group.

The degree of individual participation is likely to follow a pattern that is greatly influenced by the number of participants.

In a small discussion group (5-8 participants), virtually everyone contributes, no one person dominates, and the discussion is shared fairly evenly.

As the number of participants grows, the discussion tends to be dominated by a limited number of persons.  The 80-20 effect applies.  Basically the 80-20 effect in this case means that 80% of the comments are made by 20% of the participants.  The 80-20 effect tends to occur with what might be considered even a small number of participants (10 or more).

Consequently, IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions should be limited to a small number of participants.  Five to eight participants is the ideal number.  If more than eight participants need to be involved, then the participants should be divided into separate discussion groups, each with its own facilitator.

Finally, and as noted elsewhere in this Guidebook, it is usually prudent to recruit one or two extra or "reserve" participants to cover any absences and drop-outs.

# Suitable Participant Composition

Since IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions involve only a small number of participants, the type of participants is an important planning consideration. In IF discussions, participants gain insights by seeing how others think about the topic under discussion as well as how others explore and develop their own thoughts and choices.

The selection of participants should be driven by the quality and type of insights that a prospective participant may contribute rather than by an effort to achieve some type of structured demographic balance. Persons with diverse demographic backgrounds are likely to offer unique insights, but demographics should not be the controlling factor in deciding on discussion participants.

How can the facilitator assess the useful contributions and insights that a person is likely to bring to a discussion? To answer this question, the facilitator needs to consider that useful contributions and insights can take many different forms, including—

- Personal reactions

- Further development of the comments of others

- Assessment of the practical consequences of the conceptual policy possibilities

- Thoughts about likely reactions of others

- Critical analysis of the practical aspects of conceptual policy possibilities

Not everyone is equally adept at providing insight in each of the above areas. For example, a person who is strong on thinking conceptually about a possibility may not be as good at doing a practical critical analysis. The important point is that just as all citizens can benefit from a well run citizen discussion, all citizens can also contribute— in different ways.

One final note: IF discussions are intended to bring forward the thoughts of citizens from all walks of life about a particular area of public concern. Thus, a person's position, title, or civic responsibilities should not be given undue weight in the selection of participants.

## Sources of Participants

Where does the facilitator find citizens who would be interested in citizen discussions? There are a number of sources that have proven useful. These include

- **Personal networks –** the advantage of this source is that the recruitment is easier. The disadvantage is that the facilitator may not get the diversity of background that make discussions interesting

- **Relationship groups –** These groups include churches, civic clubs, sports groups, etc. The advantage of these groups is that the facilitator recruits the group as a whole than the participants. Group involvement makes the recruiting task easier. The facilitator may have difficulty in getting diversity depending upon t he group. However, many relationships groups can be quite diverse.

- **Internet organizing groups –** Websites such as Meet Up can be useful is putting together a group. The disadvantage of this approach is the facilitator might not have much control over the quality of the participants. The advantage is that when the facilitator frames the initial meeting criteria properly, he or she generally finds people with genuine discussion interests. (See the attachment for setting up a Meet Up group)

- **Established organizations –** These groups includes businesses, labor unions, facility, universities, etc. Generally the facilitator identifies a person in an organization and has that person suggest names and help you recruit. This is an easy way to recruit, but the facilitator may have trouble with diversity of participants.

- **Advertisements –** This approach consists of flyers, bulletin board announcements, and similar devices. This is a very time consuming approach that usually yields very few participants.

- **Discussion Alumni -** in many cases, participants in previous discussions are interested in participating in other discussions. In effect citizen discussion groups can take become the equivalent to a book club.

# Recruitment of Citizen Participants

Useful citizen discussions involve a small number of participants selected for the insights they are likely to share with a small discussion group. These participants are recruited by the discussion organizer/facilitator. Once the source of participants has been identified, the recruitment strategy that works best is referred to as "expanded networking."

Expanded networking starts with persons who have fairly significant personal networks. These persons are then asked to recommend persons who might be interested in participating in a citizen discussion. The specific qualities of participants being sought include—

- Openness to conceptual policy possibilities

- Interest and ability to fairly consider and work with contrasting perspectives and conceptual policy possibilities

- Insightful thinking

- Willingness to commit time

- Free of personal/organizational agenda

One danger to avoid in expanded networking is the "familiar choice." Every community has citizens who are very giving of their time and are often involved in many different civic activities. While such persons are likely to be willing and able discussion participants, there may, in many cases, be good reasons not to select them. Citizen discussions work best when fresh voices are heard. The discussion needs to enlighten the participants. This may be less likely if the participants (and their views) are familiar to each other because there is often a history together that can't be avoided.

Face-to-face contact is the most effective way to recruit panelists, in contrast to email, posters, phone calls, etc. Face-to face is more effective in judging a person's interest and in answering questions a participant might have.

Once the facilitator has the names of potential participants, the next step is to interview them. The interview is a casual conversation about the discussion program and the person's potential interest. This conversation should be developmental, used to work through how the discussion might be done, what would make it useful, who might be involved, etc. Persons who become engaged by this conversation are likely to be good participants. Persons who offer more negative thoughts than developmental ideas are not likely to be good candidates.

Based upon the conversation, the next step is to ask persons if they would like to participate. By this time, the organized/facilitator are likely to have a good idea of their interests and abilities.

The reasons most persons give for participating in citizen discussions include—

- The opportunity for meaningful interactions with people they don't know

- The opportunity to learn about and discuss conceptual policy possibilities in an important area of social concern

- The opportunity to contribute and fulfill a sense of civic responsibility

The facilitator may also want to offer certified day care to support those who have family obligations that would otherwise prevent them from participating. Day care expenses would be included in the overall program budget.

Finally, recruiting participants for a public discussion is not something done through an advertising campaign or some other media-driven strategy. You want to have a discussion group that can provide a variety of perspectives. A media-driven recruiting strategy is likely to lead to participants who have an agenda that they want to promote. While the expanded networking recruitment process described here takes more time then the media-driven approach, it is much more likely to lead to useful citizen discussions.

## Adapting to the Needs of the Audience

The citizen discussion program is designed for any citizen. The primary support for the citizens in their discussions is the Citizen Discussion Report. While the reports have been prepared for a general audience, the facilitator may find that some citizens need additional support in their understanding of the possibilities.

In preparation for the discussion, the facilitator may want to develop some illustrative situations to use for your discussion. These situations can be tailored to help the participants understand a possibility from their own frame of reference.

The facilitator might also want to develop supplemental materials to help the participants work through what the possibility means. Again these supplemental materials should describe the possibility into a frame of reference familiar to the participants.

In the Citizen Discussion Guide are a series of discussion questions for each possibility. In most cases, these should be helpful in starting the discussion. The facilitator might want to think through which of these questions would be most useful for your participants.

Finally, the facilitator can briefly help participants work through the possibilities in the Citizen Discussion Report to put them in their own words. This can help focus the discussion on what is most important to the participants.

As the facilitator, you need to anticipate in advance what your participants will need to be successful in their discussions. Facilitating is a lot like teaching in that you need to plan ahead your strategy for helping the participants be a success in their discussions.

# Recruitment Materials

When participants are being recruited to participate in a citizen discussion, they are likely to ask some common questions in advance about the discussions.  On the following page are the most frequently asked questions.

As discussion organizer/facilitator, you may want to reproduce the attached materials to hand out to potential participants.  Generally it's better to respond to these questions orally, but you may want to leave the fact sheet with the participants for their review.

## Fact Sheet for Potential Discussion Participants

**What are citizen discussions?** Citizen discussions are an opportunity for you and a small group (6-8) of people in your community to learn about an emerging issue facing our nation and to discuss possibilities for dealing with that issue.

**Why would I want to participate in a citizen discussion?** Most people who participate find the experience to be very enjoyable. It's not something they do very often. Participants also find the discussions to be informative both with respect to learning about the issue itself but also learning how others think through the issue. Finally participants feel good about the experience. They feel that they have made themselves more informed as citizens.

**What happens as a result of the discussion?** We are not looking for you to reach any form of consensus, to develop a position paper, or to carry forward any message. The result we are looking for is simply more thoughtful citizens. You may want to host your own discussions after participating or you may want to share your experience with others. What you do as a result of the discussion is entirely up to you.

**What am I expected to do during the discussion?** All you need to do is just express your thoughts on the possibilities that are presented in the discussion material. We are not asking you to do anything different than what you might do every day around the lunch table at work or among friends at church or at any social event. There is a modest amount of reading (a few pages) we would like you to do, but even if you don't have time for the reading, you can still contribute.

**Does this cost anything?** The short answer is no. If you need child care to participate, we will provide it. We will even provide you with a free meal in most cases.

**Who else will be in the discussion?** In most cases, you will have the opportunity to spend time with people whom you might not know. Meeting new people is often one of the things that participants enjoy the most about the citizen discussion.

**How much time will the discussion take?** Generally each discussion session is 2-3 hours (including a meal). Most discussion programs last for four sessions.

**Are spouses also involved in the discussion?** That's up to the discussion facilitator, but spouses are often a part of the discussion.

**Who is paying for the meals and other expenses?** The Interactivity Foundation (IF), located in Parkersburg, WV, is the sponsor of the discussions. IF's mission is to encourage citizen engagement in emerging issues facing our nation. IF takes no political position on any of the citizen discussion issues.

# Sample Elevator Speech

The term "elevator speech" comes from the entrepreneurial economy. Aspiring entrepreneurs are taught to describe their business in a message that could be delivered in a short elevator ride with a potential investor. Below is an example of an elevator speech that might be used to describe the citizen discussions.

"Our grandparents and our parents would often spend their evening setting on their or a neighbor's front porch. They didn't have TV's, and they weren't being bombarded with opinions on current issues from talking heads on cable channels. They had the opportunity to think about issues affecting our country with their neighbors. They worked through some challenging issues including the ups and downs of the economy, civil rights, national security, technological advances, education, and others."

"We would like to invite you to join others in our community in similar discussions. Our goal is to return to the type of discussions your grandparents and parents used to have on their front porches. You will be discussing an issue of emerging concern to our nation. You will be thinking through a number of contrasting possibilities and developing your own point of view on them. Unlike the cable channels, we are not trying to persuade you on any particular issue. All we want you to do is to share your thoughts with others in our community."

"Would you join us as we return to the front porch?"

## The Desirability of Elected Official Participation

IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions are intended to help citizens exercise their civic responsibility by engaging with their fellow citizens in exploration and development of conceptual policy possibilities for an area of concern.  These discussions are not intended to be debates.  There is no attempt to achieve a consensus position.

Elected public officials are citizens and as such could benefit from an IF-sponsored discussion.  Should an elected official participate in an IF-sponsored public discussion, he/she should do so as a citizen and not in the capacity as an elected official.

There are challenges to the participation of an elected official.  There may be a tendency for other citizens to look upon the elected official differently.  The facilitator will need to coach the elected official to express thoughts as a citizen, not as an elected official.

The involvement of an elected official may not be as challenging as envisioned. The conceptual policy possibilities in the Citizen Discussion Reports are not easily identified with political labels.  As such an elected official may be free to participate fully in the discussion without falling back on partisan positions.  Also, the conceptual nature of the possibilities leads itself to a developmental discussion rather than a partisan discussion.

On balance, an elected official poses a number of challenges in an IF-sponsored small group citizen discussion.  But these challenges can be met if—

- The elected official agrees to participate as a citizen

- The other citizens are able to treat the elected official as a peer

- The elected official agrees to the overall exploratory, developmental, and collegial discussion approach, and

- The facilitator is capable of heading off any particular challenges that the elected official may present.

In summary, the organizer of an IF-sponsored small group citizen discussion should not seek out elected officials for participation but should not exclude them either.

## The Date, Time, & Other Logistics for the Program

The date and the time for the IF-sponsored discussion program are ultimately determined by specific circumstances. But there are some general guidelines that may be helpful in selecting a date and time.

**Meeting Date.** As a general rule, the date for the discussion should be about a couple of weeks from the date when the participants are selected. By selecting a date this far in advance, there should be limited concern about prior commitments.

**Day of the Week.** Another issue in the selection of a date is the day of the week selected for the discussion. Many communities will have certain weeknights when there are on-going activities. For example, Wednesday night is a church night in many communities. Obviously these nights should be avoided. In general, earlier in the week is better than later in the week simply because people tend to be less tired earlier in the week.

**Time of Day.** Selecting the time for the discussion is another consideration. In most cases, jobs dictate evening discussions. Early morning discussions beginning with breakfast can be another option. Early mornings are good because people are more alert. Persons also tend to be less distracted by the events of the day. When early morning programs are selected, the facilitator needs to be especially careful to conclude on time.

**Work Schedules & Child Care.** When setting the date and the time, the facilitator needs to be careful not to limit participation to only those who have control over their work schedule. Citizens who can't control their work schedules can be valuable contributors and should not be excluded from participating simply because of work or child care limitations. To recruit parents with young children, it may be important—or necessary—that you offer and provide certified child care or offer to reimburse participants for the costs of their own child care arrangements.

**Meals/Food.** Discussions which begin with a meal are often attractive to participants. A meal also offers a social amenity that can be useful in opening up and encouraging participation. Even if the selected meeting time is not appropriate for a meal, you should consider providing snack food and beverages for breaks in the meeting.

Finally, date and time issues can be a part of the developmental discussion during the recruiting phase. By the time you select the participants, the facilitator should have a good idea of the best dates and times for the discussion sessions.

## Selecting the Venue

The venue for IF-sponsored public discussions should follow the medical adage, "first do no harm."  The venue does harm when it distracts from the discussion due to noise, room arrangements, poor support services (leading to problems in keeping the discussion on schedule), or other problems that limit discussion.

The essential qualities in a successful venue for discussion include—

- Quiet environment
- Comfortable seating
- Seating arrangements that support relaxed discussion (see the following section)
- Minimal distractions

The above are the essential qualities that every venue should have.  They create the ambience for good discussions.

In addition to the essential qualities, there are other qualities of a venue that are important.  While these other qualities don't enhance the discussion itself, they can create problems if they aren't met.  These qualities include--

- Convenient access
- Available parking
- Meal availability
- Child care availability

Some discussion programs may require other arrangements, but the above qualities tend to be the most important.

There are a number of possible public discussion venues.  The most obvious are designated public meeting spaces such as hotels, conference centers, etc.  While such venues are natural choices for meetings, they may not be as good for IF-sponsored citizen discussions.  The typical space available in such public places tends to create an atmosphere associated with more formal discussion and with problem-solving meetings.  When people enter such places, they may tend to take on an action orientation.

Contrast the atmosphere of a public meeting space with that of a more private setting such as a home, church or retreat setting.  The private setting creates a difference in the way participants approach the discussion.  In a private space, people tend to engage in a conversation or discussion in a more relaxed, more personal way.  They are more removed from their professional and organizational frame of mind.

Restaurants are natural venues for discussions.  If a restaurant is selected, the facilitator should find one that has a private room for dining.  Otherwise restaurants can be very noisy and impede discussions.

Getting menu orders in advance of the discussion date is also desirable since this can save valuable time.

When the facilitator uses a home for a meeting; he or she might want to have a casual meal that can be brought in.  This type of arrangement can reduce the host's time commitment in preparing for the discussion.

Seating Arrangements

While seating arrangements may seem trivial, they are important in creating the proper atmosphere for an IF-sponsored small group citizen discussion. Many business meetings have seating around a long rectangular or U-shaped table. While such arrangements may work for business meetings, they do not work well for an IF-sponsored small group citizen discussion.

Seating for citizen discussions should meet the following criteria:

- Every participant should be able to see every other participant

- There should be no "power position" or head of the table

- The seating should be comfortable and relaxing

- The seating should invite full attention to the discussion

The best seating arrangement to ensure that every participant is fully visible to the other participants is a circle. When a circular arrangement is used, there is no "head of the table". The facilitator is simply one of the positions in the circle. There is no preferred seating as is common in business seating arrangements.

Ideally, the seats themselves would be more like what one would find in a living room than what you would find in the conference room. Such seating helps the participants feel more comfortable in expressing their thoughts.

Preferably, tables should not be used. Tables provide a writing surface, which may encourage participants to write while others are talking. More relaxed seating without a table still permits the participants to take notes, but it doesn't invite extended writing.

Overall you want the seating to avoid the image of a business meeting. The organizer/facilitator doesn't want the seating arrangements to convey a problem-solving arena but rather a relaxed space in which to share ideas.

# The Roles of the Facilitator

IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions need to be facilitated to be effective. In all cases a facilitator keeps the discussion flowing and helps ensure that all participants are involved. But the facilitator may have other roles as well.

Additional roles for the facilitator:

- Program organizer (recruits participants, selects the venue, plans the program, etc.)

- Possibilities presenter (provides an overview of the Citizen Discussion Report and the conceptual policy possibilities to be discussed)

- Follow-up coordinator (ensures that all appropriate follow up actions are carried out)

In citizen discussions, the facilitator will be the facilitator of all meeting sessions. The role of program organizer may be done by the discussion program sponsor in consultation with the facilitator.

The facilitator needs to produce a discussion summary and other documents coming from the discussion. The facilitator or the discussion program sponsor may be involved with the follow-up activities.

In general, the facilitator needs to conduct the activities that directly affect the discussion of the Citizen Discussion Report. The facilitator's role is less critical in activities that are primarily administrative.

For IF purposes, the facilitator needs to also provide some administrative support. This includes:

- Obtaining names and addresses of discussion participants so that IF can send thank-you notes, and follow-up surveys

- Impression reports after each discussion

- Participating in a wrap-up phone call at the end of the discussion with IF

- Submitting expense reimbursement forms to IF.

## Developing Illustrative Examples of the Possibilities

In some cases, the participants in a discussion may be uncomfortable with the possibilities as presented in the Citizen Discussion Report. Not everyone has the ability to understand the possibilities as presented in analytical format. In these cases, you may want to supplement the discussion materials with illustrative examples that help frame the possibility in a way that brings the possibility to light for the participants.

Consider the following possibility that is in the Anticipating Human Genetic Technology Citizen Discussion Report.

> *"This policy possibility aims at balancing individual and social control over the development and use of human genetic technologies. Society is responsible to individuals by making sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to make informed choices about whether or how to use these technologies. In turn, individuals' choices should be responsive to the good of society as a whole."*

Suppose that the citizen discussion participants come largely from a lower income, minority segment of our society. For this possibility, you might create some illustrative cases that focus on specific situation involving these citizen groups. An illustrative example is shown below for this possibility.

> Suppose that a deadly disease has been spreading in low income, minority populations. A genetic marker has been found that identifies people who will likely fall victim to this disease. These people can be treated, but the treatment creates short term physical difficulties. Without treatment the disease is likely to spread to other generations. The treatment is subsidized but it still poses a challenge for some with very low incomes.

The participants should be able to connect to the example. Once they discuss the example, the facilitator can then broaden the discussion to the more conceptual level.

In order to be effective, the illustrative example should:

■   Describe a situation that the participants are likely to identify with.

■   Illustrate different dimensions of the possibility

■   Challenge the participants on a personal level (what would I do?)

■   Be free of biases that would steer the consideration of the possibility.

Facilitators will probably want to prepare these examples to have available should the participants need help. The process of preparing the examples can also be helpful to the facilitator in his/her own understanding of the possibility.

## Maintaining Balance in Presenting and Participation

Most people have had the experience of being invited to some event billed as an opportunity to share differing views on an issue. Many of these events end up being more of a presentation by "officials" than a genuine sharing of citizen views and insights. The participants often leave feeling that program planners misrepresented the real reason for the event.

One of the challenges in planning an IF-sponsored small group citizen discussion is to decide how much "presentation" time is necessary. Typically presentation time is used for—

- Introductions

- Setting the ground rules for the discussion

- Describing the issue to be discussed

- Describing follow-up at the end of the event

- Giving sponsors and others a time in front of the participants

Let's take a look at each of these presentation activities to see what can be done to minimize this time.

**Introductions** – By providing background information on the participants prior to the discussion, the facilitator can limit the oral introductions at the meeting to just names. Also, providing name tags and name plaques where each person is seated can help others connect a person with the in background information.

**Setting the Ground Rules** – These should be written down and distributed to each person. The facilitator should quickly review these ground rules initially, but the more important time for review is when the ground rule is actually used. Any set of ground rules that takes more than a couple of minutes to describe is too complex.

**Describing the Issue** – This is when facilitator goes over the topic for the discussion. In most cases, participants will be given the Citizen Discussion Report to review prior to the discussion. The facilitator should provide 1-2 page summaries of critical information on the possibilities for discussion. These summaries should cross reference the Citizen Discussion Reports provided in advance. The facilitator should also give instructions to participants on how to prepare for the discussion.

This is the one element in the presentation time when the facilitator must be especially careful. All too often, facilitators assume that participants want help in understanding the issue. Participants, on the other hand, are often anxious to begin the discussion.

**Describing the Follow-Up –** Any follow-up instructions for the participants should be written down and given to the participants.  The only time needed for presentation is simply a quick reminder.

**Promotional Activities –** These activities may be necessary, but they also need to be controlled.  The facilitator needs to coach those who are doing their presentation on how much time they have.  In most cases, promotional presentations will be more harmful than beneficial if they detract from the discussion.

The general rule for balance between participation and presenting is this:  participation should comprise at least 90% of the total time of any event.  This rule of thumb can be a useful guide to force the hard choice about what needs to be presented.

# Planning the Time Schedule

In planning a citizen discussion program, a facilitator must develop an anticipated time schedule. While no time schedule will ever work out perfectly, the thought process required to put together a time schedule can be very helpful.

While most of the meeting time should be devoted to discussion of the conceptual policy possibilities presented in the Citizen Discussion Reports, there will need to be some time allotted for "overhead" or presentation activities such as—

- Introductions
- Setting the ground rules for discussion
- Describing the issue to be discussed
- Describing follow-up activities

See the immediately preceding section of this Guidebook ("Maintaining Balance in Presenting and Participation") on how to manage the time for these overhead activities. The total time allocated for these activities should not exceed 15 minutes.

In session 1, 30 minutes should be allocated for exploring the area of concern. An additional 15 minutes should be allocated for providing an overview of all of the possibilities.

The discussion of the possibilities is the most important part of the program. Initially each possibility will take 40-60 minutes to discuss. This time can be decreased for subsequent possibilities because some comments might be relevant to other possibility.

An overall schedule for the discussion program is shown below:

| | |
|---|---|
| Session 1 | Overhead Activities (15 minutes)<br>Exploration of the Area of Concern (30 minutes)<br>Overview of Possibilities (15 minutes)<br>Discussion of First Possibility (60 minutes) |
| Session 2 | Discussion of 2-3 Possibilities |
| Session 3 | Discussion of 2- 3 Possibilities |
| Session 4 | Discussion of Remaining Possibilities<br>Program Wrap Up<br>Assessment |

Note: Each session is planned for two hours. A meal will add 45 minutes – 60 minutes to this time.

These estimates are for planning purposes only and should not be controlling.

# Planning Challenges

No public discussion ever goes just as you plan it--no matter how good your plans are. In the best case, the things that go against your plan will be minor. But you also need to anticipate some of the more serious challenges that may occur. These challenges include the following.

**Logistics** – Logistical details never seem to fall exactly into place—especially when relying upon someone else. Many of these problems can be resolved by double checking on arrangements in advance and by getting to the event in advance to check on arrangements.

**Participant Behavior** – When planning an event, hope for a well-behaved group, but be prepared to be challenged by participant behavior. Some of these challenges are described in Section D—Managing Challenges.

**Time Management** – Section B—The Time Schedule, gives some guidance for time management. Also the facilitator needs to have a back-up "Plan" in case the original time plan does not work out as hoped. Plan for the discussion session going too slow (mostly likely) or going too fast (less likely).

**Attendance** – When planning for a discussion, the facilitator will have a specific number of people in mind. One needs a critical mass for a useful discussion. What happens when people don't show up? It's always wise to invite 1-2 more people to attend than considered ideal. There is likely to be some non-attendance so the "over-booking" shouldn't be a problem. Avoid delaying the start of the discussion for those who are not there on time.

**Discussion Direction** – (By "direction" we mean the level and tone of the discussion, not the nature or content of the comments). When planning the discussion, the facilitator will have an idea of the direction he or she wants the discussion to go. What happens when the participants won't or can't go in that direction? Skilled facilitators can often bring the discussion back into focus. But on some occasions, even skilled facilitation won't work. When this occurs, the only thing the facilitator can do is let the participants go in the direction they want. While the discussion may not have gone as hoped, the facilitator may be able to salvage something from it. More will be said about this in Section C—Conducting the Program.

Often the challenges the facilitator faces will be ones that can't be anticipated. There are two ways to plan for the unexpected. One is to have an assistant who can help the facilitator with an anticipated challenge. This way the facilitator can focus on the discussion and let the challenge be handled by the assistant. The second way to handle the challenge is to accept the challenge for what it is and focus on the discussion. While the discussion may not be perfect, as facilitator, you shouldn't abandon your original plans.

## Use of the Citizen Discussion Reports

Citizen Discussion Reports are developed by citizen and expert panels working with an IF facilitator. The Citizen Discussion Reports present a number of conceptual policy possibilities for addressing a specific area of concern. The Citizen Discussion Reports are the basis for the small group citizen discussions.

The Citizen Discussion Reports are designed to be used by citizens for exploration and development of the area of concern and the possibilities for addressing it. The reports should be given to discussion participants when they agree to participate. In addition to the reports, the facilitator will give the participants summary materials and some general guidance on how they might use the reports to prepare for the discussion.

The facilitator should stress several points with respect to the use of the Citizen Discussion Reports.

1. The reports are works in progress. They are intended to be developmental. As such, the reports are not meant to be an exhaustive development of all the possibilities of an area of concern.

2. The reports are not legislative proposals or formal statements of proposed policy. The specific words in the report are not to be parsed and debated as if they were proposals. The reports are intended to indicate possibilities and the words are reflective of what *might* be, not what *ought* to be.

3. The reports are written at a conceptual level and are intended to stimulate discussion of broad possibilities, not legislative or administrative details.

4. The consequences that are presented in the reports are intended to be illustrative. They are not definitive or exclusive, and they often suggest alternative consequences resulting from a possibility.

While the Citizen Discussion Reports are not intended be all-inclusive documents, the citizen discussion should focus on the possibilities presented in the reports. Participants may have their own ideas for additional possibilities. To the extent reasonably possible, these ideas should be either integrated into a discussion of the existing possibilities, or they should be reserved for the participant's final or summary comments and assessment. Otherwise the discussion is likely to wander so broadly that it is unlikely to be useful to the participants.

# Participant Preparation

Citizen discussions shouldn't require extensive preparation by citizens to be affective. The Citizen Discussion Report is the only thing that citizens need to read to take part in the discussions.

Ideally citizens will have read the report prior to the first discussion. But you need to be prepared for citizens who have not read the report. Outlined below are some things you can do to ensure that the citizens have some minimal preparation prior to the discussion.

1.  Give the citizens specific pages in the Citizen Discussion Report to focus on. For most meetings, the amount of reading that is necessary is only 6-10 pages.

2.  At the beginning of the meeting, ask participants to reread the specific pages of the report that are critical to the discussion. In most cases, this will take around 5 minutes. Rereading the material is good even for those participants who have prepared in advance.

3.  Provide a brief overview of the possibility prior to the discussion beginning

Even with minimal preparation, the discussions should be effective.

# Meeting Documents

IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions require careful attention to the documents provided to participants before and during the discussion.   Carefully prepared documents can improve the preparation of participants for discussion and improve the flow of discussion.  Outlined below are suggestions for documents that might be used for IF citizen discussions.

<u>Pre-Discussion Documents</u> (given to participants in advance to prepare for discussions)

1. Citizen Discussion Report – the report from the Interactivity Foundation that presents the conceptual policy possibilities for the area of concern.  Citizens should also be given suggestions on specific pages to read in preparation for the meeting.

2. Discussion Guidelines – describe how the discussion will be conducted.  See <u>Attachment A</u> for an example of this document.

3. Discussion Participants - provides background information on other people to be involved in the discussion.

<u>Discussion Session Documents</u> (given to participants during the discussion sessions)

1. Possibilities Summary – summarizes the possibilities on a few pages.  It is designed as a quick reference to be used during the discussion.

2. Insight Journal – provides participants with a place to capture their own thoughts on the possibilities.  See <u>Attachment B</u> for an example of this document.

Finally, the facilitator will need to control the number of documents given to participants.  Too much information can be distracting and take away from quality of the discussion.

## <u>Attachment A – Discussion Guidelines</u>

At our upcoming citizen discussion, you and your fellow citizens will have an opportunity to explore a number of possibilities for addressing the issue of _____ _____.  We hope that you will be able to use this discussion to explore and develop your own thinking.  We are not asking the discussion participants to develop a consensus or otherwise determine an answer or solution.  Rather, we hope that you will share with us your thinking about the possibilities.

We invite you to participate as a citizen not as a representative of any group.  Our discussion will be kept confidential, and we hope you will feel free to explore the possibilities openly.

At the conclusion of our discussion program, we hope that you will have formed your own ideas about the possibilities that are presented.  The Interactivity Foundation is not advocating for or against any of the possibilities.  As facilitator, role in the discussion is limited to helping each of you explore and develop your own understanding about the area of concern and a number of contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing it.

We think you will enjoy these discussions and find them to be one way for you to enrich your participation in civic life.

## <u>Attachment B – Insight Journal</u>

Throughout the discussion, please record any insights you develop about the area of concern and/or conceptual possibilities for addressing it. These insights are for your use only.

1.


2.


3.


4.


5.


6.


7.


8.


9.


10.

## Ensuring Attendance

The preferred number of participants for a citizen discussion is 5-8.  Discussions with three or fewer participants can be problematic.  Outlined below are some strategies for getting the attendance you need for a discussion.

1.  Over recruit for the discussion.  Starting off with a higher number of recruits – eight (or even 9-10) - should ensure a critical mass of participants for the discussion.

2.  Send a series of emails or other communications before each meeting.  Even if there is only one week between discussions, try sending two messages: One as a recap of the previous discussion and a second as a reminder of the next discussion.

3.  Ask participants to let you as organizer/facilitator know if they cannot attend a discussion or will be late for a discussion.  This will help you know when to start a discussion if you don't have full attendance.

4.  Obtain meal orders in advance.  People are generally less likely to miss a discussion if they have made meal plans.

5.  Start the session with a reading review so that late arrivers will miss less of the discussion.

6.  Contact people who missed a session to determine their continued interest in the discussion.  If there are no-shows for the first session, consider recruiting additional persons.  They should be able to get caught up if they miss only one session.

The key aspect to all of the above strategies is to be pro-active.

# Communications to Participants

In addition to the meeting documents described in the preceding section, there are other communications that need to occur in advance of the discussion program. Often these communications can set the tone for the discussion and make the discussion program flow more smoothly.

Listed below is a checklist of topics that might be communicated in advance.

<u>Logistics</u>

- ■ Meeting location

- ■ Time schedule

- ■ Your cell phone number

- ■ Child care

- ■ Parking

- ■ Meal/snack & beverage accommodations

- ■ Point of contact for questions

<u>Participant Preparation</u>

- ■ Advance reading (give specific pages)

- ■ What to bring to the discussion

<u>Discussion Perspectives</u>

- ■ Selected articles on civic engagement

- ■ Testimonials from previous participants

- ■ Information on the discussion process

Since the discussion is typically scheduled a few weeks in advance, a regular weekly communication can be helpful in developing a sense of the discussion. Such communications can also help prevent absences by providing a continuing reminder of the upcoming discussion.

# Section C – Conducting the Program

## The Discussion Program

IF discussions are not intended to produce consensus or other group decision or action. The discussions are intended to help individual citizens explore and develop a broadened and deepened understanding of an area of concern.  The discussions also help citizens think about the conceptual policy possibilities in the Citizen Discussion Report so that they can participate more meaningfully and effectively in helping to determine the broad direction our public policy might go in addressing an area of concern.

The discussion program typically is conducted as follows.

**Step 1 (Set the Context)**: The facilitator sets the context for the discussion by presenting a brief overview of the area of concern.

**Step 2 (Identify Perspectives)**:  The facilitator helps identify differing perspectives and opens the discussion on the area of concern by asking the participants what is important to them about the area of concern.

**Step 3 (Develop a Sense of the Possibilities):**  The facilitator gives an overview of all of the possibilities as a group.

**Step 4 (Explore the Possibilities)**:  The facilitator then engages the participants in exploring each of the possibilities in turn.  For each possibility, the participants are asked to reflect on questions such as the following:

> a) How would you describe this possibility to a friend who didn't participate in this discussion? (e.g., How do you understand this possibility?)
>
> b) What do you see as the strengths of this possibility?
>
> c) What do you see as the weaknesses of the possibility?
>
> d) How might this possibility be further strengthened to make it more useful or effective?

Each of these questions is discussed in a facilitated environment where each participant is encouraged to contribute in a natural discussion flow.  A structured order of discussion (e.g., round robin) should not be used.

During the discussion, the facilitator should make summary notes on a flipchart.  These notes are merely intended to give a visual reminder of what has been said.

Typically the facilitator will start with questions (a), then move to (b) and (c) together, and then to (d).  Follow-up questions might be asked at anytime.  At the conclusion of

the discussion of each possibility, the facilitator asks each of the participants to prepare their own summary comments on the possibility.  These are private thoughts that are not to be shared with the other participants.  This process is repeated for each of the possibilities.  After all of the possibilities are discussed, the facilitator asks the participants to look back over their private notes on each possibility and to prepare their own summary comments.  These summary comments may indicate their preferred conceptual policy possibility, or they may indicate the issues and questions that still remain for them.  These summary comments are also private.

**Step 5 (Assessment)**:  The facilitator concludes the program by asking the participants what they got from the discussion and what changes they would suggest for future discussions.  For additional guidance on assessment and related discussion questions, see Section F (Assessing Program Effectiveness).

# The Character of the Discussion

Nearly everyone has seen a discussion of a public issue on a television news or talk show. IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions are about as different from those types of discussions as they could be.

The character of IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions is one of open exploration, development, and understanding, rather than "winning a debate". When participants in an IF discussion present their thoughts about a possibility, they are expressing their developmental thinking about the possibility under discussion. They aren't trying to win over other people to their thinking. Rather, they are asking others to help them think about the possibility.

The facilitator has a critical role to play in setting the character for the discussion. This can be done through the following practices.

- Let the participants know up front that the discussion is one of personal exploration where each participant is asked to think about the possibilities being presented. There will be no voting, consensus, or other group decision process in use. Instead the goal of the discussion is to help each participant and the group explore, develop, and grow in understanding of an issue.

- Ask follow up questions that help participants discover their own thinking. This is very different from typical discussions where the participant is asked to defend a position they may have expressed.

- Take a firm stand whenever the discussion is tending toward a debate. The facilitator can do this by helping participants rephrase their comments in a developmental, rather than a challenging, way.

- Encourage the participants to "try on" each possibility that they discuss, adopting it as if it were their own and exploring how it affects their view of things.

When the facilitator is successful at creating the proper character, the discussion becomes one that is truly unique and personally rewarding to participants.

# Starting the Discussion

In most discussions, there is a reluctance to talk at first.  Often one of the more outgoing participants will begin the discussion.  Others will follow.  Often one or two of the shyer participants may not offer comments for some time.

When the facilitator starts a discussion by asking participants to volunteer comments, the more outgoing participants can steer the discussion in directions of interest to them.  Outlined below is an approach that can be used to get a discussion started in a way that lets every participant contribute equally.

1.  Develop a starting discussion point question.  Some that you might use include:

    ■   How would you describe this possibility to a friend?

    ■   What do you like about this possibility?

2.  Ask participants to jot down notes for this question.

3.  Call on participants at random to respond to the question.  Throughout the discussion program, it should be possible to have each person start the discussion at least once.

The written notes and the use of a random calling sequence should avoid the problem of having more outgoing participants dominate the direction of the discussion.

# Lightning Round on the Area of Concern

The first item in the discussion in session one should be a lightning round on the area of concern.  A lightning round discussion is essentially a rapid-paced exploration of the area of concern.  The facilitator poses a question to the panel and captures the panelist comments on a flip chart.  A very simple generic question to be used is what issues do you have about (the area of concern)?

The facilitator should let the participants write down their thoughts for a few minutes.  Then the issues should be solicited in a random order from the participants.  This activity will take approximately 30 minutes.

The lightning round accomplishes three purposes:

- It helps the participants better appreciate the scope of the area of concern

- It helps the participants become more comfortable with each other.

- It helps the facilitator understand the participants' current understanding of the area of concern.

The facilitator should refer back to issues identified in the lightning round as the possibilities are being discussed.  This will give the participants a personal connection to the possibilities by showing them how the possibilities connect back to the issues they identified.

# Reviewing the Composite Set of Possibilities

Before the discussion begins on any one of the possibilities, the facilitator should give the participants an overview of all of the possibilities.  In the Citizen Discussion Reports, there will be a sample page with a description of all of the possibilities.  The facilitator should copy this page and have it available for reference by the participants.

The facilitator should also prepare a flip chart page that has an abbreviated title of each possibility and some key aspects of that possibility.  This flip chart page should be visible to the participants as they discuss the possibilities.  Often participants will want to compare and contrast possibilities, and the page will help provide a useful reference.

The facilitator should also review each possibility quickly so that the participants have an overview of the entire collection of the possibilities.  The facilitator may want to answer questions during the review but defer discussion until later.

# Discussing Each Possibility

Once the discussion has started, the facilitator's role becomes more passive. The facilitator will want to capture key comments from the discussion on a flip chart. But when the discussion goes off course, the facilitator will need to step in and ask clarifying questions or provide prompts for other directions the discussion might go.

Once the discussion winds down, the facilitator should try to recap the major points covered in the discussion. This can be very useful in providing the participants with a sense of what was said in the discussion. This recap should not be cast a consensus statement of the group but rather a summary of the major points covered in the discussion.

Before a discussion begins on the next possibility, the facilitator should ask the participants to capture their thoughts in an insight journal. A copy of the journal is shown as Attachment A in the meeting documents section of this Facilitation Guide.

As the discussions continue, participants may want to refer back to previous possibilities in their comments. In some cases, the discussions of later possibilities will go more quickly because earlier comments will also apply to these later possibilities. Recap notes may also have evaluative comments that compare one possibility to another.

The facilitator may find that not every possibility needs discussion. This is especially the case when a possibility is essentially discussed in conjunction with another possibility.

At the end of the discussion of the final possibility, participants should be asked to identify the possibility or possibilities they prefer. Again **no consensus is being sought.** Participants might choose to develop their own possibility from whole cloth or from two or more aspects of the other possibilities. More will be said about this in the section entitled: The Final Discussion Session.

# Keeping the Discussion on Track

In order for discussions to be effective, they have to be maintained at the right level, which is one of the primary responsibilities of the facilitator.

Typical situations that can lead the discussion off track include:

1. Repeated use of anecdotal experiences – While some personal stories can be instructive, they often can lead to unproductive discussions that lead nowhere.

2. Excessive attention to rather minor points – Participants have a tendency to dwell on insignificant issues that are their personal "hot buttons".  When these come up, the discussion can quickly focus on what is of little importance to the overall discussion.

3. Endless "Ping pong Style" debates – While contrasting viewpoints are desired, the contrasts need to be acknowledged, and the discussion needs to move on.  All too often these contrasts can become debates where few new insights are gained after the original contrasting viewpoints are given.

4. Personal interests – Participants often come to a discussion with a particular subject of interest.  Often they will want to direct the discussion toward this particular interest.

5. Excessive focus on a cause – Some participants will want to raise concerns for a social cause repeatedly throughout a discussion.  Every time the discussion moves to a new possibility, the participants will want to interject their social cause into the discussion.

The facilitator needs to be directive when the discussion level gets off track.  If the facilitator doesn't take a direct approach in these situations, then participants may also lose faith in the ability of the facilitator to lead the discussion.

Some approaches that the facilitator can take to keep the discussion on track include:

1. Establish some guidelines up front in the project about the level of detail desired.  Periodically ask the participants to evaluate how well they are living up to the agreement.

2. Calling a "timeout" in the discussion when it seems to be moving to the wrong level.  Give feedback to t he participants as to the level that is desired.  Facilitators may also want to use these situations as an opportunity to remind the participants about the goals of the discussion.

3. Talking privately with individuals who interject personal interests or causes into the discussion.  Ask these persons to raise these interests/causes to the appropriate level of the discussion.

4.  Giving participants an example that might help them understand the possibilities, especially if the participants have a difficult time understanding the level you are seeking.

The facilitator needs to be sensitive about the perception of controlling the discussion. At the same time, the facilitator needs to redirect the level of the discussion if it appears to be going off course.

## Making the Transition from One Possibility to the Next

Once the group is ready to move on to the next possibility, the facilitator needs to help the participants make this transition. The first thing to do in making this transition is to give a brief description of the new possibility. This may be the same description provided earlier in the overview of all of the possibilities.

Next, it would be helpful to show how the new possibility compares with those that have previously been discussed. What is especially helpful is to show how the new possibility might address concerns that were raised with previous possibilities.

At first participants may need some guidance in putting aside the previous possibilities. Facilitators may need to correct them when there is some obvious confusion in their understanding of the new possibility.

## Capturing Participants' Thoughts on the Possibilities

During the discussion, the facilitator needs to capture the participants' thoughts on a flip chart. The notes that are placed on t he flip chart are abbreviated notes of what was said. In general each person's comments should be captured on the flip chart.

Why capture notes of the participants' thoughts? When notes become visible, the discussion tends to become more focused. Participants can see the flow of the discussion. Discussions without visible capturing of comments can often become random exchanges without apparent flow.

There is also a psychological reason for capturing thoughts in a visible manner. Participants feel that their thoughts have more permanence when they are captured for others to see.

Finally, the capturing of participants' thoughts can give the facilitator a useful way to review the discussion.

These reviews can be useful in facilitation improvement and in reflecting on the overall effectiveness of the discussion. These notes are also useful to IF in its understanding of how citizens utilize the Citizens Discussion Reports.

# The Final Discussion Session

The final discussion session is different from the other sessions in that it is a mix of possibility discussions and some overhead activities. In most cases, the final discussion session will contain the following activities:

- A discussion of any remaining possibilities

- A discussion of individual selections of the possibilities participants find most acceptable

- An assessment of the overall discussion program

- A discussion of possible next steps the participants may wish to pursue

The final session should involve the discussion of just one possibility. This discussion will be conducted like that of other possibilities.

Next, the facilitator should ask the participants to review their insight journals and select the possibility they most prefer. This is an individual selection. No effort should be made to achieve a group consensus. Participants should also feel free to select features of other possibilities they like. In effect their preferred possibility can be a combination of the possibilities as presented. Once individual participants have made their selections, the facilitator should ask the participants to share their selections and reasoning with others.

Also in the final session will be a preliminary assessment of the overall discussion program. This can be very informal with just a simple question of: What did you like and what didn't you like? The facilitator should also encourage the participants to participate in a short online assessment as well. The online assessment will be very useful to IF in continuously improving the discussion process.

Finally, the facilitator should mention other possibilities they might want to pursue with IF. These include:

- Hosting a similar discussion with a group or organization they are a member of

- Participating in a sanctuary project

- Participating in discussions of another area of concern.

The attached follow-up sheet can be useful in capturing these interests.

If the facilitator hasn't already done so, he/she should obtain contact information from the participants so that IF can send them a thank you letter, and a follow-up survey.

### Attachment A:  Follow Up Possibilities

Would you be interested in further participation in activities of the Interactivity Foundation?  If so please check one or more of the boxes below:

☐  Hosting a discussion session on this area of concern for a group or organization that I participate in

☐  Participating in a sanctuary project

☐  Participating in discussions of another area of concern

☐  Staying on IF's contact list to receive future information about IF activities

Name: _____

Contact Information: _____

_____

_____

_____

# Handling Difficult Participants

One of the banes of the facilitator is difficult participants. Every discussion session is likely to have one or more participants who pose a challenge in some form. There are a number of strategies for dealing with difficult participants. These are outlined below.

- Someone who talks excessively
  - Capture comments on a flip chart to reduce the tendency to repeat the same point
  - Ask all participants to limit their comments to one point at a time
  - Randomize the starting point for a particular discussion topic so the same person doesn't always start

- Someone who is passive
  - Help the person get started by asking the person to comment on a specific point
  - Observe the person's body language and call on the person when he/she appears ready to speak
  - Provide positive reinforcement when the person does make a comment.

- Someone who dominates or threatens others
  - Continuously reinforce the concept that our purpose in the discussion is reflective and exploratory to help others understand their own thinking
  - Council the person at the break about their dominating or threatening mannerisms

- Someone who is negative
  - Emphasize that the discussion is an exploration of possibilities and their consequences, not an evaluation of the possibilities
  - Ask the person to turn the negative comments to positive alternatives and possibilities that address his/her concerns. Use the phrase: "Suggest-don't reject"

- Someone who seems bored or uninterested in the discussion
  - Ask the person to reflect upon what he/she is getting from the discussion (e.g. "What are the most useful insights you have gained today that help you in your own understanding of the possibilities?"
  - At a break ask: "How can we increase the usefulness of the discussion?"

- Someone who is perceived and deferred to as being an expert
  - Make the point that because of the broadly conceptual and long-term nature of the discussions every citizen has unique expertise and something to offer when it comes to the topic under discussion.
  - Ask the participants to look at their insight list and put a person's name by the insight that first comes to mind when they think about the insight. In

almost all cases, the names on the insight list will be a cross-section of the participants and not just the expert.

There are other difficult participants as well but these are the most common ones.  The key to all of these is to be sensitive to the challenges and to confront them directly.

# Ensuring "Honest" Discussion

IF-sponsored citizen discussions are designed to be exploratory for the participants as a group and especially for each individual. The exploratory aspect of IF-sponsored citizen discussions won't succeed unless the discussions are honest.

Honest discussions are discussions in which—

- ■ each participant is open to thinking about his/her own views freely without constraints.

- ■ each participant genuinely wants to help other participants in developing their thinking.

- ■ there is no effort to force a group consensus or decision.

- ■ engagement, development, and self-learning are the main goals of the participants.

Initially the facilitator will be responsible for ensuring honesty. Over time, the participants will become their own "referees" for discussion honesty. When participants understand what a truly honest discussion can be, they will protect the discussion process to assure its honesty.

Here are some of the things that a facilitator can do to ensure honesty in the discussion.

- • Ask that the participants not share articles or other written materials with the other participants. All too often, these written materials have a particular bias. Written materials can also take on an air of authority, which can inhibit the exploration and self-learning of each participant.

- • Provide an early intervention in any discussion that moves toward advocacy or doesn't fulfill the desired tone of the discussion. Participants need continuing reminders of the non-advocacy nature of the discussion since they are probably unaccustomed to such discussions.

- • Be careful not to interject your own personal views into any of the discussion. Facilitators need to be careful not to show any judgmental reaction to the participants' comments.

One of the interesting aspects of facilitating "honest" discussions is how unfamiliar participants are with truly honest discussions. While participants may initially have difficulties with the process of an honest discussion, they quickly warm up to the expectations (and potential) of an honest discussion.

## Maintaining the Discussion at the Right Level

IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions focus on possibilities for an area of concern.  These possibilities are inherently conceptual.  They do not deal with specific legislative proposals or implementation details.  The discussions should remain at the conceptual level in order to keep the discussions from evolving into an endless series of issues and questions that are best dealt with at a later stage when the possibilities are ultimately converted into governmental proposals.

The facilitator can keep the discussion at the right level by using some or all of the following methods:

- Describe to the participants why the discussion is focused on the conceptual level.  Make the point that a focus on policy details is best left for drafters of legislation and subsequent administrative rulemaking.


- Begin the discussion by asking participants to reflect on conceptual thoughts on the possibilities.  Questions such as, "What do you think about the possibility, what personal beliefs, values, principles does the possibility embody or support?"


- When participants make comments that move toward specific details, generalize the comments to a higher and more conceptual level.  When you record the comments on the flip chart.


- Help the participants stay at the conceptual level by giving them examples of what conceptual thoughts might look like.

Broad conceptual thinking may not be something that is familiar to some of the participants.  But with a little encouragement, discussion participants usually find that they enjoy this type of discussion and thinking.

## Balancing the Comments of All Participants

Even in small groups, not every participant will be comfortable in expressing his/her thoughts.  Conversely, some participants can take over a discussion unwittingly.  The facilitator of IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions will need to balance the contributions of all participants.

Balance doesn't necessarily mean that everyone makes the same number of comments.  Balance in this case means that participants have an equal opportunity for sharing their insights.  In some cases, a participant may not speak as much as others, but the participant's comments may be highly insightful.

In order to achieve balance, the facilitator will need to be able to assess the participants' approach to discussion early during the discussion sessions.  Some of the common discussion approaches include the following:

1. First Responders – these participants often lead off a discussion.  They tend to be very outgoing and can dominate the direction of the discussion.  Possible facilitation strategies:

   ■ Rotate persons who are called on to lead off a discussion.

   ■ Consciously seek comments from every participant before calling on one person a second time.

2. "Me Too" Participants – these participants want to share their parallel thoughts, even (or especially) when they add minimal additional insight to the discussion.  Possible facilitation strategies:

   ■ Call on them to lead off a discussion.

   ■ Help them to offer new or different insights by asking them specific questions.  Often these participants are more confident in responding to specific questions than responding to more open-ended inquiries.

3. Shy Participants – these participants may not be comfortable in contributing to a discussion even after others have contributed.  Possible facilitation strategies:

   ■ Call on them to contribute.  Help them get started in their comments by asking a question they can be fully comfortable with. (e.g., "Jake, I know you have some thoughts on this from your personal experience.  What would you say to your family or friends about this issue?")

4. The Sage – this participant makes relatively few comments but when he/she does speak, the comments are particularly insightful.  Possible facilitation strategies:

■ Give this participant time to think about the topic under discussion before calling on him/her.

■ Follow up on their comments by asking other participants what they think. While the sage's comments maybe uniquely insightful, you should not respond to their comments differently.

Even though, the facilitator will often have interviewed the participants in advance of the discussion, the facilitator will not be able to judge how the participants will respond to the discussion until the discussion actually begins.

## Using Participant Experiences

Every participant in an IF-sponsored small group citizen discussion will have a collection of personal experiences that relate to the discussion topic. These experiences are valuable if they are managed properly.

Participants' personal experiences can also quickly drag down the discussion if they are not managed well. Participant experiences can be harmful when they—

- Take excessive amounts of time to share.

- Divert the discussion away from the possibilities.

- Focus the discussion on unnecessary details suggested by the participant's experiences.

Participant experiences can be very useful when—

- The facilitator or participant is able to generalize from the more detailed experience to a broader conceptual exploration of the possibilities.

- The facilitator or participant can show how a specific experience relates to a conceptual possibility. Often these experiences can help participants develop a personal connection to a possibility.

- The time it takes to share the experience is controlled. Often this can be done by the facilitator asking questions of the participant rather than just having the participant share the experience.

As a general rule, the facilitator will want to limit the sharing of personal experiences so that the discussion doesn't just become a sharing of "war stories."

# Section D – Managing Challenges

## Overcoming Participant Doubts

In spite of how well the participants are briefed in advance about the nature and of an IF-sponsored small group citizen discussion, they are likely to have doubts about the discussion.  Many of these doubts can only be overcome by having them experience the discussion.  Such doubts are best addressed by acknowledging them openly and relieving the doubts during the discussions.

Doubts generally fall into one or more of the following groups:

- ■   Doubts about the discussion process.
- ■   Doubts about the "real intent" of the discussion.
- ■   Doubts about what they will get out of the discussion.
- ■   Doubts about why IF is sponsoring the discussions.

**Doubts about the Discussion Process.**  Doubts about the process refer to concerns about how the discussion will be conducted.  The most prominent of these doubts is that the discussion will essentially be a "bull session."  Other doubts may arise during the discussion itself when participants want to challenge the process (e.g., make the discussion go faster, or otherwise change the approach).

The best ways to handle doubts about the process is to describe up front how the discussion will be conducted and to describe why the particular process elements are important.  Often these doubts go away as the discussion unfolds.  But should these doubts continue during the discussion, the facilitator may need to ask the participants for their patience to see the process through.

**Doubts about the Real Intent of the Discussion.**  Doubts about the "real intent" (or "hidden agenda") of the discussion arise out of the cynicism that is widespread in society.  People associate policy discussions with an attempt to win one over to a particular point of view.

These doubts can only be overcome by demonstrating during the discussion that there is no hidden agenda.  The Citizen Discussion Reports and the contrasting possibilities themselves should relieve these doubts.  But the facilitator must also be both reasonably neutral regarding the conceptual policy possibilities and  enthusiastic about the discussion process overall and the participants' engagement with the possibilities.

**Doubts about the Benefits of the Discussion.**  The final category of doubts relates to people's natural tendency to think of how they (or others) will benefit from the

discussions.  People are reluctant to commit their time to activities where they see minimal gain for themselves or society – or where it is difficult to see at all.

The best way to overcome these doubts is to provide testimonials of other participants who have participated in similar discussions.  Often these testimonials touch on the value of exchanging thoughts with people they don't know and the value of increasing their understanding of possibilities for emerging public issues.

**Doubts about why IF is sponsoring the Discussion.** Most of these doubts should have been handled during the recruitment phase.  If these doubts continue to surface, the facilitator should comment that IF has two reasons to sponsor the citizen discussions.

- To engage citizens in thinking about emerging issues facing our country

- To learn from these discussions how IF can improve its Citizen discussion Reports

The facilitator should also emphasize that IF takes no position on any of the possibilities.

## Managing Participant Advocacy

Participant advocacy has no place in IF-sponsored citizen discussions. As described in another section of this Facilitation Guidebook (Character of the Discussion), the role of the participant is to openly explore and develop with the other participants their own thinking about the possibilities in the Citizen Discussion Report. IF-sponsored citizen discussions are not debates, and there is no attempt to achieve a consensus or other group decision.

There is however an understandable tendency on the part of the participants to move toward advocacy. Advocacy is what participants see on television and what they experience in their professional lives.

There are a few things the facilitator can do to manage advocacy.

- ■ Limit participants' sharing of articles or other external documents. Often such articles have an advocacy focus, and even when they don't, sharing such information can be a subtle form of advocacy.

- ■ Continuously remind participants that the overall goal of the discussion is to help each person explore, develop, and understand his/her own thinking. This reminder can be done at the beginning of each discussion.

- ■ Provide participants with prompt feedback when they move toward advocacy. This can be done by turning advocacy statements to more general statements that may be helpful in promoting understanding.

Managing advocacy requires a firm hand by the facilitator. While participants may initially chafe at the facilitator's firmness, by the end of the discussion, they will have come to appreciate it.

# Maintaining the Proper Pace

In an earlier section of this Facilitation Guidebook (Planning the Time Schedule), suggestions were given for timing of the discussion. These time estimates are rough. Specific programs will vary in the time required for specific segments of the program. The challenge for the facilitator is to know how to judge the pace of the discussion.

In some cases, the discussion may seem to drag, while in other cases the discussion may be very lively and is likely to go well beyond the time estimates. The facilitator will need to take appropriate actions to manage the pace. Outlined below are some general guidelines that may be helpful in judging the pace and taking appropriate action.

1. The discussion is at the proper pace when, at any given moment, there are 2-3 participants "queued up" to provide comments. The skilled facilitator will constantly scan the participants to see who has a comment to make. When 2-3 people appear eager to comment, the discussion is progressing at a manageable pace. Should there be no one eager to contribute, the pace is obviously too slow. When a large number of participants want to contribute, the pace is difficult to control.

2. When the pace is too slow, change directions. In any discussion, there will come a time when the participants will have exhausted their thoughts. When this happens, the facilitator may wish to:

   ■ Take a break and then pose a new direction for the discussion when the break is over.

   ■ Present a hypothetical situation to the participants for their reaction. Often these hypothetical can stimulate thinking about a specific situation, which can then be generalized to a broader discussion of the conceptual possibilities.

   ■ Stimulate the discussion by asking provocative questions. Often these questions represent thoughts that the participants want to discuss but are reluctant to bring up.

3. When the pace is so fast that the discussion is likely to spin out of control, manage the pace by "segmentation." Segmentation in this case refers to breaking up the major discussion issues into separate topics which can be discussed one at a time.

4. In some cases, the facilitator may wish to move to a new possibility is the discussion is too slow. There is no set formula for how many possibilities need to be discussed, nor is there a set order for discussion. Before moving on to another possibility, the facilitator needs to be certain that a possibility has had a full discussion.

## Covering the Possibilities in the Available Time

An earlier section (Planning the Time Schedule), provided guidance on the overall discussion time schedule.  This section will explain how to manage the time for discussion of a specific possibility.

Each discussion of a possibility should begin with a short amount of time for reading and thinking about a possibility.  While participants should have read the possibility in advance, reviewing the possibility again can be very helpful.  Also during this time, the facilitator should ask the participants to write down what they liked and didn't like about the possibility.  This reading and thinking will take approximately 10 minutes.

Next the facilitator should capture on the flip chart what the participants said in response to what they liked and didn't like about the possibility.  In some cases, the participants will have similar likes and dislikes.  Rather than spending significant time in rehashing these similarities, the facilitator should simply note the number of people who share a similar like or dislike.  This part of the program should take about 15 minutes.

Next the facilitator should open up the discussion to any general comments about the likely consequences of the possibility.  A question for this part of the discussion could be: "How would the adoption of this possibility as a policy guide change our nation?"  This part of the discussion is likely to be far ranging.  There are also likely to be contrasting points of view of the consequences of a possibility.  This phase of the discussion will take a minimum of 30 minutes, but it could take longer if time permits.

The final part of the discussion of a possibility is a recap by the facilitator.  The recap is an effort to bring into focus the key points of the discussion, not an effort to provide a consensus point of view.  The recap will take 5 minutes to complete.

As the discussions continue through the possibilities, times will likely shorten for the discussion of the possibilities.  This happens because some comments from previews possibilities can also apply to the new possibility.  These comments need only be briefly noted.

The times given above are merely indicators.  Any specific discussion is likely to vary from these times.

## Using Some Citizens to Support Others

IF discussions are designed for any citizen in the United States. Citizens are likely to differ in their ability to participate in the discussion.

- Some may have trouble reading and understanding the possibilities

- Some may have difficulty in saying what they think

- Some may have trouble accepting the thoughts of others

- Some may have difficulty at keeping their comments at the right level

- Some may have a tendency to recast every possibility into their own particular political philosophy.

In each of these cases, the facilitator may wish to pair up participants who have complimentary abilities. For example, the person who has trouble understanding the possibility may be paired with the person who has trouble accepting the thoughts of others. These pairings can be especially effective when the participants are reading the possibility and capturing their thoughts. In these cases, the facilitator should ask the pairs to respond together. Often these paired responses can be very useful in providing insights into how people working together can view a possibility.

The goal of the pairing is to build on individual strengths while overcoming challenges the individuals might have. The discussion pains can also add a humanizing touch to the discussion. When the discussions are over, the participants will have a richer understanding of contrasting views because of their getting to know a person who represents the contrasting view.

## Managing Challenges When Family Members Are in a Discussion

In many cases, spouses participate in a citizen discussion. Family members can be useful discussion participants if challenges are managed properly. These challenges can vary in scope.

One of the most fundamental challenges for discussions with spouses is child care. When IF sponsors a discussion, expenses for child care can be reimbursed by IF.

The more significant challenges with spouses are related to the discussion itself. When spouses are invited to a discussion, the facilitator should caution the spouses that the discussion works best when every participant brings his/her own views to the discussion. In most cases, spouses can have very different points of view on an issue, so this shouldn't be a problem.

Spouses should also be asked to sit apart during the discussions (and meal). Often seating arrangements can be very useful in encouraging an exchange of points of view.

The final issue with spouses participating in a discussion relates to attendance. If some spouse cannot attend, you often will find the second spouse not attending. Losing two participants from a discussion can create a significant problem.

Overall spousal participation in a discussion should be positive as long as the facilitator is ready to meet the challenges outline above.

## Connecting the Possibilities to the Participants' Own Experiences

One of the challenges a facilitator faces is how to connect the possibilities with the participants own experiences without having the discussion become a sharing of war stories.  A strategy for handling these situations is outlined below.

1. Tell participants up front that we value the sharing of their personal experiences but ask that they keep the descriptions as short as possible. This will make the participants sensitive to the appropriate use of the personal experiences.

2. When a participant does share a personal experience, see if you can generalize from this experience to identify the broader issues the experience represents.

You may have a contrasting problem when the participants can't relate to a possibility. They may not realize how they might be impacted by the possibility.  In these cases, you will want to have some case studies to use (see the section titled Developing Illustrative Concepts of the Possibilities.)  These illustrations should get the discussion started but you will also want to generalize the discussion from the particulars of the illustration.

# Section E – Ensuring Follow-Up

## Discussion Summaries

IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions are not public hearings. The focus of the discussions is the insights developed by the participants after exploring the conceptual policy possibilities described in the Citizen Discussion Report.  There is no need for a discussion transcript or an audio/video recording of the discussion.

However, the discussion does deserve being memorializing for the participants themselves.  During the discussion, key points made by the discussion participants should be placed on flip charts so they are visible to all participants.  Such a recording of key concepts can keep the discussion flowing at the right pace.  The very act of recording key concepts can help the discussion from digressing into a gab fest without a focus or flow.

Once each discussion session is over, the facilitator should take the flip chart notes and develop them into a discussion summary.  Deciding how to organize the discussion summary is up to the facilitator.  In most cases, this organization will not be a chronological recap of the discussion.  Rather, it will be a reflective summary of the insights developed around the conceptual possibilities.  These insights are often captured as simple statements placed in a list rather than a narrative recap.  The simple statements may display contrasting insights since there is no need to reach consensus or common ground.  The discussion summary rarely exceeds a few pages of typed text.  This short, easy to ready format makes the insights more useful to the participants.  Often these summaries help the participants gain a better appreciation of the discussion overall, and their organization can be as useful as the insights themselves.  Organization adds perspective to the discussion that is often hard to discern during the discussion itself.

Each discussion session within a multiple-session program should have a discussion summary that is shared with the participants shortly after the session.  The discussion summaries should also be sent to the participants a couple of days before the next discussion session.  Participants will want to review these summaries as preparation for the next session. Also, the discussion summaries should be sent to IF.

## Between Session Communications

In most cases, IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions will be conducted in multiple sessions.  Successful multiple session discussions need regular communications between sessions in order for each session to make progress without needless time spent in going over previous discussions.  As a result, the communications with participants between sessions are an important facilitator responsibility.  Outlined below is a representative schedule of communications that might be used between the discussion sessions.

| | |
|---|---|
| Next Day: | Send a note thanking all who participated.  Include with the note some of the key insights that evolved from the discussion.  Also include a review of any follow-up commitments that were made at the discussion session. |
| 2-3 Days Later: | Send a discussion summary.  (See the preceding section on Discussion Summaries).  You might ask for their comments on the discussion summary. |
| Intermittently: | Send a note to stimulate the participants' thinking about the discussions to come.  These might be short, simple thought provoking questions.  These can also be useful reminders of the upcoming discussion. |
| Two days prior to the next discussion: | Send a reminder notice of the upcoming meeting to the participants.  Included will be a preview of the upcoming discussion and a gentle reminder of any commitments made at the last discussion.  The discussion summary might also be re-sent at this time. |

The communications listed above are communications from the facilitator to the participants.  There are also communications from participants to the facilitator and among the participants.   These communications tend to be more personal and are not necessarily shared with all participants.  The facilitator and the participants should decide how to share these communications.

These discussions should not take the place of face-to-face communications.  Should the nature of these communications take on the tone of a discussion, the facilitator should encourage the participants to hold their thoughts until the next discussion session.

## Communication of the Discussion Results to Others

IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions are intended to be of primary benefit to the participating citizens. These discussions are not designed to be a focus group whose insights are shared with others. Each person needs to experience the discussion to fully benefit from it. In most cases, written summaries or other documents are of limited value to persons who have not actually had the experience of participating in the discussion. Thus, in most cases, the communication of the discussion results should be limited to the participants and IF itself.

The one standard exception to the above guideline is that the Interactivity Foundation would like to receive copies of all documents produced by the facilitator. These documents are used by IF to learn from the experiences of those involved in its discussions. Learning in such cases is directed primarily at how people think about the conceptual possibilities and how they help each other work through their thinking. The discussion documents in essence serve a developmental role for IF.

## Possible Next Steps

While the primary purpose of IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions is citizen insights, these discussions may lead to other actions. These actions are likely to be a natural outgrowth of the discussion and not something that would be designed or promoted. Some of the actions that might possibly evolve from the discussions include the following:

1.      Additional Small Group Discussion Sessions – These small group discussion sessions might be initiated by participants. IF may or may not be involved in these discussions. Essentially these discussions would follow the IF citizen discussion process, although IF may not be a direct sponsor.

2.      Relationship Group Discussions – Relationship groups are composed of individuals who have something in common. The common background may be a religious organization, a civic or social group, a dialogue or deliberative group, an employer, a professional group, a special interest group, etc. These discussions would help the individual participants in these discussions develop their thinking about the conceptual policy possibilities.

3.      Educational Applications – The Citizen Discussion Reports offer a number of interesting opportunities for classroom use. Participants in IF sponsored small group discussions may have an interest in sharing IF's reports with educators for their possible use.

4.      Personal Sharing – It is perhaps inevitable that participants in IF-sponsored citizen discussions will share their insights with family and friends. These are likely to be very informal but important follow up discussions.

The above are possible next steps from the IF-sponsored citizen discussions that reflect the exploratory intent of IF discussions. Individual citizens may, of course, pursue other types of "next steps" on their own. The facilitator may want to clarify, however, that IF cannot be affiliated with, support, or be otherwise involved with any such later activities that have an advocacy tone or focus.

At the conclusion of the IF sponsored citizen discussion, the facilitator may want to explore with participants possible next steps. The point should be emphasized that IF views its role as a catalyst for further public discussion and would probably not have any direct role in these subsequent activities.

# Section F – Assessing Program Effectiveness

## Assessing the Discussion Program as It Unfolds

IF-sponsored small group citizen discussions are a learning and developmental experience for IF and for the participating citizens. As a learning experience, IF citizen discussion programs are not scripted, nor are they tightly programmed. As such, the facilitator will want to do some assessment of how useful the discussion is to participants as the program is unfolding. The next section of this Guidebook (Assessing the Quality of the Discussions) will describe an assessment approach to be used at the end of the program.

One of the most useful and effective ways to judge participant responses is to use an assessment process known as the $+/\Delta$ approach. The plus (+) sign represents aspects of the discussion program that were thought to be very useful. These aspects are what the citizens would like to see continue.

The deltas ($\Delta$) are the improvements the participants would like to make in the discussion. An important concept of the delta is that suggestions are for improvement, not just something a participant doesn't like. The deltas ask the participants to take "ownership" of the discussion by suggesting ways to improve it.

The steps for implementing the $+/\Delta$ assessment are as follows:

1.  The facilitator poses the following questions to the participants at the end of each discussion session.

    - Q1 - "What did you like about the discussion we just had?"

    - Q2 - "What improvements would you suggest we make in future discussions?"

    The facilitator should ask the participants to focus on the discussion itself rather than logistical arrangements (e.g. food, parking). The facilitator should ask the participants to share their thoughts on the arrangements with him/her after the session is over. This caution helps focus the discussion on more substantive issues.

2.  The facilitators then ask each participant to contribute one response to each question. These responses are captured on the flip chart in two columns.

    - Left column (labeled +)

    - Right column (labeled $\Delta$ )

    Every participant is asked to contribute a response until all participants have had a chance to contribute.

3. Once all the responses are given, the facilitator then reviews the list with the group as a way of bringing the discussion into perspective.

The facilitator should review the responses to the assessment and give some thought to them in planning for the next session.  Improvements, where appropriate, should be incorporated into the next session.

## Assessing the Discussion Program upon Its Completion

At the end of the discussion program, both the facilitator and participants should assess the discussion program.  This final assessment is very important in—

- encouraging participants to reflect on the discussion

- helping IF improve its citizen discussions.

The final assessment involves the following four steps.

1. *After the conclusion of the final discussion*, participants:

   - provide the facilitator with their contact information if they have not already done so—especially email addresses, if available.  This information is used by the facilitator for the follow-up survey (see #4, below).

   - fill out a short "Participant Survey" (See Exhibit A).  Encourage participants to fill out the on-line survey as soon as possible.  Have participants who do not have internet access fill out a paper copy of the survey before leaving the final session.  IF will provide you with instructions for the survey.

2. *As soon after the final session as possible, and before the final wrap up call with IF*, the facilitator:

   - fills out an on-line "Facilitator Survey" (see Exhibit B). IF will provide you with instructions for the survey.

3. *One-two weeks after the final session*, the facilitator participates in a final wrap up conference call with IF (see "The Final Wrap-Up Phone Call," Exhibit C).  The call will be led by an IF Fellow.  This call provides both the facilitator and IF an opportunity to explore the discussion experience more fully.

4. *Approximately one year after the final session*, the facilitator contacts participants to invite them to fill out a quick and simple "Participant Follow-up Survey" (see Exhibit D). (This is why it is important to collect contact information at or before the last session.) Try to administer the follow-up survey on-line whenever possible, but use a paper copy if necessary.  IF will provide you with instructions for the survey.


Facilitators should familiarize themselves with the contents of the Exhibits A-D before the first session to get a feel for the specific objectives of IF citizen discussions.

<u>**Exhibit A — Participant Survey**</u>

After the final discussion session, the facilitator asks all participants to complete an assessment survey by going to a Survey Monkey link.  (IF will provide facilitators with an instruction sheet indicating the link and a pass code for participants to enter when they begin the survey.) The on-line version will be the most up-to-date version and should be used to print paper copies for those without internet access.

The survey has four sections and takes 10-15 minutes to complete.  It includes open-ended and closed-ended questions.

The participant link should only be used by participants in a citizen discussion.  If a citizen participates in multiple citizen discussions, she or he should complete a separate survey for each discussion in which she or he participates.

If you would like to preview the survey on Survey Monkey, you can use the following <u>test link</u>:

<u>http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=H_2fzZPPuwnfl_2bo8PMwi3Ohw_3d_3d</u>

The survey is also reproduced below in its *current* form.

<u>**Directions to Participants:**</u>

**Instructions**: Please take a few minutes to fill out the following survey — your answers will help make our citizen discussions more effective.  When you are finished, hit the "Send" button.  Your answers will be transmitted directly to IF and will remain both anonymous and confidential.

**PASS CODE**:  __ ___ __ - __ __ - __

**SECTION 1:  Reflecting on the Discussion Experience**

1.      Prior to this citizen discussion experience, I _____ participated in policy discussions.

        _____frequently

        _____occasionally

        _____rarely

        _____never

2.    Compared to other policy discussions in which I have participated, I felt
_____ in this discussion.

_____much freer to contribute

_____freer to contribute

_____about equally as free to contribute

_____less free to contribute

_____much less free to contribute

_____not applicable

3.    The discussion encouraged me to—
        (check one choice per row)

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Consider a wide range of concerns | | | | | |
| Consider a wide range of policy possibilities | | | | | |
| Consider a wide range of policy consequences | | | | | |
| Think about public policy in terms of possibilities | | | | | |
| Think about public policy conceptually | | | | | |
| Consider alternative points of view | | | | | |

4.    Describe how and why the discussion might have affected what you think about
the area of concern and possibilities for addressing it (i.e., your conclusions or
current view).   (short answer)

5.   Describe how and why the discussion might have affected how you think about the area of concern and possibilities for addressing it (i.e., your approach to it, what you take into account, etc.).  (short answer)

6.   As the discussion went on, I listened more and talked less.

      ____Strongly Agree

      ____Agree

      ____Neither Agree Nor Disagree

      ____Disagree

      ____Strongly Disagree

7.   As the discussion went on, I found myself more willing to contribute to the discussion.

      ____Strongly Agree

      ____Agree

      ____Neither Agree Nor Disagree

      ____Disagree

      ____Strongly Disagree

8.   Describe how and why your participation in this discussion might have affected either your willingness or your ability to contribute to the discussion.  (short answer)

**SECTION 2:  Assessing the Impact of Your Participation**

1.      As a result of the discussion, I am more likely to (check all that apply)—

___Pay attention to media stories about the area of concern

___Think about the area of concern

___Think about the area of concern in terms of possibilities

___Discuss this area of concern with other people

___Discuss other areas of concern with other people

___Encourage others (friends, families, neighbors) to discuss the  area of concern

___Other (please specify)


2.      As a result of the discussion, I am more likely to (check all that apply)—

___Vote

___Contact a representative or government official

___Make my views known to the media

___Comment on a blog or web site

___Get involved in a political campaign

___Become actively involved with a club or organization

___Other (please specify)


3.      As a result of the discussion, my view about how public policy should govern the area concerned has changed—

___Not at all

___Somewhat--and in the opposite direction of what I had originally thought

___Somewhat--but in some other direction(s) (i.e., not in the totally opposite direction)

___Completely in the opposite direction of what I had originally thought

___Completely--but in some other direction(s)

4.       Would you participate in another IF discussion?

   ___Yes, definitely.

   ___Yes, probably.

   ___Maybe.

   ___Probably not.

   ___Definitely not.

**SECTION 3:  How Might IF Improve Future Discussions?**

1.       How might IF improve the format or content of the <u>materials</u> in the citizen discussion report you used?  Think about either individual possibilities and/or the range or sequence of possibilities that were presented.  (short answer)

2.        How might IF improve upon the discussion <u>process</u> used within your citizen discussion?  (short answer)

3.       How might the <u>facilitation</u> of your citizen discussion have been improved? (short answer)

**SECTION 4:  Your Background**

*Please note that, since this is an anonymous survey, specific answers to any of these questions cannot be linked to any of your previous answers.  Your responses just help to give us a sense of the sorts of citizens that are participating in our discussions.*

1.      Last year of schooling completed?

   ____8th Grade or Less

   ____Some High School

   ____High School Degree

   ____Some College

   ____Associate's Degree

   ____4-Year College Degree

   ____Graduate or Professional Degree

2.      Which of the following best describes your race or ethnicity? Please select all that apply.

   ____White

   ____African American or Black

   ____Hispanic or Latino

   ____Asian

   ____Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

   ____American Indian or Alaskan Native

   ____Other (please specify)

3.    Sex:        ___ Male      ___ Female          ___ Intersex or Transgendered

4.    Marital Status?      ___ Single (never married)

                           ___ Married

                           ___ Divorced

                           ___ Widowed

5.      How many children under the age of 18 currently reside in your home (on either a part or full-time basis)?

        ___ None

        ___ 1

        ___ 2

        ___ 3-4

        ___ 5 or more

6.      What would you estimate your annual (before taxes) household income as being?

        ___ Under $24,999

        ___ $25,000-$49,999

        ___ $50,000-$74,999

        ___ $75,000-$99,999

        ___ $100,000-$149,999

        ___ $150,000-$199,999

        ___ $200,000-$249,999

        ___ $250,000 or more

7.      "Government should do more to address society's problems." Would you say that you agree or disagree with this statement?

        ___ I strongly agree.

        ___ I agree.

        ___ I neither agree nor disagree.

        ___ I disagree.

        ___ I strongly disagree.

8.      Is there anything about your background that might have affected your participation in this discussion and what you got out of it? (short answer)

**Exhibit B — Facilitator Survey**

Facilitators are also asked to complete a survey on Survey Monkey. They should contact IF for the link to the online survey and the pass code to enter when they begin the survey.

Note that facilitators' pass codes will be a number that combines: their facilitator ID #, a number representing the project Report they facilitated, and a number designating how many times the facilitator has led a discussion of this particular report. For instance:

     __ __ __  -  __ __  -  __

     Facilitator    Report    Times
     ID #          #       Facilitated

The facilitator and report numbers are assigned. The third number simply refers to how many times a facilitator has led a discussion of a particular Report. For example, the first time the facilitator discusses a particular Report the "Times Facilitated" number would be "1." If it is the second discussion of a particular Report the facilitator has led, the third number would be "2."

The survey takes about 20 minutes to complete. It includes five sections that incorporate a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions.

To maintain the integrity of the survey, only the facilitator should use the link indicated on the instruction sheet and should use it only once per discussion.. However, to explore how these questions look on Survey Monkey, you can use the following test link:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=7t8G3i1RFU_2bl0SbmjZZUMQ_3d_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=7t8G3i1RFU_2bl0SbmjZZUMQ_3d_3d)

The survey is also reproduced below in its *current* form, which may be refined over time.

*Instructions: Please fill out the following survey. When you are finished, hit the "Send" button. Your answers will be transmitted directly to IF. They will prove useful in your final wrap up call.*

**PASS CODE:** __ ___ __ - __ __ - __

**SECTION 1:  Your Background:**

1.     How much previous experience have you had as a facilitator?
         ___ None
         ___ Very Little
         ___ Some
         ___ A Great Deal

2.     How much prior experience have you had participating in IF discussions?
         ___ None
         ___ Very Little
         ___ Some
         ___ A Great Deal

3.     How much previous experience have you had facilitating IF discussions?
         ___ None
         ___ Very Little
         ___ Some
         ___ A Great Deal

**SECTION 2:  Quality & Flow of Discussion:**

1.     Were participants able to avoid advocacy on the one hand and detailed discussions about specifics on the other? What did you do to help them keep the discussions exploratory?  (short answer)

2.     As the discussions went on, did participants seem to improve in their ability to think about public policy in terms of possibilities? In terms of concepts?  (short answer)

3.     Describe any challenges you faced in organizing and conducting the discussion and describe how you dealt with them.  (short answer)

**SECTION 3: Evaluating the Possibilities**

1.     The possibilities articulated in the report that your group discussed were clearly written and easily understood by your participants.

*Note that IF reports contain between 6 and 10 possibilities. If your report included only 6 possibilities, please select the N/A option for possibilities 7-10, as well as for any possibilities included in your report that your group did not discuss.*

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Possibility 1: | | | | | |
| Possibility 2: | | | | | |
| Possibility 3: | | | | | |
| Possibility 4: | | | | | |
| Possibility 5: | | | | | |
| Possibility 6: | | | | | |
| Possibility 7: | | | | | |
| Possibility 8: | | | | | |
| Possibility 9: | | | | | |
| Possibility 10: | | | | | |

2.     The possibilities that were covered in your report stimulated discussion within your group.

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Possibility 1: | | | | | |
| Possibility 2: | | | | | |
| Possibility 3: | | | | | |
| Possibility 4: | | | | | |
| Possibility 5: | | | | | |
| Possibility 6: | | | | | |
| Possibility 7: | | | | | |
| Possibility 8: | | | | | |
| Possibility 9: | | | | | |
| Possibility 10: | | | | | |

3.     How might IF improve the Citizen Discussion Report you used? Consider any or all of the following:  (short answer)

         -the description of the area of concern
         -format/arrangement/sequence of the possibilities
         -content of individual possibilities
         -range of possibilities
         -any supplemental sections in the report

## SECTION 4:  Improving the Discussion

1.     How might you have better organized your discussion?     (short answer)

2.     How might you have improved your facilitation of your discussion?  (short answer)

3.     How might IF improve the process followed in your citizen discussion? (short answer)

4.     How helpful was the Facilitation Guidebook for Small Group Citizen Discussions? What suggestions do you have for changes or additional topics? (short answer)

**SECTION 5: How the Discussion Affected Participants**

1.     The discussion encouraged participants to—

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Consider a wide range of concerns | | | | | |
| Consider a wide range of policy possibilities | | | | | |
| Consider a wide range of policy consequences | | | | | |
| Think about public policy in terms of possibilities | | | | | |
| Think about public policy conceptually | | | | | |
| Consider alternative points of view | | | | | |

2.     As the discussion went on, participants listened more carefully to one another.
           ___Strongly Agree
           ___Agree
           ___Neither Agree Nor Disagree
           ___Disagree
           ___Strongly Disagree
           ___Not Sure

3.     As the discussion went on, shy participants were more willing to contribute to the discussion.
           ___Strongly Agree
           ___Agree
           ___Neither Agree Nor Disagree
           ___Disagree
           ___Strongly Disagree
           ___Not Sure

4.     As a result of the discussion, participants' views about what public policy should be with regard to the area of concern changed:
      ___Not at all
      ___Somewhat—and mostly in the opposite direction from where each had started
      ___Somewhat—and mostly in a different (but not necessarily opposite) direction from where each had started
      ___Completely—and mostly in the opposite direction from where each had started
      ___Completely—but in varying directions from where each had started
      ___Not sure

## Exhibit C – The Final Wrap-Up Phone Call

Once the final discussion has concluded, the facilitator, the IF citizen discussion coordinator, and the IF fellow who directed the project will have a conference call debriefing on the discussion.  The debriefing will review the assessments done during the final session and online and will focus on:

- As overall assessment of how the discussion program went

- A discussion of the participants' reaction to the possibilities  (The discussion summaries prepared by the facilitator after each meeting (see Section E, page 62, above), should help the facilitator in describing the participants' reactions to the possibilities.)

- A discussion of lessons learned from the citizen discussion program.

- What changes might be made to the Citizen Discussion Report to make the possibilities (and their descriptions) more useful for future discussions.

The IF citizen discussion coordinator will take notes during the call and prepare a call summary.  The call summary will then be used by IF to improve its overall citizen discussion program.

IF's overall assessment of the discussion program will examine such issues as—

- Participant engagement in the discussion

- Attendance

- The presentation, sequencing, and possible implementations and consequences of the possibilities in the Citizen Discussion Report

### Exhibit D— Participant Follow-Up Survey

Approximately one year after the discussion program, facilitators of IF citizen discussions shall contact all participants and ask them to complete a follow-up survey. (IF will provide facilitators with an instruction sheet indicating the link and a pass code for participants to enter when they begin the survey.)

The survey has two brief sections and takes 5-10 minutes to complete.  It asks only closed-ended questions.

The participant link should only be used by participants in a citizen discussion.  If a citizen participates in multiple citizen discussions, she or he should complete a separate survey for each discussion in which she or he participates.

If you would like to preview the survey on Survey Monkey, you can use the following test link:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=H_2fzZPPuwnfl_2bo8PMwi3Ohw_3d_3d

The survey is also reproduced below in its *current* form.  The on-line version will be the most up-to-date version and should be used to print paper copies for those without internet access.

### Directions to Participants:

*Instructions: Please take a couple of minutes to fill out the following follow up survey—your answers will help assess the long term impact of our citizen discussions so that we can continue to refine them.  When you are finished, hit the "Send" button. Your answers will be transmitted directly to IF and will remain both anonymous and confidential.*

**PASS CODE:** __ ___ __ - __ __ - __

**Section 1.**

1.      As a result of the discussion, I am more likely to (check all that apply):

___Pay attention to media stories about the area of concern

___Think about the area of concern

___Think about the area of concern in terms of possibilities

___Discuss this area of concern with other people

___Discuss other areas of concern with other people

___Encourage others (friends, families, neighbors) to discuss the area of concern

___Other (please specify)

2.     As a result of the discussion, I am more likely to (check all that apply):

       ___Vote

       ___Contact a representative or government official

       ___Make my views known to the media

       ___Comment on a blog or web site

       ___Get involved in a political campaign

       ___Become actively involved with a club or organization

       ___Other (please specify)

3.     As a result of the discussion, I have done the following—*which I otherwise would not have done*— (check all that apply)):

       ___Voted

       ___Contacted a representative or government official

       ___Made my views known to the media

       ___Commented on a blog or web site

       ___Gotten involved in a political campaign

       ___Become actively involved with a club or organization

       ___Other (please specify)

4.     As a result of the discussion, my view about how public policy should govern the area concerned has changed—

       ___Not at all

       ___Somewhat--and in the opposite direction of what I had originally thought

       ___Somewhat--but in some other direction(s) (i.e., not in the totally opposite direction)

       ___Completely in the opposite direction of what I had originally thought

       ___Completely--but in some other direction(s)

**Section 2: Your Background**

*Please note that this is an anonymous survey. We do not collect or keep any information that would allow us to track any particular individual. It is used solely to improve our discussion process.*

1.      Last year of schooling completed?

___8th Grade or Less

___Some High School

___High School Degree

___Some College

___Associate's Degree

___4-Year College Degree

___Graduate or Professional Degree

2.      Which of the following best describes your race or ethnicity? Please select all that apply.

___White

___African American or Black

___Hispanic or Latino

___Asian

___Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

___American Indian or Alaskan Native

___Other (please specify)

3.      Sex:    ___Male     ___Female     ___Intersex or Transgendered

4.      Marital Status?

___Single (never married)

___Married

___Divorced

___Widowed

5.   How many children under the age of 18 currently reside in your home (on either a part or full-time basis)?

       \_\_\_None

       \_\_\_1

       \_\_\_2

       \_\_\_3-4

6.   What would you estimate your annual, (before taxes) household income as being?

       \_\_\_Under $24,999

       \_\_\_$25,000-$49,999

       \_\_\_$50,000-$74,999

       \_\_\_$75,000-$99,999

       \_\_\_$100,000-$149,999

       \_\_\_$150,000-$199,999

       \_\_\_$200,000-$249,999

       \_\_\_$250,000 or more

7.   "Government should do more to address society's problems." Would you say that you agree or disagree with this statement?

       \_\_\_I strongly agree.

       \_\_\_I agree.

       \_\_\_I neither agree nor disagree.

       \_\_\_I disagree.

       \_\_\_I strongly disagree.

# Section G – Facilitator Learning By Doing

## Identifying Your Style

No two facilitators are alike in their approach to facilitation. Some facilitators are rather assertive. They challenge participants, especially when they think the participants can be more insightful. Other facilitators are more comforting. They help participants develop ever expanding insights through timely, but gentle questioning.

Some facilitators are fairly scripted. They are mindful of how time is being spent during the discussion. They are driven to be at a certain point in the program at specific times. Other facilitators are more flexible. They focus on the discussion flow rather than time. They adjust "on the fly" should discussions not go as planned with respect to time.

Some facilitators are very creative. They will try out new approaches on the spur of the moment. They are also more comfortable in taking risks in the discussion approach. Other facilitators like to develop a routine. They make few adjustments in their approach.

Over time facilitators will develop their own style. Perhaps the worst thing a facilitator can do is to reach a lot of material on facilitation style. What works best is for each facilitator to reflect on every facilitation experience and learn to identify what works best.

# Using the IF Network

IF has a number of experienced facilitators who can help facilitators think through challenges they face.  The best way to access this network is to send an email to IF offices at [if@citynet.net](mailto:if@citynet.net).  In the email, describe the issue you would like help on.

IF will likely respond to your request with a phone call from one of its facilitators.  IF values these inquires because they help improve the material that is contained in this Facilitation Guidebook.

## Adding to the IF Facilitation Guidebook

IF views this Guidebook as a developmental document for facilitators.  Those who have suggestions for changes to the guidebook should send their suggestions to IF offices via email if@citynet.net.

Suggestions for changes can include:

- Additional sections that might be added

- Additional detail that might be covered in an existing section

- Questions that might be addressed somewhere in the guidebook

- Suggestions for strengthening the guidance in a specific section

IF will accept any input it gets and incorporate this input into new editions of the Guidebook.  IF plans to publish a new Guidebook edition every three years.