Recognizing and Supporting Deliberation

Perhaps one of the most important jobs of a deliberative facilitator is to ask good questions. Every time a facilitator intervenes in any way, she or he is essentially taking some power and control from participants, so each intervention should be purposeful. Questions should serve specific, intended purposes and should push participants to engage more deliberatively.

Questions that connect the policy issue to the lives and concerns of real people:

- Could you please share a story to illustrate that point?
- What makes this issue real to you?
- Can anyone envision how their life would change if this approach became national policy?
- How has this issue affected you personally?

Questions to ensure a fair and balanced examination of all potential effects:

- What would be the consequences of doing what you are suggesting?
- What would be an argument against the choice you like best?
- If we followed this course of action, what would be the effect on your life?
- How might your ideas affect other people?
- Would the consequence of what you are proposing impact others differently than it impacts you?

Questions that ask participants to weigh the costs they are willing to accept in order to achieve the results they want:

- Why is _______ an acceptable trade-off for you?
- Could you identify the things that are important to us that seem to be clashing?
- What trade-offs are you not willing to make? Why?
- Would you give up ____ in order to achieve ____? Why?
- Are there additional trade-offs have not been addressed that concern you?

Questions that probe each participant’s statement until others can understand what she or he believes should be done and why she or he thinks it should be done:

- Why does that choice appeal to you?
- What is important about taking this direction?
- Can you give an example of how that might work out?
- What is most valuable to you or to those who support that action/option?

Questions that discourage groupthink and allow for different perspectives to be considered in homogenous forums:

- What seems to be most important to those who are attracted to this approach?
- For those who dislike this approach, what seems to be their concern?
- Can anyone think of something constructive/negative that might come from this approach?
- How would someone make a case against what you just said?
- How might this conversation be different if _________ were in the room?
- How might this conversation be different if we were in ________ instead of _________?
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Questions that give the participants an opportunity to identify what they have heard and/or acknowledge common ground for action:

- What actions did you hear that you think we could not accept or live with?
- What trade-offs are you unwilling to accept?
- What seemed important to all of us?
- Is there some action we could all live with?
- Where do we want this policy to take us?
- Can someone suggest areas that we seem to have in common?