PUBLIC POLICY DELIBERATION TOOL

There are three major questions that could be considered in examining an issue. These questions may be used by an individual or in a group setting, including: a forum, seminar, workshop, meeting or round table discussion.

1. What Appeals to Others, or Us, about this Approach and Why?

This question helps people to "try on" the perspectives of others or to identify what it is that they, themselves, value about this approach. Some ways to ask this type of question are:

- *What is appealing about this approach?*
- *What might others find appealing about this approach even if you don't?*
- *What is most valuable to people who support this approach?*
- *What makes this choice a good idea-or a bad idea?*

2. What are the Consequences (Benefits or Costs) Associated with This Approach?

This kind of question pushes people to get beyond the cliché and sound-bite way of talking about an issue. You are asking them to envision not only the positive things that will happen if this approach is followed but also to confront the inevitable downsides that accompany making choices about what to do about complex and difficult issues that will affect many people in very different situations. Some ways to ask this type of question:

- *Who will be most affected by this approach, and how?*
- *What might be the consequences of following this approach?*
- *Who will be affected negatively? Who will be affected positively?*
- *Can you give an example of what you think would happen?*
- *How would someone make a case against what you just said?*
- *How might your concerns differ if you were poor, wealthy, etc.?*
- *Who might think the costs and consequences of this approach are too much to pay?*

3. What are the Tensions, or Dilemmas, in this Issue that We Have to Work Through?

Moderators can help participants explore areas where there are tensions between and within approaches and when a dilemma arises. (For example: "So, you are saying that we should have smaller class sizes in our schools, but you are firmly against any increase in taxes or cutting other programs-is there sonic way to reconcile those two desires?") Often at different times during a discussion a person, or a whole group, might express ideas or desires that are in conflict but never put the conflicting ideas together in a way that makes the conflict or tension obvious. This is a kind of "wishful thinking" or work avoidance that we all do until we spend enough time working on a problem to see that we can't have it all and recognize that we need to make some difficult choices. Some questions to ask include:

- *What makes this a difficult issue?*
- *Are there any conflicts or dilemmas that grow out of what we've said we want to do about this issue?*
- *What do you see as the tensions between (or within) these approaches?*
- *Do you see any gray or fuzzy areas in this issue that make it especially difficult?*
- *Are there any consequences that make the most attractive approach (es) hard to imagine living with?*
- *If that is such a good idea (or approach) what has kept it from being done already?*

Other General Questions - Some very simple but powerful questions that may be useful are:

1. *Why? or Why Not?* When someone makes what seems like an obvious and straightforward statement, sometimes it can be very helpful for the purposes of deliberation to ask "why?" or "why not?" For example, if someone says, "In our community we want to be able to rely on the media to report about good things that happen too," when you respond simply with the question "Why?" you are stimulating deeper consideration of what is important and valuable behind what the person had said. You, as moderator, can fly it out on all kinds of statements that are usually never questioned such as: "It's a good thing to live in a community where people value a good education for all children." The moderator could ask why?" or "We don't want a health care system where the rich get one kind of care and everybody else gets another kind." The moderator might say Why not?"

2. *How?* This is another question that can be very effective in pushing people to think more deeply. For example if someone says, "we need to do a better job of educating school students about being good citizens." The moderator might ask … "How?" or "Everyone should know what their rights and responsibilities are." The moderator might respond .. " How could that be accomplished?"