

Civic Deliberation

Facilitator's Guide

Public Achievement/CCESL

What is a Civic Deliberation?

Civic Deliberation is a key public skill of all citizen professionals. Civic Deliberation is an opportunity to engage in civic discourse around key issues and problems occurring in our schools, communities and societies. Civic Discourse is not an opportunity for debate; instead civic deliberations are an opportunity to listen deeply to others, gain critical perspectives on a topic, and discuss ways in which action can be taken to address changes needed on a certain issue or problem in our society. **A civic deliberation is an engagement of democratic values that intentionally causes tensions in order to promote the conditions and motivations to create change.**

How do we have a Civic Deliberation?

1. Pick a topic

In order for a civic deliberation to occur there must be some pre-work involved in choosing a topic that sparks engagement and interest from those who are participating in the dialogue. This can be done by voting, building consensus, current events, common themes in a particular civic setting (work, school, neighborhood, etc), or relevant local matters.

2. Facilitators Prepare

There should be 1-2 facilitators for a civic deliberation selected in advance. These facilitators should spend time preparing for the civic deliberation in some of the following ways:

- Review and seek to understanding diverse perspectives on the selected topic
- Anticipate problematic or harmful stances on the selected issue and prepare to meet people where they are at (not where you want them to be!)
- Remember: tension creates change!

- Review guidelines and add/edit as needed
- Prepare guiding content for the civic deliberation (questions, quote, personal anecdotes, facilitator notes, etc.)

3. Set guidelines

Guidelines should reflect democratic values and the the values of those participating in the civic deliberation. It is important for a facilitator to come with pre-set guidelines and facilitate the process of adding or editing guidelines as needed to be responsive to each group. Here are some general guidelines you can use or build from:

- Step back, step forward
- Talk with each other, not at each other
- Speak from experience, values and identities
- Impact vs. intent
- Meet others where they are at, not where you want them to be

4. Engage in Civic Deliberation

Facilitator opens the space with guidelines and guiding comments (questions, quotes, personal anecdotes, etc.). Facilitator takes a step back to allow the civic deliberation to occur while strategically guiding the conversation by:

- Locating moments of tension as an opportunity to discuss ways to address change
- Asking strategic questions based on the direction of the conversation
- Pulling out participants to share their thoughts, observations and experiences
- Giving sufficient time to talk ways to address the tension, issue or problem at hand

5. Closing Thoughts

A facilitator should make sure to close the space in a meaningful way. This can be by:

- Summarizing the perspectives and outcomes of the civic deliberation
- Asking a few key participants to summarize the deliberation
- Closing with a prepared quote, question or perspective on the issue

- Listing the ways in which action can be taken to address the issue

6. Evaluate

Another essential skill of the civic professional is evaluation. Make sure you leave five minutes or more at the end of each civic deliberation to publically evaluate the process and outcomes of the dialogue. You can keep this basic or formulate evaluation questions specific to your group or topic. Basic evaluation questions are:

- What went well? What things specifically made this a valuable experience?
- What could have gone better? What would you improve this process for next time?
- What did you learn? What new perspectives were gained? How can you address change?