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PUBLIC DELIBERATION'S ROLE IN INFORMING CITIZENS

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The National Public Policy Education Committee describes its conference in Providence, Rhode Island, as an opportunity to develop ideas about ways to “increase the knowledge of interest groups and individual citizens about emerging public issues.” Some of the members of this conference are going about reaching this objective in a way quite different from the politics-as-usual prescription for informing citizens. I would like to tell you what they are doing and accomplishing.

Some educators in agriculture and family/consumer science are informing the public on policy issues by involving citizens in making the tough decisions characteristic of all these issues. They are finding that the challenge of making choices—“choice work”—increases the amount of information people take in and that it also generates its own kind of public knowledge, which is a type of socially constructed knowledge.

The agents who are adding public deliberation to their programs are reviving a tradition that goes back to the earliest days of our country, a tradition that people such as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson considered as essential to self-government as the Constitution itself. (John Adams actually began his policy career as a moderator of a deliberative town meeting in Braintree, Massachusetts.)

Why Citizens Take Time to Deliberate

Although the agents who use public deliberation in their programs have all questioned whether busy people will make the time needed for choice work, they are finding that this way of learning about issues—and about the views of others—serves a wide range of purposes and appeals to citizens on several levels. In fact, if you ask people why they attend deliberative forums, you are likely to hear reasons that range from personal growth to changing the political system.

Some reasons are personal: People want to learn new decisionmaking skills. They want to understand the issues better—particularly the “gray areas” in issues normally framed around absolutes. Tired of being on the outside, looking in, they are looking for a way to reconnect to the political process and regain a sense of being able to make a difference. They would prefer to be able to formulate their opinions without becoming someone’s enemy. They want an opportunity to hear other voices.

Other participants say that when they go to forums, they have their community in mind or the role of their institution in the community. They want to strengthen their community. Often, they come to forums looking for a different way to approach issues and deal with community problems. They are concerned that issues are not being

addressed by the community as a whole. Tired of having issues framed divisively, they want a dialogue that will help them manage their problems better. They want to open up new avenues or “stepping stones” to action.

Or, participants might tell you that their institution has been looking for a way to be a catalyst in the community—that holding forums helps them to do this. They may say they are looking for a better way to carry out their organization’s mission in the community (Doble Research Associates).

Other studies show that many Americans—not just forum participants—see a connection between what goes on in their communities and the tenor of the conversations people have. They want a different kind of dialogue, one in which people can speak “on the same plane,” even though they are from different sections of town. A typical comment is: “We want a dialogue that teaches respect” or “We are looking for another way to deal with conflict” (The Harwood Group 1993a, p. 20-30; Farkas and Friedman).

Changing ways of talking also seems to change relationships, as reflected in the following kinds of comments from forums: “What you need is a redneck like me and the black fireman over there to come together and talk about crime. . . and realize the other person is not so bad. We’ll leave here talking to each other. The attitude of the whole group will improve.” Others echo these sentiments with such observations as this: “The more we get together and talk, the more we discover we have a shared future and a shared destiny. Our solutions come from our commonalities, not from our differences” (Doble Research Associates, p. 34).

Being concerned about better working relationships among citizens certainly doesn’t preclude creating a better relationship with governments and institutions. People say they are looking for a different way to connect to officeholders. They deliberate because they want to create a genuinely public voice in their community and want officials to hear that voice.

Of course, not everyone finds deliberation useful. Some people leave forums frustrated because their expectations weren’t realized immediately.

Most, however, believe the effects are cumulative. They are convinced a public dialogue can have a lasting influence. And they want something that will endure, because they don’t want just to make improvements. They want a different kind of politics.

If any one theme runs through these varied comments, it is that people think their problems require more action by more citizens. In addition, they want better informed public action. They see deliberation as the first step. Their words imply that before people can act together as a public, they have to be able to decide—together—*how* to act.

What Is Public Deliberation and How Is It Different?

Up to this point, I haven't really said what I mean by "public deliberation," except to suggest that it is a process associated with making decisions on policy issues. Normally, "deliberation" is just a word for any kind of serious discussion. But that is not what I mean. I am referring to a particular way of reasoning that is tied to a particular way of talking.

I want to explain what I mean by "deliberation," because it brings Extension educators into a very different relationship with citizens. Agents moderating forums have to go beyond their roles as providers of expert information. That doesn't mean they can't give information; it just means that they have to do it in a different way.

Here is what is distinctive about deliberation:

- Most political exchanges are debates. Stories in the media turn politics into a never-ending series of contests. People get swept into taking sides. Their energy goes into figuring out who or what they're for or against.
- Deliberation is neither a partisan argument in which opposing sides try to win nor a casual conversation in which people conduct themselves with polite civility. It is an exploratory dialogue for working toward a decision about the purpose and direction of public policies and civic action.

To deliberate is to weigh the consequences and costs of various options, based on what is truly valuable to us. (Think of the way people once used to weigh gold on an old-fashioned scale.) How much will each consequence tip the scale? What are the costs of doing what we want to do? Answering these questions requires a dialogue in which we can test ideas about how to act.

Deliberation also involves weighing the views of others. Careful listening increases the chances that our decisions will be sound, especially when a wide range of people is pooling experiences and insights. No one person or small group of people has all the experience and insight needed to decide what is best. That is why it is essential for an inclusive group of citizens to combine perspectives.

While we can't know for certain that we have made the right decision until we have acted, deliberation forces us to face up to conflicts among the various options we are considering, to anticipate consequences, and to ask ourselves whether we will be willing to accept the "downside" of the option we like most. In other words, deliberation is looking before we leap.

Facts and More

When we are faced with a difficult choice, we try to get all the information we can. Facts certainly aren't unimportant, yet they aren't enough to tell us what we *should* do—which is what making politics is all about. We use deliberation for deciding

“How should we act?” when there is no fact or certainty that can give us an answer. Facts tell us what is, and we don’t have to deliberate about things we know.

When making personal choices—e.g., deciding whether to marry—we don’t look in the encyclopedia under “M.” In much the same way, public deliberation takes us to facts—important as they are—but also takes us beyond, to things no book or expert can tell us, things that represent what’s truly valuable to us in our common life.

We shouldn’t confuse the choices we make about what is most important to us with simple preferences or the selection of one politician’s solution over another’s. We are tempted to think of choice as preference because citizens often are treated as though they are political consumers. But, choices about what kind of community we want to live in or what kind of country we want to be cause us to dig deeper. The consequences are serious, so we have to think carefully about what they might be and about whether we can accept them. We have to look inside ourselves to determine what is most valuable to us.

In making public choices, we seem to be motivated by a reservoir of things that have great meaning in our common life: our deepest concerns and convictions. These things—such as the security of our families—are the ends for which we live. They also are cherished means or ways of behaving—such as having the freedom or opportunity to realize our goals. Few people are not moved by such considerations (Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach).

Because our deeply held concerns—the things that are most valuable to us—are so central to the decisions we make about issues, policy questions have to be described in a way that reveals what these concerns and motivations are. You might call that using “public terms,” if it is clear public terms are not merely everyday language, folksy stories or words of less than three syllables. When I say the description of issues has to resonate with those things that are deeply important or valuable to people, I also mean something other than “values.”

Here’s an example of what I have in mind. National defense policy revolves around a very basic concern: security—which is more fundamental than the relative merits of weapons systems. Yet, we are influenced by varying notions of security:

- We value the security that comes from being stronger than our enemies.
- We value the security that comes from being far from sources of danger.
- We value the security that comes from being on good terms with those who might harm us.

Most people are motivated, at least to some degree, by all three notions of security.

Most of us feel more secure if we are stronger than what is a danger to us. We feel more secure when danger is far away. And, usually, we would like to be on friendly terms with someone who is a potential threat.

Unfortunately, Americans often find issues described in a “foreign” language—in technical, legal, expert, highly partisan and/or ideological terms. A wide gap separates the way issues are presented from the way people experience them; so, most don’t see any connection to what they hold dear.

The result of not seeing a connection is that people don’t invest their time in learning about an issue. They don’t think their “dog is in that fight.”

Here is an illustration of the different “take” citizens often have on an issue: People are more likely to see the problem of stopping drug abuse as a family matter than as a simple matter of enforcing the law or of preventing drugs from entering the country. That perspective stems from deep concerns about the decline of the family and the loss of personal responsibility.

Deliberation depends on having issues framed in public terms because that sets the stage for confronting our conflicting motives or concerns. What really is at issue in an issue is the tension among the many things we consider valuable.

Different concerns lead to different perceptions. These perceptions, in turn, lead to different ways of approaching a problem—to different strategies or options for action. These options can be in direct conflict with one another.

For instance, when it comes to health care, we want the best care possible. We also want the most affordable care. Yet, the better the care is technically, the more costly and less affordable it is. So, any strategy for dealing with the costs of technically advanced health care runs squarely into this dilemma.

Furthermore, every option we might think of for acting on this or other issues will contain both positive and negative implications for what we hold dear. There really are no free lunches.

While our concerns seem to draw on a common storehouse of things valuable to all human beings, they vary because we draw in different measures from that storehouse. These differences become evident when we identify actions we would use to carry out a general strategy. For example, we may all place a premium on fairness. But when I find out that the action you would take to secure economic fairness is to redistribute incomes, I might object to your approach.

A framework for deliberation has to reveal where different approaches to a problem conflict. It has to identify the unpleasant costs and consequences that are part of even the most attractive courses of action.

Framing an issue so that the public knows what its options are and is aware of the conflicts to be resolved can't be done in the usual bipolar way of presenting issues as a debate between two opposing camps. Because many things are important to us, there always are more than two ways of approaching an issue—typically three or four. And, if the framework doesn't take into consideration all of the major concerns—if people don't see what they consider valuable represented—they will reject the framing as unfair.

A good framework will identify the deeper sources of conflict, those that are not just *between* but also *among* and even *within* us. (Recall the illustration of the motives at play in the security and health care issues. We all want to stay as far from danger as possible, and we all want both high quality and affordable health care.)

Conflicts aren't quite as they usually are depicted—that is, as though the friction were just between different individuals or interests (e.g., environmentalists versus developers or conservatives versus liberals). As usually portrayed, partisans in one of those camps are not likely to be in the other camp, too. Yet, when it comes to the things most important to us as human beings, most of us are in many of the same camps. That is what I mean when I say conflicts are among and even within us, not just between opposing factions.

Conflicts or tensions, unpleasant as they are, make choice work a learning experience. As we know, people learn when they are trying to solve problems. Discontinuities and contradictions produce a discomfort that stimulates learning. That is the reason why the books used in Extension programs (the National Issues Forums or NIF books) not only frame issues in public terms but also lay out various approaches to an issue or policy option in such a way as to reveal the conflicts among different approaches, as well as the costs and consequences that follow from every option.

News organizations also are framing issues to show the public what its choices are. They include the *Mercury News* in San Jose, the *Dayton Daily News*, and the *Virginian-Pilot* in Norfolk.

In addition, some civic organizations have begun to do this kind of framing. The North American Association for Environmental Education has been framing environmental issues this way for several years. The General Federation of Women's Clubs is publishing its first "choice" book on the role of women. And the National Collegiate Honors Council currently is working on an issue book on higher education.

What Can Deliberation Produce?

Americans are intensely practical. Before they will spend time deliberating, they want assurances that their efforts will produce something useful.

So, what are the outcomes of deliberation?

■ **Changes in People.** Based on the results of thousands of forums, the initial effects seem to be personal (Doble Research Associates; Alamprese). Participants say they get a better handle on issues—that is, they are able to put particular issues into a larger context and make connections between different issues. People then approach policy questions more realistically. Self-interests tend to broaden. The experience of deliberating with others makes citizens more confident; they believe they own their opinions and are able to voice them.

A study of citizen deliberations by Public Agenda found that about half the participants (53 percent) change their minds in forums. A much larger percentage (71 percent) say they have second thoughts about their opinions, even though they do not change their minds. More than three-fourths (78 percent) say they encounter viewpoints different from their own and think those views are at least understandable (Farkas and Friedman, p. 17). Changing opinions of others' opinions seems to prompt people to think of new possibilities for working together.

■ **Changes in Behavior.** A single forum isn't likely to change beliefs about political participation any more than one trip to a gym will convince us of the benefits of regular exercise. People who have been in a number of forums say, however, that they start reading or listening to the news more . . . and in a different way: looking for the options and their consequences. They also report becoming more involved in civic activities. Deliberation seems to have the power to get people to take the first step toward civic involvement. It also links them to one another, creating a public—which is a body of citizens joined together to deal with common problems.

Americans use deliberative dialogues not only to understand issues but also to decide whether they should act publicly. Situations that might prompt individuals to political action (e.g., finding drug paraphernalia in the neighborhood, worrying about what happens to a child in school, seeing oil spilled on a beach) lose their motivating power in time. So, something else has to happen. People who have such experiences have to find others who will share their concerns—others who also see how the problems affect what is valuable to them. In addition, people have to find out if they can get their hands on a problem and really make a difference. Then, they will get involved (The Harwood Group 1993b).

■ **Increased Civic Responsibility.** Making choices together in deliberation also promotes civic responsibility. Human beings take more responsibility for what they have participated in choosing than for what someone has chosen for them. Making decisions as a public is claiming responsibility for the future.

Forum participants begin to see themselves as political actors, not just clients or consumers. As one study reported: "People learn that they are capable of understanding complex issues, saying reasonable things about them, reaching reasonable judgments about what to do" (Doble Research Associates, p. 59-60). As people deliberate, they see that there is no faceless "they" to blame—that problems

arise out of conflicting motives and from actions that Americans did or did not take. (For example, deliberative citizens are more likely to say that the desire to spend without raising taxes has intensified the budget deficit.) Deliberative forums prompt people to recognize that they often are responsible for significant parts of their problems. In turn, they reason that if they can create problems, they also must have the capacity to begin managing them more effectively.

■ **New Knowledge.** As I already have noted, the prospect of having to make a choice prompts people to get more information. Learning facts increases because people have a context or reason to learn. They need to use the information.

Deliberation also creates “public knowledge” that isn’t available from experts or polls. It consists of things we can know only when we engage one another—and never when we are alone. Essential in making public policies, this knowledge tells us:

- How the public sees an issue or the framework people use in approaching the issue;
- What is valuable to people and where the tensions are among those many things that are important;
- What people are or are not willing to do to solve a problem—i.e., which costs and consequences are or are not acceptable; and
- Whether there is any shared sense of direction or purpose.

Deliberation produces public knowledge by synthesizing many different experiences and perspectives into a shared framework of meaning.

Imagine that you and your friends are standing around a building, trying to determine its condition so you can decide whether to repair it or tear it down. You could send your friends out to stand on different sides to inspect the building and then invite them back to give their sense of what should be done. Each person would report on the side he or she faced. Some might have seen an entrance in good repair; others, a deteriorating back wall. Although the group could vote on which point of view to accept, that would reveal only which side was seen by the largest number of people.

On the other hand, the group could exchange views, reflect on what everyone saw and then integrate their views into a composite. They would blend many angles of vision into something new—a picture of the whole structure, different from any of the points of view with which the group began. By synthesizing many different angles of vision—by seeing things from more than one side—the group could see the whole afresh. Integrating views would more accurately reflect what the building was like.

In the latter example, people didn't merely tolerate differences—they used them. Deliberation doesn't destroy individual differences in a homogeneous amalgam. Rather, it builds on each perspective in creating an integrated view of the whole.

■ **The Transformation of Opinion Into Judgment.** Public knowledge and the interaction that creates it have a very practical purpose: They change individual or popular and often top-of-the-head opinion into more reflective and shared public judgment. Of course, this takes time.

For the country as a whole, according to Daniel Yankelovich, the shift from opinion to judgment comes slowly and in stages:

- Early in the life of a policy debate, opinions are likely to be ill-formed and unstable. When people become aware of an issue, they respond to initial impressions and scant information. Opinions fluctuate almost day to day.
- Mere awareness of an issue is a long way from stable, consistent and coherent public judgment. There are many obstacles along the way, such as blaming others and engaging in wishful thinking, to avoid difficult decisions.
- To develop mature judgment, people have to explore a variety of choices. They have to overcome a natural resistance to facing costly tradeoffs. They have to look honestly at all the pros and cons. And, finally, they have to take a stand, both intellectually and emotionally (Yankelovich).

It is a long journey.

While this distinction between opinion and judgment usually isn't made, the differences are important. Yankelovich describes the distinction this way: Public opinion has come to mean what public opinion polls measure—the vagaries of the public viewpoint at a moment in time—no matter how vague, confused, ill-informed and clouded with emotion it may be. Public judgment, on the other hand, represents the public's viewpoint after all elements of mere opinion have been distilled from it. Public judgment reflects the public's viewpoint once people have had an opportunity to confront an issue seriously over an extended period of time.

Forums that do nothing but inform individuals about particular issues are not the same as deliberative forums that attempt to develop the capacity for public judgment. Yankelovich says a deliberative dialogue can “distill” judgment out of mere opinion.

The problem with popular opinion is that it often is contradictory and does not account for what would happen if a policy were followed over the long term. For example, popular opinion says the government should provide more services. Yet, this same opinion also insists that taxes should not be raised. The contradiction is

obvious, but has to be resolved before anyone should take such opinions seriously.

Popular opinion also is often shortsighted. For example, lower taxes will mean more disposable income in the near term. Yet, schools, social services and highways eventually will deteriorate without financial support. So, are people willing to accept the consequences of the attractive prospect of lower taxes? No one can know what the public judgment will be until people face up to the contradictions and the long-term consequences. That's the job of deliberation.

Over the long term, public deliberation seems to have an effect. Based on their analyses of the public's responses to thousands of questions on a variety of policy issues over the course of 50 years, opinion researchers Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro found—contrary to the common perception that citizens are irrational, inconsistent and fickle—that Americans' long-term attitudes have been quite consistent, rational and stable. The public's attitudes have proven to be stable in that they changed incrementally—in understandable responses to real change in circumstances. The public has been reasonable in that people had clear reasons for their attitudes. And, the public's views have been consistent in that the policies people favored corresponded to what they considered valuable.

Why have public policy preferences—over time and on the whole—been so consistent, rational and stable? Page and Shapiro think that it is because the “cool and deliberative sense of the community” prevailed (Page and Shapiro, p. 390).

What Can the Products of Deliberation Do?

Public deliberation's products—public knowledge and judgment—have two principal uses. One is to make public action (i.e., the action citizens take) possible. The other is to inform the policies of governments and, in the process, help change the often troubled relationships between citizens and officeholders.

■ **Making Public Action Possible.** Democracies depend on public action, the action that citizens take in cooperation with one another. The kind of action I am talking about is not the same as the action of special interest groups. The kind of action I am talking about is comprehensive or inclusive, rather than categorical. It also is not just a “citizen's version” of governmental or institutional action. That tends to be uniform and linear and usually is coordinated by some administrative agency. In official action, lines of interaction are vertical—from officials down to citizens and from citizens up (or down) to officials. Public action, on the other hand, is richly diverse, with many people “doing their own thing.” The lines of interaction are horizontal, rather than vertical. They are eye-to-eye and shoulder-to-shoulder. Public action is not administratively coordinated, yet it is coherent and mutually reinforcing because all of the actions serve related purposes. It is not linear, beginning at one point and ending at another; it is a more organic, ever-repeating series of activities. Public action is powerful because each piece reinforces the other. It is complementary, for the whole of the effort can be greater than the sum of the parts.

Without public action, institutional action often is ineffective. Consider the way a good Neighborhood Watch program can help a police department do its job.

Think of public action as a potluck dinner. What keeps the dinner from being all desserts is the discussion beforehand about what needs to be done and then about the division of all the responsibilities. No authority controls potluck dinners; no contracts are signed. Still, these dinners happen all the time. They happen because people are aware of what others are doing and don't need to be told what to bring.

While public action isn't the product of administrative planning, it also is neither spontaneous nor magical. It grows out of deliberation that—if all goes well—results in a sense of direction and points to shared purposes. Deliberation is not the same thing as building a consensus or mediating differences. Forums identify a range of actions people can “live with.” They locate the area between agreement and disagreement—the area of the politically permissible. Perhaps better said: Deliberative forums create this area as people sort out what they are and are not willing to do, to deal with an issue.

Think of a community faced with the growing problem of vandalism. As people deliberate over what to do, they may not agree on any one solution. But they may develop a shared sense that cleaning and fixing up neighborhoods might help. Several neighborhood groups may meet afterward, with residents volunteering to show up at local parks the following Saturday. Once people have a common sense of direction and a commitment to act, they should be able to take on more cooperative projects.

While public deliberation is a necessary condition for stimulating public action, it isn't totally sufficient. Communities also have to deal with the obstacles posed by conflicting interests. Ideally, common interests should override the particular interests that clash, but that is not always the case. Everyone knows about the major conflicts, such as those between developers and environmentalists. But other kinds of self-interest—those that are not mutually exclusive—may also hamper public action. People simply may not see the interdependence of their interests clearly enough to be mutually supportive.

The interests of the policeman on the beat may be to preserve order, while the social worker in the area may be more concerned with the dynamics of family life. These interests are different. And, while not mutually exclusive, they also are not necessarily related. Each professional can and often does go about his or her business without the assistance of the other.

So, after deliberative forums, citizens and their organizations have more work to do in order to identify interdependence of different interests. Deliberation lays the foundation for that work.

■ **Informing Officials About What Is Politically Possible.** One question

citizens ask is whether those in government pay any attention to public deliberations.

Certainly, deliberation produces information (i.e., public knowledge) that officeholders need and cannot get from any other source. And, although citizens despair of having any influence on officeholders, the long-term evidence is that public judgment does, in fact, shape the major policies of our government—although perhaps not in the way Americans think it does. When people ask if public deliberation influences the positions that politicians and governments take on issues, they often want an unqualified “yes” or “no” answer. Either response would miss the way deliberation influences policy—which is gradually and cumulatively. The reality is, although public deliberations can affect policymaking, they rarely do so overnight—and for good reason. Most political issues—even the problems of one community—require that we take time to understand, plan for and act upon them. On major issues, changing policy can take a decade or more. The role of deliberation is to keep that long journey on track and out of unproductive complaining and blaming.

Does public deliberation eventually affect official policymaking? There is evidence that it does. Fortunately, we have Page and Shapiro’s study, which found many issues on which public opinion developed independently and paved the way for a change in government policy. For instance, the gradual change toward favoring more pragmatic relations with what we once called Red China shows how public opinion anticipated and provided a foundation for what Presidents Nixon and Carter would do two decades later.

■ **Changing Relations Between Citizens and Officeholders.** Officeholders often are as frustrated by their relationship with citizens as citizens are with them. Some genuinely want to work with the public, but face serious obstacles—which citizens need to understand. Officials who listen in public meetings may be attacked for not taking strong positions. They may have trouble working with another officeholder who thinks they are too open with the public. Interest groups may attack them for deliberating with citizens, rather than negotiating with their group. Attacking groups sometimes oppose framing issues in terms other than those they prefer; they may criticize officials who embrace a larger framework (Adams, p. 19).

Despite these obstacles, officeholders often face situations in which they know they need the public. Those are situations in which the nature of the problem is unclear, the public’s goals aren’t defined, or values are at issue and conflict has gotten out of hand. Officials also are frustrated when tradeoffs have to be made in situations in which there is no public consensus about the choice to make. They are stymied when political gridlock brought on by interest group conflict shuts down the machinery of government. In these circumstances, officeholders need citizens—not just as voters, but as active participants in defining the larger public interest.

Unfortunately, citizens don’t always believe that those in office recognize that officials need the public in order to do their jobs. Mutual misunderstanding grows

out of differences in the ways people in and out of government see their respective roles. Opportunities to reorder the relationship are missed.

But if the often-counterproductive relationship between people and the government is going to change, citizens are going to have to reach out. Those in deliberative forums have a powerful tool they can use: a different kind of dialogue.

Not only is the information produced in deliberative forums useful, but also the forums themselves create a setting for a better exchange than the usual hearings produce. Of course, the citizens must let the officeholders really participate—which means not insisting that they make speeches or take official positions. Officeholders have to be able to explore and test ideas, too.

Imagine an official who attends a forum on the condition that he or she be allowed to see how citizens deal with the choices before explaining how the “forum” in the legislature or city council has dealt with the same choices. Imagine a setting where citizens don’t ask officials the usual question of “What are you going to do for us?” and instead draw officeholders into their deliberations by saying, in effect, “Here is what our experiences with this issue are, here is what we see as the tensions, and here is how we have tried to resolve them—recognizing the downside of the approach we like best. Now, tell us what your experiences are, how you see the tensions and how you would try to resolve them.” Conversations such as these would certainly change the relationship between citizens and officeholders.

Public Deliberation and the Interests of Extension Educators

Public deliberation appeals to citizens. It offers officeholders a better way to understand and relate to the public. Some journalists see deliberation as essential in meeting their objectives (Mathews). And, it serves the interests of Extension educators.

Although public deliberation is just beginning to be used in Extension programs, some in the field are finding it very useful. To be sure, everyone begins with such reservations as “Will this draw me into unproductive controversies?” Once those fears prove unfounded, however, educators venture out. While wishing for more institutional commitment, they experiment anyway. And, as they do, they find deliberation opens citizens’ eyes to other points of view. They see great potential in framing local issues for public deliberation. They think the process can be useful to Extension educators in a variety of ways, such as in working with youth groups and local community organizations.

Ann Hinsdale-Knisel, a county director with Michigan State University Extension, has been using NIF materials for several years in community development. She believes that Extension Service staff across the country will be moving more from the role of expert advisor to that of facilitator, and she thinks public deliberation is an excellent tool for this change. She says, “People used to call Extension agents for answers, and the Extension agents would offer or suggest solutions. Today’s

world demands that we explore options and discuss the costs and consequences together” (Hinsdale-Knisel).

Michael Score, University of Kentucky agricultural economist, makes a similar point. He believes the important issues in agriculture require collaboration among people with very different interests (e.g., in land ownership and water quality). Having used deliberative forums to deal with these differences, he reports: “NIF clarifies what is at stake for people in the community. It provides people with an efficient and fair way to search out common ground for action” (Score).

Americans are looking for better ways to understand and shape public policy—now at the local and state levels, as well as the national. They are looking for ways to make communities work better in the face of problems (e.g., drug abuse and juvenile crime) that don’t seem to go away. I think they also will be looking for professionals such as Ann, Michael and their colleagues, who can work *with*, not just *for* citizens.

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