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**SUBJECT:** Designing Educational Programs on Public Issues  
(Lesson Plan to supplement pages 15-24)

**CONCEPT:** Designing an educational program around a public issue involves three key steps: choosing an issue, identifying and recruiting participants, and matching delivery methods with learning objectives. If issues can be anticipated, there is more time for advance planning, but issues sometimes emerge from other work or erupt unexpectedly. Educators and facilitators need to recognize sensitive issues and to select issues carefully to avoid overcommitment. Issue framing is also important. It means defining the issue as a broad question that lends itself to education and discourse, avoids potential for bias, and generates positive energy by emphasizing a constructive point of view. Careless framing of an issue can obstruct resolution, while careful framing can enhance the learning process. Whenever possible, participants in an educational effort should include stakeholders on all sides of the issues. Educational programs should be designed with careful attention to what stakeholders need to learn and what delivery methods will best encourage and facilitate learning.

**LEARNER OBJECTIVES:** At the completion of this lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Choose and frame an issue in order to enhance the likelihood of mutual learning among stakeholders.
2. Identify and recruit participants for public issues education.
3. Set learning objectives and choose or design appropriate delivery methods for public issues education.

**BEFORE PRESENTING THIS MATERIAL:**

1. Review Chapter 3 in *Increasing Competence In Resolving Public Issues* (and also pp. 44-47 on evaluation).
2. Review and duplicate “Anticipating Controversy” and “Examples: Framing The Question” handouts if participants do not have *Increasing Competence In Resolving Public Issues*. Review and duplicate worksheets for each participant. Plan the amount of time you will allot to each worksheet.
3. Identify issues for group interaction. The group task will be to design an educational program to address an issue. As an educator you might be prepared to give examples of issues that are current, emerging, or erupting. (NOTE: Designing this exercise and identifying facilitators for the groups provides an opportunity to connect with experts or specialists in different issue areas.) You may want to develop a realistic crisis situation to give to each of the groups. The idea here is, while the groups are developing a program plan for the issue they have chosen, to spring on them a crisis situation related to their issue and

ask them to decide on short notice how to respond. For example, if they are working on a plan for educational reform, a crisis situation could be a tornado hitting the school. How would their plan be affected?

*If you prefer to use the alternative meeting agenda:*

1. Select a film or videotape that portrays a contentious public issue in some detail. The movie or video should portray the issue in enough detail that questions can be addressed about issue framing, stakeholders, and how the stakeholders learn about the issue.
2. Review the film or video and identify/decide on appropriate points to stop it and raise questions for discussion.

#### **MEETING AGENDA FOR MATERIAL PRESENTATION:**

1. Provide a definition and overview of issue framing. Distribute handouts, “Anticipating Controversy” and “Examples: Framing The Question” or use pages 17 and 19 in *Increasing Competence in Resolving Public Issues*.
2. Divide the audience into groups so people can work on their own issues—i.e., issues that they care about and are likely to actually work on “back home.”
3. *Phase 1:* Ask the groups to select an issue and identify stakeholders, using Worksheet 1.

*Phase 2:* Ask them to frame the issue and make plans for recruiting participants, using Worksheet 2.

*Phase 3:* Finally, have them set learning objectives and choose or design appropriate delivery methods, using Worksheet 3.

4. Have the groups report their plans, and encourage discussion and critique. This might be done once at the end or separately after each phase. If possible, give the groups time to revise their plans after discussion and critique.

#### **(CRISIS OPTION)**

Interrupt the groups at some point (probably in Phase 3) and tell them that a crisis—a heated controversy related to their issue—has come up and they have been asked by the county legislative body to use their expertise as educators to facilitate a solution. Give them a short time (10-15 minutes) to come up with a plan. Then have them report their crisis plans to the whole group. Discuss the difference between current and erupting issues. Ask:

- Can you identify examples of each from your own work?
- How does working on a plan for an existing issue help in developing a plan for one that erupts?

## (ALTERNATIVE MEETING AGENDA)

If the participants are more experienced in dealing with public issues, show a movie or a videotape of a TV program and stop it at appropriate points to ask such questions as:

- What is the issue here? How is it framed? How does the framing of the issue affect the way it is dealt with? What would have been a more constructive way to frame the issue?
- Who are the stakeholders? Which ones were involved and which ones weren't? How equal was the power of different stakeholders? How did the mix of stakeholders affect the decision making process? What could be done to change the mix of stakeholders?
- What did the various stakeholders learn? How did they learn it? What were the learning objectives? (Different characters might have different learning objectives). What methods were used to promote each objective? How could learning have been promoted more effectively?

## ANTICIPATING CONTROVERSY

Any of the following characteristics provide you with a clue that an issue may be especially heated and controversial:

### Quality of life, standard of living

- ☐ People believe their livelihood or standard of living are threatened.

### Personal health and safety

- ☐ There is a real or perceived health risk.
- ☐ There is a risk of bodily injury or harm.

### Environment: There is a risk to the environment which may threaten

- ☐ human health
- ☐ animals
- ☐ natural resources or scenic areas

### Justice and equal opportunity

- ☐ People's sense of fairness or justice is violated.
- ☐ Opportunities are being denied to a segment of the population.

### Party politics

- ☐ The two major political parties have different perspectives on the issue.

### Government role

- ☐ There is a question of more government vs. less.
- ☐ There is a question about how many tax dollars to spend.
- ☐ There are questions about whether government "solutions" are impinging on individual rights and freedoms.
- ☐ Multiple government agencies are involved, and there is real or perceived conflict among their missions.

*Notes on specific potential sources of controversy for your issue:*

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## EXAMPLES: FRAMING THE QUESTION

The objective should be to frame the question in a way that lends itself to education and discourse. This usually means stating the issue as a question (or questions) that all parties find acceptable and worthy of consideration. Consider the examples:

### **“Ag and Wildlife Coexistence”**

When cotton growers and environmentalists sat down to talk in Cameron County, Texas, they named their committee the Ag and Wildlife Coexistence Committee. This name carried an implicit framing of the question: Can agriculture and wildlife interests coexist successfully in the county? Initially it appeared that the measures needed to protect an endangered falcon and the pesticides needed to grow cotton were incompatible. The wording was acceptable to all the participants because it didn't reflect a bias in favor of one viewpoint.

### **From “Hunger” to “Food Security”**

In recent years, many people concerned about hunger in the United States have shifted their focus to “food security.” This phrase encompasses hunger and malnutrition, usually linked to low family income; it also includes food access problems related to geographic location. It is a rewording that clarifies why a broader audience has a stake in the issue.

### **“Communities for Child Safety”**

This phrase became the title of a project sponsored by 4-H, the National 4-H Council and other partners. It reflects a fresh way of looking at two old problems: accidental injury and child abuse. Combining the two problems has made it safer for people to come forward and talk about their concerns and possible solutions. As a separate topic, child abuse was especially sensitive and difficult. The greatest strength of this new language, however, is that it generates positive energy by emphasizing a constructive point of view: What can communities do to create a safe environment for their children?

### **County Food and Ag Committees**

This committee name implies a broad problem area—broad enough to let specific committees identify the issues they believe are most important. Extensions' Northeast Network for Food, Health and Agriculture project worked with such committees on issues ranging from local farmers' markets to hunger to agricultural regulations.

## PHASE 1 WORKSHEET

### ISSUE SELECTION AND STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION

<b>1.</b> List potential issues for an educational program:			
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<b>2.</b> What controversies are likely with each issue?			
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<b>3.</b> For each of the following criteria, rate each issue on a 5-point scale. (1 = low priority on this criterion; 5 = high priority on this criterion.)			
• Important to the general public			
• Important to policy makers			
• Important to specific interests: _____			
_____			
_____			
• Fits with your organization's mission or expertise			
• Necessary resources are available			
• Timing appropriate			
<b>TOTALS</b>			

**4.** Select one of the issues for program development: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Identify the stakeholders in the selected issue and list them below on the STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION table. Consider: Who's affected by the issue? Who makes decisions about the issue? Who can obstruct decisions about the issue? See the Stakeholder categories listed on p. 20 of *Increasing Competence in Resolving Public Issues*.
6. How is the issue perceived by each stakeholder? What are their hopes and fears? Record notes about stakeholder perceptions on the table below.
7. What do stakeholders need to learn to move this issue toward resolution?

**STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION TABLE**

STAKEHOLDERS	HOPES AND FEARS	LEARNING NEEDS



## PHASE 2 WORKSHEET

### ISSUE FRAMING AND STAKEHOLDER RECRUITMENT

1. How will you frame the issue? Consider how different stakeholders will respond to the issue as you have framed it. Will your framing attract the audience you want? Will it turn off any stakeholders? Will it make them antagonistic or defensive? Does it imply favoritism for certain viewpoints? Is it likely to make anyone believe that their viewpoints are excluded or that their concerns will not be addressed?

How our issue will be framed:

2. What strategies will you use to get the various stakeholders involved? Consider: Which stakeholders will participate readily? Who will need special invitations or special encouragement? How should they be invited or encouraged, and by whom? What's "in it" for them—how would you respond if they asked, "Why should we participate?" If there is no way to get certain stakeholders involved, what alternative ways can you identify to get their viewpoints represented and understood by those who are involved?

STRATEGIES	FOR WHICH STAKEHOLDERS?	WHO WILL DO IT?	WHEN?

## PHASE 3 WORKSHEET

### LEARNER OBJECTIVES AND PROGRAM DESIGN

- 1.** What resources are needed? This includes process facilitation (e.g., opportunities for dialogue) as well as provision of information.

RESOURCES NEEDED	FOR WHAT AUDIENCE(S)?
Information:	
Process facilitation:	

- 2.** What delivery methods will be used to encourage and facilitate learning? Keep in mind that you may need to plan a *sequence* of different methods. Why were these particular methods chosen? What can be expected to happen as a result of those methods, and why? If you can answer these questions, you will have articulated your “program theory”, which should help in evaluation.

DELIVERY METHODS	FOR WHAT AUDIENCE(S)?	WHEN?	DESIRED RESULTS?

**3.** What will you do next? How will you decide what to do next?

Notes:

**4.** What will you need to know in order to decide what to do next?

Notes:

**5.** What will you want to be able to report to your superiors, funders, policy makers, or the public?

To superiors:

To funders:

To policy makers:

To the public:

To \_\_\_\_\_:

**6.** How will you evaluate? What information will you need, and how will you collect it?

INFORMATION TO COLLECT	FROM WHOM?	HOW?