
ENVIRONMENT &
SOCIETY SERIES

 naaee



energy choices

what should we do about america's energy future?

*a guide to moderating and
organizing forums*



why are we here? what are we going to do?

We are here to move toward a public decision on a difficult issue through choice work.

how do we do that?

We do that by engaging in a deliberative dialogue in which we:

- understand the pros and cons of each option—its benefits, drawbacks, and trade-offs;
- know the strategic facts and how they affect the way the group thinks about each option;
- get beyond the initial positions people hold to their deeper motivations—the things they consider to be the most valuable in everyday life;
- weigh carefully the views of others and appreciate the impact various options would have on what others consider valuable; and
- work through the conflicting emotions that arise when various options pull and tug on what people consider valuable.

Environment and Society Series

This guide to organizing and moderating forums was prepared for the National Issues Forums Institute in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation and the North American Association for Environmental Education. The Environment and Society Series is designed to promote meaningful, productive deliberation, convened locally and online, about difficult issues that affect the environment and communities. For more information, see www.naaee.org/eif. For deliberative forum guides on other environmental issues, see www.nifi.org.

NAAEE's Environmental Issues Forums program provides tools, training, and support for engaging adults and students in meaningful, productive discussions about sticky issues that affect the environment and communities. For more information about EIF and to download materials, please visit: naaee.org/eif.

For More Information

- To order issue guides, visit nifi.org.
- For more information or to make comments, visit the National Issues Forums Institute website at www.nifi.org or call NIFI at 1-800-433-7834.
- Post the dates and locations of your forums on the Events section of nifi.org or e-mail forums@nifi.org.

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organizing a forum

KINDS OF FORUMS

National Issues Forums are about encouraging public deliberation. The needs of your community will drive the schedule in which deliberation can best occur.

Single Forums: Many NIF groups choose to organize single forums around issues of concern in their communities. Most single forums last 2 to 2 ½ hours.

Multiple Sessions: Other groups plan for multiple sessions or study circles to allow participants greater opportunity to examine issues in depth. Some groups set aside time for two meetings while others might devote a separate session to each option. Still others plan ahead for a session after the forum for participants to come back together and consider next steps.

Breakout Groups: In some communities, people begin their examination of an issue in a large-group forum and then break off into smaller groups for subsequent sessions. The reverse is also helpful—starting in small groups and culminating in a larger community forum.

MATERIALS

Issue Guides: Each participant should have an issue guide. Ideally, participants have a chance to read the guide before they attend the forum.

Starter Videos: To get everyone on the same page at the beginning of a forum, consider using a short video (e.g., this one from the U.S. Department of Energy: goo.gl/PU48lp) or another visual like an infographic, or review the issue guide introduction to focus on key trade-offs and tensions involved in the issue.

Questionnaires: Participant questionnaires can be downloaded on the NIFI website or filled out online at NIFI.org/questionnaires. These help us understand more about the forum process and how participants benefit, and can also underpin issue guidance to policy leaders.

Moderator Response Form: This is for you, the moderator, to complete after the forum. Fill it out at: www.nifi.org/questionnaires.

CONVENING

Size: Generally, between 8 and 20 participants is ideal. If you have a larger group, perhaps break into two groups and have someone else moderate the additional group.

Invite a Diverse Group: The point of these forums is to work through the hard choices involved in a tough problem, but those hard choices can be evaded if a group is very like-minded. Having a diverse group almost ensures that tensions will surface and the group will have to wrestle with trade-offs.

Let the Network Know: Please create a listing for your forum in the Events area on nifi.org. This can be a helpful link to share as you promote your forum.

stages of a forum



1. Welcome

The convenor or moderator introduces the NIF program.

2. Ground Rules

Participants and the moderator review desired outcomes and agree on ground rules.

3. Getting Started

One good way to start is for participants to take a few minutes to talk about their personal experiences with the issue and tell their stories. Sometimes the convenor or moderator begins by showing a starter video that reviews the problems underlying the issue.

4. Deliberation

Participants examine all the options. An approximately equal amount of time should be spent on each option.

5. Ending the Forum

Participants reflect on what has been achieved.

6. Questionnaire

Participants complete the questionnaire.



your role as moderator

- 1 Provide an overview of the deliberation process. Ask probing questions about what's at stake in each issue and each option.
- 2 Encourage participants to direct their questions and responses to one another.
- 3 Remain neutral.
- 4 Report: Participants and moderators should fill out the downloaded questionnaires, or complete them online at nifi.org/questionnaires. Mail written questionnaires the address on the form or email to reports@nifi.org.

- everyone is encouraged to participate,
- no one or two individuals should dominate,
- the discussion should focus on the options,
- all the major options should be considered fairly,
- they will maintain an open and respectful atmosphere for the discussion, and
- they will listen to each other.

3. GETTING STARTED

Starter video: Many moderators start the forum by showing a short video (see p. 2 for a suggestion).

Personal stake: Ask participants to take a few minutes to talk about their personal experiences with the issue and tell their stories. A good question to ask is, "Can anyone say how this issue has affected them or their family or community?"

4. DELIBERATION

Participants examine all the options individually. An approximately equal amount of time should be spent on each option. Some good questions for all three options are:

- How does this option address our concerns about energy?
- What worries or makes us uncomfortable about this approach?
- If this approach worked perfectly, what would the trade-offs or consequences be?

Some individual questions for particular options are listed with each option.

moderating a forum

1. WELCOME

The convenor or moderator introduces the NIF program.

2. GROUND RULES

Before the deliberation begins, it is important for participants to review guidelines for their discussion. They should agree that:

5. ENDING THE FORUM

Before ending a forum, take a few minutes to reflect, both individually and as a group, on what has been achieved. Consider the following kinds of questions:

Individual Reflections

- How has your thinking about the issue changed?
- How has your thinking about other people's views changed?
- How has your perspective changed as a result of what you heard in this forum?

Group Reflections

- What didn't we work through?
- Can we identify any shared sense of purpose or direction?
- Which trade-offs are we willing to make to move in a shared direction? Which are we unwilling to make?

Next-Step Reflections

- What do we still need to talk about?
- How can we use what we learned about ourselves in this forum? Do we want to meet again?

6. QUESTIONNAIRES

Participants and moderators should fill out the downloaded questionnaires, or complete them online at nifi.org/questionnaires. Mail written questionnaires to the address on the form or email to reports@nifi.org.

if this is your first experience as a moderator

You don't have to be an expert on the

issue. Read the issue guide thoroughly. Consider questions that get to the heart of the issue and think through the essence of each option. This is a critical part of preparation.

Stay focused on what the forum is about

—**deliberation.** Ask questions that probe the underlying motivations of each option, the trade-offs it might require, and the willingness of the participants to recognize them. (Sample questions begin on Page 5.) Listen to others; remain neutral.

Keep the discussion moving and focused on the issue.

Sometimes it's difficult to move on to another option when there is so much more that could be said. But in order to make progress, participants need time to weigh all the major options fairly. Be mindful of the time.

Reserve ample time for reflections on the forum.

In many ways, this is the most important work the group will do. The moderator will provide reminders that time is passing, but it is up to all the participants to help preserve the time to reflect on what they have said and what they might want to do about it.

Invite a diverse group of participants.

Groups where everyone thinks similarly have a difficult time considering the trade-offs of the option(s) they favor. A diverse group will force participants to work through the trade-offs of all the options more equally.

option 1: keep America self-reliant and stable

We should use our own abundant natural resources to produce all the energy we need to fuel our economy and avoid entanglements in unstable and unfriendly regions. Relying on the market and technological advancements will continue to lead us to a cleaner energy future. BUT large-scale energy production, even solar and wind power, has major environmental impacts, and unfairly affects communities near facilities like mines, refineries, and transmission lines. Furthermore, the transition to cleaner energy may not occur quickly enough to stave off the threat of climate change.

Questions to Surface Trade-Offs and Tensions

- In 2015 we imported about 25 percent of the oil we use. How important is it to free ourselves from dependence on other countries for our supplies of oil?
- This option assumes we'll be able to secure our current way of life—including the amount of energy we use—through market and technological advancements. Is the amount of energy we consume an issue that concerns you? Why?
- Are you concerned about unintended consequences of large scale energy production through expanded oil, solar, and wind production on wildlife, special natural areas, clean air and water, or our communities? Why?
- How important is reducing carbon pollution and climate change when considering various energy sources such as oil and coal?
- If allowing the construction of pipelines, oil refineries, and wind and solar farms is almost certainly going to cause noticeable changes to the places we live in, what kinds of change are we prepared to accept?
- What are the best ways to produce the energy we need and become energy independent? Why do you think that way?
- Does this option risk giving too much power and discretion to large energy companies?
- If this approach worked perfectly, what would the trade-offs or consequences be?

Definitions:

Carbon pollution is the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from human activities such as burning fossil fuels such as oil, natural gas, and coal.

Climate change is a change in global or regional climate patterns, in particular a change apparent from the mid to late 20th century onwards and attributed largely to the increased levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide produced by the use of fossil fuels.

option 2: take local responsibility for clean energy

If we want our country to transition to clean, low-carbon power, everyone needs to participate, as not only a consumer but also a producer. Currently, electricity in our system mainly flows one way, from large power plants through transmission and distribution lines to end users. We need to decentralize that system to enable more clean, locally produced energy to flow where it needs to. BUT retooling our power grid and fueling infrastructure could be costly, take a long time, and cause economic disruptions. This would change how our communities look and how we live, and add a responsibility for producing power that people may not want or be able to afford.

Questions to Surface Trade-Offs and Tensions

- How would you feel about a wind turbine on your next-door neighbor's property? Or a wind farm out in the ocean in front of your beach house?
- Do you think we should aim to have renewable power sources provide the majority of our community's energy needs in your lifetime? In your children's?
- If localized energy production is almost certainly going to cause noticeable changes to the places we live in, what kinds of changes are we prepared to accept?
- As an individual or as a business owner, would you be willing to accept the responsibility of generating your own energy by installing solar panels and wind generators on your home or business? Should this be mandated? Who should pay for this?
- Do you think retooling our power grid to support a decentralized energy system is a good idea? Why?
- Would you be willing to pay more for in energy if needed, to pay for a decentralized system that enables cleaner, locally produced energy to flow where it needs to?
- If this approach worked perfectly, what would the trade-offs or consequences be?

Definitions:

The **electric grid** includes the networks that carry electricity from the plants where it is generated to consumers. The grid includes wires, substations, transformers, switches and much more.

Microgrids are localized electric grids that can disconnect from the traditional regional or national electric grid to operate autonomously. Disconnecting from the traditional grid can help mitigate grid disturbances and strengthen grid resilience.

A **smart grid** is an electricity supply network that uses digital communications or computer technology to detect and react to local changes in usage.

option 3: find ways to use less energy

We should aggressively reduce energy use and boost efficiency. Energy consumption in the United States has leveled off recently, but to tackle climate change, we must rapidly reduce carbon emissions. Using less energy could also lead to greater security. BUT requiring energy conservation could restrict personal choices and limit economic growth. And tackling climate change could depend more on replacing fossil fuels with cleaner fuels than on how much energy we use.

Questions to Surface Trade-Offs and Tensions

- What, if anything, have you and your family done to save energy in the last few years?
- Do you think that promoting changes in individual lifestyles is a good way to reduce our use of fossil fuels? Why?
- How important are cost-effectiveness and safety when considering new energy-saving technologies?
- Would you be willing to deal with more regulations as an individual or as a business owner in order to collectively use less energy? Do you think large companies and government agencies should be required to use less energy?
- What are the best ways to encourage widespread adoption of new technologies and ways of doing things? Should these be mandated?
- Would you be willing to change your lifestyle—eat differently, ride a bike or take public transportation more often, lower your home thermostat—in order to use less energy? Do you think changes like these should be required, or how should they be encouraged?
- If this approach worked perfectly, what would the trade-offs or consequences be?

Definitions:

A **smart meter** is an electronic device, often connected to individual households or businesses, that records consumption of electric energy in intervals of an hour or less and communicates that information at least daily back to the utility for monitoring and billing. Smart meters enable two-way communication between the meter and the central system.

moderator response

Moderator's Name _____ Phone _____

E-mail Address _____

Date and location (state) where forum was held:

Briefly describe the audience of your forum, including city and state, diversity, age, and number of participants.

What elements of this issue seemed most difficult for the participants?

What common concerns were most apparent?

What things did participants appear to hold most valuable as they wrestled with trade-offs? Please describe.

Which trade-offs were participants most comfortable with? Please describe.

Which trade-offs did the participants struggle with the most? Please describe.

Did the group identify shared directions for action?

RETURN WITH PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRES TO:

National Issues Forums Institute, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, OH 45459, or scan and e-mail to reports@nifi.org. You may also fill out this report online at nifi.org/questionnaires.