



# From Polarization to Problem Solving

## A Learning Exchange on Public Engagement

Friday, October 29, 2010, 9am-5pm

### Learning From Experience I – Analysis of Dialogue and Deliberation Cases 10:30 am - 12:00 pm

#### Case Analysis #1: Alternatives to Seclusion and Restraint

Presenter: Dave Joseph  
Organization: Public Conversations Project

The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health had received a 3-year federal grant to reduce the use of restraint and seclusion in psychiatric hospitals. They reached out to people with psychiatric disabilities and advocates to partner with them and provide input from those who had experienced these practices first-hand. Breakdowns in communication, relationships and trust had brought progress to a screeching halt by the end of the first year of the three-year process. The Steering Committee, composed of both mental health professionals and "consumers" were both committed to the success of this initiative, but equally frustrated. They contacted the Public Conversations Project to help them rebuild trust, listen to each other and work together for their shared purpose.

#### Case Analysis #2: Massachusetts Forest Futures Visioning Process

Presenters: Loraine Della Porta, John Goodrich, and Bill Logue  
Organization: Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration (MODR)

The Forest Futures Visioning Process (FFVP) was sponsored by Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and facilitated by the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration (MODR) at the University of Massachusetts Boston to develop policy recommendations for the future stewardship of Massachusetts forests. The goals of the FFVP were as follows:

1. Create a facilitated collaborative process to engage a group of selected experts and stakeholders as well as the general public on social and ecological values for long-term forest stewardship in Massachusetts; and
2. Create a set of consensus recommendations with broader engagement, consultation and communication from numerous stakeholder types.





## Case Analysis #3: Art for Water at Franklin Pierce: Art, Dialogue, and Engagement

Presenter: Joni Doherty  
Organization: New England Center for Civic Life

Although it is important to convene regular public conversations about local issues, as educators at a liberal arts university we are also interested in enlarging our students' spheres of knowledge and engagement. Engaging students in deliberations about national or global issues presents challenges that differ from issues where participants are more directly impacted and experience the more immediate effects of the outcomes of deliberations. Successfully achieving these goals transforms students who may have been primarily identified by their major and class standing into a "public" with diverse interests, backgrounds, and experiences as well as an interest in deliberating on an issue that extends beyond their immediate concerns.

## Case Analysis #4: Congregational Conversation: Tradition and Change in Dialogue

Presenter: Michael Duda  
Organization: First Church in Wenham, MA

A 375 year old congregation faces the contemporary issues of same sex marriage and GLBT clergy. In this tradition the decision to become an "Open & Affirming" church is determined by vote. How can the process address concerns of long-time members and also newer members who want their church to be "welcoming"?

## Learning from Experience II – Analysis of Dialogue and Deliberation Cases 1:30 pm - 3:00 pm

### Case Analysis #5: Can citizens have quality deliberation on complex and controversial issues? Of course, but how?

Presenter: Daniel Clark  
Organization: AmericaSpeaks

A session about the challenges and some solutions for bringing citizens together to talk about controversial, complex, and sometimes mind numbing issues, such as government budgets, health care reform, immigration law, and more. Daniel will share from AmericaSpeaks' recent National Town Meeting that engaged 3,500 people in 57 cities from across the political spectrum to identify different tax increases and spending cuts to reduce the long term federal budget deficit by \$1.2 trillion and other projects. How do you frame such difficult issues? What information do participants need so they can participate in a meaningful way? How do facilitators support discussion? Please join us to share your experiences and ask questions on how deliberation with citizens on such difficult issues can work.





## Case Analysis #6: What's at Stake: Community Conversations on the Benefits and Risks of Expanded Gambling in NH

Presenters: Michele Holt-Shannon and Bruce Mallory  
Organization: The Democracy Imperative, University of New Hampshire

New Hampshire, like most states, has labored to balance its budget in the face of the recent economic downturn and is now weighing the merits of expanding legal gambling as a way to generate tax and licensing fees in order to bridge the state's revenue gap. To enable the public to weigh in on the matter, in June of 2009, Governor John Lynch appointed a Study Commission on Expanded Gaming, charged with reviewing available data about the economic and social impacts of legal gambling and soliciting public opinion on the topic. Consequently, the Commission partnered with the NH Center for Public Policy Studies, the University of New Hampshire Survey Center, and the Carsey Institute at UNH to review existing economic and social research, conduct telephone polls, and create a statewide process for citizen engagement and deliberation, respectively. Thus, on a snow-free Saturday in mid-February, 19 facilitated small group discussions took place in eleven communities across the state, and following the face-to-face sessions an on-line forum was launched to continue the dialogue and include those who were unable to attend the events.

## Case Analysis #7: Ad-Hoc Committee on Best Practices in Municipal Decision-Making in Northampton (MA)

Presenter: Wendy Foxmyn  
Organization: Ad Hoc Committee on Best Practices in Northampton Decision-Making

On December 6, 2007, the Northampton, MA City Council adopted a resolution creating an "Ad Hoc Committee for Best Practices in Northampton Decision-Making" comprised of three City Councilors and four citizens. The Committee's charge was to "create and oversee a public process for reviewing municipal decision-making in the City of Northampton and shall make recommendations to the City Council on ensuring the use of locally and nationally accepted best practices in our community." The Committee held 26 public meetings and 4 public forums during the course of its work and on March 6, 2009 its Final Recommendations were formally accepted for review by the Northampton City Council.

## Case Analysis #8: Solar energy policy collaborations in New York City

Presenter: Neil Veilleux  
Organization: Meister Consultants Group Inc.

New York City is one of DOE's Solar America Cities (SAC) and, as such, has been provided federal funding to develop its solar energy market. As in many cities, solar energy is an underutilized resource in New York City, though it could provide significant grid, environmental, and economic benefits to City residents. However, this requires cooperation from a number of different organizations in the City, including the local utility, department of buildings (permitting authority/inspector), Mayor's office, universities, financiers, installers/developers, environmentalists, community groups, and so forth. Tension between stakeholders is not uncommon, because different policies proposed under SAC lead to different distribution of costs and benefits. As a result, it is important for stakeholders to collaborate in order to realize the benefits of solar power. Meister Consultants Group was brought in to develop a market assessment of NYC's solar market, interview stakeholders to understand interests and barriers to market growth, and propose recommendations to help the market grow in the future. The desired outcome is to build a vibrant solar market in New York City.





## Marketplace: Sharing Resources 12:00pm – 1:30 pm

### Building Relationship Conversations with the Johari Window

The Johari Window gives participants a mental model and actionable strategy for initiating Conversations that Build Relationship. By understanding the dynamics of the four panes of the window, one can choose which pane to navigate when, in order to strengthen relationships desired for collaboration and coordination of effort.

### Citizens in Charge

Citizens in Charge is the only national organization dedicated to the belief that citizens should be in charge of their government. One of the best tools that citizens have for enacting change is the initiative and referendum process. Our organization is made up of activists, legislators, financial supporters, opinion leaders, and most importantly — citizens — who come together to protect and defend this process where it exists, and extend it to where it does not.

### Conferences that Work

Conferences That Work use an innovative, highly interactive, attendee-driven event design that leverages attendees' expertise and experience to create just the conference that participants want. The processes used are described in my book *Conferences That Work: Creating Events That People Love*. The design is based on thirty years experience organizing and facilitating conferences, and twenty years of honing the participant-driven design.

### Consensus Building Institute

The Consensus Building Institute (CBI) is a not-for-profit organization created by leading practitioners and theory builders in the fields of negotiation and dispute resolution. CBI works with leaders, advocates, experts, and communities to promote effective negotiations, build consensus, and resolve conflicts.

### Dynamic Facilitation

Dynamic Facilitation (DF) is an emergence-based process for working with diverse perspectives to generate co-intelligence and co-creativity. DF uses deep reflective listening and a simple harvesting framework to appreciatively receive each contribution, no matter how divergent. This allows differences to help create a broader systemic understanding of the “larger picture.”

### MA Office of Public Collaboration

MODR is a statutory state institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston that functions as a neutral forum and state-wide resource for public policy dispute resolution and collaborative governance. MODR works with government agencies, courts, businesses, non-profits and citizen groups to address complex issues related to economic development, environmental resource management, land use, agriculture, transportation, housing, health care and other important community objectives.

### Mediem

Mediem is repurposing the internet to power transformative conversations, inspire personal understanding and engage communities. The unique online platform creates a unique participation experience that interconnects people, viewpoints, dialogues and resources, providing the ability to move beyond limited ‘back and forth’ to a deeper exploration of complex topics.





## New England Center for Civic Life

The Center for Civic Life is dedicated to the teaching, practice and study of deliberative democracy. The Center's initiatives and research are based on the premise that in order to foster strong communities, based on principles of inclusiveness and equity, individuals must engage in thoughtful and civil dialogue. The Center serves as a resource for students, higher education professionals and community members.

### Public Conversations Project

20 years of experience creating and implementing a method for bringing people together on incendiary issues, and training other practitioners in dialogue design and facilitation skills. Our emphasis on advance planning and participant preparation prevents a lot of problems and leads to more constructive face-to-face meetings.

### The Shared Interest Model and Conversation Agreements

The Shared Interest Model provides a method for groups to conduct a dialogue by:

- Exploring the scope, significance and possibilities of an issue
- Developing common ground through shared interests
- Creating an action plan

Conversation Agreements are a printed sheet of paper that provide guidelines for participating in a productive dialogue. It is structured to ensure that people know the "guidelines" of how a conversation will be conducted.

### Zing Team Meeting System

A wireless keyboard system that facilitates structured dialogue or dialectical discourse. Participants are presented a series of questions that take the entire community on the same thinking, learning or decision making journey. A sequence of rich questions guides the participants to broad agreement around a new concept that bridges individual world views.

## Workspace: Ongoing Cases and Questions

3:05 pm - 4:15 pm

### Discussion #1: Using a web based discussion to help voters prepare for a New England Town Meeting

Leaders: David M Rosenberg and Lucas Cioffi  
Organization: Town of Norfolk and Online Townhalls, Inc.

The Town Meeting is the legislative body of the town. Norfolk Massachusetts still has an "Open" (rather than "Representative") Town Meeting, which means that all the registered voters have the right to attend the meeting, be the legislators, and vote on all the issues that come before the Town Meeting. Prior to the Town Meeting, a Warrant is distributed to give the voters notice of all the matters that will come up for a vote at the Town Meeting. (The warrant contains articles which describe the matters to be voted on, but the vote will be on a motion that might be worded differently from the warrant article.) With the pace of today's society, it is difficult for people to find time to attend the meeting, let alone study the Warrant, ask questions, do research, and really understand the issues on which they will be voting. This workspace session will discuss how we are using a web-based discussion forum prior to the start of the Town Meeting. The purpose of using an online tool is to help voters better understand the arguments in support of and in opposition to the various articles and prepare to vote at the Town Meeting. We'll discuss some challenges such as limiting participation to town residents, ensuring that residents post comments under their real names, and conforming to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.





## Discussion #2: Economic Security: How Can Public Dialogue Impact Public Policy?

Leaders: Joni Doherty and Laura Keir  
Organization: New England Center for Civic Life at Franklin Pierce University

This national project has been organized by the National Issues Forums Institutes with assistance from the Kettering Foundation. As the nation slowly recovers from its worst recession in decades, it is a good time to ask, “How can we best take charge of the future so families can feel reasonably secure, parents can help their children prosper, and everyone can move toward a financially stable retirement?” As a regional coordinator of this national project, the New England Center for Civic Life is asking organizations to hold forums on this topic in their communities.

## Discussion #3: Finding a Way to Work Together: Improving Public-Private Partnerships to Spur Dialogue and Action in Biddeford’s Downtown

Leaders: Zeke Callanan and Holli Andrews  
Organization: Heart of Biddeford and Orton Family Foundation

The City is creating a Master Plan for its Downtown, which has declined over the years due to the loss of the mill industry but is seeing some signs of resurgence. The effort is being led by Heart of Biddeford, a Main Street organization, in partnership with the City. It has formed a local committee to help guide the process. The local partners see the Master Plan process as a way to knit the different parts of the city together and create a downtown that works for all.

## Discussion #4: Collaborative Governance Training Institute

Leader: Susan Jeghelian  
Organization: Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration (MODR)

This discussion will address the key issue of capacity building for public officials and public leaders to help them integrate collaborative governance into the way they carry out their public missions. The Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration’s (a.k.a. MODR) 25 years of experience working with public officials has taught us that there is a critical need for outreach, education and training, and the establishment of infrastructure (policies, systems, programs, tools, and other resources) to help public agencies overcome legal, procedural and practical barriers to deploying collaborative/deliberative approaches in carrying out their public missions. MODR is a member of the University Network for Collaborative Governance (UNCG) made up of college and university centers and programs that engage in service and scholarship in order to build the capacity for collaborative governance in their communities and states. UNCG is undertaking a project to establish collaborative governance competency standards to guide training and educational programs for public officials and public leaders in this area. In this discussion MODR will share information and solicit feedback from participants on the concept of Training Institute with programming around a standard/generally recognized set of competency standards.

## Discussion #5: Not (Just) another Public Meeting

Leader: Bill Logue  
Organization: The Logue Group

The traditional public meeting or hearing serves many purposes and is required in some situations. Whether the issue is a local, statewide or national and the topic environment, social services, healthcare, transportation, or urban planning, traditional meeting models can be supplemented or replaced. This workspace will share and discuss experiences about public leader expectations and public expectations about public meetings, especially in relation to the work of community advisory groups, task forces, and other ad hoc committees in highly charged situations.





## Discussion #6: Participatory Budgeting

Leader: Daniel Clark  
Organization: AmericaSpeaks

This session aims to stimulate discussion and engage participants, particularly public managers who have deployed or are interested in deploying participatory budgeting.

What questions do we have about participatory budgeting? What are the best ways to approach involving the public in budgeting decisions? We will discuss these questions and more, and participants are asked to come with their own experiences and questions to share.

## Discussion #7: Learning From Efforts to Launch City-Wide Dialogues on Contraception in Gloucester Schools

Leader: Robert Stains and John Sarrouf  
Organization: Public Conversations Project and Clark University's Difficult Dialogues Program

In 2008 Time magazine reported that girls in Gloucester had entered into a “pregnancy pact”. Despite the fact that this was not true, it was reported worldwide as fact. This left the community angry and traumatized as they neared a decision on whether to make condoms available in schools. A multi-stakeholder planning team was created and a plan designed to offer “Community conversations” in Gloucester, MA. The idea was to give people an opportunity to talk together about the values that were important to them as a way of helping them make their own statements and decisions, not in reaction to the magazine article and subsequent media frenzy. The project was cut off by repeated, damaging editorials in the local paper as the planning stage ended and implementation was on the horizon. This discussion will cover a couple of key issues which this project raises: Can there be any way of having confidentiality in a public process? How can the press be best engaged? What, if any, limits and boundaries are necessary? What other groups should have been engaged?

## Discussion #8: Working Wisely with "Unsolvable" Problems: Managing Polarities in Public Dialogue

Leaders: John Findlay and Abby Straus  
Organization: Zing and Maverick & Boutique

As we come together to create our future in increasingly complex environments, we have two main sorts of issues to address: 1. problems to solve, in which there can be only one right answer (Which property will we purchase for our community center?), and 2. polarities to manage, pairs of seemingly opposed or competing ideas or conditions that exist over time and are interdependent—where both are necessary and where focusing on one, to the exclusion of the other, causes a system to become unstable and create unsatisfactory outcomes (e.g. How do we choose a property that provides both for the needs of the elderly and for the needs of the young?). When we manage polarities well, we experience systems that work for all stakeholders. When we favor one pole, to the exclusion of the other, we encounter the downsides of one or both points of view.

This discussion will make use of the Zing team meeting system, a wireless keyboard system that facilitates structured dialogue or dialectical discourse.





## Discussion #9: Big Change on a Small Budget: How to Garner Meaningful Public Engagement and Affect Change with Limited Resources

Leader: Ariana McBride  
Organization: Orton Family Foundation

The Orton Family Foundation works with small cities and towns to build enduring futures. We primarily engage with these places through the lens of land use planning. In our projects in the east and the west, we have seen our local partners struggle with the level of effort and time necessary to meaningfully engage a broad and deep cross section of their communities. Our partners are relying on overcommitted municipal and/or partner organization staff and busy volunteers to do everything from getting the word out, arranging for meetings, facilitating discussions, and working with consultants, documenting progress and taking action. We've also seen how challenging it can be to engage people in a proactive discussion about the future of a town when most folks are used to showing up only when there is a controversy (if they show up at all). Keeping this in mind, we will discuss how to garner meaningful public engagement and affect change when limited resources are available. Come prepared to discuss your experiences, too.

## Discussion #10: Politics, Policy, and Citizen Participation in City Governance

Leaders: Felicia Sullivan, Rebecca Moryl, and Rebecca Lisi  
Organization: UMass Boston, Emmanuel College, and UMass Amherst

Local governance is one of the most accessible forms of public debate and dialogue. By building important civic skills in local settings, citizens become better equipped to engage in larger public discourses and better able to participate in democratic decision-making. This discussion hopes to shed light on the experience of community engagement in the city setting. Participants will probe the obstacles, understand some of the elements of examples of success, and takeaway some lessons for citizens, urban policy practitioners, and for researchers.

## Discussion #11: What Can NCDD Do to Help Foster Regional Networking?

Leader: Sandy Heierbacher  
Organization: National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD)

The NCDD Boston event will bring together public engagement practitioners from across the Northeast to discuss practical methods and policies for productive dialogue, and to help build a regional network. But what happens after the event? Join Sandy Heierbacher, NCDD's Director, to discuss how NCDD can help the Northeast continue to build and develop its network.

## Discussion #12: Questions about Online Dialogue and What Works

Leader: Noam Shore  
Organization: Idealogue, Inc.

The availability of online tools that help foster online conversations is growing. At the same time, effective utilization of technology requires more than "plug and play" as new dialogue capacity has ramifications for both participants and organizations leading community engagement initiatives. This session will take a look at questions, concerns and opportunities around creating effective online dialogue programs.

