

# Workspace Session Reports from the NCDD Boston Event

October 29, 2010

The workspace session at the NCDD Boston Event provided participants with an opportunity to discuss and work through ongoing cases or key issues or questions in the field. At the end of the sessions, the facilitators were asked to briefly answer the following questions:



*What key points or insights from your conversation would you like us to post on the NCDD blog? & What plans, if any, do you have to continue this conversation after the meeting?*

In the hope of continuing these conversations after the event, we have compiled the answers to these questions and information on who to contact to join any of the continuing conversations.

## Workspace Sessions Related to Ongoing Cases

### 1. **Using a Web-Based Discussion Forum to Help Voters Prepare for a New England Town Meeting**

Led by David Rosenberg of Norfolk, MA and Lucas Cioffi of OnlineTownhalls  
([David-Rosenberg@earthlink.net](mailto:David-Rosenberg@earthlink.net) and [lucas.cioffi@gmail.com](mailto:lucas.cioffi@gmail.com))

*Central issue, question or desired outcome*

How to create high-quality online dialogue to blend into a traditional in-person New England town meeting.

*Key points/insights:*

- In terms of online tools, the most bang for the buck is to help people prepare for the town meeting.
- The purpose of Norfolk's discussion forum using OnlineTownhalls is for peer-to-peer education for the voters and will not be entered into the official record.
- Open Meeting Law affects this public engagement. If there are several members of Education Committee using the forum, for example, it's possible that could be a quorum, so to prevent that, official participation is limited to one representative per committee who will comment for the committee.
- Some towns' meetings are not completely open to the public; it's only open to designated town meeting members.
- Should a business owner who is not a town resident (but who has a relevant opinion), be able to participate?
- Best decisions are informed opinions, and it's best to err on the side of having more information; therefore it's better to raise fewer barriers to participation.
- It's wise to state that new initiatives are experiments so that the public will permit the town to learn in public.

*Continuing the conversation...*

Other Remaining Questions:

- What is the effect of using real names on quality of dialogue, if any?
- What is the quality of dialogue?
- Are there accessibility issues?
- How does the town deal with the challenge of getting participation?
- Can it online discussions change governance in the town?
- What are the public policy implications?
- How does this affect the open meeting law?

## 2. Economic Security: How Can Public Dialogue Impact Public Policy

Led by Laura Keir, New England Center for Civic Life ([keirl@franklinpierce.edu](mailto:keirl@franklinpierce.edu))

*Central issue, question or desired outcome*

Holding public deliberations on economic security and ensuring that the public voice is heard by policy makers at the state and local level.

*Key points/insights*

- Local organizations or towns may sometimes be better suited by local projects/approaches rather than being a part of a national project
  - could benefit the local community more
  - influences public policy on a local level
- Local needs and issues can be a barrier to involvement on a national scale.

*Continuing the conversation...*

- NECCL will continue to help with this local issue by providing resources (including a model for a discussion guide).
- We are continuing to organize National Issues Forums on Economic Security, so anyone interested in holding forums can contact us! Laura Keir at 603-899-1155 or [keirl@franklinpierce.edu](mailto:keirl@franklinpierce.edu).

## 3. Training and Capacity-Building for Public Engagement: How can we give our leaders the tools they need to engage us?

Led by Susan Jeghelian and Loraine Della Porta, MA Office of Public Collaboration ([Susan.jeghelian@umb.edu](mailto:Susan.jeghelian@umb.edu) and [loraine.dellaporta@umb.edu](mailto:loraine.dellaporta@umb.edu))

*Central issue, question or desired outcome*

Building capacity for public officials and leaders to help integrate collaborative governance into how they carry out their missions.

*Key points/insights*

According to National League of Cities (NLC) survey – 95% of public officials responding value public engagement processes. Nearly 50% of them say that both they and the public need more training for engagement processes. Through our brief but robust conversation, we discovered there are a variety of training resources around the Northeast and beyond that are not being utilized. We need to establish a regional “skills bank” that public officials can go to for training/capacity building. We also need to network these resources together so that we can collaborate on initiatives and complement one another.

*Continuing the conversation...*

MODR offered to take the lead in convening a follow-up regional meeting to explore how we as practitioners can collaborate to develop and deliver training for public officials. We will be looking for practitioners with experience in public engagement methodologies, training, facilitation, etc. Contact Susan or Loraine at [Susan.jeghelian@umb.edu](mailto:Susan.jeghelian@umb.edu) or [loraine.dellaporta@umb.edu](mailto:loraine.dellaporta@umb.edu) if you are interested in this follow-up meeting.

#### **4. Finding a Way to Work Together: Public-Private Partnerships in Biddeford, ME**

Led by Zeke Callanan and Holli Andrews ([zeke@heartofbiddeford.org](mailto:zeke@heartofbiddeford.org) and [holti.answers@gmail.com](mailto:holti.answers@gmail.com))

*Central issue, question or desired outcome*

Creating a master plan for Biddeford, Maine and a downtown that works for all.

*Key points/insights*

- We must rebuild relationships with the city on their new merits.
- We'll ask specific and generous questions to increase dialogue on level ground and attempt to increase mutual understanding.

*Continuing the conversation...*

- At the outset, we will start an email conversation.
- Hopefully this will develop into an online forum of some sort, or even something else that may come from another member of the group.

### Workspace Sessions on Key Questions or Issues

#### **5. Not (Just) Another Public Meeting**

Led by Bill Logue ([bill@loguegroup.com](mailto:bill@loguegroup.com))

*Central issue, question or desired outcome*

The traditional public meeting or hearing serves many purposes and is required in some situations, but traditional meeting models can be supplemented or replaced.

*Headline:* Showing up is hard to do

*Key Points/Insights*

- Upstream dialogue is easier.
- It is hard to get people to show up for emergent issues, and is dominated by a few for issues at a conflict level.
- Giving voice to quiet is essential (small groups discussion, cards, dots...) and need reasons to show up for those who have limited time (role of definition/message is important).
- All about relationship building/humanizing – expectations and trust, finding ways to engage earlier.
- Better collaboration and communication across municipal boards and municipal/state agencies will help them engage the public more effectively.

*Continuing the conversation...*

- Await outcomes of leadership training group (see *Training and Capacity Building Workspace*).
- Direct conversation between municipal/state discussion participants.

## 6. What Can NCDD Do to Help Foster Regional Networking?

Led by Sandy Heierbacher, NCDD ([sandy@thataway.org](mailto:sandy@thataway.org))

*Central issue, question or desired outcome*

Continuing to foster a regional network of public engagement practitioners and public leaders following the NCDD Boston event.

*Key points/insights*

- Appreciate what we've done; what we have today, and let continued regional efforts develop organically.
- Encourage leading organizations in the region to host informal meetings (focus on either a common challenge or a specific problem we can work on together).
- Find a way to support existing local networks (like the Boston Facilitators Roundtable); filter NCDD members to those local networks.

*Continuing the conversation...*

- MODR will follow-up with a phone call (involving Sandy, Courtney, Susan) about further regional networking – those interested in joining the conversation should contact [Courtney.breese@umb.edu](mailto:Courtney.breese@umb.edu).
- NCDD will keep up the New England listserv, but we need to identify a moderator. (Send a blank email to [newengland-network-subscribe-request@lists.thataway.org](mailto:newengland-network-subscribe-request@lists.thataway.org) to subscribe.)

## 7. Big Change on a Small Budget

Led by Ariana McBride, Orton Family Foundation ([amcbride@orton.org](mailto:amcbride@orton.org))

*Central issue, question or desired outcome*

Effort and time necessary to meaningfully engage a broad and deep cross section of a community, engaging in proactive discussions.

*Key points/insights*

- Be strategic
  - Don't try to do everything
  - Know which groups/perspectives you need to reach and target them
  - Use local partnerships for meeting spaces, food, other resources
  - Mix online and in-person methods to fill in gaps
- What works to get people to participate?
  - Personal invitations and calls
  - Identify barriers to participation and address them (e.g. day care)
  - Don't move too fast
  - Don't rely on just one meeting
- Know your end goal and share where you're going
- Support volunteers
  - Match their interests to project needs
  - Training (need for simple facilitation course/webinar)
  - Recognize their work
- Need to build capacity over time
- “Good, fast and cheap” - typically have to pick 2 so go with good and cheap

*Continuing the conversation...*

- Use New England NCDD listserv to continue conversation ([Newengland-Network@lists.thataway.org](mailto:Newengland-Network@lists.thataway.org)).

## **8. Politics, Policy and Citizen Participation in City Governance**

Led by Rebecca Moryl, Emmanuel College ([rmoryl@morylenterprises.com](mailto:rmoryl@morylenterprises.com))

*Central issue, question or desired outcome*

The role of government and of community organizations in developing community engagement.

*Key points/insights*

- Challenges:
  - defining community
  - uncovering the invisible
  - understanding you may not represent all of the community
- What are the barriers to being heard?
- Recognize: perfection is not a goal, messiness and resource challenges are real challenges of political driver: pressure for a sprint (rather than a marathon to a solution)
- Key elements to success:
  - transparency is critical
  - build on who you know – relationship building

*Continuing the conversation...*

- Posting notes on Google docs.
- Emails to table participants, others who may be interested in joining the conversation (email [rmoryl@morylenterprises.com](mailto:rmoryl@morylenterprises.com) to join in).

## **9. Learning from efforts to launch city-wide dialogues on contraception in Gloucester, MA**

Led by Bob Stains, Public Conversations Project, and John Sarrouf, Difficult Dialogues Initiative at Clark University ([rrstains@yahoo.com](mailto:rrstains@yahoo.com) and [Jsarrouf@clarku.edu](mailto:Jsarrouf@clarku.edu))

*Central issue, question or desired outcome*

Helping a city clarify its values before voting on whether contraception should be available in high schools.

*Key points/insights*

1. Know the community
2. Find and engage local elder statesmen and women
3. Assess credibility of convener and how task force members are positioned (Old residents? New?) and regarded by the community
4. Get a wide range of representation: high school students, clergy, politicians, press, business, political diversity
5. Have a communications plan
  - Press guidelines – if/how involved
  - Spokespeople
  - Crisis response
6. If the building is on fire, call the fire department!

*Continuing the conversation...*

As the project is ended, we will not be continuing this conversation. The contributions of all who joined in this conversation were greatly appreciated.

## **10. Questions about Online Dialogue and What Works**

Led by Noam Shore, Idealogue Inc. ([noams@idealogueinc.com](mailto:noams@idealogueinc.com))

*Central issue, question or desired outcome*

Questions, concerns, and opportunities around creating effective online dialogue programs.

*Key point/insights*

- Framing purpose
- Match to process
- Blend online/ offline

- Alignment of goals
- Data: new analytics capacity and accountability
- Who are you really talking to?
- Challenging to figure out how to make effective
- Someone needs to own, lead

*Continuing the conversation...*

Create a practice group within NCDD to further experiment with and assess tools and processes for including online technology in dialogue engagements.

## **11. Working Wisely with “Unsolvable” Problems: Managing Polarities in Public Dialogue**

Led by Abby Straus and John Findlay, Zing ([akstraus@gmail.com](mailto:akstraus@gmail.com) and [john.g.findlay@gmail.com](mailto:john.g.findlay@gmail.com))

*Central issue, question or desired outcome*

Managing polarities in the course of public dialogue.

*Key points/insights*

- Help two sides to understand each other.
- Use in a polarized situation.
- Use in stuck places.
- Balance stakeholders' interests.

*Continuing the conversation...*

- Like to see how it works on common problems.
- Abby has offered to continue the conversation with anyone online who wishes to join in (email [akstraus@gmail.com](mailto:akstraus@gmail.com)).