

Deliberative Democracy: A Primer

Deliberative democracy is a flexible tool for spurring interaction and increasing participant investment and interest in a topic.

Description of deliberative democracy

Deliberative democracy is a flexible pedagogical tool for engaged discussion. As will be discussed further the details may vary but **all such discussion include the following elements**;

- Identification and articulation of the topic to be considered. (Some sample topics: “Immigration in American,” “Abortion in American,” “Publicly Financing Higher Education Behind Bars.” “Free Speech on College Campuses.”) In formulating the topic area, it is helpful to have in mind the “sides” or “positions.” Deliberative democracy has also been used to define qualities desired in certain positions. For example, the City of Pittsburgh conducted neighborhood deliberative democracy sessions to define the necessary qualities for the city’s chief of police.
- Neutral materials provided to participants on the topic which present both sides. (These materials can consist of one-page or multiple pages and may consist of textbook reading.) Participants can be provided the materials in advance and instructed to read them before the event or the materials can be provided on the day of the event. (Keep in mind that if materials are provided on the day of the event, that they should be no longer than 1-2 pages.) .
- Structured and unbiased discussion questions developed. A schedule is created with the anticipated time for each question. Upon completion of the discussion questions, each group develops 1-2 questions for a panel of experts.
- Identification and training of discussion leaders. (Discussion leaders can be trained students, faculty and / or administrators, community members or a combination. Two group leaders, one student paired with another can work very well).
- Scheduling of the date for the deliberative democracy event and associated logistics. (Such logistics may include room reservations, ordering hospitality, if available, creation of signage, AV, invitations to others such as reporters or politicians who may be interested in observing the discussions.)
- Recruitment or identification of discussion participants. A class can constitute the participants or the discussion can be expanded to include several classes along with community members. With larger events, it is usual to have an emcee who shepherds the event (an emcee) along with time keepers. Some events use scribes in each group to take notes on the discussion.
- Identification and invitation extended to experts. (Experts need to provide perspective on the topic. Typically you will have experts on either side of the topic and another expert or two who can provide additional perspective, such as an historical, sociological or

philosophical context. In using deliberative democracy in the classroom students could be assigned roles as experts.) A brief training session for experts is helpful to ensure that the experts understand that their primary role is to educate, not to advocate.

- On the day of the event, participants are welcomed and, if need be, given time to read the materials. They are then assigned to a small group consisting of 4-5 participants and a group leader or co-group leader. (In assigning groups it's useful, if possible to break up those that come together or those who are members of the same class.) During the group session, participants are led through the discussion questions. A timekeeper (could be a co-group leader or a general time keeper for all groups) keeps the group on track by announcing the time to move to the next discussion question. As mentioned previously, a scribe is an additional optional position which may be included.. The scribe takes notes of the conversation and does not participate. If the topic is particularly complex, a "Quick Reference Guide" can be prepared and included in each group for reference. (Most discussions do not use such a guide.)
- Upon completion of the discussion questions, the group must agree on 1-2 questions to ask the panel of experts. This process is where the "magic" of deliberative democracy lies. No matter how passionate participants are on an issue, regardless of their "side" all participants discuss and agree on a question or two for the experts - questions that will provide deeper insight on the issue.
- All groups meet with the experts and ask their questions. Experts respond.
- If time permits a short additional period with small groups can take place to briefly decompress about the event.

Possible additional elements / expansions

In addition to the above, the deliberative democracy experience may include:

- Surveys - pre and post. Surveys may be developed which question the participants about attitudes and beliefs on the top along with some demographic data. This element is also flexible. Sociologically sound surveys could be developed (But the purpose of deliberative democracy is engagement first and foremost, rather than the cultivation of Pre-surveys can be matched with post-surveys to determine movement or only post-surveys could be used to obtain feedback on how participants felt about the event itself and the issue.
- Recruitment of participants. As indicated - participants could be a class or a much larger pool. If a larger pool is desired, internal campus recruitment efforts in soliciting other classes and college personnel can be utilized. Outside community members could be solicited by reaching out to program advisory groups, professional groups and neighborhood sites.
- Scribes: A scribe is assigned to a group to take notes but does not participate. The note may be compiled as part of a report on the event.
- Timekeepers: It is very important that the groups progress through the questions on schedule. This should be emphasized to group leaders. A couple of timekeepers to

circulate and announce when it's time to move on to the next question or when it's time to develop questions for experts is very helpful.

- Outreach to politicians and reporters. A press release can be developed to reach out to press members. Outreach to politicians through email and personal contacts can be helpful if that type of interaction is desired.
- Incentives for participants / stipends for experts. Grants or institutional support may enable a small incentive for participants and stipends for participants.
- Hospitality for participants. Depending on when the event is held, hospitality would be a welcomed incentive for most participants.
- Follow-up sharing of results and experiences with media and political entities.

Readings / Additional materials:

- Deliberative Democracy Guide which is also included with these materials. This Guide was prepared by the City of Pittsburgh to assist its citizens in conducting deliberative democracy sessions. As you will see in the Guide the method has been used extensively in Pittsburgh, including in the process to select a new Police Chief.
- Deliberative Democracy on Marriage in American (a grant-funded deliberative democracy project conducted across the state)
<https://www.cmu.edu/dietrich/philosophy/pdd/forums/state/marriage/index.html>
- Deliberative Democracy on Abortion in America
<https://www.cmu.edu/dietrich/philosophy/pdd/forums/state/iaia2022/index.html>
- Program for Deliberative Democracy at Carnegie Mellon University
<https://www.cmu.edu/dietrich/philosophy/pdd/>
- Deliberative Polling: <https://deliberation.stanford.edu/what-deliberative-pollingr>