

Naming and Framing for Deliberative Dialogue

This outline describes a process used by the Charles F. Kettering Foundation and National Issues Forums Institute to name and frame issues for deliberative dialogue forums. While these two organizations prepare issue guides and issue advisories for issues of national importance, centers for public life staff and deliberative democracy practitioners across the nation prepare issue guides for local communities and regions.

1. **Issue.** One or more organizations identify an issue for public discourse.
2. **Framing Team.** The organization brings together a diverse framing team of four-six people who reflect a range of perspectives and expertise.
3. **First Steps.** The framing team reviews the issue and takes two initial steps. **(1-2 hour first meeting)**
 - a. One or more team members take responsibility for research – literature review, polling, historic data points, and any other information that represents a range of opinions and anecdotal data about the issue.
 - b. Team members agree to use a very basic survey tool to interview people in the community to gather concerns about the issue. It is critical to interview not only people “in the know” – community movers and shakers – but people whose voices from whom little is heard.
 - i. Survey Questions **(Two weeks)**
 1. Why are you concerned about this issue?
 2. What aspects of this issue does the public most need to talk about?
 3. What could be done to address this issue?
 4. What obstacles might prevent progress from being made?
 5. What other ideas, concerns, or thoughts do you have?
4. **Review Research and Surveys.** Review survey results and list concerns **(2 hours)**
 - a. Framing team members share the results of their survey work and one person lists and numbers the concerns.
 - b. Other framing team members share and review their research. The group may agree to conduct some more research for aspects of the issue not covered.
5. **Framing.** Frame the dialogue resource **(2-3 hours)**
 - a. The framing team will display all the flip chart sheets of numbered concerns in the room and begin to **identify themes** that will eventually serve as the three or four options or approaches to the issue. The concerns will also inform the group regarding the actions and trade-offs, three to five for each option.
 - b. The options will offer distinctive approaches to addressing the issue. They should NOT be organized by who or what organizations should fix the problem; rather they should reflect a range of perspectives. For example: opportunity, security, and economy.
 - c. After the options are determined, the group discusses a name for the dialogue resource, the underlying question of “What should we do?” is important to consider.
6. **Write and field test the issue guide (two-three weeks)**
 - a. A subset of the framing group should take responsibility for writing the issue guide by using research data for introducing the issue and each of the options. Visual materials are often very helpful.
 - b. Once the dialogue resource is drafted, try it out on several small groups of people and refine as necessary.
7. **Publish the Issue Guide and Promote the Forums.**

