

An Overview of the Discussion Process

In your discussion groups, you will be going through a three-stage process as described below. Please keep in mind that you can always revisit a stage.

Stage 1: Describe the Area of Concern by Developing Questions

In stage one, you'll develop questions about an area of concern. During this stage, you should try to think about the area of concern from multiple perspectives. At times this might be challenging. By the time you are done with this exploration, you will probably be amazed at the range of questions that are developed. You might also be overwhelmed by the scope of what needs to be done. Being overwhelmed at this point is a typical reaction, but moving ahead with the process should help you to keep your explorations manageable.

Stage 2: Generating Policy Possibilities that Respond to those Questions

Once the questions are developed, you will begin to think about possible answers. You probably won't answer every question. In some cases, you might group several questions together and explore the answers to these questions as a set. When you think about answers, you want to be conceptual in our thinking. You are not looking for specific answers as you would expect when solving a problem. Rather you are looking for broad, qualitative thoughts about what might be done in response to the question(s) you have developed.

As this stage unfolds, you will begin to shape your answers into a limited number of broad or conceptual possibilities. These possibilities will represent contrasting approaches our society might take to deal with the questions you have raised. The possibilities are contrasting in that they provide different ways of approaching different aspects of the area of concern. Possibilities are not recommendations. You may not personally agree with every possibility. Your criteria for considering a possibility is whether it represents an interesting choice for others to consider.

Stage 3: Exploring Consequences to Revise the Policy Possibilities

In this stage, you will examine consequences of the possibilities, exploring some of their real-world implications. Again this is an exploration rather than a quantitative analysis. You will be looking for general indications of how the possibilities might take shape in the real world and how they

might relate to the issues that you raised in stage one. Once you have examined these consequences, you can modify the possibilities to make them more acceptable or understandable. You might also see ways to combine some of them. This is also a time to make an overall review of the possibilities in terms of what might be useful for spurring thoughtful discussions among your fellow citizens. This review could lead to the exclusion of some possibilities and the revision of others.