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Interactivity Foundation

Support Materials
for the IF Discussion Process

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Support Materials For the IF Discussion Process

By Jack Byrd, Jr.

**Edited by Jeff Prudhomme
and Sue Goodney Lea**

First Edition, July 2009

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Background Materials

What is the Purpose of the Discussion Project?

The Interactivity Foundation (IF) aspires to create more opportunity for citizens to come together to discuss issues that are of public concern and to develop more approaches that society might take toward such areas of public concern. To that end, IF puts together project groups charged with developing a set of contrasting policy possibilities that respond to a particular public concern. The goal of these possibilities is that citizens will find them useful in thinking about public policies. The focus of the project discussion will be an emerging issue of societal concern. In effect, the project asks a small group of citizens to think about an area of societal concern and develop policy possibilities for consideration by fellow citizens. The end result of the project is a concise report, written in plain English, that average citizens will find easy to read and helpful for developing their own thinking about a public concern.

What is Meant by the Term “Area of Concern”?

The area of concern represents a topic that is at issue for our society, something that we’ve got to grapple with as a society. Most areas of concern that we deal with are “over-the-horizon” issues. Thus they represent issues that are likely to become a growing concern for our society. We hope to develop useful possibilities for discussion before an issue becomes politicized.

Areas of concern represent broad societal issues. We use the expression “*area of concern*” to convey that it is not something that can be reduced to just a single problem or issue. An area of concern is more like a web of interconnected issues. We won’t focus on narrowly defined problems or hot-button issues. Such discussions would likely restrict your ability to discover such interconnections and to imagine a range of novel or diverging possibilities to deal with these issues. Rather, we are looking for areas of concern that have many dimensions. At first, these issues may seem too immense for a small group of citizens to explore. Your facilitator will be very helpful to your panel as you work to narrow the scope of the project.

What Are We Looking for in Panelists?

When we select panelists for projects, we are looking for several traits:

- A willingness to explore the area of concern conceptually, to explore its broader ideas. We are looking for people who are comfortable thinking beyond the practical, here-and-now world of their experiences. We want people who can imagine possibilities in broad terms rather than just thinking of solutions for specific problems.
- A willingness to engage in a discussion where each person helps the other participants think through the ideas. We are not looking for advocates or competitors. Rather we want panelists who can help each other explore and develop possibilities even when they may not personally agree with the possibility.
- An ability and willingness to see issues from different perspectives. The smaller size of the panel does not allow every group to be represented. Thus panelists must be able to step outside their own thinking and think about issues as people from different backgrounds might see them.
- An ability to get “lost in the moment.” Our discussions will challenge you to experience the freedom of speaking without fear, to be hopeful without ridicule, and to follow paths of thinking without knowing in advance where you might end up. Some of these paths may end up being dead-ends – or they may only appear to be so. We need participants who are willing to entertain such ideas or move down such paths because that may be the way to discover something truly worthwhile.

What Am I Committing To?

As panelists, your basic commitment is to meet with fellow citizens once a month for a discussion session. Overall the series of discussions will likely run for approximately 12-14 months. Each session is likely to involve a 3-4 hour time commitment per discussion session. The meetings are both serious and informal. You'll find that the atmosphere is friendly and easy-going. At the same time, you'll likely feel like you're getting into a lot of deep or difficult issues. Panelists often remark about how hard it was to think through some particular set of issues – and then turn around and say how fun it was! Your meetings will usually have refreshments or a meal, which helps keep up the energy level and sense of hospitality.

Your discussion facilitator will be responsible for developing notes or work documents from each session. Your responsibilities are to participate during the discussion sessions and to review the notes or work documents between sessions. Otherwise there's no other work for you, nothing to study or research.

We work with small panels (typically 7-9 people) so your participation at each session is critical. The discussion in each session builds on previous discussion, and it's hard to pick up with the flow of a project after an absence. Should you have to miss a discussion, we ask you to notify the facilitator as soon as possible.

While your time commitment is important, the most important commitment we ask you to make is your thoughtful participation in the discussion. We value your experience and insight, yet even more we value your willingness to work in an interactive and collaborative manner with fellow citizens. We are not asking you to represent anyone or any group. We are not asking you to be an advocate. What we are asking is that you be a citizen who is interested in thinking openly about a topic of social and political concern so that other citizens can benefit from the possibilities that you and your fellow panelists will develop.

How Will We Explore the Area of Concern?

We will be going through a five stage process. While these stages are described below in order, we can always revisit a stage. Two panels will explore the area of concern simultaneously. The first panel will consist of persons with professional experience relevant to the area of concern. The second panel will be ordinary citizens whose familiarity with the area of concern will be from their general life experiences outside of work.

Stage 1: Describe the Area of Concern by Developing Questions

In stage one, we will develop questions about an area of concern. During this stage, we want you to feel free to think about the area of concern from multiple perspectives. At times this might be challenging in that you will need to consider the perspectives of others. By the time we are done with this exploration, you will probably be amazed at the range of questions that have been 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 your facilitator will help you manage the effort to make it manageable.

Stage 2: Generating Policy Possibilities that Respond to those Questions

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

As this stage unfolds, we 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 will be contrasting in that they provide different ways of approaching different aspects of the area of concern. The possibilities are not designed as specific recommendations. You may not personally agree with every possibility. Our criterion 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, we will examine likely consequences of the possibilities, exploring some of their real-world implications. Again this is an exploration of ideas rather than a quantitative or numerical analysis. We 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 we raised in stage one. Once we have examined these consequences, we can modify the possibilities to make them more acceptable or understandable. We 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.

Stage 4: Joint Panel Discussions

Once the possibilities have been adjusted, we will meet with the other panel. When we meet, our goal is to develop a common set of possibilities that both panels support. Often the panels will have very similar possibilities, so the effort of arriving at a common set of possibilities will not be difficult.

Stage 5: Creating a Citizen Discussion Report

In this stage, the facilitator uses the material that emerges from the Joint Panel discussions to develop written descriptions that will be shared with the public. Our focus is to write in concise language that average citizens can understand. Our intent is to develop a document that will help stimulate reflective discussions by a diverse range of citizens in small group settings.

How Can I Be a Good Discussion Participant?

Panelists often comment that these discussions are some of the most satisfying experiences that they have had. To make the discussions useful and satisfying there are some general discussion guidelines that we ask you to accept:

1. **Support Your Fellow Panelists** – Our discussions are not debates. There are no winners or losers. We hope you will help each other understand the issues being discussed. A good approach is to employ the motto of “yes – and”: you accept what your colleagues say and build on it. Don’t reject ideas out of hand. Try to accept them, play with them, and develop them further.
2. **Be Willing to Explore** – This may be a new experience for you in that you will be asked to think about issues without confining yourself to the practical realities that you normally confront in your daily life. We ask you to imagine the *way things might be* without worrying about *the way things are*.
3. **Limit Your Anecdotal Story Telling** – All of us have personal experiences that will be relevant to the discussion. Some of these stories can be very insightful. Most will be interesting. But you will have to decide when a personal story really adds to the discussion. If you do share a story or anecdote, make sure to use it as a jumping off point for the discussion of some broader or more general concerns.
4. **Be a Contributor but Not a Dominator** – We want everyone to contribute to the discussion. Some of you are more comfortable speaking up than others. Ideally everyone will feel free to discuss issues, but you can help by letting others have a chance to talk and by inviting quieter participants to add their ideas.
5. **Trust the Process and the Facilitator** – The facilitator has extensive experience with these types of discussions. At times, you may feel uncomfortable with what you are being asked to do. You may not know where the discussion is headed. You may be grappling with some really big and difficult questions. This is an important part of the discussion process: having an unhurried space to puzzle things out together. That feeling of not knowing the answer, not knowing how to proceed, can be awkward. But those are often the most creative times for the panel. Work with the facilitator and you will see where the process is going. The facilitator’s guidance will be especially important as you move from one step in the discussion process to another.

What Role Does Partisanship Play in the IF Discussion?

In IF discussions you'll find yourself exploring contrasting perspectives and lines of questioning in such a way that the typical partisan labels will begin to seem irrelevant. Our projects start with areas of concern that are too complicated to be resolved with pre-fabricated partisan positions. In your discussions, you and your fellow panelists will have the opportunity to look at an area of social or political concern as if for the first time. You'll be rethinking or re-imagining how public policy might respond to some of the many different kinds of concerns you discover. You'll soon find that you'll be discussing issues in ways that can't be confined to typical partisan positions or the status quo of current policies.

In all cases, our final product is a collection of conceptual possibilities that are contrasting. When we say "conceptual possibilities," we mean that they set out a basic idea or the gist of how public policy might respond to some aspect of an area of concern. They are not detailed legalistic statements. Should you look at our previous projects, you will find it difficult to confine the resulting policy possibilities with the traditional labels of political parties.

During our discussions, we want to explore possibilities from different points of view – including views that you might find disagreeable. We will ask you to think beyond yourself and your own personal beliefs. We will ask you to make your best case for these different points of view.

We don't look for political balance on our panels. We don't even ask panelists to identify their political leaning. We're looking for people who show a willingness to look beyond their own leanings and develop ideas in ways that contrast with, or even run contrary to, those leanings. Similarly, the facilitator's political preferences or policy views have no role in the discussion. The facilitator's role will be to keep the discussions moving in ways that uncover contrasting perspectives and possibilities. Often this will mean that the facilitator will challenge you and your colleagues to think of other perspectives, especially if the discussions seem to have overlooked a particular point of view. The facilitator's job is to help you think of more possibilities, to open up your thinking.

What Perspective Do I Adopt During the Discussions?

You were selected to serve on the discussion panel in part because of the personal insight that you bring to the topic. Certainly we want you to share that insight with the panel. But we'd also like you to try to think as an other. You were also selected to serve on the panel because of your willingness to entertain other points of view. Be yourself – and an other.

On the one hand, we are asking that your perspective be your own. What we mean is that we aren't asking you to represent your employer, an interest group, or any other group you may belong to. We want to know how you as an individual feel about the discussion topic. We often refer to our discussion projects and their meetings as "sanctuary" discussions because we want you to feel free to talk about issues without fear. In this sense, your personal perspective is what we are asking you to share with us.

On the other hand, we don't want you to restrict yourself only to what you personally happen to believe. Our panels can't be big enough to include every relevant perspective on the panel. So we rely on you to explore perspectives beyond your own. There will be times in the discussions when the facilitator may ask you to take on these other perspectives. You might be asked to think about a point of view that is missing from the discussion panel. You may find this challenging when the perspectives are those that you disagree with or which are foreign to your own experience. Often we find the challenge of thinking of other perspectives can add new conceptual insights to our discussions. Over time, you'll find that each panelist's contributions will add together to broaden the perspectives that you each might have had on your own. The panel will be more than the sum of its parts.

The facilitator will help you approach each discussion from the proper perspective.

What Is the Final Product of Our Discussions?

The final product of the IF discussions is a document that describes the possibilities developed by the panelists as well as the basic questions that prompted these possibilities. Toward the end of the process, both panels will meet together as a joint panel to discuss the ways they separately explored the area of concern and the different ideas for public policy that grew out of these explorations. The thinking that emerges from this joint panel discussion will be captured in a “Citizen Discussion Report” – a report of possibilities intended to stimulate exploratory discussions among citizens. This Citizen Discussion Report will then be used in other discussions occurring across the country.

These subsequent “citizen” discussions will take place in small groups, in informal settings, much like your own “sanctuary” discussions. Our goal for these citizen discussions is to have citizens, everyday people, learn from your efforts so that they can be better engaged in their own deliberations and conversations about the area of concern. We are not trying to convince our fellow citizens to support a particular policy or even a particular way of looking at the area of concern. We want to encourage these citizens to make up their own minds about the issues presented in your report. Our goal is to stimulate more thinking and more thoughtful discussion, so we’ll be happy if we find that they discover new possibilities or raise questions that may never have come up during a project.

Because we want everyday citizens to benefit from your thinking, we will try to frame our Citizen Discussion Report, our final work product, in language that they’ll find useful and accessible. We find that most people work best from documents that help create mental images of the possibilities. It also helps to use language that helps people see the different lines of thinking a person might follow. Thus our Citizen Discussion Report will describe the possibilities for public policy in ways that should help other citizens embark on their own thinking about these possibilities and the choices they’ll face as citizens.

What Happens After Each Discussion Is Concluded?

Most panelists will respond something like this at the end of a discussion: “Wow, we sure covered a lot of issues, but I’m not sure we really got anywhere.” Or, “We were all over the place, how will we ever make sense of this?”

The role of the facilitator is to bring structure to the discussion. The facilitator has experience with synthesizing wide ranging discussions into a coherent structure. We call this the editorial function of the facilitator.

Following the meeting, the facilitator will use the meeting notes to develop discussion summary notes that capture the gist of the discussion. These are not transcripts or meeting minutes. These notes will organize the discussion in a way that you’ll be able to build on in future sessions. They won’t reproduce every single thing that was said. Instead, they’ll try to get to the heart of the discussion and highlight the main ideas you brought up. Since your discussions will focus on developing thoughts or ideas regardless of who says or thinks them, the summary notes won’t indicate who said what. Your individual contributions will all flow together into one group product. The summary notes will be organized around the major topics or big thoughts that you discuss, so they won’t match the precise order of the actual discussion session. In most cases, you will receive a copy of these summary notes prior to the next meeting.

The facilitator will be open to suggestions for changes in the summary notes should you feel they don’t capture the essence of the discussion. But remember these notes are simply rough drafts of the main ideas of the discussion. They are intended to be useful in capturing what was said so that the next discussion can continue to build on those ideas. The notes are not intended to preserve individual contributions to the discussion. Rather, they are intended to foster the panel’s collaborative development of contrasting thoughts. When you review the documents, your main focus should be on how well the documents captured the central points of the overall discussion.

How Is the Area of Concern Developed?

IF discussion projects focus on broad areas of social or political concern rather than on more specific problems or concrete issues. An area of concern encompasses a range of related issues. It is intended to be a loose designation. It points to or includes issues about which citizens might have to make a political choice.

A project's area of concern is selected through a development process within IF itself. Typically, an IF Fellow suggests a topic that appears to be an emerging or growing social concern that would be a good fit for the IF process. The Fellow will not be an expert on the topic because we want there to be a fresh set of eyes facilitating the discussions.

When we evaluate topics for suitability for the IF discussion process, we consider several factors:

- Is this a topic of emerging political and social concern? We look for topics that are likely to be a real future concern but which are not yet at a "crisis" stage.
- Are points of view about this topic still being developed? We want topics that are not rigidly polarized.
- Does the topic fit within the scope of an IF discussion project? We want topics that are ripe for exploring fundamental concerns and big ideas, but not so broad that it will be difficult to focus the discussion. We want panelists to focus on different ways to look at or think about a given policy area, not focus on solving a particular problem with set ways of defining the issues. We might call this a topic ripe for "conceptual development," where panelists can explore different ways to frame the basic questions that public policy might try to answer.

Once a topic appears promising, we explore it at a Fellows meeting. The Fellows, in effect, act as a panel and explore the area of concern as a panel might explore it in its first session. This initial "test run" of the area of concern helps us identify the challenges that might be faced in an IF project. It also helps the Fellow to clarify the presentation of the area of concern and the initial questions that might be used for discussions with eventual citizen panelists.

Following this test run, IF makes the final decision whether to approve an area of concern for an IF discussion project.

How Comprehensive Will We Be in Exploring the Area of Concern?

The area of concern is by its nature a broad topic. It is intended to broaden the horizon of the discussion and go beyond the typical focus on a single issue or specific problem to be solved. An area of concern encompasses many different kinds of issues. Our goal is not to produce a comprehensive document that focuses on all aspects of the area of concern. The exploration process is very developmental. The panel, with the help of the facilitator, will uncover and develop the different aspects of the area of concern through the discussion process.

Often discussions can become very broad and range far afield. Sometimes they only *seem* to be wandering. It's important to keep in mind that we don't start with definitions and we avoid finally defining the area of concern. Rather, we explore different ways of *describing* the area of concern. Often this descriptive approach may feel too vague. You may want to pin things down with definitions. Resist this. This descriptive approach is vital to exploratory discussions. The facilitator will help you stay focused but without defining the precise parameters of the discussion. There may also be times when the facilitator will ask the panel to narrow its discussion. The facilitator may also have the panel explore aspects of the area of concern it has not considered.

In all cases, the facilitator will help the panel explore the area of concern within an appropriate scope. Without this guidance, the discussion can become too broad or too narrow. This guidance is not intended to steer the discussion toward any particular point of view. It is intended to enable your discovery of different ways to look at the area of concern.

When you finish your work, the report you produce will describe the scope of the area of concern you have developed, but it will not offer fixed definitions, nor will it attempt to provide a definitive or exhaustive account of the area of concern. You're not shutting out other ways to look at the area of concern. You are opening some of the many ways to look at it and inviting others to explore some of the many aspects you have discovered.

Stage 1:
Developing Conceptual Questions
About the Area of Concern

How Do We Develop the Conceptual Questions?

During the first several discussion sessions, the facilitator will ask you to begin developing questions to explore different dimensions of the area of concern. Questions open up our thinking to pursue discoveries. They help to raise possibilities for our consideration. Questions also frame the way we think about a given topic: the questions we ask are a guide to the kind of responses we'll find. So, we start the process of describing the area of concern by exploring the big and emerging questions that citizens might eventually confront about this area of concern.

You'll likely find this process of asking questions to be fascinating, since it will allow you to open up new ways of looking at the key concerns society might face. Focusing on identifying the big questions might free up your mind, since you won't have to worry about justifying assertions. You will likely start thinking about the area of concern in ways that go well beyond what you might have previously imagined.

You may also have doubts about the question process itself. You may wonder how the list of questions will ever be brought into focus—or how you'll ever answer them. The facilitator is very experienced with organizing the notes from the discussion. The facilitator will take your thoughts and shape these into an organizational framework for the next discussion.

As you go through the process of generating questions, there may be times when you think that the facilitator is continuing the discussion longer than needed. It has been our experience that some of the most significant lines of inquiry occur after a panel thinks it has already exhausted the topic. Often these late entries into the discussion are the most innovative and insightful. They often probe issues that would normally not be considered in conventional explorations of the area of concern. (See the Bench Strength story on the next page for more discussion of this topic).

Your panel will probably start the process of developing questions at its initial meeting and continue this process for the next meeting or two. Keep in mind, however, that this discussion process is meant to move like a real conversation—not a mechanized process. This means there's room to circle back to topics that may have come up earlier. It means that most phases of the IF discussion process can be revisited at any time during the project.

Bench Strength

The game was a rout almost from the start. It was early in the basketball season when higher-level teams play what are called “buy-in” games. These are games where lower level teams from smaller divisions are guaranteed a fixed amount of money for playing the game. The lower level teams know they have little chance of winning, but the payout for playing the game can often fund a significant part of their athletic program.

This game had around five minutes to go. The coach of the winning team decided to remove most of the players and substitute players that were deep on the bench. These guys deserved some time in a real game. They had worked hard in practice, and they might not have many more opportunities to play once conference games started.

The new players on the floor were almost comical at first. Many of them were playing out of position. All of them wanted to get in the score book in a positive way. And then something happened. One of the bench players called the team together. What was said in that impromptu huddle was unclear, but the bench players started playing with efficiency as a team. At times they looked better than the starting five.

From that moment on, the bench team became a regular contributor to every game. They would come into the game as a team, and often their energy and team skills would turn a deficit into a lead.

At the end of the season, the coach paid tribute to his bench. “This season taught me that you’ll never know how important those late moments can be in an early season game. I thought I had seen all that I needed to see from my team. The fans had left the arena, and the coaching staff was thinking ahead to tougher games. But I learned something that I’ll never forget. You need to keep yourself open to new ideas about your team even when the game appears to be over.”

The development of ideas can mimic the flow of a runaway basketball game. In most group settings, there is a flurry of ideas early in the generation process. There is a quick accumulation of ideas that seem to have merit. After a while the idea production wanes and most new ideas are simply modifications of previous ideas. The roster seems to be set. The game seems to be over. But if the group takes a time out, calls on its reserves, and regroups its efforts, some interesting new ideas can be generated. The process of developing ideas never really stops as long as people keep an open mind. Don’t close off late developments just because you think the game is already over.

What Do You Mean by Conceptual Questions?

In our daily lives most of us focus on concrete practical issues. When we ask questions, we are looking for specific answers. Conceptual questions are designed for a different level of exploration – both broader and deeper. They are questions that help you focus on a more basic and encompassing level of discussion. They'll help you engage in more of a conceptual discussion. What are “concepts” anyway? You might think of them as ways we can group things together in our minds. They can provide ways of framing the issues or ways of looking at things. They can help you get a handle on a topic, help you make sense of it. They can also provide a way to get to the bottom of things, to say what something is all about.

The following are some characteristics you might think of when developing conceptual questions:

1. They are focused on broader themes that often surround more particular problems or more specific issues. They might start with some particular issues, then ask, “What is the more general concern surrounding these?”
2. They are focused on penetrating to the heart of an issue or getting to the basic matters. They might ask, “What are the basic factors that are at play here?” or “What’s at the root of this?”
3. They are qualitative (descriptive) rather than quantitative (numerical).
4. They are designed to open up exploration of possibilities rather than to assert conclusions. They are open to different possible answers and to more than simple “yes” or “no” responses. Rather than asking “how?” or “why?” they ask “how might?” or “why might?”
5. They should help you explore dimensions that often are overlooked:
 - Connections that are not readily apparent
 - Perspectives of citizens that often are ignored
 - Systemic factors that are challenging to identify

When you are generating questions, you don't have to worry about whether they are “conceptual enough.” The facilitator will help you to bring out the conceptual aspects of your questions. Often what is a very specific practical question can lead to several very productive conceptual directions.

What Happens After We Develop the Initial Set of Questions?

When the development of questions concludes, you may be intimidated at first by the sheer number and scope of the questions. Your facilitator will organize the questions to make them more manageable.

Also, the facilitator will work with you to frame the questions in conceptual terms. That will help focus your future discussions on broad conceptual themes rather than on narrow problem-solving issues.

Your facilitator will also work with you to identify the questions that you want to explore further in subsequent stages of the project. As a panel, you will help direct the scope of subsequent discussions through the identification of the questions you would like to explore. Keep in mind that the discussion process is not intended to move in a rigidly analytical way. You'll likely find that certain big questions rise to the surface as those that the panel really thinks need attention.

The Blue Bags

The road rambled over rolling countryside in West Virginia. There were few houses or buildings but lots of trees. And here or there along the roadside would be a stylish looking blue bag hanging from a tree. The bags looked like those used by high end fashion retailers. The bags seemed to be hanging upside down. Few people who traveled that lonely fifty-mile section of road ever noticed them let alone wondered about them.

There was no apparent pattern to the placement of the bags. They were not evenly spaced. They were not placed near anything identifiable. They were just blue bags along the highway.

Imagine the possibilities. What was their purpose? Or did they have one? Why were they put in some places rather than other places? Why were they on one side of the road but not the other side? Or did it matter? Why were they blue and not another color? Was the color significant or just a personal choice? **Before you read on, imagine the possibilities.**

Creative possibilities spring from our imagination. They require us to disconnect from our current reality and our conventional ways of seeing things. The blue bags offer this kind of a disconnect. They caused us to think in ways we normally wouldn't. Generating possibilities requires us to diverge from conventional patterns. Possibilities don't follow a pattern or a formula just as the blue bags had no apparent pattern in their placement. Possibilities ask us to question what's really important, just as we wondered whether the color of the bags really mattered.

When you're trying to generate possibilities, you need to engage your imagination. To do this, it can help if you have a disconnect, such as the blue bags: something that doesn't fit in, something that makes you wonder, something that breaks with your routine ways of looking at the world. Once your imagination is engaged, you'll realize that it's all about creating possibilities rather than about studying the solution to a problem. What do you see as a possibility?

Stage 2:
Developing Policy Possibilities
that Respond to the Questions

What Will We Be Doing in Developing Answers and Shaping Possibilities?

This stage begins by examining the questions we selected for initial discussion. We will explore these questions from the framework of “What if...?” rather than from the framework of “How might...?” “What if” implies an exploration of where society might go without undue consideration of current circumstances. “How might” begins with the current situation and tries to determine how we might change it. Our exploration focuses on contrasting possibilities for the future rather than on strategies for dealing with present situations.

As we discuss the possible answers, your facilitator will be capturing your thinking on a flip chart. These notes are critical in bringing together your wide ranging thinking into a coherent collection of possibilities. These possibilities represent “collections” of answers around “themes.” These themes are often present in the discussion but not recognized as such until the notes are reviewed by the facilitator after the meeting has concluded. Developing these themes can be a bit like the game of “where’s Waldo?”. At first, Waldo is in a sea of people and it’s hard to find him. But once you find him, you wonder why it took so long. The themes are like Waldo. They may be hard to find, but once identified they seem obvious.

The possibilities will represent contrasting ways of addressing the questions. Contrasting in this case can refer to different dimensions of the area of concern or different ways to respond to a particular set of questions.

At first the number of possibilities may be rather large (say, 10-15). As the discussion process unfolds, the number of possibilities will decline in number to a workable range of 6-8.

Of all stages, this one may be the most demanding and the most fun. This is the stage when you will begin to see the shape of what will become the final product of your discussions.

Where Do We Start in Developing Answers?

In most discussions, there are some questions that are “hot topics” for panelists. Often these questions are used to start the development of answers. The development of answers for these questions can become the platform for developing other answers.

The development of answers is an unfolding process that flows naturally. There is no organized structure or set order in developing answers. Instead the answers are developed in a way that the discussion of one set of answers flows into the discussion of another set of answers. The facilitator will guide you through this developmental process.

Read the “Going with the Flow” illustration on the next page. The developmental process for answers is a lot like flying a glider plane. You are reacting to an unfolding set of responses and from these responses you are determining the directions the answers will go. There is no pre-flight plan.

Going with the Flow

Ed had just won his third national title as a glider pilot. The award was based upon his ability to guide his powerless glider over a long distance and land the plane at a target location. Ed's story had become a personal interest story in an extreme sports magazine.

Reporter: I'm impressed by your award but I'm curious. What skills do you need to be a champion glider pilot?

Ed: Obviously you need to know how to pilot a plane, but that's not what makes you a champion.

Reporter: I'm intrigued. I thought you would have told me about your piloting skills.

Ed: Actually, I think of myself as a micrometeorologist. When you fly a glider, you have to judge the weather 10 feet in front of the glider. Then you just have to guide your plane in response to the immediate weather you see.

Reporter: It sounds like your success is really controlled by things you can't control?

Ed: It's true that I can't control the weather but I can, to some extent, control the weather that I fly my glider into. With experience, you can learn that one small segment of weather will often lead to other segments of weather.

Reporter: Fascinating. Could you say that you are less of a pilot and more of a facilitator for your plane?

Ed: Very well said.

Will We Need to Have Information Sources to Respond to the Questions?

Our process is designed to work with the knowledge, insights, and experience of the panelists. We will not be researching published or other traditional information sources as the basis of the answers. We ask you to develop your own answers as if no one had ever thought about these questions before.

You may wonder why we take this approach. Information, when published by some perceived authority, often takes on an aura of validity that, in fact, may not be warranted. You don't have to watch a debate on TV for very long to realize that experts can often have very different points of view.

Experts often become advocates. Does their advocacy destroy the validity of their work? In many cases it may. But we are in no position to test the validity of what others claim to be valid.

If the facilitator or panelists bring outside information to a discussion, the information may tend to frame or otherwise limit the discussion in inappropriate ways.

What we want you to do is to think about answers from your own insight. Although you may not be an expert in the topic area being discussed, you have a lifetime of thinking and experience which can be used to develop the starting point for answers.

The illustration on the following page, "Expertise and Insight," may give you a tangible example of why we take the approach that we do.

Expertise and Insight

The firm of Seavers/ Austin is one of the top architectural firms in the nation. Their specialty is the design of educational facilities. One of their marketing strategies was to take prospective clients on site visits to completed projects to show off their impressive designs. These visits were a very effective way to showcase the expertise of the firm.

One such visit was to a campus where Seavers/ Austin had designed a new academic structure containing classrooms, offices, and labs. The building's appearance was stunning.

The visit occurred while classes were in session, which meant they only viewed the classrooms when they were empty, during breaks between classes. As they were leaving one classroom, however, the professor invited them to stay. "This is a freshman engineering class and my students are interested in structures," the teacher commented. "Would you mind if the class asked you about your design?"

Mike Jenkins, the representative of Seavers/ Austin was delighted. What a great way to showcase their design!

To start things off, a student seated in the back of the room asked, "Whenever you sit in the back of the room, you can't see the entire screen when a PowerPoint presentation is being given. Did you consider the projection sight lines in your design?"

Jenkins was floored. They never thought about where a projector would need to be placed. He responded, "That's a good question. But, you always need to make trade-offs in any design. I'm sure our architects thought about the projector but they were constrained by other factors."

Next, a student to the side of the room asked, "The overhead lighting is directional, which is good if you are sitting right under the lights. But you can see that there are five rows of seats in here and only three rows of lights. Could you tell us your thinking behind your choice of lighting?"

By this point, Jenkins wanted to get out of the room as quickly as possible. What followed were a series of additional questions all in the same vein. The students' questions reflected their experiences as users of the space that Seavers/ Austin had designed, and they were embarrassing to Seavers/ Austin. The final question was the clincher: "Could you tell me if you ever had any actual students work with you on your design?"

What was meant to be a marketing showcase for Seavers/ Austin turned out to be a disaster. Grace Baxter, the client representative concluded the visit with her comments: "I'm impressed with the professional expertise of Seavers/ Austin, but expertise alone isn't what we need. We also need the insight of the user."

Professionals tend to view issues based on their expertise and as filtered through the lenses of their specialization. In many cases, these professionals don't have to live with the consequences of their expert judgments. They don't have to take into account the actual experiences of those who use the things they design. But the practical insights born from everyday life were precisely what the professionals from Seavers/Austin needed.

When it comes to thinking about public concerns, about policy possibilities and their consequences, the perspective of professional expertise is not good enough on its own. You need to take into account the perspective of the user, the lived experiences of citizens. Practical insights, the kind of wisdom you can get from life experiences, may not be rooted in scholarship, but they are just as critical in the exploration of possibilities and their consequences. Ordinary citizens may not have specialized training on an area of public concern, but they can offer the practical insights that come from experience. Both expertise and practical insight are needed in addressing the complex concerns our society faces today, but we have to make sure that the perspective of expertise does not close off the insights of the user.

Do We Need to Answer Each of the Questions We Develop?

The process of developing questions is an important part of the sanctuary discussion process. Questions frame different ways to find an answer; they embody different ways to look at an area of concern. Questions can function as catalysts for the eventual development of contrasting conceptual possibilities. In this way, questions provide “clues” for what the possibilities might address. You’ll likely develop tons of questions.

You do not need to answer each question. You might want to suggest a possible answer for one question. The discussion that follows this suggestion may in turn address other questions. Thus there is not a one-to-one correspondence between questions and answers.

You may also find that some questions no longer seem to be critical to the overall discussion process. Your facilitator will hold these questions for later use should the time be appropriate. You may find that some questions are just more fundamental than others. Over time, some will rise to the top as the big questions or concerns that public policy might address. By addressing these, you may find that the smaller questions get answered along the way.

As you are developing possible answers, you may raise additional questions as well. Like a catalyst that starts a chemical reaction, the questions are meant to be the starting point for the development of conceptual possibilities. And, as with a chemical reaction, you’ll find that sometimes these developments can set off a whole chain of reactions, raising and answering more questions as you go.

How Complex Should Our Answers Be?

Complexity often implies a wealth of details and an intricate web of logic. But complexity does not automatically translate into a “better answer.”

We are not necessarily looking for complex answers. Rather we are looking for answers that may be simple in formulation but profound in their significance. A simple formulation may be a sign that you have gotten to a very basic kind of policy choice, which is a good step toward developing some useful contrasting possibilities.

Your formulations may be simple or plain spoken, but that’s not the same as being simplistic. The key to thinking about simple yet profound policy answers is to explore the possibilities below the level of a single cause and effect. This means exploring root causes and recognizing how many factors are often interlinked. Many public policy discussions rely on a kind of single level cause-and-effect analysis. See the Coffee Can Illustration for an example of what we mean when we refer to single level cause-and-effect analysis.

When issues are explored at multiple levels of cause-and-effect, answers can actually become simpler rather than more complex. This is because you’ll be thinking about more basic issues rather than a hodgepodge of specific problems. Often policy choices seem so complex because they don’t deal with the underlying issues at their root. Instead they propose “work-arounds” or patches that may solve near-term problems but ultimately seem to fail or have even worse side effects.

Simpler answers are better as long as they get at the systemic or fundamental issues.

Coffee Can Answers

The Dean's Office had a leak in the ceiling. The Physical Plant sent two employees to fix the problem. After spending a half-hour looking into the ceiling panel, they gave their initial diagnosis: "It looks like we have some work to do. We may be a while."

They called their supervisor to report in. After a brief conversation, the call ended. "Our supervisor wants to look over the job."

In 15 minutes, the supervisor arrived and he looked up into the ceiling panel. He called his staff outside the office. A few minutes later, the employees returned to the job. In less than 10 minutes, they announced they had fixed the problem.

...

Two weeks later, the leak returned. The Physical Plant was called again. This time a different pair of employees arrived. They removed the ceiling panel. Their diagnosis was quick to make: "We found your problem. The coffee can is full. We'll just empty it. You could just check on it whenever there is a rainy day."

Now, think about how often we use figurative "coffee cans" as answers to the problems we face. These coffee can answers don't look at the systemic issues that are at the root cause of our concerns. They're stopgap measures that might deal with some of the immediate symptoms, but they do little to address the underlying issues. When you begin to generate possibilities, try instead to develop possibilities that address those more complex underlying issues.

As you develop these possibilities, ask yourself: Have you addressed the real questions at the heart of the issue or are you just reaching for another coffee can answer?

Do We Need to Have a Complete Answer?

Often the answers that are the most creative are the ones that started out as just fragments of an idea. You may be concerned that you have to have a fully developed answer before you share it with others. Don't worry about how polished or complete your answer is. We will work with each answer to develop it more fully.

Often we will take several initial answers and merge them into a more complete possibility. But we can't do this without each of the component answers.

You will be amazed at how answers grow and develop from your initial thought. "Ragged" ideas are often better than more complete ideas in that they allow the development of more useful answers. When you censor your own ideas, you tend to end up with ideas that aren't that original or useful.

What Role Should Current Policy Play in the Development of Our Answers?

In most cases, the topics we will be exploring represent issues for which there is limited current policy. When current policy does exist, it may not address the questions that your panel has raised. These discussions are a chance for you and your fellow panelists to re-imagine what possibilities there could be for this area of concern. We don't want you to be hemmed in by the status quo.

Current policy should only be considered in the development of answers if you feel it addresses questions you have developed. Current policy should not necessarily be ignored, but it also shouldn't be taken as a starting point for the discussion. And there's no reason to assume that current policy should finally determine either the terms of the issue or its answer(s).

Most of our panels have not spent much time discussing current policy because they don't feel that current policy addresses the range of concerns of the panel.

When current policy is introduced into the discussion of answers, you will need to be careful that partisanship and advocacy doesn't enter into the discussion. Current policy discussions can often disturb the safe or "sanctuary" discussion environment we are trying to create.

When we are exploring possibilities we are looking for conceptual possibilities not solutions to current problems. Bringing existing policy into the discussion is likely to lead the discussion into a problem solving focus. In general, it's better to approach possibilities without specific reference to current policy.

Current policy can also have a dampening effect on the creative development of possibilities. When you think about the development of possibilities, start with your questions and answers. Often a few of the most challenging questions will be the most useful in thinking about the conceptual possibilities. These questions are the ones that typically trigger a flurry of additional follow-up questions when the questions were first being developed.

What are Conceptual Policy Possibilities?

Conceptual policy possibilities are guidance for the direction that a policy might take. Conceptual in this case indicates that the possibility is focused on more general issues rather than specific issues. Conceptual possibilities have several common features.

- They are hopeful. They focus on what might be.
- They provide general guidance rather than specific prescriptions
- They are focused on the future and do not address current problems

Possibilities also have a policy focus. They provide guidance for how citizens might view an issue of public concern that will need to be addressed eventually by branches of government. Possibilities are not legislative proposals, but rather they represent different ways of approaching an issue of public concern.

A conceptual policy possibility combines several of the answers developed earlier in the discussion process into a coherent statement. Not all conceptual policy possibilities will address the same set of answers. Some possibilities can focus on some aspects of the area of concern while others might address other aspects.

Ultimately the conceptual policy possibility should be a description of guidance on a long-term approach to public policy that citizens can understand and find interesting for discussion.

As a collection, the possibilities do not need to be exhaustive of all possibilities that could be developed. Citizens will use these possibilities as a platform for developing their own thinking about the area of concern. Thus the possibilities are meant to be a catalyst for discussion rather than a menu of choices to be voted upon.

Why Discuss Conceptual Policy Possibilities?

You may be wondering just what “conceptual policy possibilities” are—and why anyone would be interested in talking about them. Discussing conceptual policy possibilities is a way for citizens to explore different ways that we, as a democratic society, might respond to some area of present or emerging public concern. Here’s one way to break this down.

Discussing “public policy” means thinking about the ways that society might approach some area of social or political concern. Policies give us a kind of rule for action, telling us how we, as a society, will deal with some public matter. Talking about policies is a way to talk about the decisions we might make as citizens in a democratic society.

Discussing “policy possibilities” means exploring *the way things could be*—without being hemmed in by the way things are or always have been. By focusing on “possibilities” we can free up our thinking. This might enable new discoveries and new insights.

Discussing “conceptual policy possibilities” means exploring the big ideas without getting lost in the complex details of how a policy might be implemented. Concepts are a way of getting to the heart of the matter, a way of cutting through the surface details and saying this is what something is all about. Concepts also provide a way to frame an issue. Concepts shape the way we look at things. Once you get the concept, you can see how it applies to more than one situation. Most of us know, whoever gets to frame the terms of a discussion tends to determine the results. Talking about different “conceptual policy possibilities” gives us a way to explore different ways to frame public policy without getting hung up on a lot of specific details—and without wedding ourselves to any one of those approaches. It’s a way of engaging with the big ideas so that we can test out the different values that might shape public policy and the different goals we, as a democratic society, might aim at in our public policy choices.

The phrase “conceptual policy possibilities” may sound like a complicated mouthful. But what we have in mind is a way for any citizen to get to the bottom of things, to free up one’s thinking, and to explore different ways that we, as a society, might face some major emerging social concerns.

How Will We Develop the Possibilities?

The conceptual possibilities can evolve from very simple thoughts of panelists. Often the best way to think about a possibility is to work through an imagination exercise of what might be. You might start this exercise by finishing the sentence: *It would be great if...* Take a look at the illustration entitled “Miss Jones’ children” on the next page for further guidance.

Your imagination exercise might be “ragged.” Over time the facilitator will help you shape your thoughts into a conceptual possibility. The key is to avoid imposing current realities on your thinking. Conceptual possibilities are not solutions for current problems. Instead they are expressions of where we might go as a society.

One person’s imagination exercise might lead to an extended discussion. Once one conceptual possibility is fleshed out, then it’s time for another person to create another imagination exercise starting point.

Initially the imagination exercise will be developed from your own personal desires of what might be. At some point the facilitator will challenge you to conduct an imagination exercise from the perspectives of others with different backgrounds. You will need to think how others might see an issue and what their desires might be.

Typically a panel will develop 7-12 possibilities to start. Later in the process, some of the possibilities will likely be combined, eliminated, or modified. At this point, we are just looking for different ways of thinking about the issues.

Miss Jones' Children

Miss Jones was in her 90s. In her assisted living apartment, she was surrounded by drawings that she had made of her kindergarten classes over her 50 year career. She loved to remember her children.

Miss Jones was an artist. It had been her custom to draw a montage of each class. She explained her approach this way: "I try to capture more than just a likeness of each child. My drawings reflect my vision of them as individuals. The drawings reflect hope. You'll see that I'm not specific in my caricatures. For example, I don't picture them as firemen, teachers, or athletes. What I try to capture are the qualities that make each of them special. These are the qualities that they will have forever."

"I try to reflect these qualities in their eyes, in the expressions on their face, in the positioning of their mouth, and in other ways that seem important to me. I don't have a formula for my drawings. I draw what seems important to me. I never let their family circumstances or other reality shape my drawing of them. What I'm doing is drawing possibilities."

Possibilities are about hope for the future. They are developed from thoughtful observations of what might be. They are not meant to be a "design" of what should be. They are not meant to be an accurate portrait of the way things are. Possibilities are subtle in their presentation. They are not meant to be a roadmap. But there is something real about them: Miss Jones' drawings sprang from the hope she saw in each child's face, not from studying their biographies or family situations. Each person viewing a possibility can make his or her own interpretation of where it might lead. Over time possibilities can develop into more specific concepts, but for now they are simply expressions of hope, like the hope that shines through the drawings of Miss Jones' children.

How Do We Work Together in Developing Possibilities?

Developing possibilities involves an interactive collaborative act. Possibilities begin with one panelist's exercise of imagination. Providing the starting point can take courage.

The role of your fellow panelists is not to criticize your thoughts but to help you develop the idea further. For more on this, read the Comden and Green illustration on the following page. The development of possibilities is a creative process much like the work of Comden and Green.

While the collaborative process might sound appealing in the abstract, it may be challenging when the possibility is one that you do not like. Whether or not you like a possibility, you need to support its development with the best of your thinking. In fact, your contribution on these possibilities will be especially valuable, since you might help to make them more comprehensible to people who share your views.

Remember, we are not making recommendations. We are creating conceptual possibilities that citizens will find useful for expanding their thinking about the area of concern. What you are doing is working collaboratively with your fellow panelists to make the possibilities useful for others to think about.

Comden and Green

Betty Comden and Adolph Green met in the late 1930's. They were both aspiring Broadway actors but had little success. They decided to form their own troupe and joined up with another aspiring actor, Judy Holliday, to create and perform their own productions.

Comden and Green discovered they had a talent for writing song lyrics. Soon their acting careers were over, and Comden and Green set off on a career journey that has led to some of America's most enduring music.

Some of their lyrics include:

- Singin' in the Rain
- Just in Time
- Make Someone Happy
- New York, New York
- The Party's Over
- Lonely Town

Their partnership lasted for nearly 70 years until the death of Adolph Green in 2002.

Over the years of creative collaboration, Comden and Green rarely had serious disagreements about their work. One might wonder how two people could create such memorable lyrics. Which one of them was bold enough to suggest the first words of the song? How did they respond to each other when something didn't seem right? When did they know they were done?

One more thing to think about: they often wrote the lyrics before they knew the melody of the song.

Developing possibilities is not that different from what Comden and Green did. You have to start somewhere. The person who starts has to be comfortable that others will respond in a collegial fashion. The collaborative process needs creators, and builders, and those who are good at doing the touch-up work. You can always tweak an idea and make it better, but the creative process also needs to have a closure.

You may not know the "melody" when you start. Creating possibilities is an interactive process that eventually connects some basic beliefs, values, or themes ("the lyrics") with various ways of embodying these ("the melody"). You probably won't know how it will all come together, and, just like Comden and Green, you don't need to know this in advance to be successful at creating your own possibilities.

Should We Study Others' Writings When We Develop the Possibilities?

No! We are looking for your own ideas, not what other people have to say about the topic. We want you not to be hemmed in by what others have already said or written about the topic. We are not conducting a research study that only compiles what the current thinking is about a topic. The end product that we want to achieve is a collection of possibilities that were developed by and will be useful to citizens in future discussions.

When you bring outside written materials into the discussion, they may tend to serve as a starting point for the discussion, and they may also limit our exploration. Materials written by experts often don't necessarily have the insight that only citizens bring to a discussion. There's no reason to privilege the writings of others over the insights you are able to develop in your discussions. We want to develop your own insights, not simply review what conventional opinion deems acceptable for publication.

Expert written materials often are based upon assumptions that don't necessarily fit the situations of many citizens. These assumptions may reflect the particular bias of the author of the material, or of the community of experts within a particular discipline.

As with current policy (see page 33), the ideas suggested by outside written materials should only be considered if you feel they help to address questions you have independently developed. Outside written materials shouldn't be used as either a starting point or, in any way, as a limit on your explorations and discussions. In general, we would rather approach the subject as if no one else had examined the topic of our discussion.

How Much Should Our Perceptions of What Is Acceptable Influence Our Development of Possibilities?

The key point in thinking about this question is that we are exploring possibilities for the future. We should be careful about imposing any restrictions on our explorations. History is full of examples of social changes that people said would never happen. Yet they did. Unexpected developments do happen, so don't hem yourselves in by a limited view of what might be acceptable.

Perceptions of what is acceptable can be a major restriction on the creative process that we need in developing possibilities. Read the "Playing the Game" illustration on the next page. As adults we tend to approach any challenge first by understanding what won't work or won't be allowed.

In your discussions, however, we are asking you to think about the development of possibilities without concern for what you believe is acceptable. Later in our discussion process, we will examine the possible consequences of what we are generating in this phase. For now, let's not impose any limits on your thinking.

Playing the Game

It's a simple game. Teams of five to six persons are asked to pass three tennis balls from one person to another in the same sequence. The time to complete the task is measured. Any dropped tennis ball is a penalty of 10 seconds. The teams are challenged to cut their time in half after each attempt. The following are three case studies of actual experiences with the game.

Group 1 - Completed the first trial in 15 seconds. They were then able to reduce their time to 7 seconds on the second trial. As soon as they saw the results of their improvement, they quit.

Group 2 - Was never able to make an improvement. In fact they got worse as they continued. They argued over what should be done.

Group 3 - Looked at the game *as a game* and went from 15 seconds to 1 second in one trial.

Who were the three groups?

- Group 1 was a collection of plant managers for a major U.S. corporation.
- Group 2 was a team of senior partners in a law firm
- Group 3 was a group of children in a kindergarten class.

Think about the lessons that we can learn from the above experience.

- We tend to impose limits on ourselves. We imagine reasons why things can't happen rather than thinking of possibilities.
- We fail to challenge our perceptions of the "rules." Rules convey our sense of what will be allowed. We tend to get stuck on very narrow interpretations of what the rules might mean.
- We become complacent with some improvement without considering whether other improvements are possible.
- Our expertise and our experience may limit the way we look at issues. It's hard to have an open mind about something when our experience and expertise are challenged. By relying on our expertise, we might overlook possibilities that seem too obvious or simplistic.

The kindergarten class was able to master the challenge because the children were not bound by the accumulation of self-imposed constraints that adults place on their thinking. They had more of a beginner's mind that was open to possibilities the adults could not see. You'll need that kind of a beginner's mind when you're trying to generate possibilities. You'll need to question the rules and push beyond the limits of your preconceived ideas or beliefs about what is feasible or acceptable. And you just might wonder, how did those kids do it?

What Types of Possibilities Work Best in Citizen Discussions?

When we are developing possibilities, we are not trying to develop an exhaustive set of possibilities. Rather we are trying to develop possibilities that will be useful to citizens in future discussions. What makes possibilities useful? Our experience suggests the most useful possibilities have the following qualities:

- They have the capacity to engage citizens' interest, whether intellectual, moral, emotional, or a combination of these.
- They offer some distance from the status quo.
- They have the capacity to evoke a "different world" or, to make the familiar seem "new" again, or to help participants use the status quo as a "foil" for considering alternative possibilities.
- They are rich in insight. They offer contrast from one to another.
- They have a clearly identified policy or governance component (who the key actors are and how they will interact, as well as who will make decisions, how decisions will be made, and what sorts of consequences are contemplated, including who might "gain" and "lose").
- They are open to different interpretations or descriptions as to means of implementation, consequences, future direction, or modes of unfolding.

and/or

- They are described in language that is unbiased and of sufficient clarity to avoid disputes over the meaning of words.

What Does the Term *Contrasting* Mean with Respect to Possibilities?

Basically, contrasting means that the possibilities are different from each other. Contrast in our context can be reflected in a number of ways including:

- Different points of focus in the possibility
- Different perspectives based upon diverging social, economic, moral, (etc.) beliefs and practices
- Different conceptual approaches based upon how one views the role of government in confronting the issue.

More particularly, as we use the term “contrasting” for the possibilities developed by the IF discussion process—

- contrast is not that useful when it simply represents different places on a political spectrum from conservative to liberal. Such contrasts tend to lead to political debates rather than to useful discussions.
- the contrasts should be useful to citizens who will be discussing the possibilities. The contrasts should reflect aspects of topic that are a real concern to citizens.
- contrasts should not be so nuanced that few citizens will really understand the difference from one possibility to another (see the illustration entitled, “Two Grams” on the next page). When you’re talking about contrasting possibilities, they should be possibilities that offer clearly distinct approaches to the area of concern. People should be able to see how there are fundamentally different visions embodied in the different possibilities.
- Possibilities should be contrasting but they don’t need to be mutually exclusive. Citizens might decide that they especially like one of the contrasting possibilities. Or they may decide they like features of one possibility and features of another one. They may see ways to combine two or more possibilities to address different dimensions of the area of concern. Contrast doesn’t necessarily mean that support for one possibility means you couldn’t support another one.

Contrast is simply a way of giving citizens different and useful ways of looking at an area of concern.

Two Grams

The Nike Corporation had developed four new possible designs for a driver. Nike hoped that Tiger Woods would adopt one of them. With Tiger's endorsement, the driver was sure to be a top seller.

Nike arranged for Tiger to test each of the models. When the test was over, Tiger was asked for his favorite. "I like this one because it's the lightest," Tiger said.

The Nike engineers were perplexed. All of the drivers were of the same weight. But Tiger persisted that the driver he selected was lighter. To satisfy their curiosity the Nike engineers weighed each of the three drivers more precisely. To their surprise, they found that the driver that Tiger had selected was indeed lighter – by two grams. To give you an idea of what that means, that's about the weight of two regular paper clips.

Now it's likely that only an expert like Tiger could have sensed the difference in weights. Most of us, or at least your typical golfer, would never notice such a subtle distinction. We might find the same situation with experts on public policy. Experts who devote their attention to specific areas of public policy often get hung up dealing with the fine details of public policy. Only these experts can really value these nuances, just as only an extraordinary golfer like Tiger can sense two grams in the weight of a club.

As we develop public policy choices, we need to keep our focus on citizens just as citizens – not as public policy experts. Citizens will see public issues in simpler more human terms. They likely won't worry too much about fine details or subtle nuances. They'll focus more on the basic personal choices about how to approach complex policy areas. As you think about describing these policy choices for your fellow citizens, try to find ways to express these policy choices in the simplest possible human terms. Ask yourself if you're getting hung up about those two grams, or if there's a simpler way to express the basic policy choice you're describing. Remember, those two grams may make a big difference to Tiger, but not to the average person, who is likely facing more basic choices about what kind of club to use or even whether to play golf at all.

Stage 3:

Exploration of Consequences

How Do We Explore Conceptual Consequences?

Once the initial set of possibilities is developed, our next step is to identify what might be the result of each possibility. Identifying consequences can be difficult because nothing ever happens in a static environment. There will be an initial response to enacting a possibility followed by subsequent actions and reactions.

When you explore these real-world implications of each possibility, your facilitator will help you work through some representative consequences. Representative in this case implies a range of possible consequences. Some of these may be contradictory to others. What we are trying to do is to get a sense of how the possibility looks with respect to many of the questions we raised earlier.

During this phase, we will ask you to take on perspectives that are different from your own. We want to look at consequences from a number of perspectives.

Once we have explored the consequences, we will reexamine the possibilities and adjust them as appropriate. Also at this time, we will identify those possibilities we want to continue considering. We may drop some possibilities, modify possibilities, combine possibilities, or even add possibilities.

The end result of this phase is a collection of possibilities that we feel fairly comfortable in taking forward into discussions with other citizens.

What Is Meant By the Term Conceptual Consequences?

Conceptual consequences are basically an exploration of what kinds of broad societal changes might result from the conceptual possibility in the future. It's a way to imagine what the world would be like if a given policy possibility was the way society approached the area of concern. The exploration of these consequences can help you identify revisions you might want to make in your conceptual possibilities.

There are several challenges in the exploration of conceptual consequences. It's rarely clear how a possibility might affect the area of concern. Thus consequences can often be described in contrasting ways. In one case, the consequences can lead to a desirable outcome while in another case the consequence might possibly generate something undesirable.

This equivocation may seem undesirable but remember that we are exploring possibilities not doing advocacy. When the discussion leads to uncertainty about the consequences of a possibility, this is simply a reflection of a healthy discussion about the possibility rather than advocacy for the possibility.

Exploring conceptual consequences can also be difficult because possibilities are not a simple matter of cause and effect. The response to possibilities is not static, and circumstances will change over time. Often what at first seems undesirable can turn out very positive and vice versa. The "Bottle Dilemma" illustration on the next page is an example of how consequences can be viewed differently over time.

As you explore consequences, you might ask yourself "if this happens, then what might happen next?" This questioning might help you think through consequences which are more dynamic.

As you are exploring consequences, you might wonder when the process will ever end. Remember that the exploration of consequences is meant to be a proving ground for thinking about your possibilities, not a precise or numerical assessment or a research study. More will be said about this in a later section ("How Far Should We Take the Exploration of Conceptual Possibilities?")

The Bottle Dilemma

Asa Candler was a pharmacist and drug store owner when he had the opportunity to buy the rights to a tonic that went by the name of Coca-Cola. For years, Coca-Cola was sold as a fountain drink. Candler didn't believe there was a market for a bottled drink.

In 1899, Candler gave in to some entrepreneurs from Chattanooga, Tennessee who convinced him that Coca-Cola would sell in bottles. Candler essentially gave away the rights to bottle the drink (selling them for a dollar) as long as the bottlers bought the syrup from him.

The Chattanooga bottle experiment was a success and people from other states came to Candler asking for bottling rights. Again Candler virtually gave away the rights as long as they purchased the syrup from him.

Over the years, the bottling companies have become enormously successful. At first blush, the consequences of Candler's actions in giving away the bottling rights looked to be one of our nation's greatest business blunders. Candler could have sold the rights for a large amount of money. He didn't. In the process, he created a vast network of entrepreneurial success stories. And as the bottling companies succeeded so did Coca-Cola. Candler could have kept the bottling rights. He didn't. And in the process, he created partners rather than competitors. What looked like disastrous consequences of Candler's decision have been recognized as one of the primary reasons for Coca-Cola's long-term success.

Consequences are not always what they seem at first glance. There can be a vast difference between short-term and long-term consequences. You might feel certain that you can predict how things will unfold. But honestly, it's hard to imagine that Candler's decision to give up the short-term gains of selling his bottling rights would have appeared to be anything other than folly. Yet this short-term folly was the key to Coca-Cola's success. You might assume that there will be a continuous development along a predictable path between the immediate consequences and long-term consequences. But reality can intervene. Consequences are never static. They change as reactions to them change. When you think about consequences for policy possibilities, remember that, at best, all you can do is to explore some of these diverging pathways of what *might* happen rather than making firm predictions of what *will* happen. So try thinking differently. Remember that the very thing that seems to be certain folly might very well turn out to be a stroke of genius.

What Is the Purpose of Exploring Conceptual Consequences?

The primary purpose of developing conceptual consequences is to get some sense of how the possibilities address the issues identified in the area of concern. The exploration isn't intended to be an assessment research activity but an overall discussion of what society might look like should the possibility become the overall direction the nation might take. This should give you more of a real-world perspective on the possibility.

In many respects, the *discussion* of the consequences and the insights derived from this discussion are just as important as the resulting consequences that are identified. This discussion will ultimately lead to refinements in the possibilities.

The discussion of the consequences will also be helpful in the next step in the overall process as we select the possibilities to be taken forward. Possibilities that get excluded will often have a number of undesirable consequences that outweigh their favorable consequences.

The discussion of the consequences can also reveal conceptual gaps that suggest the need for a new possibility or the strengthening of existing possibilities. In some cases the same negative consequence may be identified to be present in every possibility. In this case, you will need to discuss how to "fix" the possibilities to reflect this consequence.

Finally the discussion of consequences will give you some preview of how citizens might discuss the possibilities. Citizens will be thinking through the consequences as well. The more involved your discussion of consequences is, the more likely it is that citizens will also find the possibility to be interesting for discussion.

How Far Should We Take the Exploration of Conceptual Consequences?

The exploration of conceptual consequences is intended to be a way for you to think about the conceptual possibilities you are developing. This exploration is not intended to be a formal assessment study.

The exploration of consequences should continue as long as you think the exploration is adding new insight into how you might further develop your possibilities.

When you are exploring the consequences, there are likely to be several broad dimensions for your exploration (e.g. economic, social, moral, political). You might also want to explore specific dimensions that reflect your initial set of questions. These specific dimensions will examine how the possibility responds to issues that were initially raised in the development of the area of concern.

When you are developing the consequences, your facilitator will develop these as a list of what might happen. The consequences that you develop are not intended to be predictions. Rather, they are meant to be a process of thinking about the developing conceptual possibilities.

The end result of the development of the possibilities will be a list of what might happen. This list will eventually be shared with citizens as they discuss the possibilities that you have developed.

What Perspective Should We Take in Exploring Consequences?

With any exploration of consequences that could affect the public, the question of perspective arises. Often a consequence that may be desirable for one group of citizens may not be so desirable for other citizens. How do we reflect these multiple perspectives in our exploration of consequences?

One way to look at consequences is to think about groups who are likely to be the most affected by the possibility. In all cases there will be a broad category of citizens-at-large. But we also need to think of particular collections of citizens in our exploration. There could be specific communities or groups that might especially benefit from a given possibility – or they might be harmed. There are likely to be interest groups that are especially involved in the area of concern. We need to consider these perspectives as well.

When we think about other perspectives, we are merely noting how the possibility might be viewed by these multiple perspectives. In no case are we suggesting that the possibility should ultimately become a compromise that supports all perspectives.

In the description of your consequences, you might suggest how the consequences might be viewed by different perspectives. That way the citizens who discuss your report will be able to think through the consequences from these multiple points of view.

The challenge that you might face is to think about these consequences from perspectives that are different from your own. Failing to incorporate these multiple perspectives in your exploration can lead to a potentially biased view of the possibility.

Should the Consequences for Each Possibility

Deal with the Same Topics?

Not every possibility will have the same types of issues with respect to consequences. The discussion of consequences should flow naturally without any pre-developed checklist.

In reality, you will probably discuss similar topic areas when you explore consequences. Once you get moving, you're likely to think of similar categories of consequences for each possibility. But each possibility is also likely to have a unique set of issues to explore when developing consequences.

When the exploration of consequences is done, you will likely end up with consequences dealing with many of the same topics. But particular possibilities will also have consequences that are unique.

How Will We Select the Possibilities We Want to Take Forward?

After the exploration of consequences, it's time for you to review the policy possibilities both individually and as a whole set in order to make decisions about which possibilities to take forward. All of the considerations below can provide guidance for how a policy possibility might be evaluated. We are *not* interested in rank-ordering the policy possibilities, nor in reaching consensus on these. Generally if one person chooses to keep a policy under development, it is taken forward. Our review should hold itself as free as possible from consideration of current policy, or from our assessments of current political realities or of the political viability of certain policy ideas.

Ignore these factors:

- Lack of personal support by panelists (no need for consensus or unanimity)
- Lack of perceived political support or acceptance by the public in general
- Too close to, or too distant from, current public policy

Consider these factors:

- How useful the possibility might be for stimulating citizen discussions
- Lack of practical relevance (doesn't really produce the outcome originally intended)
- Too many adverse practical consequences (that could not be addressed by revising the possibility)
- Internal inconsistencies (some aspects of the policy description may not fit well with others)
- Weak in comparison with a similar possibility (another similar policy possibility addresses the area of concern more adequately)

Be prepared to discuss these questions:

- What reasons would support decisions to exclude (or revise, combine, select, etc.) a given policy possibility?
- What changes, consistent with the basic principles of a given policy direction, might be made to keep a possibility from being excluded?
- Given our goals of prompting useful, creative, and broad public discussions about this policy area, how do decisions to exclude or revise the policy directions stack up?
- Will our ultimate product be less or more likely to stimulate useful and interesting citizen discussions if the possibility is excluded?
- Does a given possibility contain useful elements that could be incorporated into others?

On the positive side, you might consider these questions:

- Does the policy direction clearly address an aspect of the area of concern?
- Is it sufficiently distinct from others to offer a usefully contrasting alternative for public policy?
- What additions or deletions might be made to help the possibility to be even more useful?
- Is it likely to lead to interesting, thought-provoking, and useful citizen discussions of the policy area?
- Are there any gaps in addressing the area of concern that need to be addressed to help the ultimate product be more useful for citizen discussions?

Is There a Preferred Number of Possibilities?

There isn't a single preferred number of possibilities, but there is a preferred range of roughly four to seven possibilities. There should be at least four possibilities. Having four possibilities will help to keep citizens from viewing one of the possibilities as being a preferred possibility – as a happy medium between two extremes that can then be ignored.

If you have six or seven possibilities that is probably the upper limit of the number of possibilities that can meaningfully be discussed by small group of citizens. Since we're generating these possibilities for the purpose of small group citizen discussions, we want to keep a cap on the number of possibilities to make these discussions manageable.

Citizen discussions generally require one session to discuss a couple of possibilities, where the session might last for two or three hours. When the number of possibilities grows beyond seven, it is very hard to incorporate all of these possibilities into the citizen discussions. It is also hard for the citizens to hold all the ideas in mind or to see how they might interrelate with one another.

If your panel initially can't cut down its possibilities to seven or fewer, don't worry. There will be additional opportunities to reduce the number of possibilities.

Should We Include Possibilities That Are Essentially Opposites of each Other?

Remember that the main purpose of the overall effort is to produce a discussion report that is useful for citizen discussion. When citizens discuss a possibility, they often naturally discuss the opposite of that possibility. For this reason, you probably don't want to include in the report two possibilities that are essentially clear opposites of each other.

If you end up with two opposite possibilities, which do you include in the report? You will usually want to include the possibility that your panel find the most attractive. Often this is the possibility that seems directly to address the area of concern in a positive way or in a way that is directly meaningful to citizens. In most cases the opposite possibility is only being considered as a "straw man," a kind of extreme caricature of a policy idea. In discussion sessions, citizens can usually tell when an idea is just a sort of throwaway idea, introduced just to be contrarian. And most people would usually prefer that such ideas were just thrown away. They can't get much out of ideas that seem to be caricatures. If a possibility seems like such a straw man, perhaps the panel won't have trouble in excluding it.

Can We Combine Possibilities Rather Than Exclude Them?

Combining possibilities is very desirable and generally happens in a project. There should be a logical or natural connection for combining the possibilities. Your facilitator will help you develop the combined possibility and help you develop the connections that make the combination appropriate. This can be one effective way to trim down the number of possibilities you have developed.

Generally you don't combine more than two possibilities since the connections between three or more possibilities may be difficult to develop and support. You'll have to be careful when making combinations that you don't end up with a patchwork of random pieces stuck together. It will help if you focus on an underlying theme that can unify the different aspects of the newly-formed combined possibility.

Do the Possibilities Need to Be Mutually Exclusive of Each Other?

No they do not. You may have possibilities that represent different dimensions in the area of concern. In these cases, the possibilities are contrasting, but they are not contrasting on the same dimension.

If the panel feels that many citizens would find both of these possibilities interesting and in combination attractive, the panel may want to look at whether the possibilities can be combined into one possibility.

In many cases, there could be one possibility that is so attractive that the panel feels that this possibility will overwhelm the other possibilities. It might be something that seems relevant to all the other possibilities. It might be getting at an underlying theme that could be addressed in each possibility. In this case, the panel might consider incorporating this possibility into every possibility and essentially eliminating it as a stand-alone possibility.

Should the Panel Maintain a Possibility that Appears to Be Unacceptable?

The criteria for inclusion of a possibility in the report is whether the possibility would be useful for exploratory discussions by citizens. Some possibilities that the panel finds to be unacceptable may actually be very useful for citizens to discuss. Often it's easier for people to describe what they like when they begin by describing what they don't like.

When an unacceptable possibility is likely to generate a discussion that is simply negative and even derisive, that possibility should not be included in the report. There's no need for an extreme idea to be included in the report solely to be knocked down as a straw man. The possibility should have some meritorious features for it to be included, even if most of the panelists think the idea is unlikely to meet initial widespread public acceptance. Try to keep in mind that some of the most creative insights can come from ideas that initially seem to be so far out of the mainstream that they are initially unacceptable.

Stage 4:
Working Through the Possibilities
with the Other Panel

What Will We Be Doing in the Joint Panel Meeting?

The discussion process works with two panels working independently and simultaneously to generate a number of contrasting policy possibilities. While you've been working with your colleagues on your discussion panel, there has been another group working in a parallel fashion. Once each panel has finished revising and consolidating a set of contrasting possibilities, you'll be ready to meet as a single joint panel. As a joint panel, you'll share with each other the possibilities you developed independently. The goal of these combined panel sessions is to enable more fruitful interactions and to come up with a composite set of recommendations that will be presented to the public in the Citizen Discussion Report.

Your facilitator will help you to take a comparative look at the possibilities developed by each panel. It's very likely that there will be similar possibilities developed by each group. Your facilitator will help you see how to weave these similar ideas together into a possibility that reflects the intent of both panels. When possibilities are unique, the facilitator will help you decide which of the unique possibilities should be included in the final report.

You might imagine that joint panel meeting would be a contentious affair, but that has not been our experience. In fact the participants really enjoy seeing how another group worked through the same area of concern. The two panels generally welcome learning from each other, since they've each concentrated so hard on these topics. There is usually a strong sense of a shared bond, even though people are meeting each other for the first time. When each panel sees how deeply the other group thought in developing its possibilities, the joint panel meeting becomes a confirmation of the work of both panels.

How Will We Describe Our Possibilities to the Other Panel?

When it is time to describe your possibilities to the other panel, you'll want to develop a simple one-page description of the possibility. The keys to writing these descriptions are as follows:

- Write the descriptions in conversational plain English
- Don't try to include everything you discussed in your descriptions
- Don't go into operational detail; focus on major themes and big ideas
- Describe some representative consequences of adopting this policy possibility

Attachment A on the following two pages contains a sample of the description of one possibility. Don't worry about the typographical formatting or the sidebars at this point.

Attachment A**FULL SPEED AHEAD!
EMBRACE HUMAN GENETIC TECHNOLOGIES**

We human beings are, by nature, tool-making and tool-using animals. Human genetic technologies are tools to exert control over our human biology and the natural world. This policy possibility aims at supporting their development and use as part of our inherent humanity.

Suppose you believe that using technology to change ourselves or to control our environment is a fundamental part of our human nature. It's what we humans do. If so, you may feel that human genetic technologies are just another outgrowth tools to change and possibly improve ourselves. In this respect, they are no more problematic than other technologies. They offer us new ways to extend our control over our own biology. Aspects of our human existence that used to be matters of destiny, things we just had to accept, could now become matters of choice. If this vision of human existence appeals to you, you might be attracted to this possibility. It aims at affirming the development and use of human genetic technologies as a basic part of our human nature. Human genetic technologies are "natural" for us, so we should embrace rather than resist their use.

Suppose this general approach meshes with your basic beliefs about what it means to be human: to be human is to be a tool-making, tool-using animal, If you look at it this way, you may be interested in taking an unconditional approach toward affirm the technological imperative: the fact that we *can* do something means that we *should*. We really *ought* to pursue the development and use of human genetic technologies, because to do otherwise would be a violation of our basic nature. We really should use human genetic technologies to try to improve ourselves individually and/or as a species, because such efforts are what make us truly human. This kind of blanket approval might appeal to you if you are motivated by core philosophical, moral, or religious convictions about the meaning of being human as a

technological and self-transforming animal. If you affirm this unconditional approach, you might also believe that society has an obligation to support the development and use of human genetic technologies.

Or you may be interested in a more cautious approach to affirming human genetic technologies. You

may still be motivated by similar beliefs about being human as a technological animal. But you might want to make room for some cost-benefit analyses when weighing potential uses of human genetic technologies.

Instead of an unconditional "yes" to such technology,

you might think of this as an "innocent until proven guilty" approach. In general, we as a society should craft public policy to affirm the use of human genetic technologies *unless* there is a balance of evidence against particular uses. If the potential harms outweigh the potential benefits, then we may have to disallow some human genetic technologies. You may lean toward this conditional approach if you like the idea of affirming technology as something natural, but are less concerned with uniformity and more concerned with preserving the ability to adjust policy decisions on a case-by-case basis.

The fact that we can do something means that we should. We ought to pursue the development and use of human genetic technologies, because to do otherwise would be a violation of our basic nature. We really should use human genetic technologies to try to improve ourselves individually.

Considering Some Potential Consequences

Administrative or Programmatic Consequences

- Consider how the policy might go about implementing either an unconditional affirmation or a more conditional affirmation of human genetic technology.
- Consider the kinds of mechanisms for public education and public input needed to sustain this policy over time.

Impact on Well-being, Health, and healthcare Practices

- Consider how the policy might lead to a greater risk of negative, or even catastrophic health effects. What about its effects on the process of human evolution? What if people choose non-adaptive traits, traits that make it more difficult for them, or their offspring, to survive or live healthy lives?
- How might the policy impact the overall level of health of the population as a whole or of distinct classes of people?
- How might the policy impact the overall practice of healthcare?

Technology Research and Development

- How might the policy impact technology research and development? How might it affect the relation between technical experts and the general population?

Socio-Economic Effects

- What impact might the policy have on economic development, both domestically and internationally?
- Consider how the policy might lead to expanding levels of socio-economic inequalities with increased discrimination (in areas like employment and education)? Alternatively, consider how it might lead to socio-economic equality across society if it affirms genetic technology as a public good.
- Consider how it might lead to increased international cooperation, or, in contrast, increasing international conflict.

Socio-Cultural Effects

- Consider how the policy might lead to a cultural attitude that overemphasizes the value of technology in general, and human genetic technologies in particular. Contrarily, consider how it might lead to a cultural backlash against technology.
- Consider how it might lead to a cultural mindset overemphasizing the role of genetic factors in human health and development. Or, contrarily, consider how it could lead to a more balanced understanding of gene-environment interactions.
- Consider how the policy could foster a mindset of conformism and a preoccupation with being a “perfect” human. Or, contrarily, consider how it might lead to a backlash against such conformism.

What Happens If the Joint Panels Can't Agree on Some Key Aspect of the Possibilities?

Surprisingly, serious disagreements are not that common in the joint panel meeting. The spirit of collegiality that has developed throughout the project carries over to the joint panel meetings also.

Should a serious disagreement occur, the facilitator will make the final decision. The facilitator has to play the role of the editor of the Citizen Discussion Report that embodies the joint panel's thinking. The facilitator will respect the opinions of the panelists in the decision. The facilitator's decision will be based upon what is likely to work best for the subsequent citizen discussions.

What Happens After the Joint Panel Meeting?

After the joint panel meeting, the facilitator will develop a draft of the Citizen Discussion Report. This draft will be shared with the panels for their comments.

In most cases the panels will meet at most one time after the joint panel meeting. During this meeting, the facilitator will go over the draft of the report with the panelists.

Once the project has concluded, the facilitator will keep in touch with the panelists to let them know how the citizen discussions of the report are going.

Stage 5: Developing the Final Report

What Are the Contents of the Final Report?

The purpose in developing the final report is preparing a document that average citizens will find useful in thinking about and discussing possibilities for the area of concern. When we prepare the final report, we want to have the following practices in mind:

- The report should focus on the possibilities and their likely consequences and not on the details of the sanctuary discussions
- The report should be written in a conversational style that readers will find easy to understand
- The report should be short. Most reports are less than 25 pages.

The overall contents of the final report include the following:

- An executive summary that simply lists the possibilities and a short description of them (typically one page)
- A short description of the area of concern. This section includes the background issues behind the area of concern that led to the possibilities (typically 4-6 pages)
- A description of each possibility and some potential consequences (typically 2 pages for each possibility and its consequences)

What Does the Executive Summary Look Like?

You will find a representative Executive Summary in Attachment A on the following page.

Here are some pointers in putting together the Executive Summary.

- List the title for each possibility as a simple phrase that describes the essence of the possibility. It helps to have wording that will be easily understood and remembered by your fellow citizens. This title should be the same as used in the fuller description of each possibility.
- Give a brief one-sentence rationale for the possibility. The rationale should provide the reader with a sense of what the possibility is aiming at and why it was chosen for inclusion in the report.

Attachment A

Illustrative Policy Possibilities For Public Discussion

Policies Focused on an Up or Down Appraisal of Human Genetic Technology

A. Don't Go - or Go Slow! Limit Human Genetic Technologies

These technologies are dangerous and potentially quite harmful to individuals and to our society. We should strictly limit or stop their development and future use.

B. Full Speed Ahead! Embrace Human Genetic Technologies

These technologies promise great benefits for everyone. We should embrace them and support their development and future use.

Policies Focused on Concerns About Control and Access

C. Let Each Decide - as Each Can Afford

Protect the rights of individuals to make their own decisions about human genetic technologies as they see fit - and as they can afford.

D. Let each Decide - We're All in this Together

Balance individual and societal control of human genetic technologies by emphasizing mutual responsibility between the individual and society. Treat human genetic technologies as collective resources to which individuals should have fair and equitable access. Individuals should have the right to make their own personal choices and should be encouraged to make them in socially responsible ways.

E. Let the Community Decide for Everyone

Maximize the common benefit that might be gained from the use of human genetic technologies by centralizing control and treating them as shared community resources to be managed collectively and distributed fairly and equitably across society.

Other Policy Notions

F. Don't Let Anything Fall Through the Cracks - Seamless Oversight of All Technology

Supervise human genetic technologies by establishing a seamless oversight framework for technical developments in general and biotechnology and human genetic technologies in particular.

G. Decide as We Go - Let Policy Evolve with Use

Allow public policy to emerge from the actual use of human genetic technologies, recognizing that there are limits on our predictive powers and that new technologies tend to shape culture as much as culture shapes them.

What Does the Description of the Area of Concern Cover?

This is the initial section of the report. In this section, the context for the area of concern is developed. This is essentially a summary of your explorations of the area of concern from early in your panel discussions. What you are trying to do in this section is to give citizens some insight into the ways this area of concern could affect people's lives. You are trying to create images in citizen's minds to help them see why they might be interested in the area of concern. See [Attachment A](#) for an example of this part of the background.

Next you will give a brief description of how the possibilities were developed. This short description will give the reader some concept of the discussion process that led to the possibilities. See [Attachment B](#) for an example of this part of the background.

You will also want to give an overview of the questions that the panel explored. Typically this part of the overview will organize the questions into some coherent categories. See [Attachments C and D](#) for an example of this part of the background.

This section of the report concludes with an introduction to the possibilities. (See [Attachment E](#) for an example of such an introduction).

Attachment A

Insight Into the Area of Concern

Imagine a world where, through the use of genetic technologies, you could be certain that our children would be born without disabilities? What if all children could be born without disabilities? What if they were *required* to be? Or what if these choices were only open to the wealthy? What if these choices meant you could reduce your child's risk of developing any of a number of diseases, say, Alzheimer's or Diabetes? Or what if you could lower your child's risk of developing behavioral or mental disorders? And, what if you could use these technologies to choose positive traits – not just to avoid diseases or disorders? Perhaps you could increase your child's chances of growing up to be tall, or athletic? What if you can choose that your child would have superior memory or mathematical abilities? Again, what if they could be expanded to all children – or was required to be? And again, what if these choices were only available to the wealthy?

What if you lived in a world where your entire personal genome could be put on a card as small and portable as a credit card? Genetic testing, combined with advances in the study of human genetics, might give you a fairly complete report about your likelihood of developing any number of physical or behavioral traits. For example, this information might indicate whether you, or your children, or your employees, will be likely to develop Diabetes, be physically agile, or prone to aggression. Would you want to know what your report said about you? Who else might want this information? How might this information impact your educational prospects, your job prospects, your marriage prospects, and your family relations? If we could know this kind of information, how might it affect the delivery of healthcare, the business of insurance, or the ways people have access to opportunities in our society?

Attachment B

A Short Description of How the Possibilities Were Developed

Thirteen of your fellow citizens engaged in precisely these kinds of explorations in a series of discussions that extended over a period of roughly two years. Some of these citizens were experts in various aspects of human genetic technology and public policy; others had no special background on the topic. Together they developed contrasting ways to look at human genetic technologies as an area of public policy concern and contrasting ways for public policy to respond to these concerns. They did not argue for any particular perspective or any particular approach to public policy. Instead, they aimed at developing contrasts in order to stimulate further democratic discussions. This document presents their thinking as an invitation to you as a citizen to continue the discussion and to develop your own thinking about this complex area of public policy. To accept this invitation, simply think along with your fellow citizens about some of the following concerns.

Attachment C

Overview Description of the Questions

Imagine a world where you're able to impact not just the future development of your children, but your own future. Suppose you'd be able to prevent the emergence of some illness, perhaps by inserting a gene or repairing a defective one. Or maybe you could choose to enhance your mental or physical abilities in some decisive way. Imagine you or a loved-one suffered a severed spinal cord in a car crash. Perhaps by using cloning technologies and some of your own genetic material, your physicians could stimulate the regrowth of your spinal cord, so you could walk again. Or perhaps your genetic material could be used to help give birth to a child who would be essentially your identical twin, a child with your identical genes.

When you think about this future world, try to think of some of the basic concerns that a democratic society might have to address. Again, don't worry about the details of how these technologies work. Imagine that we'll have to face many of the scenarios mentioned—and more. Now, ask yourself, what might be the public policy impact of being able to do these things? What are the social and political implications? What are the sorts of questions that we might have to answer as a democratic society when it comes to crafting public policy to govern these technical capacities? As you think about the policy concerns surrounding human genetic technologies, you might think about them in five overlapping groups or as the five basic kinds of questions listed in the box below.

- **Questions about Basic Concepts**
- **Questions about Control or Authority**
- **Questions about Distribution or Access**
- **Questions about Human Identity and Diversity**
- **Questions about Science and Technology in a Democracy**

Attachment D

A Description of One of the Questions

Questions about Basic Concepts. You might ask yourself, what are the big ideas or fundamental beliefs that might shape public policy for human genetic technologies? On the flip side, how might human genetic technologies affect these basic concepts or beliefs? You might want to explore the interactivity between these notions and human genetic technologies. You might think about the ways that these core beliefs might guide or determine the kinds of public policies we choose for human genetic technologies. And, you might think about how the very uses of these technologies might eventually change our thinking about some of these basic ideas. The following are some examples.

You might wonder how different notions of what it means to be human could lead to different public policy choices for human genetic technologies. And how might genetic technologies impact or change our understandings of what it means to be human? If we're able to make choices about our own biology instead of accepting certain traits as our inherited genetic fate, how might this change the way we think of our humanity, whether as individuals or as a society?

What about different notions of what it means to be "healthy" or "normal," or different notions of "disease" or "disability"? What if being "healthy" means more than not suffering from illness? How might these ideas change? What if traits we accept as a normal part of the variety of human existence, such as being bald, pudgy, short, or left-handed, are eventually seen as diseases or disorders subject to therapy or treatment? Who will decide what a disease is or what it means to be normal? In a world where "all the children are above average," what would it be like to be the child who was below average?

You might wonder about various beliefs or ideas that we often use to guide our thinking about human actions in a democratic society. Ideas such as being a person, being autonomous, or having personal liberty and individual rights. You might think about different ways to think about our obligations, duties, and respect for others. And you might think about such notions as justice, fairness, and equality. You might think about privacy, and property, including intellectual property. You might wonder about the authority behind these ideas. Do they spring from our culture or religion— and how do we make sense of this in a culturally diverse society? Are these core ideas and beliefs dependent on private convictions or can they apply to everyone?

You might also wonder about the different goals that society might set for public policy for human genetic technologies. What if the goal were to maximize health? If so, do we mean for everyone, or only for these individuals who can afford it? What if the goal were to maximize individual liberty, or to maximize the greater good for society as a whole – in whatever way the society chooses?

Attachment E

A Lead-in Description to the Possibilities

An Overview of the Policy Possibilities. On the following pages you'll find descriptions of seven contrasting policy possibilities. These possibilities respond in different ways to some of the questions and concerns about human genetic technologies raised above. Each possibility is intended to embody a distinct vision of a broad public policy response to human genetic technologies. Each description is intentionally short and sketched out only in broad strokes as a general way to frame public policy. As you read these, try to focus on the basic vision that each one presents, rather than getting bogged down in the details of how they might be implemented.

These policy possibilities are intended to be contrasting in the sense of exploring different, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, ways to approach human genetic technologies. You might think of ways that some of these could be combined with one another. Further, these policy possibilities are not intended to respond to every policy question raised above – just some of them. You may very well think of new possibilities or ways to expand upon certain aspects of these. The account you'll find here doesn't claim to be exhaustive or wholly novel. It simply offers you, as a democratic citizen, an opportunity to explore some distinct policy possibilities that might help you expand and clarify your own thinking about this complex area of social and political concern. It also offers you an opportunity to engage in discussion about these policy possibilities with your fellow democratic citizens.

The seven policy possibilities are presented on the following pages without regard to rank ordering.

How Are the Possibilities and Their Consequences Described?

The purpose of this section of the report is to describe the possibility in human terms. We try to avoid the highly detailed or legalistic descriptions that are typical of policy think tanks. Think about how you'd describe the possibilities to a typical citizen to answer the question: "Why do I care about this?"

When you describe the possibilities, adopt the frame of mind that you are describing the possibility to a friend or neighbor. Try to think of someone who hasn't thought much about your topic. You'll want to help that person see some of what you and your fellow panelists discovered as you developed your thinking. The tone of the description will be conversational. See the section entitled: "What Should Be the Writing Style for the Report?" on page 81.

When you describe this possibility, you will want to help citizens understand why the panels developed the possibility. See [Attachment A](#) for an example of how a possibility might be described.

The other part of the description of the possibilities is to describe some potential consequences. In this section you want to describe some representative consequences. You might try to describe the consequences as questions so that the readers can make up their own mind about the consequences. See [Attachment B](#) for an example of how consequences might be presented.

Attachment A

A Representative Possibility Description

DON'T GO – OR GO SLOW! LIMIT HUMAN GENETIC TECHNOLOGIES

The continued development and use of human genetic technologies create unacceptable dangers – both to our moral and physical well-being. In response, this policy possibility aims at stopping, or at least limiting, their development and use.

Suppose you believe that human genetic technologies pose so many dangers to us, morally and/or physically, that it's better not to go down that path at all. Or you may believe that we should go slowly in pursuing new genetic technologies. The basic motto of this policy possibility is "Don't go – or go slow." If you are attracted to this possibility, you're likely interested in slowing or stopping the introduction of human genetic technologies. You might see this as a way to resist what is often called the "technological imperative," the belief that just because we *can* do something, we *should*. There's a saying, "To a person with a hammer, everything looks like a nail." You may believe that once we have technologies, it's often hard not to use them. So, this policy is a way to get rid of the hammer, or at least to make sure it's taken out less often.

You may be drawn to this possibility because it expresses your basic beliefs about what it means to live a human life. You may have concerns that people might go too far in using technology to change ourselves or our world. You might be worried about how poorly we can predict catastrophic side effects. There could be negative consequences of these technologies that we never saw coming, unintended consequences that could go on for generations. So you might be interested in setting clear limits to people's use of these technologies. As you think about the basic idea of this policy possibility, you might consider a couple of different ways it could be fleshed out.

On the one hand, you might think that the main point is to stop human genetic technologies, period. In that case, the policy may take shape as an unconditional ban – a "do not go" approach. Your main concern might be to set clear boundaries for the use of genetic technologies that simply should never be crossed. Your concerns may spring from your philosophical, moral,

religious, or cultural convictions. For example, you may feel that any use of human genetic technologies amounts to playing God – Trying to control things we should leave up to a higher power. Or you might be motivated by the fear of opening a Pandora's box – that using these technologies may unleash negative consequences that will quickly spiral out of control. This risk, and our inability to put the genie back in the bottle, is so great that it's better not to allow their use at all. If you end up selecting this policy possibility, you are likely someone who is willing to accept things just as they are. This could mean doing without treatment for a loved – one if that treatment would involve genetic technologies. It could also mean that you'd support rolling back existing uses of these technologies.

On the other hand, you may not be prepared to go all the way for an absolute ban on human genetic technologies. You might rather have the policy take shape as a "go slow" approach. Your main concern might be human safety. But you might choose to make some room for risk analysis, rather than to adopt a wholesale ban on these technologies. Perhaps this could be expressed as a kind of "guilty unless proven innocent" approach. You might be interested in this approach if you want to err on the side of caution by restricting the use of human genetic technologies. At the same time, you may also realize that we can't totally stop them, especially since many are already in use. It may be impossible to turn back the clock and force people to stop using technologies that have already been adopted. It may be easier simply to slow any new developments. If you lean toward this approach, you may feel that the most important thing is to manage the negative consequences as best we can be moving slowly.

Attachment B

A Representative Consequences Description

Considering Some Potential Consequences

One way to get a better understanding of what these policy possibilities might really mean to discuss some of their potential consequences. The following are some considerations or questions that may help you do this. With each policy possibility, try to imagine what the world would be like, or how things might unfold, if this policy were in place. As you do this, it might help if you imagine different perspectives or different starting assumptions.

Administrative or Programmatic Consequences

- Consider how the policy might go about setting up administrative guidelines for implementing either a complete ban or more conditional limitations on human genetic technology.

Impact on Well-being, Health, and Healthcare Practices

- How might the policy impact the overall level of health of the population as whole or of distinct classes of people, especially if genetic technologies are banned or limited?
- What are some possible consequences for the scientific and healthcare communities, whether at a national or international level, should a variety of human genetic technologies be limited or banned?
- Given that we humans can become preoccupied with things that are forbidden, what unintended consequences might emerge?

Technology Research and Development

- What are some possible consequences for technology research, technology development, and technology services, whether nationally or internationally?

Socio-Economic Effects

- What impact might the policy have on socio-economic inequalities?
- What impact might the policy have on economic growth, domestically and/or internationally?

Socio-Cultural Effects

- How might the policy impact human migration or people's decisions to move into or out of the country?
- What impact might the policy have on the way the society views human diversity or the way that it views those with disabilities?
- What impact might the policy have on the social attitudes or the moral character of the society as a whole? Consider whether or how the policy might lead to attitudes of acceptance or attitudes of fatalism. Consider how the policy might lead to a more caring society – or, contrarily, to an uncaring society.
- What impact might the policy have on the social roles of science and religion (or other cultural convictions)?

What Should Be the Writing Style for the Report?

The report should be written in a style that will make it easy to understand for most any citizen. As a general frame of reference, most people read at a level that is three grade levels lower their highest educational achievement. Thus a high school graduate will read at a 9th grade level.

Here are some general guidelines for conversational writing

- Write like you talk. Use personal pronouns and contractions because that's how we talk.
- Limit sentence length to 15 words or less.
- Limit word selection to words used in everyday speech. Eliminate specialized language that might be relevant to a topic but not widely understood.
- Avoid compound or complex sentences whenever possible. The only punctuation you should need will be a period, comma, or question mark.
- Don't worry about strict grammatical correctness if more common word usage or sentence formation is easier to understand.
- Avoid having more than 3 -4 sentences in a paragraph.
- Make the text visually appealing by using bulleted points rather than lists that are embedded in written content.

Once you have a draft of the report, you may want to have it reviewed by someone who is not used to reading this type of material.

