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**Introduction & Ground Rules \_\_\_ Minutes**

**Purpose: Look at Alternative Approaches to the Issue and Hear Different Points of View**

* This is not a debate; we’re not here to “win” an argument.
* We’ll look carefully at alternative approaches—all of them with trade-offs and drawbacks.
* At the close of the forum, we’ll reflect on what we’ve heard, looking for common ground, but also recognizing remaining areas of uncertainty or tension.
* We’ll try to think about what matters most to us and what we are willing to give up to make progress on resolving this issue.

**My Role: Serve as Impartial Facilitator**

* I’m here to help us have a conversation that is as deliberative as possible.
* I’ll encourage everyone to consider different viewpoints.
* I’ll watch the time to ensure we talk about all the options and have time for reflections at the end.
* From time to time, I may point to specific questions and ideas in the guide, especially if they represent voices not in the room or trade-offs we haven’t talked about.
* This is your conversation. Please talk to and listen to each other.

**Structure: The Four Parts of a Deliberative Forum**

* Ground Rules
* Personal Stake
* Deliberating on the Options: Option 1, Option 2, Option 3
* Closing Reflections

**Ground Rules \_\_\_ Minutes**

**Some sample ground rules used by forum moderators**

* Listen to other voices. Listening is as important as speaking.
* Consider each approach fairly, looking at its benefits and its trade-offs.
* Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one or two individuals should dominate.
* It’s okay to disagree, but do so with curiosity, not hostility. Learning more about how others think is one of the most interesting parts of a forum.
* Keep an open mind. Avoid coming to conclusions until we’ve deliberated on all the options.
* Are there additional ground rules we would like to add?
* Do we all agree to follow these ground rules and hold one another accountable to them?

**Personal Stake: \_\_\_ Minutes**

**Some questions moderators often use to encourage participants to talk about their personal stake in the issue**

* Why did you come out to the forum today?
* What aspect of the issue concerns you most?
* How has this issue affected you, your family, or your community?
* When you think about this issue, what bothers you?
* How does this problem impact your life and community?

**Questions for Deliberation—Option 1: Make it easier to register and vote \_\_\_ Minutes**

According to this option, we need to make sure that voting rules are fair and that casting a ballot is straightforward and convenient. Unfortunately, that’s not the case for many Americans. Some voters face long lines while others vote quickly and easily. Rules on voter registration, absentee ballots, and voting by mail vary across the country. Sometimes, people who want to vote aren’t able to because they haven’t registered ahead of time. This option says we must do much to give every American an equal chance to vote.

**BUT** changes to make voting and registration easier can reduce safeguards intended to make sure that only eligible voters vote. Are current voting rules really so burdensome?

* Automatic registration makes the process easier, but couldn’t it also increase the chances of accidentally including ineligible people? What should we do to make sure voting roles are accurate?
* Suggestions to make voting easier—extended poll hours, mail-in ballots, etc.—are often quite costly. With government budgets strained at all levels, what would you be willing cut to pay for these changes?

**Questions for Deliberation—Option 2: Do more to make elections secure \_\_\_ Minutes**

According to this option, we should do more to make sure our elections are accurate and free from both foreign interference and political manipulation. US intelligence officials have warned that Russia, China, and other nations are trying to meddle, and experts advise that our system has vulnerabilities, including the relative ease of hacking voting machines, out-of-date registration lists, and inadequate staffing and resources at polling places. In eight states, there is no paper record of ballots cast. Our top priority must be to ensure that elections are lawful, accurate, and secure.

**BUT s**teps intended to fight fraud often end up discouraging legitimate voters, especially lower-income and minority voters.

* People show IDs to get on planes and rent cars, and there are alternative IDs for people who don’t drive. Wouldn’t this be a straightforward and minimally intrusive requirement for voting. Why or why not?
* More federal involvement in safeguarding elections would bring expertise and resources to strapped local election boards. But could the federal government use its power to steer outcomes and/or discourage opposing party members from voting?

**Questions for Deliberation—Option 3: Offer more and better choices \_\_\_ Minutes**

According to this option, our major problem is not lack of access or security. It is the lack of a genuine range of choices and the sense many people have that their votes don’t make any difference. Many Americans feel their views are not fully represented by either political party. Some worry about Congressional districts drawn to favor one side. Others believe the Electoral College violates the principle of one person-one vote because the votes of rural Americans count more than the votes of those in populous states. This option says that changing the system to offer all voters real choices should be our priority.

**BUT** aren’t there dangers in upending a traditional system that people understand and has worked well for new, unproven methods? We should work on fixing the system we have, not inventing a new one.

* What could be the unanticipated consequences of ending the Electoral College and allowing commissions to draw Congressional districts? Are we willing to take these risks?
* Changing voting laws is always difficult and controversial. Could trying to make these broader, longer--term changes pull attention away from more urgent problems like backing up voting systems and guarding against voter suppression?

**Closing Reflections \_\_\_ minutes**

Acting on the ideas and proposals presented here will bring about changes affecting all of us, in every city and town—whether we are attuned to politics or not. And changes to complex regulatory and technical systems often go wrong in ways that are unexpected. It is important to think carefully about how these changes would work and what the advantages and risks might be.

* We can’t, and probably shouldn’t, make too many changes all at once. What is most important overall? Making sure voting is fair, making sure it’s accurate, or making changes that give us all more choices?
* Voting is a cornerstone of our democracy, but how much will a better voting system do to improve education, make our economy fairer, provide racial justice, and keep us all safer? On the other hand, can we address those problems without a fair and effective voting system?
* Public discussion of voting often focuses on elections for president and Congress, but the results of local and state elections affect schools, policing, and our local economies and neighborhoods. Take a moment to revisit some of the key questions here and talk about them specifically in terms of state and local elections.
* Many people say they don’t vote because they “aren’t interested in politics” or because they don’t know much about the candidates and the issues. This is especially common for state, local, and municipal elections. Should we address these issues, and if so, how would we do it?

**Other important questions to consider:**

* Now that we have deliberated, are there ideas or viewpoints you hadn’t considered before?
* Can you now identify any shared concerns or hopes we have discovered in our conversation?
* How has what you heard in the forum affected your thinking?
* Can you identify any tensions that came up during the deliberations?
* What questions remain? What work do we still need to do?
* What could you do as an individual to improve our voting system?
* What could you do if you worked with others in the community?
* And what changes do we want our elected officials at the local, state, and national level to make?