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What Should Go on the Internet?
Privacy, Freedom, and Security Online
Updated Edition, 2013

The Internet has become an integral part of American life in the 21st century. But as its presence in our lives has grown, so have concerns about its dangers. It's time to consider our priorities with regard to protecting privacy, preserving free speech, and ensuring security. Can we—or should we—regulate what goes on the Internet?

OPTION ONE

Protect Our Privacy

Privacy is a fundamental American value. But the Internet has obliterated the line between public and private, forcing Americans to live in a virtual fishbowl. Our top priority must be to safeguard personal information on the Internet.

OPTION TWO

### Promote Freedom of Speech and Commerce

The Internet is a revolutionary leap forward for democratic societies and free markets. Direct or indirect censorship by concerned citizens, special interests, or government could stifle this great resource. All attacks on Internet freedom should be vigorously resisted.

OPTION THREE

Secure Us from Online Threats

The Internet is a Wild West of criminal activity that threatens our personal safety, our economic vitality, and our national security. Our top priority must be protecting our children and ourselves, even if it means giving up some civil liberties to do so.
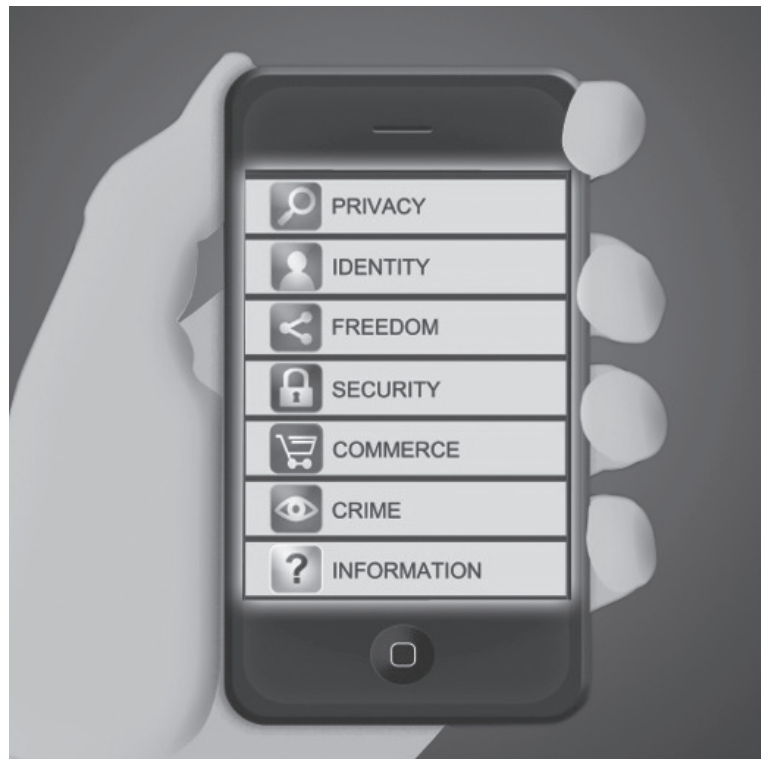
>>National Issues Forums and Study Guides

Why are we here? What are we going to do?

We are here to move toward a public decision on a difficult issue through CHOICE WORK.

How do we do that?

We do that by engaging in a deliberative dialogue in which we:

- understand the PROS and CONS of each approach—its benefits, drawbacks, and trade-offs.

- know the STRATEGIC FACTS and how they affect the way the group thinks about each option.

- get beyond the initial positions people hold to their deeper motivations— the things they consider to be the most valuable in everyday life.

- weigh carefully the views of others and appreciate the impact various options would have on what others consider valuable.

- WORK THROUGH the conflicting emotions that arise when various options pull and tug on what people consider valuable.

>>Forums or Study Circles—or Both?

Many NIF groups choose to organize single forums around issues of concern in their communities. Most single forums last two to two-and-a-half hours.

Other groups, however, plan for multiple sessions, or study circles, to allow participants greater opportunity to examine issues in depth. Some groups set aside time for two meetings, while others might devote a separate session to each approach. And still others plan ahead for a session after the forum for participants to come back together and consider next steps.

In some communities, people begin their examination of an issue in a large-group forum and then break off into smaller groups for subsequent sessions. The reverse is also helpful—starting in small groups and culminating in a larger community forum.

National Issues Forums is about encouraging public deliberation. The needs of your community will drive the schedule in which deliberation can best occur.

>>Stages of a Forum

Welcome

The convenor or moderator introduces the NIF program.

Ground rules

Participants and the moderator review desired outcomes and agree on ground rules.

Getting started

One good way to start is for participants to take a few minutes to talk about their personal experiences with the issue and tell their stories. Sometimes the convenor or moderator begins by showing a starter video that reviews the problems underlying the issue.

Deliberation

Participants examine all the choices. An approximately equal amount of time should be spent on each choice.

Ending the forum

Participants reflect on what has been achieved.

Questionnaire

Participants complete the questionnaire.

>>If This Is Your First Experience as a Moderator

You don't have to be an expert on the issue.

Read the issue guide thoroughly. Consider questions that get to the heart of the issue and think through the essence of each approach. This is a critical part of preparation.

Stay focused on what the forum is about—deliberation.

Ask questions that probe the underlying motivations of each approach, the trade-offs it might require, and the willingness of the participants to recognize them. (Sample questions begin on Page 5.) Listen to others.

Keep the discussion moving and focused on the issue.

Sometimes it's difficult to move on to another approach when there is so much more that could be said. But in order to make progress, participants need time to weigh all the major approaches fairly.

Reserve ample time for reflections on the forum.

In many ways, this is the most important work the group will do. The moderator will provide reminders that time is passing, but it is up to all the participants to help preserve the time to reflect on what they have said and what they might want to do about it.

>>Beginning a Forum

Before the deliberation begins, it is important for participants to review guidelines for their discussion. They should agree that:

- everyone is encouraged to participate,
- no one or two individuals should dominate,
- the discussion should focus on the approaches,
- all the major choices should be considered fairly,
- they will maintain an open and respectful atmosphere for the discussion, and
- they will listen to each other.

>>Ending a Forum

Before ending a forum, take a few minutes to reflect, both individually and as a group, on what has been achieved. Consider the following kinds of questions:

I. **Individual reflections**

How has your thinking about the issue changed?

How has your thinking about other peoples' views changed?

How has your perspective changed as a result of what you heard in this forum?

II. **Group reflections**

What didn't we work through?

Can we identify any shared sense of purpose or direction?

Which trade-offs are we willing to make to move in a shared direction?

Which are we unwilling to make?

III. **Next-step reflections**

What do we still need to talk about?

How can we use what we learned in this forum about ourselves?

Do we want to meet again?

Questions to Promote Deliberation of the Issue

As you examine this issue together you will undoubtedly think of questions that are at the heart of what makes the issue compelling. In some forums, certain questions might arise that could derail the deliberation by veering into partisan political debate. It will be important to remember that, as a group, you are dealing with broader underlying concerns that are not defined by party affiliation and that your work here is to dig down to the basic values that define us as human beings and as Americans rather than as liberals and conservatives. It is helpful to consider, ahead of time, broad questions that need to be addressed in each approach. Here are some examples:

OPTION ONE

- Is it still enough to rely on "buyer beware" when shopping online? How much privacy can we expect when we shop in a public marketplace?

- How can we help our children understand the risks of posting personal information and pictures online?

- Do you think it's ethical for employers to seek information about prospective employees on social networking sites, such as Facebook?

- Spying on Internet users, by tracking the websites they visit, is one of the fastest growing businesses on the Internet. Should such activities on the Internet be regulated? What about revelations that the government has access to supposedly private communications? Should this be changed?

OPTION TWO

- What would you think about outlawing anonymous postings on Internet sites?

- Do you think hate speech and misinformation can be successfully countered by speech that educates and enlightens? If not, should certain kinds of offensive speech be censored on the Internet?

- Creative artists have to make a living. But should they have the right to control who uses their music, art, and films on the Internet?

- Terrorists and criminals have wide-open access to the Internet. Does this make it easier or harder for law enforcement agencies?

OPTION THREE

- What do you think can or should be done about posting classified government information, such as that made public in 2010 by WikiLeaks, on the Internet?

- What should be the role of schools and public libraries in protecting children from inappropriate material on the Internet?

- Do you think the government should be legally empowered to censor Internet material—instructions for making bombs, for example—that threatens the safety of US citizens? Would this constitute a slippery slope that might ultimately compromise our right to free speech?

- In your experience, how can parents best protect their children from sexual predators?

>>Questionnaires

Questionnaires play an important role in your local forum—and in the national NIF network. Filled out after the forum, they serve multiple purposes. They give participants an opportunity to reconsider their views in light of the experience they have just had and give them a chance to add to what was said or heard in the forum.

The questionnaires also serve a vital role outside the forum. As one means of capturing what happened in the forum, they provide information that can be used to communicate participants' views to others—to officeholders, to the media, and to other citizens.

A national report on the outcomes of the forums on a given issue is produced each year, based on extensive interviews with moderators and the questionnaires that forums generate. Some communities use questionnaires as part of the reports they generate on the outcomes of local forums.

Please return completed questionnaires to your moderator or to National Issues Forums Institute, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777.

>>The Role of the Moderator

• to provide an overview of the deliberation process

• to ask probing questions about what's at stake in each issue and each choice

• to encourage participants to direct their questions and responses to one another

• to remain neutral

Another important job for the moderator is to fill out the Moderator Response sheet at the end of this guide and return it with the questionnaires to National Issues Forums Institute, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777.

>>For More Information

To order issue guides or starter tapes for this issue, visit store.nifi.org, call 1-800-600-4060, or e-mail info@ait.net. Other issue guides and tapes may also be ordered from this source.

For more information or to make comments, visit the National Issues Forums Institute website at www.nifi.org or call NIFI at 1-800-433-7834.

To post the dates and locations of your forums, e-mail: forums@nifi.org.

Moderator Response

After the forum, please complete this brief response sheet and return it with the questionnaires from the forum to:
National Issues Forums Institute, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777.

Moderator's Name _____

Phone _____ E-mail address _____

Date and location (state) where forum was held _____

Briefly describe the audience of your forum, including city and state, diversity, and age and number of participants.
_____
_____
_____

What elements of this issue seemed most difficult for the participants?_____
_____
_____
_____

What common concerns were most apparent? _____
_____
_____
_____

What things did participants appear to hold most valuable as they wrestled with trade-offs? _____
_____
_____
_____

Which trade-offs were participants most comfortable with? _____
_____
_____
_____

Which trade-offs did the participants struggle with most? _____
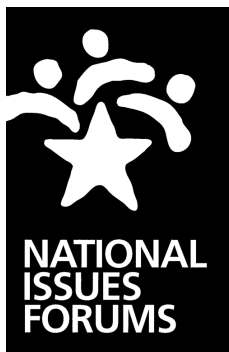_____
_____
_____

Did the group identify shared directions for action? _____
_____
_____
_____

Return with questionnaires to:
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100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777

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