

**Thank you for joining us.
The workshop will begin shortly.**

Introduction to Moderating for Deliberation

**October 9, 2025
2:00 EDT**

Welcome

Introduction to Moderating for Deliberation

October 9, 2025

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Talk. Decide. Act. Fall 2025 Workshop Series

TALK

Introduction to
Moderating for
Deliberation



Oct. 9, 2025
2:00 PM ET

DECIDE

Introduction to
Deliberative
Framing



Nov. 6, 2025
2:00 PM ET

ACT

Introduction to
Deliberative Talk-
to-Action Initiatives



Dec. 4, 2025
2:00 PM ET

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Today's Agenda

- **Defining** deliberative Forums
- **Moderator practices** that encourage deliberative forums
- **Resources** to support your work
- **Learning from each other:** questions, insights, challenges

The National Issues Forums Institute

A **nonpartisan nonprofit** that equips, empowers, and mobilizes people to use **deliberation** to take action for the public good.



Equip



Empower



Mobilize

What Are National Issues Forums?

- Convened by a **national network** of individuals and organizations
- Using **deliberative practices** that promote nonpartisan, multi-perspective discussions or forums
- On **issues** of national scope that impact communities across the country



Deliberation: What is it? Why do it?

Democracy is strengthened when individuals, institutions, and governments find ways to talk and work with each other.

Deliberative forums of issues that impact our lives make a profound contribution to our capacity to do just that.

PUBLIC DELIBERATION

- Brings the public together to work through and take ownership of a problem.
- Encourages participants to talk through rather than just about an issue.
- Asks citizens to work through tensions, weigh tradeoffs, and make choices.
- Helps community members identify areas of common ground for taking action.
- Views citizens as actors rather than passive recipients of democracy.

When is Deliberation Useful?

- When the problem is complex and affects many people
- When people disagree but must live with shared decisions
- When decision makers need public legitimacy or insight
- When communities are ready to move from talk to action
- When trust and civic capacity need rebuilding



Moderating Deliberative Forums

- Examine differing approaches for moving forward on the issue.
- Work through tensions among ways to address the issue.
- Consider the trade-offs of a wide range of potential actions.
- Reflect together on what's been said, capturing commonalities and differences.
- Identify common ground for decision-making and action.

Spaces and Places for Deliberation

- In communities
- On campus
- Within organizations
- In person
- Online



Multiple Moderator Roles

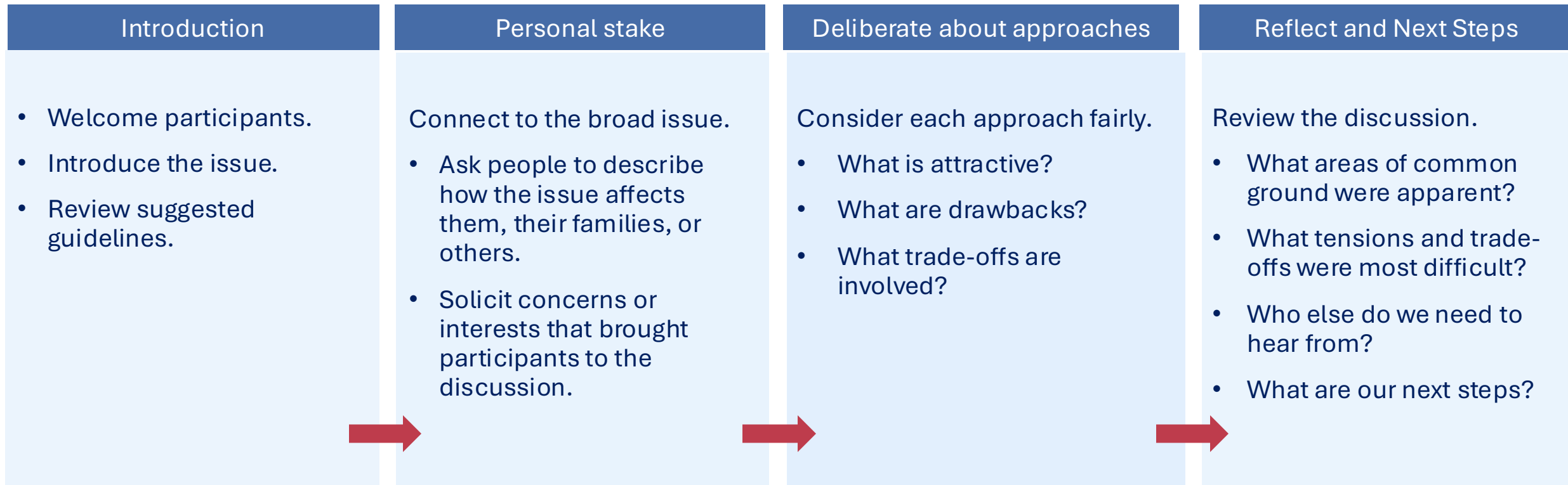
- Set a welcoming tone.
- Be an active listener.
- Behave neutrally.
- Ask probing questions.
- Encourage reflections and direction-setting.
- Manage time.



What does it mean to *behave neutrally*?

- Avoid agreement or disagreement with participants.
- Avoid using your personal experiences to make a point.
- Encourage discussion of differing points of view.
- Ask for viewpoints held by others outside the group.

Stages of Deliberative Forums



Sample Guidelines for Deliberative Forums

- Consider different perspectives fairly.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate.
- Listening is just as important as speaking.
- Maintain an open and respectful atmosphere.
- Consider actions that might be taken in our communities as well as nationally.



Four Basic “Moderator Moves”

- Ask a **follow-up question** for clarification or to dig deeper.
- Ask a **reaction question** to the last speaker’s comment.
- Ask a **transition question** to move the conversation forward.
- Synthesize **key points** when necessary.

Questions to Promote Deliberation

- Connect the issue to concerns of participants.

How would this action affect your life or the lives of others?

- Examine potential consequences.

Is there a downside to this course of action?

- Weigh trade-offs.

Would you give up _____ in order to achieve _____?

- Promote interactions among participants.

Could someone give an example to illustrate what _____ just said?

Questions to go Deeper

- What strengths do we have to build on?
- How might that idea affect other people?
- Why would someone disagree?
- What viewpoints are missing in our discussion?
- How will we prioritize among many good ideas?
- Given what you care about, what are you most eager to see happen?



Reflecting on the Deliberation

- What new insights did you gain?
- How has your thinking changed—or expanded?
- What were our areas of greatest concern?
- What actions are most pressing?
- Who else needs to be involved?
- What are our next steps?



How do you know it's going well?

- People listen actively.
- Participants are talking and asking questions of each other.
- No one dominates.
- Alternate viewpoints get aired, each approach gets a fair hearing, and tradeoffs are explored.
- People share personal experiences, as they're comfortable.
- The deliberation builds toward common ground and decision making.



Anticipating Challenges in Moderating

- Moderating particularly “heated,” controversial issues
- Effectively soliciting participation from all
- Dealing with misinformation
- Addressing extra-talkative participants
- Managing time effectively
- Being flexible while staying on track



Handling Moderating Challenges

Dominating Participant

- What do others think about this approach?
- What ideas have not been expressed?
- How would anyone else in the group respond to the concerns just expressed?
- Could someone tell us a story to illustrate that point?

Difficult Participant

- Gradually escalate your response.
- Use body language.
- Gradually use more assertive verbal techniques to capture key points.
- Refer to the guidelines.
- Redirect the conversation by saying “Thank you. What do others think about that?”

Misinformation from a Participant

- Does anyone have a different perspective on that?
- Use the discussion guide.
- What does that information mean to you?
- Would you give us an example?

Handling Moderating Challenges

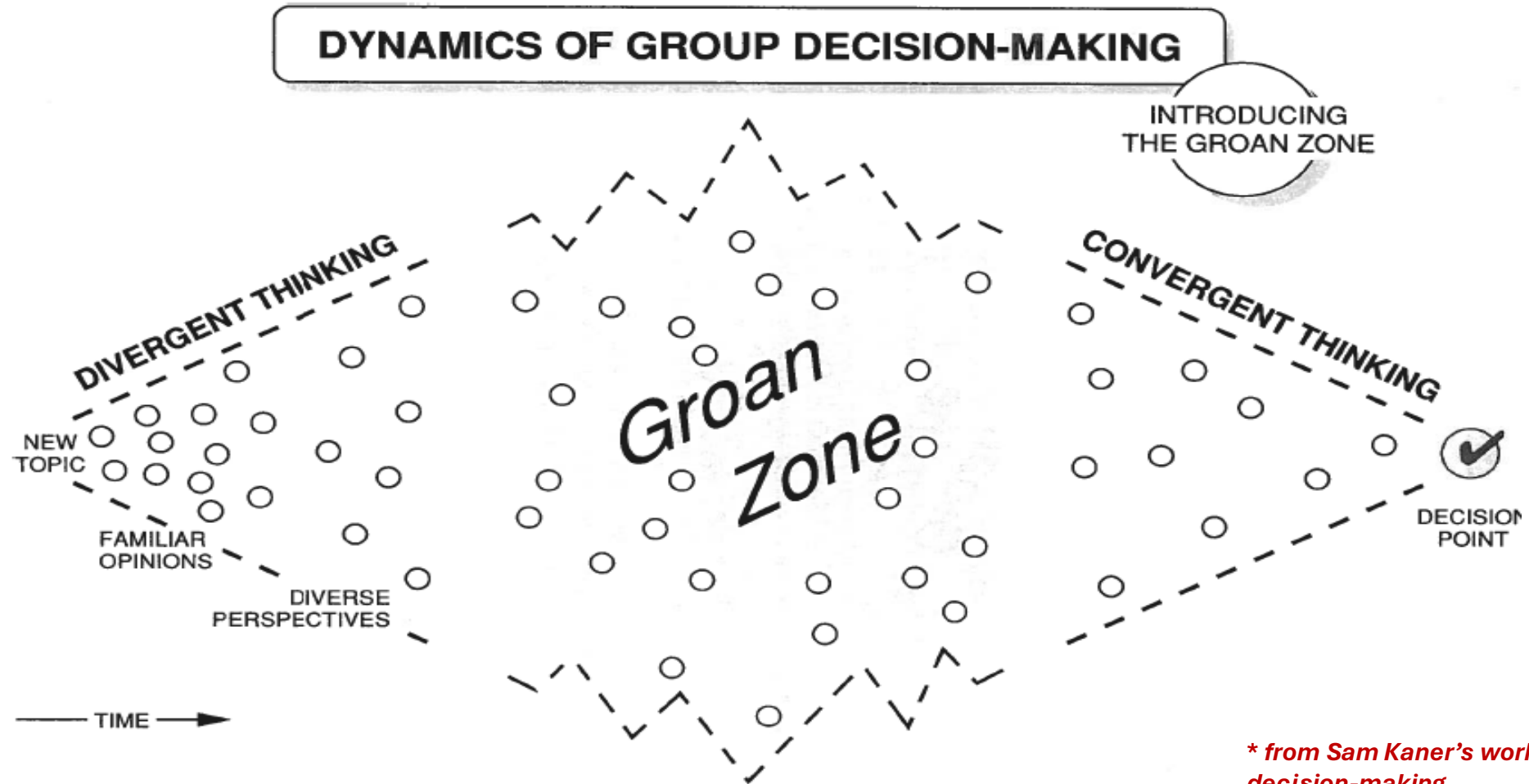
All Comments Directed to Moderator

- Does that bring up anything for anyone?
- That gets us started, so how do you respond?
- Could someone give an example to illustrate what was just said?
- Allow silence. Someone will respond.
- Move back out of the circle.

Emotions Run High

- Remember that people come first, not the issue or the agenda.
- Acknowledge what is happening; don't attempt to suppress or ignore the emotion.
- If appropriate, ask the group to reflect, respond, and then continue the conversation.
- Take a brief break if needed before continuing the deliberation.

You are Entering the *Groan Zone*



** from Sam Kaner's work on collaborative decision-making*

Time for Today's Small Group Discussions

- Connect with others.
- Ask questions.
- Share your experiences.
- Reflect on what you've learned.
- Consider your own next steps.





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Share Your Feedback!



Thank you for joining us!

Please stay in touch.

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