

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO NIF-STYLE CONVERSATIONS

National Issues Forums (NIF) have provided citizens an opportunity to purposefully and carefully deal with our most challenging public problems for over 25 years. Today, people gather for NIF-style conversations across the country and around the world to carefully deliberate on our most troubling public dilemmas where reasonable citizens disagree strongly and deeply, AND to actively seek solutions everyone can live with.

- Participants often find themselves considering some actions they thought they would easily oppose—*set aside your assumptions*.
- Similarly, people sometimes discover hidden costs and consequences in actions they thought they would support—*be willing to see the issue as complex*.
- Participants gather to learn together, not to simply persuade or advocate—*be open to new ideas and perspectives*.
- Citizens move from making individual choices to making choices as members of a better informed and more connected community—*show respect and build trust*.

NIF-style conversations draw a wide diversity of neighbors together. Concerned, interested, and inquiring citizens join the conversation for many reasons: to understand a complex issue better; to hear how the issue affects others in the community; to be a better informed voter; to decide what personal actions might be most effective; to network with others who are similarly frustrated by the issue; or to decide how to actively influence public policy decisions. Our conversations meet many needs while they build trust among neighbors.

Here's what you can expect in our conversations:

- A small group of 15-25 people with the natural diversity of your community;
- A trained, volunteer moderator to guide participants through the conversation while honoring your meeting agreements;
- A printed "issue guide" with three unique but inter-connected approaches, each with their own advantages and drawbacks;
- A neutral, non-partisan conversation where all voices are valued;
- A safe place for neighbors to listen and learn together about a critical issue;
- A discussion where everyone is encouraged to take a fresh look at the topic and at their own convictions...not a debate;
- An opportunity to organize your thoughts and feelings, so they can be applied toward real solutions to thorny problems.

Meeting Agreements:

- Everyone is encouraged to participate—we'll respect all voices equally.
- No one or two individuals will dominate—we'll speak one person at a time and then listen.
- No side conversations—we'll pay attention to the person who is speaking.
- Keep focused on the business of the group—we'll stay on the subject at hand.
- Cooperate in the schedule and agenda—we'll work together and end on time.
-