

# ***Making the Most of the First Three Years:***

***How Can We Give Our Youngest Children  
a Good Start in Life?***

## ***A Guide for Conveners and Moderators***

**West Virginia  
Dialogue-to-Action Initiative**

Sponsored by



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## **About the Project Partners**

### ***Early Childhood Advisory Council of West Virginia***

The mission of the Early Childhood Advisory Council is to create a high-quality, coordinated system of services that support early childhood development. Its members include representatives of state agencies, community organizations and business and labor groups. The Council is part of the West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts and is chaired by Cabinet Secretary Kay Goodwin.

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### ***West Virginia Center for Civic Life***

The West Virginia Center for Civic Life is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that helps engage citizens in community discussions of important public issues that affect our state and nation. The Center provides training and assistance on framing issues and developing discussion guides; convening, moderating and reporting on forums; and moving from dialogue to action.

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\*Chairperson

## The Purpose of Community Discussions

### “Why are we doing this?”

It’s a good question to ask when convening or attending a community forum. People lead busy lives and want to make sure they are spending their time in worthwhile ways. They like to have a sense of “what they’re getting into.”

### Deliberative public forums seek to accomplish many goals:

- **Help people better understand the issue.** This understanding comes not only from the information provided in the discussion guide, but also from listening to and learning from fellow community members.
- **Examine different approaches to dealing with the issue.** Forums encourage thoughtful consideration of a variety of perspectives in a respectful manner, emphasizing that there is no one right answer.
- **Weigh the benefits and trade-offs of each approach.** Forums help people identify the positive aspects of each approach, as well as the trade-offs or sacrifices that might have to be made.
- **Identify common ground and areas of disagreement.** By the end of a forum, people will have discovered where they agree, where they disagree, and why. This helps set the stage for people to work together on the issue.
- **Explore possible actions, individually and as a group.** There are no quick and easy solutions for complex public problems, but there are steps that people can begin to take to address them. Forums give people the opportunity to share their ideas and decide what they want to do next, individually and/or together.

**Deliberative forums are nonpartisan and do not advocate a particular perspective or solution to any public issue.** Instead they allow diverse groups of citizens to determine together what direction they want to take, what kinds of actions and policies they favor or oppose, and what they are able to do, individually and as a community.

## **What Is Public Dialogue?**

Public dialogue is a process whereby participants:

- ❖ Identify multiple approaches to a central issue.
- ❖ Weigh the costs and consequences of each approach.
- ❖ Determine community values.
- ❖ Develop a common ground for collaborative action.
- ❖ Decide on what kind of future the community desires for itself.

### **Identify multiple approaches to a central issue**

Most public issues are complex problems. They affect a wide-range of individuals and impact many different aspects of community life. Issues such as how to stimulate economic growth or provide comprehensive healthcare seldom have simple solutions. Instead, such situations require a range of responses resulting from multiple approaches to the issue.

### **Weigh the costs and consequences of each approach**

Since decisions about community issues will affect such a diverse group of people, dialogue encourages participants to fully examine the implications of each approach. Each approach has pros and cons. Each approach has benefits and drawbacks. Each approach has costs and consequences that citizens may or may not have considered.

Upon reflection, a community may realize that it is unwilling to accept the consequences of an approach it once highly favored. On the other hand, a community may determine that the benefits of a particular approach outweigh the costs and the drawbacks associated with it. For example, a community may decide that restrictions on gun purchasing and ownership are acceptable limitations on the right to bear arms if they also serve to reduce the number and frequency of gun-related crimes. Ultimately, how individuals weigh the costs and consequences of each approach depends largely upon what they value most.

### **Determine community values**

The underlying values held by decision-makers significantly affect which approaches they choose to take in order to address a particular concern. What a person holds most valuable impacts what costs and consequences one is willing or unwilling to accept. Yet, even the most opinionated and outspoken person may not truly recognize the values and the emotions that influence her perspective. The process of dialogue therefore enables people to identify what they value and why. People who have a deeper understanding of how they think and feel about an issue are better situated to make sound decisions.

Moreover, individuals who participate in dialogue gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for how other people view the same concern. While people may not change their view of the issue, they undoubtedly will change their perception of one another. The community begins to define itself based on commonalities rather than differences. Members of the

community identify with one another, and people gravitate toward a common purpose. They cultivate a sense of shared values.

### **Develop a common ground for collaborative action**

Behind every approach to an issue lies a range of concerns, values, emotions, and personal experiences that influence the choices people make. Even individuals who share similar concerns may experience conflict when asked to deal with the costs and consequences of a particular approach. People must confront the complexities of the issue and work through the tensions that exist. As people identify their personal values, as they focus around a common purpose, and as they struggle with the difficult processes of dialogue and coming to public judgment, individuals establish a foundation of mutual understanding, respect and trust.

It is important to recognize that individuals may not develop consensus; they may not come to full and complete agreement. However, because dialogue strengthens ties among people who hold similar views and bridges the divide between people with differing perspectives, collaboration becomes a true reality. Dialogue builds strong relationships. It promotes a shared sense of direction and develops the common ground necessary for community action.

### **Decide what kind of future the community desires for itself**

Dialogue opens people up to new ways of thinking about community issues. It creates new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration. Dialogue helps people to see new possibilities.

When people see new possibilities, they can see steps to take together that can transform their community's future. This process of getting citizens together to talk about what's important to them, assessing community capacities and assets, and making a plan of action is a roadmap for community development that any concerned group of citizens can use. The model on the next page shows the cycle of community development. If people can't understand each other enough to work together, they won't be able to improve their community.

## Coming to Public Judgment: How Public Opinion Really Works

According to much social science research, the public's thinking on issues progresses through seven predictable stages. Public opinion is in fact less like a physical process than a biological one, evolving in seven stages. Public opinion on any issue develops slowly over a long period -- at least ten years for a complex issue.

### PHASE ONE – CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

- Stage 1:     **Dawning Awareness**  
*People begin to become aware of an issue.*
  
- Stage 2:     **Greater Urgency**  
*People develop a sense of urgency about the issue.*

### PHASE TWO – WORKING THROUGH

- Stage 3:     **Discovering the Choices**  
*People start to explore the choices for dealing with the issue.*
  
- Stage 4:     **Wishful Thinking**  
*Resistance to facing costs and trade-offs kicks in, producing wishful thinking.*
  
- Stage 5:     **Weighing the Choices**  
*People weigh the pros and cons of alternatives.*

### PHASE THREE – RESOLUTION

- Stage 6:     **Taking a Stand**  
*People take a stand intellectually.*
  
- Stage 7:     **Making a Responsible Judgment**  
*People make a responsible judgment morally and emotionally.*

## A Guide to Public Dialogue

**We deliberate all the time in our daily lives.** When we have a difficult decision to make about an important matter and we weigh several approaches carefully, that, in a nutshell, is dialogue. Dialogue is the process of weighing carefully various approaches to a situation, examining the pros and cons of each option, and reflecting upon the views of others about what should be done. Dialogue provides the opportunity to explore, to test ideas, and to look at ambiguities or gray areas rather than seeing only the stark black and white of polar opposites

Making decisions about how to deal with community issues is often difficult because different people favor different approaches, and the options for action may conflict with one another. Behind each approach lies a range of concerns and values might pull people in different directions, creating tension, and influencing how they weigh costs and consequences. **People must work through these conflicts and deal with the trade-offs until they develop a shared sense of direction.**

While people may not reach complete agreement about what course of action they should take to address a community issue during dialogue, they often do have a better grasp of what they are and are not willing to do to solve the problem. **This mutual understanding paves the way for cooperation and collaboration.**

What follows are a few simple recommendations for bringing the kind of deliberating we all do privately into a public setting – where we have to dialogue, not just with friends and family members, but with people we scarcely know.

### **Establishing guidelines**

Effective dialogue is more likely to occur if certain guidelines are outlined at the beginning. Establishing such guidelines ahead of time may help prevent difficulties later.

- The purpose of dialogue is to work toward a decision.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one should dominate.
- Listening is as important as speaking.

- Participants should address one another, not just the moderator.
- Moderator may intervene occasionally to keep the dialogue on track or to remind participants to stick with the current approach under consideration.
- Participants should consider fairly each approach and examine fully all the tradeoffs involved in an approach. A diversity of perspectives is essential. Even if no one in the group seems to favor a certain option, someone should raise the question, “What would someone who favors this approach say about it?”

## Key questions

These four basic kinds of questions are useful in prompting meaningful dialogue.

1. ***What is valuable to us?*** This question gets at the reason that making public choices is so difficult, namely, that all the approaches are rooted in things about which people care very deeply. This key question can take many different forms.

To uncover deeper concerns, people may ask one another how each came to hold the views he or she has. Talking about personal experiences, rather than simply reciting facts or stating rational, impersonal arguments, promotes a more meaningful dialogue.

- How has this issue affected us personally?
- When we think about this issue, what concerns us?
- What is appealing about the first option or approach?
- What makes this approach acceptable – or unacceptable?

2. ***What are the consequences, costs, benefits and trade-offs associated with the various approaches?*** Variations of this question should prompt people to think about the relationship that exists between each approach and the values people have. Because dialogue requires the evaluation of pros and cons, it is important to ensure that both aspects are fully considered. Questions to promote a fair and balanced examination of all potential implications include:

- What would be the consequences of doing what we are suggesting?
- What would be an argument against the approach we like best? Is there a downside to this course of action?

- Can anyone think of something constructive that might come from the approach that is receiving so much criticism?
3. ***What are the inherent conflicts that we have to work through?*** As a forum progresses, participants should consider the following:
- What do we see as the tension between the approaches?
  - What are the “gray areas”?
  - Where is there ambiguity?
  - Why is reaching a decision on this issue so difficult?
4. ***Can we detect any shared sense of direction or common ground for action?*** After saying during the first few minutes of a forum that the objective is to work toward a decision, the moderator or someone else may continue to intervene from time to time with questions that move the dialogue toward a choice, always stopping short of pressing for consensus or agreement on a particular solution. Then, as the tensions become evident, and as people see how what they consider valuable pulls them in different directions, the moderator can test to see where the group is going by asking such questions as:
- Which direction seems best?
  - Where do we want this policy to take us?
  - What tradeoffs are we willing and unwilling to accept?
  - If the policy we seem to favor had the negative consequences some fear, would we still favor it?
  - What are we willing and unwilling to do as individuals or as a community in order to solve this problem?

**At the heart of dialogue is the question of whether we are willing to accept the consequences of our choices.**

# Convening a Community Dialogue

## Logistics to Consider

- What date and timeframe will work best?
- Where will the forum be held?
- Are facilities handicapped accessible?
- Is the meeting space large enough to accommodate all participants?
- Is it possible to arrange seats in a circle or U-shape in the meeting room?
- Will you serve refreshments?
- Will you provide childcare?

## Who will do what?

- Will there be a sign-in process? Who will handle it?
- Who is responsible for designing and distributing promotional materials?
- Who will help with outreach and invitations to the community?
- Who is responsible for securing discussion guides and other materials?
- Who will moderate the forum? Who will record?
- Who will return information from the forum to the county planning team?

## Equipment/Materials

- Issue booklets, starter video, questionnaires, moderator's guide
- Easels with flip charts, markers, tape
- DVD player and monitor OR laptop with projection screen, if the meeting room has Internet access (Starter video will also be posted on YouTube.)
- Extension cords, if necessary
- Microphones (Note: Only if group is quite large, usually not needed.)
- Pens or pencils for completing questionnaire

## Potential Roles of Local Conveners

- Develop a steering team to coordinate the local dialogues.
- Convene meetings; handle meeting logistics; document meetings.
- Conduct broad outreach and publicity about the dialogues in the community.
- Recruit citizens to be serve as moderators and recorders of forums.
- Recruit co-sponsors for dialogues that will reach a wide representation of citizens--the more dialogues, the better.
- Recruit participants for the forums so that ideas and action steps that emerge are broadly representative of your community's citizens.
- Consider holding an action-planning event that collects the ideas from the community discussions and other relevant local information, and kicks off additional community discussions, if needed.
- Develop task teams around priorities that emerge from the action planning.
- Coordinate process for implementing action steps by task teams
- Tell the story to the community as it unfolds.
- Evaluate results.
- Share ideas and outcomes from your community dialogues with the Early Childhood Advisory Council for the production of a statewide report on the public's views the needs of West Virginia's youngest children.

## Tips for Creating Partnerships

Building a broad base of support for local public issues forums not only ensures participation from many different segments of the community, but also serves to distribute the workload and prevent burnout of committed volunteers.

Following are some guidelines for creating positive partnerships that will ensure the success of local forums:

- **Be inclusive.** Look for partnerships including and beyond those organizations that already understand the importance of public dialogue. Successful forums represent a diversity of interests, resources, and perspectives.
- **Invite partners to participate at the earliest stages of planning a forum.** Give them ownership in the forum and the opportunity to contribute their special skills, resources, and points of view. They will be far more likely to fully participate if they are of the planning process as well as part of the forum implementation.
- **Clearly define the roles for partners.** What skills and resources do they bring to the table that will improve the capacity for public dialogue? Delegate tasks that best serve the partners' needs and interests, so that both parties feel rewarded for their efforts. Who is the partner's contact? What is their task? What kind of involvement in time and resources will the partner provide? What is the timetable to complete the assignment? How will their contribution be recognized?
- **Make sure your partners understand the mission and goals for the local public issues forum.** Communicate clearly why the forum needs their participation. Ask the partner what their expectations are and how they hope to benefit. From this discussion you can build a mutually beneficial relationship that will be long-lasting.

## Inviting the Public to Your Community Dialogue

- **Personalize, personalize, personalize.** The most effective way to get people to come to your forum is to ask them personally. Most people lead busy lives and it helps to let them know how much you value their perspectives and participation. Face-to-face invitations are great, but you might also use email or a handwritten note on a postcard through the regular mail. And since you can't invite everyone yourself, ask partners to invite others personally. **For example, ask a local pastor to invite his/her parishioners to the forum; ask a parent-teacher group to invite its members; ask a teacher to invite students; ask your friends to invite their friends.**
- **Publicize early.** When possible, send out a first round of announcements several weeks prior to the forum to allow organizations (civic groups, schools, faith groups, etc.) to include the information in their newsletters, bulletins, and mailings (email and regular mail).
- **Publicize often.** Advertising experts say that it can take 5-6 tries before your message "sinks in" with the people you are trying to reach. Don't assume that one letter or flyer will make enough of an impression on people that they will actually show up for your forum.
- **Use varied media.** People have many different learning and communication styles, so you need a variety of avenues to reach them. If your newspaper has a "community calendar," send in an announcement. See if you can interest a local reporter in doing an article prior to the event or write a letter to the editor. Many local stations have early morning or noontime shows where you can invite the community to your forum on the air. Some local newspapers might print the basic outline of the discussion guide in the paper, so their readers can think about the issue before attending the forum.

# Community Sectors—Do You Have Broad Community Representation?

When you are considering audiences for your community dialogues, strive for broad community representation.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents of young children</li> <li>• Grandparents</li> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Educators</li> <li>• Childcare workers</li> <li>• Young adults</li> <li>• County commissioners</li> <li>• General public</li> <li>• Faith groups</li> <li>• Volunteer organizations/clubs</li> <li>• Residents with diverse backgrounds:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Income level</li> <li>Geographic location</li> <li>Racial/ethnic background</li> <li>Educational level</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Counselors</li> <li>• Medical personnel</li> <li>• DHHR caseworkers</li> <li>• Elderly residents</li> </ul>	<p>Who else?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• _____</li> </ul>
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## Sample Press Release

[Date]

[Contact: Name, Phone, Email]

### *(Your Community)* **Unites to Address the Needs of WV's Youngest Children** **Community Dialogues Planned**

The first three years of a child's life are a time of great opportunity, as well as risk. We can tip the scales in favor of healthy development by providing early experiences and relationships that help babies and toddlers thrive. Our failure to do so can lead to long-lasting harm to our children, communities and economy.

In order to consider ways to ensure a good start for all West Virginia's children, \_\_\_\_\_ is joining with \_\_\_\_\_ to sponsor community discussions throughout the county. Community dialogues will be held on \_\_\_\_\_.

These discussions will bring together members of our community in a thoughtful conversation about what can be done. A neutral moderator will lead participants in a discussion of several in an atmosphere that encourages respectful sharing of differing perspectives. An issue guide will be available with background information about the issue.

The ideas for action that surface in the community discussion will be brought together in a community action planning meeting on \_\_\_\_\_.

Meeting the needs of our youngest children is a complex issue requiring the involvement of nearly every sector of the community - business, policymakers, students, educators, state and local agencies, parents, and community groups. The dialogues will allow community members to unite in purpose and actions to help improve the quality of life for young children.

These community discussions are open to the public and all forms of media. For more information about attending or sponsoring a community discussion in your neighborhood or organization, please contact \_\_\_\_\_.

###

## Sample Partner Invitation

### ***Making the Most of the First Three Years*** **How Can We Give Our Youngest Children a Good Start in Life?**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

The first three years of a child's life are a time of great opportunity, as well as risk. We can tip the scales in favor of healthy development by providing early experiences and relationships that help babies and toddlers thrive. Our failure to do so can lead to long-lasting harm to our children, communities and economy.

You are invited to join with \_\_\_\_\_ in co-sponsoring a community dialogue to discuss ways to ensure that our youngest children get a good start in life. [Your organization], in partnership with the Early Childhood Advisory Council and the WV Center for Civic Life are working together on this initiative.'

The dialogues will bring together members of our community in a thoughtful conversation about what can be done. A neutral moderator will lead participants in a discussion of several approaches in an atmosphere that encourages respectful sharing of differing perspectives. An issue guide will be available with background information about the issue. We think your organization would add important insights for tackling this critical issue in our community.

The ideas for action that surface in the community discussion will be brought together in a community action planning meeting on \_\_\_\_\_.

The ultimate goal of the forums is to consider individual, organizational, and community responses to the growing issue of students not completing high school. We hope opportunities for community action will emerge from this discussion that will be best implemented by a partnership among the agencies and organizations in our community. If we are going to be successful in improving the quality of life of our state's youngest children, our first step is to listen and learn from each other.

Please contact [name and contact information] to join as a sponsor for the dialogue or for more information.

Sincerely,

[Convener]

## Sample Participant Invitation

### *Making the Most of the First Three Years* How Can We Give Our Youngest Children a Good Start in Life?

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

The first three years of a child's life are a time of great opportunity, as well as risk. We can tip the scales in favor of healthy development by providing early experiences and relationships that help babies and toddlers thrive. Our failure to do so can lead to long-lasting harm to our children, communities and economy.

You are invited to attend a community dialogue to discuss what we can do to discuss ways to ensure that our youngest children get a good start in life. [Your organization], in partnership with The Education Alliance, the WV Center for Civic Life, and many local organizations are sponsoring a community forum on [date and time]. The form will be held at [location].

During the discussion, you will join other members of the community in a thoughtful conversation about what can be done. An issue guide will be available with background information about the issue. The goal of the discussion is to consider individual, organizational, and community actions.

The ideas for action that surface in the community discussion will be brought together in a community action planning meeting on \_\_\_\_\_.

Only you can share your concerns and insights on this issue, so your voice is critical to the success of this initiative. Please invite your friends, family and co-workers to join in addressing this important issue. If we are going to be successful in improving the quality of life of our state's youngest children, the first step is to listen to and learn from each other.

Please contact [name and information] if you would like more information.

Sincerely,

[Convener]

# Please join us . . .

for an important community discussion

## ***Making the Most of the First Three Years:***

### **How Can We Give Our Youngest Children a Good Start in Life?**

The first three years of a child's life are a time of great opportunity, as well as risk. We can tip the scales in favor of healthy development by providing early experiences and relationships that help babies and toddlers thrive. Our failure to do so can lead to long-lasting harm to our children, communities and economy.

In this community discussion, citizens from all walks of life are invited to come together to discuss what can be done to ensure that the youngest children in our community have a good start in life.

Date:

Time:

Location:

Sponsors:

## Potential Hosts or Co-Sponsors for Community Dialogues

While it is important to make sure that some of your forums are open to the general public, it is also a good idea to approach already existing groups to see if they will host a dialogue for their members. Here are some ideas—you'll have lots more.

### **Children and Families**

Headstart, Parent Councils, Family Resource Networks

### **United Way**

### **Service clubs**

Men's: Rotary, Masons, Lions, Civitans, Moose, Elks

Women's: Altrusa, Junior League, Business and Professional Women, Soroptimists

### **Faith-based meetings and classes for adults and youth**

### **Employee trainings at local businesses and agencies**

### **Chamber of Commerce**

### **Parents' organizations**

### **Youth organizations**

4-H, HI-Y, Boys and Girls Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs

### **Senior organizations**

Senior centers, AARP, senior housing complexes, Agencies on Aging

### **Veterans' organizations**

American Legion, VFW, Vietnam Veterans, Disabled Veterans

### **High school and college classrooms**

**Think creatively:** What events happen in your county that you could connect to? Where do people go?

Others \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Stages of a Community Dialogue

**Welcome** Let the participants know who is sponsoring the discussion. Stress co-sponsorship if several organizations are involved. Depending on the number of people present, you may want to ask participants to introduce themselves. If you have a particularly large group, you can ask participants to identify themselves the first time they speak in the discussion.

**Guidelines** Review the suggested guidelines for the discussion. (See page 25.)

**Starter Video** Play the video, which will provide an overview of the issue and the approaches that will form the framework for your discussion.

**Personal Stake** Before you begin deliberating together, take a few minutes to connect the issue directly to people's lives and concerns. There will not be time for everyone to offer a concern at this time. You are really looking for a range of comments that reveal the breadth of the issue. Some questions you might ask:

- What concerns you most about this issue?
- When you hear people discussing this issue, what makes it so difficult?
- Have any of you had a personal experience that illustrates what's at stake here?

**Dialogue about the Approaches** Provide a structure for people to examine each approach as fully as possible by encouraging them to consider questions such as these:

- What ideas do you have for addressing the problems?
- What might be the effect of your idea on others?
- What is there about this approach that you just cannot live with?
- What makes addressing this problem so difficult? What stands in the way?

**Reflections and Moving to Action** Turn the participants' attention to the insights and directions that have emerged in the forum. The types of questions you might ask:

- How has your thinking about the issue changed during the forum?
- What new insights or information did you gain?
- What were the greatest areas of concern?
- Where did we agree? Disagree?
- What might you do personally about this issue? What might we do together?
- Are there next steps we want to take?

**Questionnaire** Ask participants to complete the post-forum questionnaire (pages 29-30) as a way to capture their final thoughts and impressions. Collect the post-forum questionnaires and return them to local organizers and the Early Childhood Advisory Council. (See page 32).

## Community Dialogue Moderator’s Agenda

*This is an agenda for a 90-minute discussion. Make adjustments to fit your timeframe and priorities, making sure to leave time for the critical “Moving toward Action” closing.*

Time	Task
As people arrive	<b>Sign-in</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greet people, provide nametags, ask people to sign in (name/email).</li> </ul>
5 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome; host and moderator introductions, participant introductions</li> <li>• Purpose of the dialogue</li> </ul>
10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversation starter video</li> </ul>
10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review process and discussion guidelines (page 25).</li> <li>• Ask “What concerns you most about this issue?”</li> <li>• Ask “How is this issue impacting West Virginia?”</li> </ul>
15 minutes	<b>SUPPORT CARING AND CAPABLE PARENTING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are we already doing to support caring and capable parenting?</li> <li>• What more could we do—in our families, community, and state?</li> <li>• What actions would make the most difference?</li> <li>• See additional questions, page 27.</li> </ul>
15 minutes	<b>CREATE FAMILY-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are we already doing to make communities welcoming to families with infants and toddlers?</li> <li>• What more could we do—in our neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, businesses, and public facilities?</li> <li>• What actions would make the most difference?</li> <li>• See additional question, page 27.</li> </ul>
15 minutes	<b>ENSURE OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are we already doing to ensure that all young children and families thrive?</li> <li>• What more could we do—in local actions as well as state policy?</li> <li>• What actions and policies would make the most difference?</li> <li>• See additional questions, see page 27.</li> </ul>
15 minutes	<b>MOVING TOWARD ACTION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What actions are most likely to have the greatest impact?</li> <li>• What actions are likely to be supported with time, energy, and resources?</li> <li>• Who else needs to be involved?</li> <li>• What will be our next steps?</li> </ul>
5 minutes	<b>Participant Questionnaire</b>

## Suggested Discussion Guidelines

At the beginning of the discussion, most moderators review the following guidelines with participants. Some moderators write the guidelines on a flip chart and post them in the room. **You might also ask the participants if they agree with the guidelines or if they have their own suggestions for the group to consider.**

- The moderator will guide the discussion yet remain neutral.
  
- Everyone is encouraged to participate.
  
- No one or two individuals dominate the conversation.
  
- The discussion focuses on the issue.
  
- All the major approaches or positions on the issue are considered.
  
- An atmosphere for discussion and an analysis of the alternatives is maintained.
  
- Everyone listens to each other.
  
- Other ideas agreed upon by the group.

## The Moderator's Role

- Provide an overview of the process of dialogue—the rationale for the kind of work the participants are getting ready to do.
- Ask questions that probe deeply into what's at stake in the issue.
- Encourage participants to direct their responses and questions to each other, rather than to the moderator.
- Remain neutral throughout the discussion, while encouraging participants to explore all facets of their own and other's opinions
- Keep track of the time so participants can move through a discussion of each of the approaches, reserving enough time for a period of group reflections at the end.

### **If this is your first moderating experience, keep these thoughts in mind:**

**You do not have to be an expert on the issue.** Reading the discussion guide thoroughly, considering questions that get to the heart of the issue, and thinking through the essence of each approach are the critical parts of preparation.

**Stay focused on what the forum is about—dialogue.** Your natural curiosity and your interest in understanding diverse views will be your greatest assets; they're probably what got you here in the first place.

**Keep the discussion moving.** Sometimes it's hard to move on to another approach with so much more that could be said. But in order to deliberate—to really weigh what's at stake and make progress on the issue—participants need the opportunity to weigh all the major approaches.

**Reserve ample time for reflections at the end of the forum.** It's easy to find yourself with little time left at the end of the forum to reflect on what's been said. But, in many ways, this is the most important work the group will do—IF they have time to do it.

## Moderator Questions to Promote Deliberation

As you moderate each approach, three basic questions will move the discussion toward action:

- What is already being done in this area?
- What more could be done?
- What actions would have the greatest impact?

As you examine this issue together with dialogue participants, you (and they) will undoubtedly think of other questions that need to be explored. Many of these questions will arise during the course of the discussion. Most moderators find it helpful, though, to consider ahead of time some of the basic broad questions that need to be addressed about each approach. Here are some possibilities:

### Support caring and capable parenting

- What stake does the community have in the healthy development of its children? Are there tensions between the community's and the family's responsibility for children?
- Will the focus on parenting skills that this approach advocates produce the healthy child development promised? Can parents be expected to meet all their children's needs?
- What are the challenges involved in working to support parents in the ways this approach suggests?
- Your own questions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Create family-friendly communities

- What does a community that supports young children look like?
- Does our community support the healthy development of young children? Why or why not?
- What challenges do you see in making our own community more family-friendly?
- Your own questions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Ensure opportunity for all

- What responsibility do we have as adult citizens to the children growing up in our communities?
- When families don't provide what children need, at what point does the community or society step in to exert its stake in the development of the children?
- Would you support increased public funding for young children if it meant other services needed to be cut back? What would be more important funding priorities than services to young children? What would be less important?
- Your own questions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## The Role of the Recordors

The roles of the recordors are extremely important ones during a deliberative forum. Many recordors coordinate with the moderator ahead of time to plan effective strategies for working together during the forum. The purposes of recording are to:

- Remind forum participants of their key concerns, the areas of greatest agreement and disagreement.
- Provide a written record of the group's work that might feed into future meetings of the group or additional forums.
- Help inform other members of the community about the outcomes of the forum.
- Contribute insights from the forums to form a foundation for action planning.

### 1. **Group Recorder** (works at a flip chart in front of the group)

- Use brief phrases to capture main ideas. Don't try to get down every word.
- Capture the tensions and trade-offs that surface.
- Write clearly and legibly. Use dark markers and print large enough to be seen in the back of the room.

### 2. **At-the-seat Recorder** (takes notes at his/her seat)

- Capture direct quotes that reveal the deep concerns or emotions that surface.
- Record comments that reflect the spirit of the conversation.
- Summarize stories that are told that illustrate tensions or main ideas.
- Record specific ideas for dealing with the issue.

**Making the Most of the First Three Years: How Can We Give Our Youngest Children a Good Start in Life?  
Post-Discussion Participant Questionnaire**

Now that you've had the chance to participate in a discussion on this issue, please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire. Your insights will help set directions for local work on the issue. Additionally, participants' views will be summarized in a statewide report that will be shared with you, schools, organizations, policymakers, media, and the public.

<b>1. Do you agree or disagree with the statements below?</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
a. Teens need more education about pregnancy prevention.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. Low income families should receive financial assistance to purchase high quality childcare.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. Businesses should make their premises more baby-friendly.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. New parents need more parenting education.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. Employers should have more flexible leave policies for parents with young children.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

<b>2. Do you favor or oppose the following actions?</b>	<b>Strongly Favor</b>	<b>Somewhat Favor</b>	<b>Somewhat Oppose</b>	<b>Strongly Oppose</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
a. Onsite childcare for high school students with babies	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. More programs to address domestic violence, mental illness, and substance abuse in families	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. More help for students to graduate from high school, technical schools, and colleges	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. Increased requirements and wages for childcare workers	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. Full funding to implement the Quality Rating and Improvement System for childcare programs	<input type="checkbox"/>				

<b>3. Are you concerned about the following?</b>	<b>Very</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Not Sur</b>
a. .The amount of time parents have to spend with young children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Racial disparities in health, education, and employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Stress on grandparents raising their grandchildren	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Lack of job and financial skills of parents with young children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Teenage pregnancy among secondary school students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What is the best idea, program, or practice you heard in the discussion today?

What can you do personally to help West Virginia's youngest children have a good start in life?

What should your community do about this issue? Who should do it?

What policies—local, state, or national—should be changed to address the issue?

Any other thoughts, including other ideas that were not mentioned in today's discussion?

In order to summarize the demographic representation of participants in these discussions around the state, **please circle all of the responses that apply to you and provide your location.**

17 or younger	18-30	31-45	46-64	65 or older
African American	Asian American	Hispanic	Native American	White/Caucasian
Other (please specify) _____				
<i>Schooling completed:</i>	Some High School	High School	Some College	College Graduate
<i>Type of employment:</i>	Student Government	Business Not employed	Nonprofit Other _____	Educational
Town/community _____		County _____		



## What To Do After the Forum

### A Checklist

It is important to capture the ideas of each community dialogue for consideration in local action planning stage and in contributing to the upcoming statewide report on this issue.

Please do the following after your forum:

- Gather completed participant questionnaires.** (See pages 29-30.) These questionnaires provide very useful insights from individual participants that will reveal themes, trends, and areas of broad concern when they are analyzed with questionnaires from other discussions.
- Complete the moderator's response sheet.** (See page 31.) Try to do this soon after the forum, while ideas are still fresh in your mind. During the reflections period at the end of your discussion, the group will work through most of the questions on the moderator's response sheet.
- Prepare recorder notes from the forum.** (See page 28.) Better yet, ask the recorder to do this for you. If you can have the "at the seat" notes typed up, that would be very helpful. If not, send a copy of the handwritten notes.
- Prepare contact list** (name and email) for participants in order to stay in touch with them for follow-up action planning sessions.

Soon after the discussion, return copies of post forum questionnaires, the moderator's response sheet, the group and at-the-seat recorder notes, and participant contact information to:

**Gretchen Frankenberry**  
**Department of Education and the Arts**  
**State Capitol Complex, Building 5, Room 205**  
**1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East**  
**Charleston, WV 25305**

**Thank you** for your leadership in bringing community members together to consider ways ensure that West Virginia's children have a good start in life.

## **Moving From Dialogue to Action: Challenges and Opportunities**

The first rule of civic engagement is to start where people are, not where you want them to be, or where you hope they will end up. Local people solve local problems best. The shape each local dialogue initiative takes will vary because people in each county will start at a different place with a different constellation of resources and challenges.

The success of your local initiative will depend on:

- the breadth and depth of the discussion at the community forums
- how fully people from all different backgrounds in your community participate

### **Capturing the Insights from the Public as a Foundation for Action**

It is possible that clear directions will emerge from your discussions that will lend themselves to the creation of action task forces at your countywide summit, but most likely some community members will just be developing a sense of urgency about the issue and will need more conversation before they know what actions they want to take. In preparation for your countywide summit, you will need to:

- Analyze what has emerged from your discussions and interviews and identify areas of strength, promising directions, and gaps.
- Develop a summary on the status of your discussions so far, identifying what has been learned, what people still need to work on, and any common ground for action that has emerged so far. This will be used as a starting point at the countywide summit.
- Identify the assets that already exist in your county or region to address the high school completion challenge.
- Recruit people to relay insights from the community forums to the summit participants.
- Decide what discussion process you want to use at the summit to involve the people who attend and plan who will facilitate. (See sample agenda on page 37.)
- Determine how the county steering team will respond to the community's desire to continue the conversation and work on follow up action steps that emerge.

# Agenda for Action Planning Summit—Sample 1

## 1. Welcome and Introductions

- a. Acknowledge sponsors
- b. Agenda review—why we're here

## 2. Reports from the Community Discussions So Far

- a. Community discussions overview
  1. Areas of agreement
  2. Things we still need to work on
  3. Emerging ideas about what individuals, organizations,  
and the community can do
- b. Insights from individual community forum participants
- c. Starter video from forums, if desired

## 3. Overview of Community Assets—

What do we already have available to us to address this issue?

## 4. Broadening the Community Dialogue – Moving to Action

(Questions could be addressed in World Café\* format:)

- a. What else do we need to know?
- b. Who else needs to be involved in the conversation?
- c. What can we do—what is doable now?

## 5. Next steps

## 6. Closing remarks

\*For an overview of World Café, see page 35.

## World Café Conversations at a Glance

Seat **four or five people at small Café-style tables** or chairs forming conversation clusters.

Set up **progressive** (usually three) **rounds of conversation** of about 20-30 minutes each.

**Questions or issues that genuinely matter** to your life, work or community are engaged while other small groups explore similar questions at nearby tables. (See questions on page 37.)

Encourage both table hosts and members to **write, doodle and draw key ideas** on their tablecloths or to note key ideas on large index cards or placemats in the center of the group.

Upon completing the initial round of conversation, ask one person to remain at the table as the “host” **while the others serve as travelers or “ambassadors of meaning.”** The travelers carry key ideas, themes and questions into their new conversations.

Ask the table host to welcome the new guests and briefly share the main ideas, themes and questions of the initial conversation. Encourage guests to **link and connect ideas** coming from their previous table conversations—listening carefully and building on each other's contributions.

By providing opportunities for people to move in several rounds of conversation, **ideas, questions, and themes begin to link and connect.** At the end of the second round, all of the conversation clusters in the room will be *cross-pollinated* with insights from prior conversations.

In the third round of conversation, people can return to their home (original) tables to **synthesize their discoveries**, or they may continue traveling to new tables, leaving the same or a new host at the table. Sometimes a new question that helps **deepen the exploration** is posed for the third round of conversation.

After several rounds of conversation, initiate a period of sharing discoveries and insights in a **whole group conversation.** It is in this large group conversation that patterns can be identified, collective knowledge grows, and possibilities for action emerge.

Once you know what you want to achieve and the amount of time you have to work with, you can decide the appropriate number and length of conversation rounds, the most effective use of questions and the most interesting ways to connect and cross-pollinate ideas.

## **Agenda for Action Planning Summit—Sample 2**

*Moderators: Your task in this meeting is to help participants from the community move into the “action phase” of their local work together. The following questions will help the group plan for local actions based on the ideas that came up in their forums and the countywide summit.*

- **Welcome and introductions**

- **What were the key concerns that came up during our community dialogues?**

*(Ask for summaries from participants; refer to notes from forum.)*

- **What were the areas where there was the most agreement about the need for action?**

- **Which of these actions does our group want to work on? What are our priorities?**

*(Create list of potential action items; prioritize in order of groups’ desire and ability to work on them.)*

- **Who else needs to be involved to take this action(s)?**

- **What else do we need to learn in order to move forward?**

- **What can we do next to take action on this issue?**

*(Create a list of next steps and who will volunteer to take them.)*

- **How will we keep track of our action efforts for our own use? How will we contribute our ideas and progress to the countywide effort?**

- **How do we plan to work together as a large group? In small groups? Will we meet again? When?**

## **Three Parting Thoughts**

- 1. Good luck with your community dialogue-to-action initiatives.**
- 2. Thank you for the very important work you are doing in your communities to improve the quality of life of our state's youngest children.**
- 3. And don't forget to be in touch if you need help or just want to share an idea that is working in your community with others.**