



“We put the *public* in public policy.”

PO Box 10252, Kansas City, MO 64171

www.consensuskc.org

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Seven steps to public judgment

People’s views about an issue can develop and change over time from poorly informed reactions to thoughtful and considered conclusions, from changeable public opinion to settled public judgment. This evolves through seven distinct states, according to Dan Yankelovich.

Consciousness-raising

Stage 1: Dawning Awareness. People become aware of an issue but do not yet feel a pressing need to take action. People acknowledge the problem, but there is little real urgency.

Stage 2: Greater Urgency. The dominant sentiment is often a panicky appeal to “do something!”

Working Through

Stage 3: Reaching for Solutions. The public begins to look at alternatives for dealing with issues, converting free-floating concern into calls for action. At this stage, people generally do not fully understand the choices presented to them, so people often endorse a proposal but back down as soon as the costs and trade-offs are clarified.

Stage 4: Wishful Thinking. At this stage, the public’s resistance to facing trade-offs is most manifest, as people initially assume they can have it all. The public’s wishful thinking must be overcome before people come to grips with more realistic solutions.

Stage 5: Weighing the Choices. The public does choice work, weighing the pros and cons of ways to deal with an issue. This stage is hard work, as people come to understand that easy, cost-free solutions are unlikely to work. When the public has given a lot of thought to an issue and different ways to address it, they begin to hold firmly to their opinions even when presented with unpleasant consequences.

Resolution

Stage 6: Taking a Stand Intellectually

Stage 7: Making a Responsible Judgment Morally and Emotionally. People are quicker to accept change in their minds than in their hearts. In Stage 6 people accept an idea, but they usually don’t act on it until they reach Stage 7. Stage 6 requires people to clarify fuzzy thinking, reconcile inconsistencies, and grasp the full consequences of choices. The emotional resolution of Stage 7 requires people to change their own thinking and behavior and confront their own ambivalent feelings.



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Consensus processes

Consensus is a nonpartisan, nonprofit consulting firm founded in 1984. We use a variety of processes to engage people in important local, state and national issues. This chart shows the processes that Consensus has used in its work.

Process	Characteristics	Outcomes	When to use
Panel discussions	A group of four or five experts, a conversation moderated by someone engaging (often KCPT’s Nick Haines), and audience members invited to ask questions. May be filmed for broadcast. Often held in partnership with a library.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The public is more aware of an emerging issue. ▪ The public is more informed about the issue. ▪ Community leaders know more about how the public feels about the issue. 	<p>Stages 1 & 2 Panel discussions work well when an issue is just emerging or when the public hasn’t yet had a chance to weigh in. Example: panel on democracy and the decline in local reporting, 6/2009.</p>
Issue studies	A Consensus consultant gathers data, engages stakeholders and experts and writes up the findings. Then, the board can review findings and develop recommendations or Consensus can convene a citizen task force to do this. Issue studies usually receive strong media attention. The combination of data and recommendations is attractive to the media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The public understands the major perspectives on the issue. ▪ The public understands possible actions and tradeoffs involved. ▪ Recommended actions reflect the citizen perspective. 	<p>Stages 2-4 Consensus gathers and presents information from the citizen perspective. Issue studies are most useful when people are just starting to work through an issue. Example: A study on structure and funding for local libraries in 2004 got national attention.</p>

<p>Deliberative forums</p>	<p>Trained moderators work with people in small groups. They use a discussion guide that lays out the three major ways, built on different sets of values, to approach the issue. They discuss the benefits and disadvantages of each, and identify areas of common ground.</p> <p>MacNeil/Lehrer Productions sponsored four national “day of deliberation” events called By the People, using randomly selected participants. Consensus and KCPT have co-convened each time. These forums are also often sponsored by libraries. We use National Issues Forums (www.nifi.org) discussion guides or create our own.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The public has a better understanding of the issue. ▪ The public better understands other perspectives. ▪ The public is more likely to take action. ▪ Elected and other leaders better understand the public’s view of the issue. 	<p>Stage 3-5 People who participate in deliberation know more and have more moderate opinions than non-participants, who know less and have more extreme views. Deliberation was designed specifically to help the public work through difficult issues.</p> <p>Example: Johnson County Library hired Consensus to produce a guide on how to commemorate the border war between MO and KS.</p>
<p>21st Century Town Meeting</p>	<p>This process was pioneered by AmericaSpeaks. It can engage 100s or thousands at one or more sites. Trained moderators work with people in small groups. Each person has a keypad and each table has a laptop. A volunteer types note into the laptop, and a theme team identifies common themes. Individuals vote on their top themes. Typically, the group goes through this process three or four times over the course of a day, using written info and presentations to inform participants.</p> <p>Because this can involve so many people, it gathers significant attention from the media.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The public has a better understanding of the issue. ▪ A critical mass of individuals is engaged, so leaders and others pay attention. ▪ The public and elected leaders are more likely to take action. 	<p>Stages 3-5 While this doesn’t use the 3-approaches model, it is very deliberative and requires that people make choices. It can be used a little earlier than the traditional 3-approaches model, before all the major ways of dealing with the issue have been identified.</p> <p>Example: In 2013, we engaged about 360 people in creating an action plan for mental health, part of Creating Community Solutions.</p>

Focus groups	<p>With focus groups, you are asking open-ended questions to find out what people think and feel about an issue. Focus groups can be a useful way to start the process of naming and framing public issues, as you get a good sense of the language people use and their ideas for solutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The client understands what's important to focus group participants. ▪ The client understands how participants see the issue. 	<p>Data-gathering phase Convene focus groups when you are trying to get a sense of the public perspective. Example: Held a series of 15 focus groups for the KC, Kansas, Community College, which led them to make some changes.</p>
Surveys	<p>Surveys, like focus groups, are useful when you need to gather data. SurveyMonkey is low-cost and fine when you don't need a statistically valid survey. Consensus has worked with other consultants to provide statically valid surveys for library clients.</p>	<p>The outcomes depend on the type of survey and the issue being addressed.</p>	<p>Data-gathering Example: For a project for four libraries in Iowa, we conducted two mailed surveys. The first was on satisfaction with library services. The second was a deliberative survey on how to structure and fund local libraries.</p>
Future search conference	<p>A future search takes 2 or 2-1/2 days and involves about 64 persons working at 8 tables of 8. Participants explore their shared past and present, and create a vision of the ideal future. Then they generate an action plan. A future search gets the whole system in the room and focuses on common ground for action.</p> <p>In 1993, Consensus held the first-ever community-wide future search at Arrowhead Stadium. From 1994-1998, we conducted six future searches on the topic of youth/adult partnerships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ People from every aspect of an organization involved in creating its future. ▪ An action plan based on common ground and on a shared vision of the future. ▪ An action plan based on a shared understanding of the past and current trends. 	<p>Strategic / Action planning The future search is typically used for organizational action planning. It can also be used with a community or a group of people involved in a particular field or issue.</p> <p>Examples: In 2008, we held four, one-day searches on behalf of the Washington State Library, which became a 5-year plan for library services. In 2012, we conducted a 2-day search with the Monroe County (IN) Public Library.</p>

Tailored meetings & projects	Consensus tailors meetings to the needs of the situation or client.		Example: Designed and facilitated a one-day meeting for 30+ stakeholders in the Missouri River. The day included group interviews, small-group and large-group discussions. Part of an eight-state project.
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Consensus can help you learn more about how to engage your community

Certificate program on effective methods for engaging the public

Consensus teaches four days of the six-day class offered through the University of Kansas Public Management Center. To learn more: <http://kupmc.ku.edu/programs/public-engagement-certificate>.

- Located outside the KC metro? We can tailor training to your library's needs and offer it on-site for your staff, volunteers and partners.

How to moderate deliberative forums

If your library would like to offer deliberative forums through the Kettering Foundation and National Issues Forums Institute, we can train your staff and volunteers to do a great job of moderating the forums.

For more information:

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