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PUBLIC DELIBERATION

The New York Academy of Medicine has a rich history of engaging community members to inform the design and development of programs and policies that promote good health. We use many methods to accomplish this goal. One of the most innovative practices—used in health, as well as broader policy decision making—is public deliberation, a form of community engagement with a significant educational component and extended periods for discussion and analysis. Public deliberation provides guidance for policy makers, health care system administrators, community members and others, on specific, often complex, value-laden questions. The information gathered is then used to inform policy, form programs or other activities that will serve the participant communities.

We came together—we didn't all agree on everything—we came together, and I think we understood, and we learned from each other. It didn't necessarily change all my views, but it influenced my views on certain topics.

– Public Deliberation Participant, Brooklyn, NY

WHY IT WORKS

Public deliberation is a unique form of community engagement that gives people an opportunity to delve deeply into the issues at hand. Ample time is given to educating the group about the topic to help them better understand the issue and clarify their values, questions, concerns and ideas. Participants are afforded the opportunity to hear experts present arguments on different sides of a question, and to examine their views in the context of the experiences of other participants.

Input from the community is extremely valuable given that many aspects of

health are socially rooted and community residents bring social, economic and cultural knowledge that is relevant to the decision process.

THE ISSUES EXPLORED

Public deliberation has often been used to explore a variety of questions related to health, many of them linked to ethical and value-based issues in health and health care. Topics addressed have included: Triage protocols for emergencies; genetic testing; placebo use in clinical trials; bio-banks; health system reform; and priorities for funding specific health services.

HOW IT'S DONE

Deliberations are built around these basic guidelines:

- An objective convener works with a decision maker to formulate a question to be posed to constituents that will provide guidance to that decision maker about a preferred course of action.
- The convener shapes an inclusive recruitment process that ensures a demographically representative sample of individuals who will be affected by the decision.
- An educational process is developed appropriate to the knowledge and experience base of lay participants that allows them to become familiar with the range of issues that bear on the decision. Facilitators and content experts educate participants on issues, providing background information and case studies through presentations and written materials.
- Small and large-group discussions allow for in-depth exploration of participant values and perspectives.
- Pre- and post-deliberation surveys, as well as informal and formal group votes at different points in the deliberation, track participant views.
- The decision maker is furnished with tallies of the group's answer to the question posed. This is done both through vote counts and through qualitative summaries of the participants' reasons for their responses.

How do you learn about the community or what the community needs or wants if not by gleaning information from actual residents and people who utilize the hospital facilities? So yes, it's very important. It's something that I never even thought existed, really... I think it's a definite positive.

–Public Deliberation Participant, Brooklyn, NY

THE BENEFITS TO ALL PARTIES

Public deliberation may bring about policy shifts that better coincide with the values and perceived needs of constituents; it may also lead to changes that improve health in a community.

- Community engagement can have a positive impact on health in a community, as well as the individuals who participate in the process.
- Community engagement facilitates effective, sustainable population-based health interventions.

Health care policy and practice continually pose challenging questions for community members and policy makers. Public deliberation is intended to be a democratizing process that raises the voices of the people potentially affected by a decision, so that decision makers can consider their needs and values. The goal is to make decisions that will ultimately be both effective and acceptable for all stakeholders.

An example of an Academy public deliberation:

Community Priorities for Hospital-Based Prevention Initiatives: Results from a Deliberating Public

(Journal of Public Health Management & Practice, 2017)