



FACILITATION GUIDE: POLICY SYMPOSIUM

POLICY-MAKING IS UP TO ALL OF US - NOT JUST THE “EXPERTS”.

What is a policy?

A policy is an action taken by government to achieve an objective for society. Policies affect all aspects of our lives: what kind of transportation we take, what foods we eat, and how we interact with our environments.

Activity Type: Policy dialogue and creation

Participant Audience: Residents, Organizational Partners, Built Environment Professionals, Decision-Makers

Objectives

“Conventional wisdom assumes that policy-making should be left to the experts” (Keough et al., 2006). However, many of us are looking for more meaningful ways to contribute to the policies that affect our everyday life.

A policy symposium provides an opportunity for citizens to engage with one another in thoughtful dialogue to discuss, debate and resolve issues of importance to our families, communities, and our city. Respectful dialogue to create policies assumes that the decisions made are more effective and more just since everyone affected by those decisions is heard and considered.

The symposium involves a 4-part exercise. Participants will:

- Review relevant data and create a headline to describe the story the data tells;
- Identity 1-3 key issues;
- Propose 1-2 policies or actions to address key issues.
- Participate in a budget simulation.



Materials needed

1. Presentation or slides with the agenda and symposium information
2. Markers and pens
3. Paper, two sizes: large for the activities, small for writing notes
4. Sticky notes for dialogue and ideas
5. Something to “vote” with (fake bills, poker chips, etc.)
6. Reference materials - include data on the topic of discussion



Facilitation Process

1. Before the symposium begins:

- Identify the focus area(s) for your workshop (will you talk about active transportation? Sense of community? Affordable Housing? Food security?)
- Gather data on your topic, and prepare materials to share it. For examples of what these materials could look like, please refer to Sample Materials below.
- Select facilitators who are familiar with the subject matter to assist, answer questions, and guide group conversation. Provide facilitators with their subject matter data before the event to familiarize themselves.
- Select a moderator who will guide the process.
- Promote the symposium.

2. Facilitation steps at the symposium:

- Before participants arrive, place the necessary materials at each table, including: topic data, markers, pens, and paper.
- Provide an overview of the day's events:
 - Outline the process, context, and objectives of the symposium.
 - Provide a summary of the discussion topics and information on data they will be looking at.
 - Discuss the “Principles of Deliberative Dialogue” (see green box on the next page) to specify that the symposium is a collaborative exercise where everyone will learn from one another, share ideas and concepts, and come to a consensus on policy interventions.

Tip: Think strategically about inviting stakeholders and decision makers, and consider connecting this symposium with upcoming government events or announcements. For example, budgets, projects, or initiatives.

- Break into groups of 8 to 10 to explore the subject matter.
- Ask groups to review the data, discuss, and use the information to answer the question: **What story is the data telling us?**
 - After the groups have completed their review of the data, ask them to **create a headline** based on the story their data tells.
- Each group summarizes their data, presents their headlines and shares highlights of their conversation with the rest of the room.
- Ask the groups to **identify 1 to 3 key issues** that stood out for them and **propose 1 or 2 policies** or actions to address these key issues.
 - Each group presents these policies and actions to the wider group.
- Budget Simulation:
 - Each participant is given an item that represents money (poker chips, board game money, etc.) and is asked to distribute the money among the proposed policies and actions. The policies or actions with the most money will provide insight into the priorities and needs of citizens

Principles of Deliberative Dialogue:

- Find common ground through understanding and learning from one another. (You can not “win” a dialogue).
- Speak only for yourself, not as a representative of the interests of others.
- Everyone is treated as an equal: leave roles, status and stereotypes at the door
- Be open and listen to others, even (especially when) you disagree, and suspend judgement.
- Identify and test assumptions, (especially your own).
- Listen carefully and respectfully to the views of others: and acknowledge you have heard the other, especially when you disagree.
- Express disagreement with ideas, not with personalities or motives. (Disagree without being disagreeable).
- Dialogue and decision making are separate activities. (Dialogue should always come before decision making).

(From Sustainable Calgary’s Citizens’ Agenda)



Tip: Have people familiar with the topic, data, and process circulate around the room. Some of your data might be dense and may require some extra guidance. These “floaters” should be available to answer questions and provide additional information to participants.



Tip: Make sure professionals and facilitators are using plain language! This is an essential part of this toolkit and makes it accessible for all.



Tip: Given consent, share participant work on social media during the event.



Reference

Keough, Noel, Maryam Nabavi and Jeff Loomis. (2006). A Citizens' Agenda: For a More Healthy, Caring, and Vibrant Calgary. Sustainable Calgary Society, Calgary, Canada.

Sample Materials

1. Data set used at a policy symposium

Affordable Housing									
A5 Percentage of households spending 30% or more of total income on shelter									
	Calgary (CMA)	Calgary (City)	Alberta	Canada	Vancouver	Saguenay	Toronto	Edmonton	Montreal
2006	17.6								
2010	25.0	25.3	23.7	25.2	33.5	18.9			
2016	21.9			24.1	32.0	16.9	33.4	21.9	24.6



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