

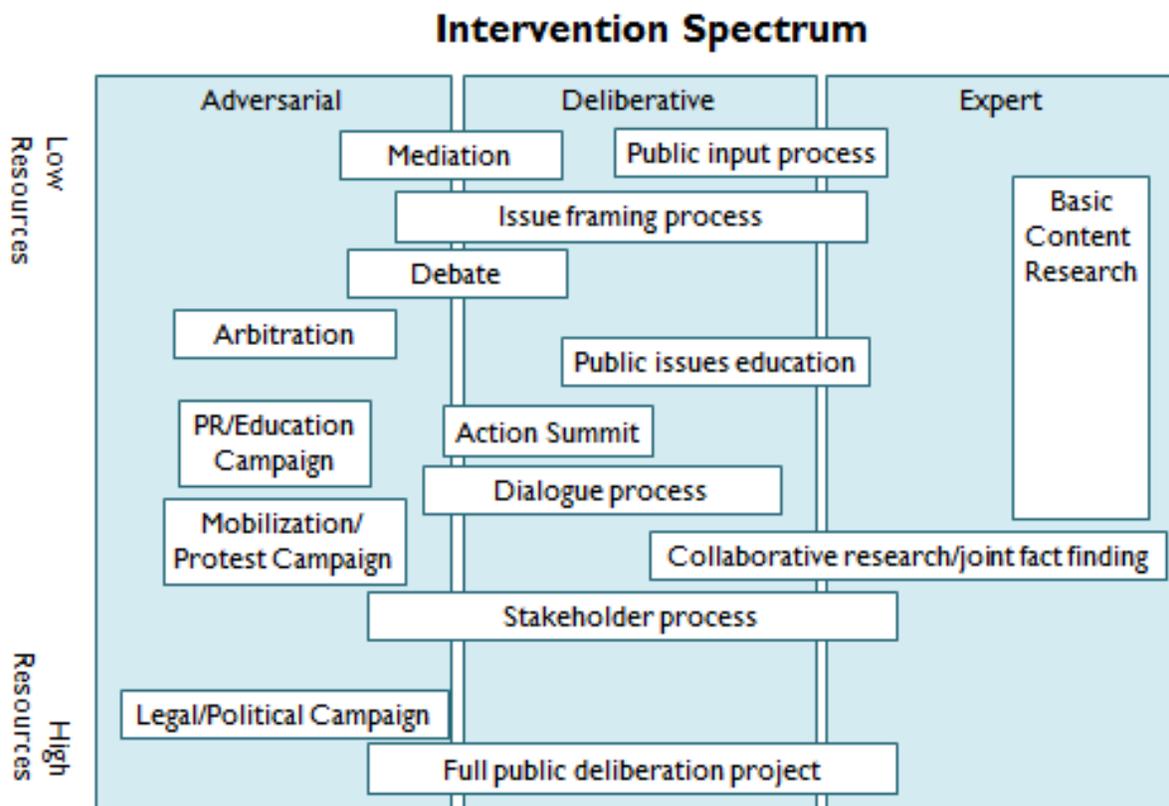
Overview of the Intervention spectrum

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There are numerous ways to intervene as a “passionate impartial” on issues in your community. The most appropriate intervention of course depends on many factors. The “Intervention Spectrum” presents a wide-range of interventions, structured across two primary dimensions. Each intervention represents a process in itself that has a stopping point, though those near the top of the spectrum can also be seen as preliminary steps to the broader, more involved processes below (i.e. issue framing can be done as a separate and complete process, or it may be an important part of a full deliberation project).

The vertical dimension is a general estimate of the resources—particularly time, money, people, and skills—that are required to complete the process in a productive manner. Those toward the top of the chart can be completed by individuals and small groups, whereas those on the bottom would generally involve multiple public events that attract a broad range of stakeholders, along with time to research and plan before and after each of those events. Those toward the top are also less demanding in terms of challenging typical notions of impartiality. As you move down, controversy and the tensions inherent to passionate impartiality grow, as do the need for more institutional connections and power. As I argued in *Beginning with the End in Mind*, deliberative projects need to fit the available resources, and



overpromising potential impacts can negatively affect a community. With limited resources, practitioners should focus on interventions higher in the spectrum. Because high quality deliberative processes tend to build community capacity for future processes, successful completion of interventions at the top of the spectrum should lead to the ability to take on interventions further down.

The horizontal placement cuts across the three forms of politics: adversarial, deliberative, and expert (for more info, see the CPD workbook). Clearly, the focus on the intervention spectrum is on deliberative interventions, but deliberative interventions often incorporate adversarial and expert politics. Indeed, the goal of deliberative politics is to bring out the best in adversarial and expert politics, while avoiding or undoing their negative impacts. As the spectrum shows, many processes cut across two or even all three areas. Some of the interventions included in the spectrum do not have clear deliberative components, but are included because they may represent appropriate interventions for particular situations (even though it may not be appropriate for a deliberative practitioner to actually support that sort of intervention). In other words, rather than simply rejecting a potential project, deliberative practitioners may suggest that a non-deliberative intervention is more appropriate, even if that means they would not be involved.

Issue input process – An issue input process focuses on gathering additional opinion on a key issue. It would primarily connect with the need for additional “divergent” opinion and a clearer sense of some of the key issues. Many broader deliberative processes need to begin here, unless there is already enough data concerning the various positions of key stakeholders. An issue input process may utilize open-ended surveys, interviews, or focus groups to produce new information that helps them with the framing process. At the CPD, we often utilize surveys early in a process so that during an interactive event we can dig deeper and move past simple input. We have utilized googledoc forms to support these processes before, tying them into an RSVP process. An issue input process typically would not directly incorporate interaction between stakeholders, and thus is focused on understanding how stakeholders currently think, rather than helping the stakeholders listen and learn from each other and thereby refine their positions. Said differently, an issue input process involves one-way communication. Most basic public hearings and citizen comment periods essentially serve as issue input sessions, though deliberative practitioners may ask more specific questions in order to refine their understanding of the issue. Overall, however, issue input sessions should remain rather open-ended, allowing the stakeholders to define how they see the issue in their terms.

A good choice when: Deliberative practitioner does not have a clear enough sense of the concerns and values of the various stakeholders to properly design an intervention.

Mediation – Mediation is a process where opposing stakeholders agree to meet with a third-party mediator to discuss issues, though typically the mediator does not have authority. They assist the individuals to develop deeper understanding of each other and discover possibilities for managing their conflict. Necessary resources are quite low because mediation is typically not a public process, but rather focused on key individuals from various groups. Often mediation begins with the mediator meeting separately with the stakeholders in order to develop clearer understanding of the issues before bringing them into a conversation together (also known as “shuttle diplomacy”).

A good choice when: Resources are too low to support a public process, and specific individuals play key roles and are willing to participate to work together.

Debate – A debate is an interactive event that publicly pits individuals from opposing perspectives to discuss key issues, primarily for the benefit of an audience. At times, it serves primarily as a spectacle with limited positive impact on the quality of public discussion, especially when the opposing sides simply talk past each other or focus on “scoring points” on each other. They tend to require few resources because advocates are often ready to debate, and audiences are typically happy to attend as spectators. A poorly structured debate can often have negative impacts because there is not enough focus on compromise or recognizing key tensions between the perspectives. However, a well-structured debate with strong deliberative questions and an active moderator can certainly provide additional clarity to an issue and therefore set the stage to move the conversation forward. Many of the problems with adversarial politics are caused by opposing sides preaching only to their own respective “choirs,” which allows them to relay misinformation and simplify issues without repercussion. A good debate should require the opposing sides to “up their game” because of the presence of both an impartial moderator and a representative of the other side. A good debate should thus serve the conversation by working like a caldron that exposes bad information and elevates strong arguments. In the process, key fact questions and important values tensions could be discovered and clarified. Said differently, a debate should essentially be seen as a “game” that can be played primarily by the advocates of opposing views that can help reveal important insights into both positions when designed and run well by a moderator. To maximize deliberative effect, the moderator should keep the four key products of deliberative inquiry in mind, and fashion questions to have the debaters provide clarity on those as much as possible.

A good choice when: Resources are low, and passionate advocates need a role to play. Can be a stand alone process, or combined with others. Debates can be put together pretty quickly, but work best when the moderator can research the issue, identify key aspects of the issue, and develop questions that will help the participants dig deeper on those issues. The CPD has helped run debates on water issues and between candidates for office focused on poverty issues (information, including examples of “deliberative” debate questions, available on RamCT).

Issue framing/Collaborative Issue Framing Process: Often a preliminary step to a larger deliberative process, issue framing can also be a process in itself that can have positive impacts on public discourse surrounding an issue. By simply doing the research and developing—or even simply attempting to develop—an impartial discussion guide that frames the issue in a more productive way can counteract many of the most damaging aspects of overly-adversarial politics. An issue framing process can be completed by an individual, a team, or as part of a public process. Issue framing can be developed from pre-existing data, but often deliberative practitioners will need to first complete an issue input process to better understand the various perspectives.

At the CPD, I often frame issues on my own, primarily utilizing public information—websites, published documents and reports, comments on messages boards, newspaper articles, etc.—to help me understand the different aspects of the issues. There are also several organizations that frame issues and provide other materials that I can typically borrow from and adapt (see RamCT for examples). If I

have time and the issue calls for it, I may work with different stakeholders while framing, essentially combining mediation with issue framing. I also often use open ended surveys to gather additional information concerning key issues.

Most broadly, issue framing can be a public process of its own. The National Issues Forum process (NIF) at times involves an extended process that starts with forums to identify key concerns and values, and then engage the public periodically as the discussion guide is developed. The Interactivity Foundation has an extensive process to develop their discussion guides, one that particularly engages experts and laypeople. Issue frames should always be considered living documents that are constantly “in process,” as no document will perfectly frame the issue.

A good choice when: Resources are too limited for a full process, but you have enough time and interest in the issue to dedicate. Issue framing is also very flexible, in that a good framing could then spark a broader process as people see the value and begin to take ownership.

Basic content research: For many issues, the best intervention may simply be additional research into causes of the problem and potential solutions. The extension literature makes the distinction between content and process expertise (Patton & Blaine, 2001), with the push for developing more process expertise as part of the move for extension to be more of a deliberative resource to their communities. This intervention, however, maintains focus on the need for additional content expertise in order to better address the issue. Deliberation certainly requires high quality information, and if an issue is dominated by groups coming from very different factual places, research focused on narrowing the gap between the perspectives may be the best option to move forward. When an issue is polarized, however, additional research may not help improve the conversation, as opposing sides tend to accept data that supports their perspective and dismiss data that doesn't. To be productive, research must then be designed and carried out with a more specific eye towards improving the conversation, rather than supporting a particular perspective. Ideally, research is completed by a source trusted by the various key stakeholders, potentially at the direction of the stakeholders. With wicked problems, however, it must be understood that research cannot resolve the issue, and that the move to “research the issue more” before engaging can simply be a procrastination device.

A good choice when: The conversation is dominated by factual questions and disagreements that could be informed by research, and those obstacles are making it difficult for the conversation to progress.

PR/Education campaign: Appropriate when issues are primarily defined by clarity or consensus among experts in terms of what needs to be done but lack of public understanding or support for those actions. Typically not appropriate for wicked problems, but if the goal is gaining more public support for predetermined ends, then a pseudo-deliberative event would be inappropriate. For our purposes, PR/educational campaigns are differentiated from mobilization/protest campaigns because they are focused primarily on changing attitudes rather than directly focusing on changing behavior as mobilization campaigns are. At the CPD, we have most often passed on potential projects when it

seemed clear we were asked by a group that had one specific action/solution in mind as the focus point of the project and were clearly reluctant to move away from that perspective.

Action planning summit: This intervention is used when a group has already worked through an issue, or working through is not necessary due to the nature of the issue, and the most important next step is to prioritize various options for action and move toward implementation (i.e. ready for the convergent thinking segment of Kaner's participatory decision-making process). This intervention generally focuses less on creating understanding across perspective and the refinement of opinions, and likely involves a smaller group of stakeholders. The CPD, for example, has run projects for the bicycling community focused on increasing bicycle safety and the art community in helping build their capacity.

Public issue education event: Public Issues Education (PIE) is the term used by Extension programs for a particular style of deliberative projects that fits extension history and philosophy (Patton & Blaine, 2001). PIE certainly incorporates many deliberative concepts, such as the realization that issues are complex, and that while good data is critical, public issues also inherently incorporate values that necessitate good process. The focus on "education"—rather than action or decision-making—provides a lower bar in multiple ways that could be important to a newly developing program (1st order v. 2nd order goals). While still striving for a broad range of stakeholders, there is less pressure to attract a representative audience when the process is framed as educational. Educational processes will also typically not be tied directly to moving to action, which makes it easier for conveners to maintain the perception of impartiality. PIE likely serve as a safe place for Extension agents to begin their work in this area, as they build skills and their local network. Like issue framing, PIE projects can also serve as important preliminary steps that lead into more extensive deliberative projects down the road. PIE differ from PR or educational campaigns in the sense that they are not advocating a specific perspective, but rather asking people to engage an issue more broadly. PIE projects can also be developed utilizing pre-developed material and issue guides from organizations like NIF, Public Agenda, and the Interactivity Foundation (see RamCT for links and examples).

Dialogue processes: A dialogue process is one that focuses primarily on developing more trust and understanding between opposing stakeholders, but stops short of action planning or decision-making. Such processes are interactive in that participants are face to face, but they focus more on storytelling and listening. Dialogue processes are therefore more exploratory rather than being focused on working through tensions. They are designed to build relationships by helping participants see things through the perspectives of others.

A good choice when: conflict between key stakeholders is a primary obstacle to moving forward, and putting them in the same room to deliberate would be counterproductive due to the lack of trust. A dialogue process brings them together with lower expectations, and may improve the relationship enough to be able to move on to other more deliberative processes.

Mobilization campaign: Similar to a PR/education campaign, this type of process is appropriate when issues are primarily defined by clarity or consensus among experts in terms of what needs to be done but lack of public understanding or support for those actions. Mobilization campaigns take it a step forward,

however, aiming for specific behavioral change rather than simply knowledge development and attitude change. Mobilization campaigns in particular tend to focus on mobilizing like-minded stakeholders or perhaps the previously undecided to rally to their cause. Mobilization campaigns may be focused on gaining membership to an organization, creating political pressure, fundraising, or other specific actions. Like most adversarial processes, they often focus more on framing issues in strategic ways rather than deliberative, therefore mobilization campaigns can be detrimental to wicked problems. They can be appropriate, however, when issues are unjustly dominated by powerful interests that silence other voices. Social movement campaigns often develop precisely because the more official and traditional means of communication and advocacy are unavailable or unduly constrained, which pushes advocates “to the streets” in order to be heard.

Collaborative research/joint fact finding: This intervention goes beyond content research and develops a collaborative process to have either representatives from different stakeholders complete the research together, or decide together what key research questions should be explored and by whom. The key point is to develop new research that is trusted by all sides and focused on key areas of disagreement or uncertainty in order to move the conversation forward.

Stakeholder process: A stakeholder process seeks to bring invited empowered representatives from all the key stakeholders together to develop a collaborative plan for addressing the issue. Deciding who should be invited may be the most important step, and a process in itself. Stakeholder processes tend to require multiple meetings and formal agreements. They likely involve many of the interventions listed above, such as issue input forums, issue framing, dialogue, and ultimately action planning. When working with a stakeholder group rather than a more open, public process, consensus may be a realistic goal for which to strive, which will require different sorts of processes and significant time.

A tension will always exist in deliberative practice between working with a group of stakeholders and working with the broader public. Stakeholders may be able to dedicate significant time and effort in a process and thus develop stronger relationships and understanding of the issue over time, but in the end if the work of the stakeholder group is out of the public eye and then not communicated well at the end, the stakeholder process may not make a significant impact or be misunderstood and rejected. All deliberative processes involved some back and forth between smaller groups and the public, and finding the right balance and the best ways to communicate progress made in the small groups to the larger public is critical. “Working through the groan zone” is a process that requires smaller groups, but individuals also tend to have to experience it for themselves, which is a difficult tradeoff to negotiate.

Full public deliberation process: Similar to a stakeholder process, but expanded to be open to the general public rather than simply invited stakeholders. Various audience development strategies may be used to insure a broad audience that is as representative as possible. “Consensus” is typically not a viable goal for a broad public process; various actions or a clearer, more refined sense of the public voice are more appropriate. As explained in the paragraph above, a tension will always exist between relying on a stakeholder group and working with the broader public.