

# MOVING FROM DIALOGUE TO ACTION: Dropout Prevention in West Virginia

A GUIDE FOR MODERATORS OF COMMUNITY DIALOGUES



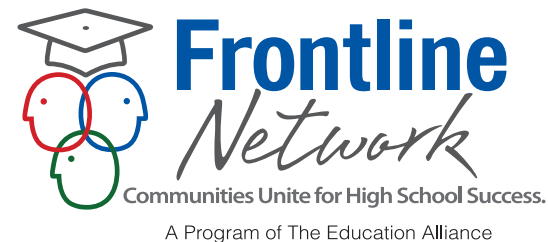
----- *One out of every four ninth-grade students in West Virginia does not complete high school within four years.*

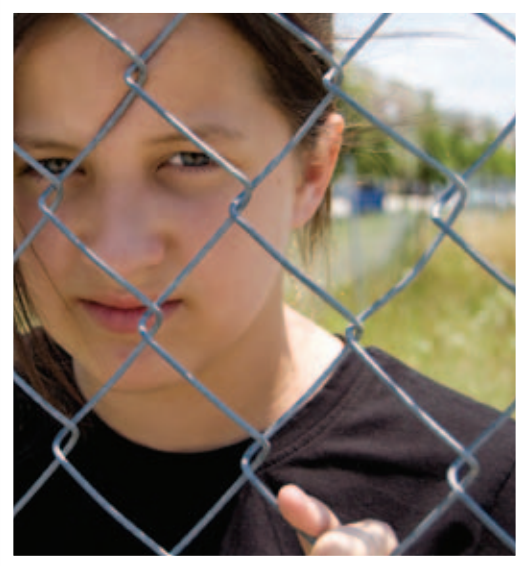


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A GUIDE FOR MODERATORS OF COMMUNITY DIALOGUES

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For more information on convening and moderating community forums, contact—

**The Education Alliance**  
[www.educationalalliance.org](http://www.educationalalliance.org)  
[info@educationalalliance.org](mailto:info@educationalalliance.org)  
866-314-KIDS

— or —

**West Virginia Center for Civic Life**  
[www.wvciviclifecenter.org](http://www.wvciviclifecenter.org)  
[mail@wvciviclifecenter.org](mailto:mail@wvciviclifecenter.org)  
304-344-3430



## The Purpose of Community Dialogue

**“Why are we doing this?” It’s a good question to ask when convening or attending a community discussion. 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.** Community dialogues can 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.** Dialogue helps 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 community discussion, 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. Community discussions give people the opportunity to share their ideas and decide what they want to do next, individually and/or together.

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

# Convening a Community Discussion

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## Logistics to Consider

What date and timeframe will work best?

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Where will the forum be held?

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Are facilities handicapped accessible?  Yes  No

Is the meeting space large enough to accommodate all participants?  Yes  No

Is it possible to arrange seats in a circle or U-shape in the meeting room?  Yes  No

Will you serve refreshments?  Yes  No

Will you provide childcare?  Yes  No

## Equipment/Materials

Issue:  Booklets  Moderator's Guide

Easels with:  Flip Charts  Markers  Tape

Microphones (Note: Only if group is quite large, usually not needed.)

## Who will do what?

Will there be a sign-in process?  Yes  No

Who will handle it?

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Who is responsible for designing and distributing promotional materials?

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Who will help with outreach and invitations to the community?

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Who is responsible for securing discussion guides and other materials?

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Who will moderate the forum?

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Who will record the forum?

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# 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. The moderator will make sure that:**

- 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.

## The Moderator's Role

- Provide an overview of the dialogue process—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 and in each of the approaches.
- 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 don't 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—deliberation.** 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.

# The Role of the Recorders

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**The role of the recorder is an extremely important one during a deliberative forum. Many recorders 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 to upcoming report on forums throughout the state.



## **Group Recorder**

*(works at a flip chart in front of the group)*

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

## **At-the-seat Recorder**

*(takes notes at his/her seat)*

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

# Community Dialogue Moderator's Agenda

***This is a suggested agenda for a one hour and forty minute discussion. Make adjustments as necessary to fit your timeframe and priorities, making sure to leave time for the critical "Moving toward Action" portion of the dialogue.***

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.</li> </ul>
5 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome; host and moderator introductions, participant introductions</li> <li>Purpose of forum</li> </ul>
10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The seriousness of the problem in West Virginia</li> <li>Conversation starter video</li> </ul>
10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review process and discussion guidelines.</li> <li>Ask "What concerns you most about this issue?"</li> <li>Ask "How is this issue impacting West Virginia?"</li> <li>Review ABC discussion areas: Attendance, Behavior, Course Performance.</li> </ul>
15 minutes	<b>ATTENDANCE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why do you think students in your community miss school?</li> <li>What could schools, individuals and community organizations do to improve attendance?</li> <li>See additional questions: discussion guide, page 7.</li> </ul>
15 minutes	<b>BEHAVIOR</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the behavioral issues that are impacting student success in your community?</li> <li>What could families, schools, and the community do to provide support to students with behavioral problems?</li> <li>See additional questions: discussion guide, page 9.</li> </ul>

Time	Task
15 minutes	<b>COURSE COMPLETION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What factors are affecting students' academic performance in your community</li> <li>What role can parents, schools, and the community play in improving course performance?</li> <li>See additional questions: discussion guide, page 11.</li> </ul>
15 minutes	<b>ENGAGING THOSE WHO HAVE LEFT SCHOOL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can students who have dropped out of high school return to complete their education?</li> <li>What can families, schools, and the community do to help those who have dropped out come back to school?</li> <li>See additional questions: discussion guide, page 13.</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>



## What To Do After the Forum: A Checklist

It is important to capture the ideas of each forum for consideration in the countywide dropout prevention summit and in action planning stages. The county leadership team needs information from your forum that captures the richness of the conversations in local communities.

Please do the following after your forum:

- Gather completed participant questionnaires.** 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 forums.
- Complete the moderator's response sheet.** Try to do this soon after the forum, while ideas are still fresh in your mind. During the reflections period of your forum, the group will work through most of the questions on the moderator's response sheet. (See page 11.)
- Prepare recorder notes from the forum.** 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 forum participants in order to stay in touch with them for the countywide dropout prevention summit and follow-up action planning sessions.

**Soon after the forum, return post forum questionnaires (pages 9-10), the moderator's response sheet (page 11), the group and at-the-seat recorder notes (see page 6), and participant contact information to—**

County Leadership Team

Address:

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# What Can We Do About Dropout Prevention West Virginia?

## POST-DISCUSSION 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. Schools and communities should provide more mental health services to children and youth.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Parents need additional resources to raise children that stay in school and do well in life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Schools should provide free online courses to help struggling students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Local businesses should partner with schools to provide internships and job shadowing in the local area.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<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. Provide more funds to schools with high dropout rates.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Do more to attract, support, and reward effective teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Tie school curriculum closely to specific career paths.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Increase the quality and quantity of healthy food offered in high schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Increase the compulsory attendance age to 17.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Provide reading classes during the school day for high school students with reading difficulties.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<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 Sure</b>
a. Early career focus shortchanging a well rounded education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. The amount of time parents and community members have to spend with youth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Liability issues associated with mentoring students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Shortchanging student-teacher relationships because of pressure to improve test scores	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Substance abuse by youth in my community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. 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?**

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**What can you do personally to help students graduate from high school in your county?**

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

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

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**Any other thoughts?**

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In order to summarize the demographic representation of participants in the dropout prevention discussions, **please circle all of the responses that apply to you.**

**Age:**

17 or younger      18-30      31-45  
46-64      65 or older

**Race:**

African American      Asian American  
Hispanic      Native American  
White/Caucasian  
Other (please specify):

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**Schooling completed:**

Some High School      High School  
Some College      College Graduate

**Type of employment:**

Student      Business      Nonprofit  
Educational      Government      Not employed  
Other (please specify):

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**Town/Community:**

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Not a county resident



**Frontline**  
Network

Communities Unite for High School Success.

# Moderator's Response Sheet

After the forum, please respond to these questions about the forum you moderated. Use an additional sheet of paper, if needed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Moderator's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date and location of forum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Number of participants

\_\_\_\_\_  
Age range

\_\_\_\_\_  
Diversity

## 1. What seemed to be the participants' main concerns about the issue?

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## 2. Which approaches and actions had the most support within the group?

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## 3. What aspects of the issue seemed most challenging for participants?

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## 4. What next steps or plans for action did the group discuss?

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803 Quarrier Street, Suite 500  
Charleston, WV 25301

P: 1.866.314.KIDS • F: 304.342.0046  
[info@educationalliance.org](mailto:info@educationalliance.org)  
[www.EducationAlliance.org](http://www.EducationAlliance.org)