



PBS Deliberation Day

On October 16, just weeks before the national election, nearly 2000 Americans in communities around the country from Seattle to Pittsburgh and Cleveland to Houston, will join together in a common deliberation about what's at stake for the nation as they approach the polls.

This democratic dialogue is the product of an unprecedented local and national cooperation among community organizations, By the People: America and the World, and the Public Broadcasting System (PBS). It will focus on two key national challenges – maintaining both national security and American jobs in the global economy - with the ideas at issue coming from the campaigns and surrounding political discourse. The deliberations, held almost simultaneously in 17 communities [Albuquerque, NM; Baton Rouge, LA; Boise, ID; Charlottesville, VA; Cleveland, OH; Detroit, MI; Houston, TX; Kansas City, MO; Lexington, KY; Lincoln, NE; Miami, FL; New Haven, CT; Pittsburgh, PA; Rochester, NY; San Diego, CA; Seattle, WA; and St. Louis, MO] and each covered by local PBS stations as well as other media, will be complemented by “Time To Choose: A By the People Election Special,” a national PBS broadcast, produced by MacNeil-Lehrer Productions with station contributions.

The PBS Deliberation Day participants will be drawn from carefully selected random samples of citizens from each community with the goal of illustrating public opinion at large at a crucial time in our nation's history. With the help of moderators and backgrounders, the participants will come together in Citizen Deliberations to talk about policy and personal tradeoffs in small groups as well as meet with and publicly question experts, who also represent a cross-section of the nation's political dialogue. All will share their substantive opinions about key issues on the nation's agenda.

The collective views of these citizens will provide local and national media with an extraordinary “poll with a human face” that illuminates a building block of our democracy: the willingness of Americans to participate in a civil exchange where the contrary views are respected. The Citizen Deliberations will be coordinated with national Deliberative Polling® data on what people from all over the country think, on reflection, after they too have had a chance to become informed about the issues. Scientific analysis and results will be made public shortly after the event.

Deliberative Polling® is an attempt to use television and public opinion research in a new and constructive way. A random, representative sample is first polled on the targeted issues. After this baseline poll, members of the sample are invited to gather at a single place in order to discuss the issues. Carefully balanced briefing materials are sent to the participants and are also made publicly available. The participants engage in dialogue with competing experts and political leaders based on questions they develop in small group discussions with trained moderators. Parts of the weekend events are broadcast on television, either live or in taped and edited form. After the deliberations, the sample is again asked the original questions. The resulting changes in opinion represent the conclusions the public would reach, if people had opportunity to become more informed and more engaged by the issues.

PBS Deliberation Day is built on public broadcasting's unique local-national base, its commitment to public affairs programming and its mission as the convener of civic dialogue as well as the post-9/11 inspiration of the By the People project. With this template for invigorated civic dialogue, these activities and partnership relationships can be redirected to other issues on the community's agenda. For more information about the methodology of the Citizen Deliberations, contact Professor James Fishkin, Stanford University, at 650/723-4611 or jfishkin@stanford.edu. For more information about the national project, consult www.pbs.org/newshour/btp/ or contact Gail Leftwich at gleftwich@newshour.org.