



Community News

Working Effectively To Find Common Ground

(NAPSA)—If your community has issues to discuss and is looking for a constructive way to explore them, you may be interested in learning more about a community forum program.

For 25 years, National Issues Forums (NIF), a nonpartisan, nationwide network of locally sponsored public forums, has encouraged people to discuss tough issues and seek common ground.

NIF forums meet in libraries and community centers and have been described as the antidote to polarization. The national network of neighbor-bringing-neighbor offers a chance for people and community to get engaged and share ideas on national issues at a grassroots level.

“NIF is a growing movement of committed individuals and organizations who have witnessed important outcomes resulting from forums,” said William Winter, National Issues Forums Institute chairman and former governor of Mississippi.

The forums are led by trained, neutral moderators and use issue discussion guides that frame issues by presenting the overall problem and three or four broad approaches to the problem. Forum participants work through the issue by considering each approach, examining what appeals to them or concerns them and also what are the costs, consequences,



Forums can have an enormous effect on how people look at the issues and how the media has addressed these issues.

and trade-offs.

For example, in recent forums in Centre County, Pennsylvania, a community program focused on both national and local issues including immigration, emergency preparedness and life and death issues. The forums have even taken deliberation into the county's high schools. Research has indicated that when citizens get to know each other, they can build a better civic life. It's also a positive way to explore and temper explosive issues. While no one can prove a direct correlation, the forums may promote civic involvement. Voter turnout in Centre County is 80 to 90 percent.

For more information on how to hold a forum in your community, visit www.nifi.org.