

# **PUBLIC AGENDA**

*Independent, Thought-Provoking,  
Always in the Public Interest*



## **Preventing Terrorism and Protecting Civil Rights**

### ***A PUBLIC AGENDA CITIZEN CHOICEWORK GUIDE***

***FOR COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS,  
CLASSROOMS, STUDY GROUPS AND  
INDIVIDUALS***

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## **A Note on Public Agenda's Choicework Guides**

Public Agenda Choicework Guides support dialogue and deliberation on a wide variety of issues. They have been used in thousands of community conversations and classrooms, by journalists and researchers, and by individual citizens looking to gain perspective on public issues.

Each guide is organized around several alternative ways of thinking about an issue, each with its own set of values, priorities, pros, cons and tradeoffs. The different perspectives are drawn both from what the public thinks about an issue, based on surveys and focus groups, as well as what experts and leaders say about it in policy debates.

### **Customizing to fit your situation**

Note that the Choicework Guides are meant to help people start thinking and talking about an issue in productive ways--they are not meant to rigidly restrict thinking or dialogue. The perspectives described are not the only ways of dealing with the problem, nor are the viewpoints necessarily mutually exclusive in every respect. Many people would mix and match from different perspectives, or add additional related ideas.

Additionally, users of these guides have the option of providing various kinds of nonpartisan information along with them as context for a conversation. For instance, for a guide on an education topic, a few well-chosen facts about local schools might be a useful adjunct to the guide if you are using it in a group setting.

### **Public Agenda's Community Conversations Model**

Public Agenda often uses these guides (and, when available, their video counterparts) as discussion starters for community conversations as part of a larger program of community dialogue and action. Such conversations are frequently a solid first step toward new partnerships and initiatives.

Public Agenda's approach to community conversations involves several principles and guidelines that can be flexibly applied to different settings:

- Local, nonpartisan sponsors/organizers
- Diverse cross-section of participants, "beyond the usual suspects"
- Small, diverse dialogue groups with trained moderators and recorders
- Nonpartisan discussion materials that help citizens weigh alternatives (Choicework)
- Strategic follow-up to connect dialogue to action

If you would like to learn more about Public Agenda's approach to public engagement, or to see a full list of our Choicework Guides (including print and video versions), please visit our website [www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org) and click on "Public Engagement."

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## Introduction

Local law enforcement plays a critical role in the fight against terrorism. Officers identify and guard likely targets, generate intelligence through informants, undercover work and technology, and coordinate with federal authorities. And, should prevention fail, they are among the first responders who try to minimize the damage.

How can law enforcement officers be most effective in fighting terrorism? Do they need new powers, technologies and procedures? What role, if any, should the community play in these efforts?

Moreover, how should we deal with tradeoffs we might face with respect to our privacy and civil liberties? Under what conditions—if at all—are we willing to carry new forms of identification, be video-taped, have our emails scanned, or be profiled in various ways? How can infringement on civil liberties be avoided, or at least minimized, while we work to maintain our security?

Our discussion today asks how law enforcement and communities might best approach these challenges. To help us get started, we will review three basic positions that people might take. You may also have additional ideas you'd like to add—we'll just use these three approaches as a way to get a discussion started.



**Approach 1: The community should support the police in their efforts to prevent terrorism**

According to this perspective, we should encourage law enforcement professionals to aggressively fight against terrorism. They are the professionals who put their lives on the line, and they should have our support. As for concerns about civil liberties, if we have to lose some privacy in order to be safe, so be it. Besides, we can trust the accountability mechanisms that are already in place, such as civilian review boards and internal affairs, to keep things from getting out of hand.

This means we should do things like make sure law enforcement is funded at adequate levels, and accept inconveniences and less privacy if they make us safer.

***Those who like this approach say*** it frees local law enforcement to concentrate on fighting terrorism with as few distractions as possible and as many resources as they need.

***Those who disagree say*** it is too likely to lead to abuses that threaten our civil liberties and freedom, which must not be sacrificed in the name of security.



**Approach 2: The community should act as a watchdog to ensure that civil liberties are protected as the police fight terrorism**

Of course the community should encourage local law enforcement agencies in their efforts to protect us against terrorism. But the community must also protect itself against abuses in case law enforcement goes too far, or we could lose the freedoms and civil liberties that our nation was founded to promote.

Therefore, we should organize our community, stay alert to abuses, and turn to political and legal action when necessary to combat abuses if they do occur.

***Those who like this approach say*** our civil liberties are too important to take for granted. We must protect them even as we protect ourselves against terrorism.

***Those who disagree say*** this approach will to create too many distractions for law enforcement, who should be focusing on preventing terrorism, not fighting political battles or court cases.



**Approach 3: The community should be an active partner with the police in efforts to fight terrorism and protect civil liberties**

The community must do more than either blindly support the police or keep a distrustful eye on them. It must become an active partner with the police through what are called “community policing strategies.”

This means being willing to deal with terror warnings rather than tuning them out, forming neighborhood watch groups, and creating community mechanisms to help deal with such complex issues as profiling and police-community relations.

***Those who like this approach say*** the best way to prevent both terrorism and the abuse of civil liberties is through good communication and close cooperation between the police and the community.

***Those who disagree say*** this all sounds very nice, but the stakes are too high to indulge in impractical ideas. Most New Yorkers are too busy to get involved in this kind of thing, and the police are too under-staffed to pull people off of more critical assignments so they can spend time “making nice” with the public.



## **Using the guide in a community conversation, discussion group or classroom setting**

**After discussing the choices on the previous pages, you may wish to consider and talk through the following questions.**

### **Summarizing a Choicework Conversation**

These questions are a good way to summarize a choicework dialogue, prior to considering more action-oriented questions.

1. In our conversation so far, have we discovered any common ground? What do we agree on or have in common?
2. What were our important areas of disagreement—the issues we may have to keep talking about in the future?
3. What are the questions and concerns that need more attention? Are there things we need more information about?

### **Bridging from Dialogue to Action**

These questions can help you move from deliberation and dialogue about the issue at hand to actions that can help address the issue.

1. How can we work together to make a difference in our community on the issues we discussed today?

*Note: If this question generates a long list of potential actions, they can be prioritized by asking each person to list his or her top three ideas.*

2. Is there anything that you, as individuals, might do, or do differently, as a result of today's conversation?
3. What would you like to see happen to follow up on today's conversation? What should the immediate follow-up steps be?

