

PUBLIC AGENDA

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



Preventing Crime And Promoting Public Safety

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 and click on "Public Engagement."

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Preventing Crime, Promoting Public Safety

What are the right approaches for our community?

Introduction

There are a variety of strategies that can guide a police department in its efforts to prevent crime and promote public safety. Some of these strategies may be more effective for a given community than others. To help you better understand the range of strategies that police departments can use, we've created a discussion guide that reviews three key approaches.

Of course, you may have additional ideas you'd like to add, or want to combine different ideas together—all of which is fine. But to get our discussion started, let's review these three major strategies. Which do you think should guide law enforcement work in your community—and why?

Choicework

Approach 1: Improve Police Procedures for Solving Serious Crime

According to this view, the most important thing we can do to promote public safety is support the police in applying the most advanced methods and technologies in their work combating serious crimes.

From this perspective, we should do things like:

- Make sure police have the best training possible in preventing, investigating and solving crimes.
- Invest in the latest technologies such as computers in patrol cars, state of the art radios, and surveillance technology to investigate criminal activities.
- Apply new effective methods such as daily computerized updates of crime statistics that pinpoint where most serious crimes are occurring and how well the police are doing at stopping them.

Those who like this approach say, "If we want to have an effective police department, we need to keep our eye on the ball by having the best training, technology and procedures possible to combat serious crimes."

Those who disagree say, "This is an expensive approach, and it does little or nothing to reduce the conditions that lead to crime in the first place, it only responds to them more effectively once they've occurred."



Approach 2: *Do sweat the Small Stuff*

This approach, sometimes called the “broken windows” strategy, emphasizes the importance of taking seriously, and responding quickly, to small, quality of life crimes (such as broken windows, panhandling, and graffiti). The purpose for doing so is to create an overall environment that’s more orderly and less conducive to crime of any kind.

From this perspective, we should do things like:

- Take petty crimes like graffiti and vandalism seriously and set significant penalties for them
- Have policies that disallow panhandling and vagrancy
- Make a point of seeing that broken windows are fixed and graffiti or abandoned cars are removed promptly by city agencies, so they do not become symbols that encourage rule breaking and social chaos

Those who like this approach say, “If police sweat the small stuff, they not only improve the quality of life in a community, they help stop the big stuff too.”

Those who disagree say, “The community should take responsibility for figuring out how to stop and clean up things like graffiti, and let the police concentrate on the big stuff, like drugs and violent crime.”



Approach 3: Partner with the Community to Fight Crime

This approach (sometimes called “community policing”) emphasizes the importance of communities getting organized to promote public safety and reduce crime. It also emphasizes the police working closely with the community to improve relations and figure out effective ways to work together to promote public safety.

From this perspective, we should do things like:

- Encourage neighborhood watch organizations and help them coordinate their efforts with the police.
- Have more neighborhood-based officers “walking the beat” that get to know a local community well.
- Create opportunities for better communication between community leaders, local organizations and ordinary citizens and police officers.

Those who like this approach say, “When a community is strong, and has good communication and trust with the police, many problems are avoided or more easily dealt with.”

Those who disagree say, “Police work is difficult enough without asking the police to get heavily involved with community dynamics.”



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?

