

Public Opinion Programme (POP), The University of Hong Kong

Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP) Deliberation Series

*Key Principles of
Community Deliberative Meetings*

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Background of OCLP Deliberation Series

Deliberation

Deliberation is a process of learning, thinking and discussing policy and electoral choices. The most valuable kind of deliberation is balanced, taking account of information both convenient and inconvenient to given arguments and alternatives.

Deliberation Day (DDay)

To overcome “rational ignorance” of the majority in major political events like national elections, Prof Bruce ACKERMAN of Yale University and Prof James FISHKIN of Stanford University in the USA have been advocating the concept of “Deliberation Day”. “Rational ignorance” occurs when the perceived cost of getting well-informed of an issue exceeds the potential benefit that the knowledge would provide. For example, for many complex policy issues, citizens tend to think it would be too time consuming to obtain good information in order to form opinions, and that their individual votes or opinions are unlikely to make much difference to the political decisions, thus it would be “rational” for them to remain ignorant. In Ackerman and Fishkin’s proposal, “Deliberation Day” should be a national holiday held one week before major national elections. Registered voters will be invited to meeting places to discuss, in rounds of small groups of 15 and large groups of 500, on key issues raised by the campaign. Each participant will receive US\$150 for the day’s work of citizenship, on the condition that he or she will show up to vote on the election day. Deliberation Day is a new idea that has not happened up to this date.

Deliberative Polling (DP)

Deliberative Polling, developed by Prof James FISHKIN of Stanford University, is a technique which combines deliberation in small group discussions with scientific random sampling to provide public consultation for public policy and for electoral issues. A number of Deliberative Polls have been conducted in various places around the world, including Brazil, Britain, Bulgaria, China, Italy, Japan, Macau and in the United States, some national and some local.

Operational-wise, 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 preferably for a weekend 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 (or “facilitators” as the OCLP Secretariat calls them). Parts of the 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 the opportunity to become more informed and more engaged by the issues.

Deliberative Meetings

POP is commissioned by the OCLP Secretariat to organize the “OCLP Deliberation Series”, which aims to let members of the general public and supporters of the campaign formulate proposals for the 2017 CE Election through rational discussions. The first event of the series, DDay1, was held in June 2013. The event comprised one module for the general public (DP1) and another module for campaign supporters (now branded as “Supporters’ Deliberative Meeting 1”). For the general public, POP randomly invited Hong Kong citizens to participate in the event, while for the campaign supporters, participants were invited by the OCLP Secretariat.

According to the latest plan, the second stage of the Deliberation Series will comprise a DP2 for the general public where a random sample will be drawn from the public by POP to attend a half day deliberative event, and a series of community-based Deliberative Meetings conducted by different organizing committees under the OCLP Secretariat to engage the pledged and potential OCLP supporters from different communities into the deliberation process. The idea of Deliberative Meeting is inspired by the idea of Deliberation Day. They will be organized under the auspices of the OCLP Secretariat, while POP provides the conceptual framework as described in this document.

Key Principles of Deliberative Meetings

Balance - The organizer should provide the participants with balanced information for and against all arguments before the deliberation.

Engagement - Deliberative meetings target to promote active citizenship by engaging the public into the discussion and/or decision making process. Participants come to see themselves as members of a community addressing common problems rather than as disengaged private individuals.

Equality - Deliberation should be conducted fairly, each participant should be considered equal.

Civility - Discussion and deliberation must be based on mutual respect.

Rationality and openness - Individuals are not called to give up their own interests, but they should also consider other views before building or adjusting their opinions.

Reference:

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Luskin, Robert. C. and Fishkin, James. S. (2002). Deliberation and “Better Citizens”. Retrieved from <http://cdd.stanford.edu/research/papers/2002/bettercitizens.pdf>.

National Consumer Council (2011). Deliberative Public Engagement: Nine Principles. Retrieved from <http://www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Deliberative-public-engagement-nine-principles.pdf>.