

What's Next, America?

Deliberation, Community Development, &
The Civic Work Ahead

Community Development Society Conference

July 21, 2026



Scan the QR code
for some
audience
interaction



Cristin Brawner
National Issues
Forums Institute



Dr. Martín Carcasson
Colorado State University
Center for Public
Deliberation



Dr. Hollie Cost
Auburn University
Outreach & Public
Service



Linda Seals
University of Florida
Extension

How would you
describe **public**
discourse right
now?



Which statements best describe your view of the current quality of public discussion and debate? (choose up to three)

High quality, informed

0

Mean-spirited

0

Polarized

0

Simplistic

0

Dominated by a few loud voices

0

Dominated by experts

0

Robust

0

Weak/limited, people are apathetic

0

Productive

0

National Issues Forums Institute

Solving Public Problems Requires Public Participation



Equip

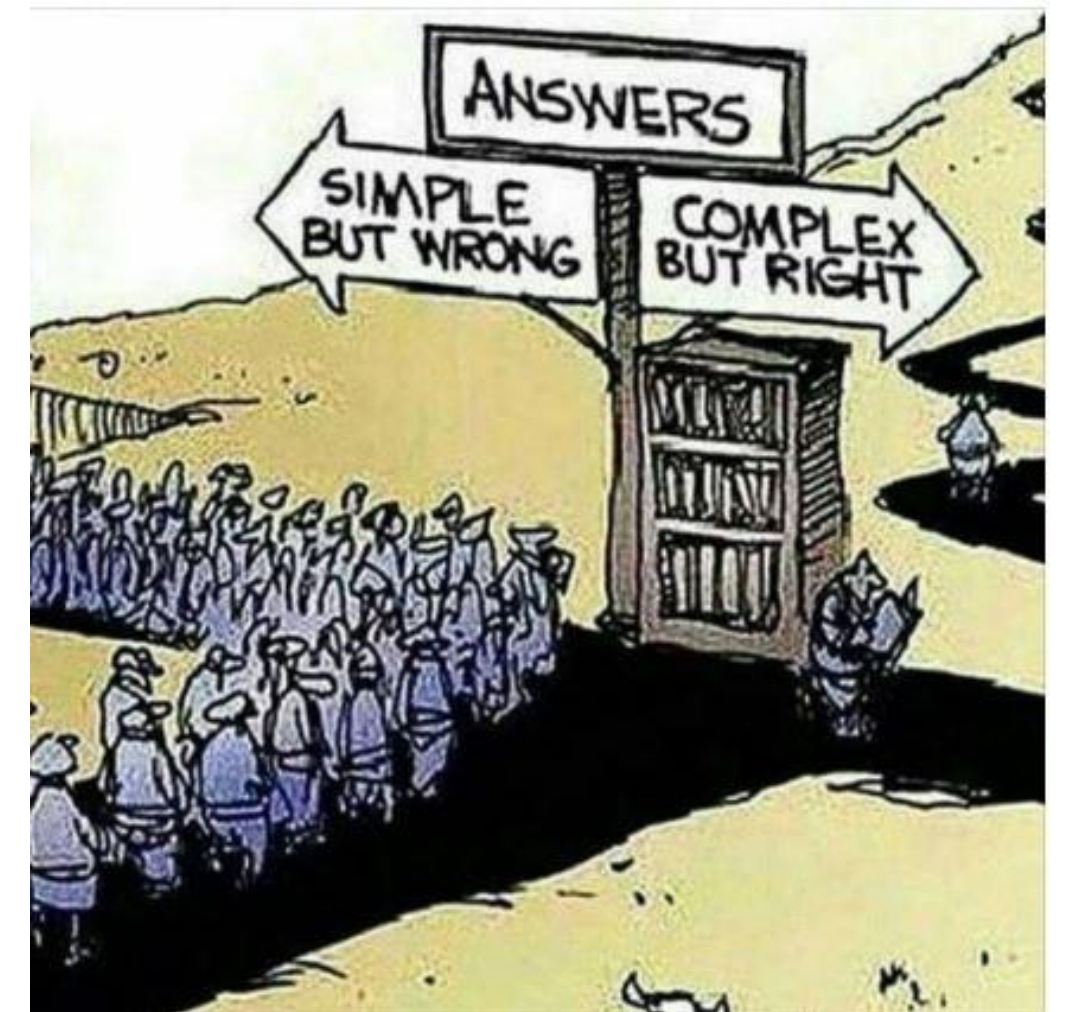


Empower



Mobilize

The hardest public
problems **resist**
easy answers.



Wicked Problems

**No single
definition**

**Competing
values**

**No perfect
solution**

Wicked Problems

Power generation/decarbonization as a
Wicked Problem

Financially
sustainable

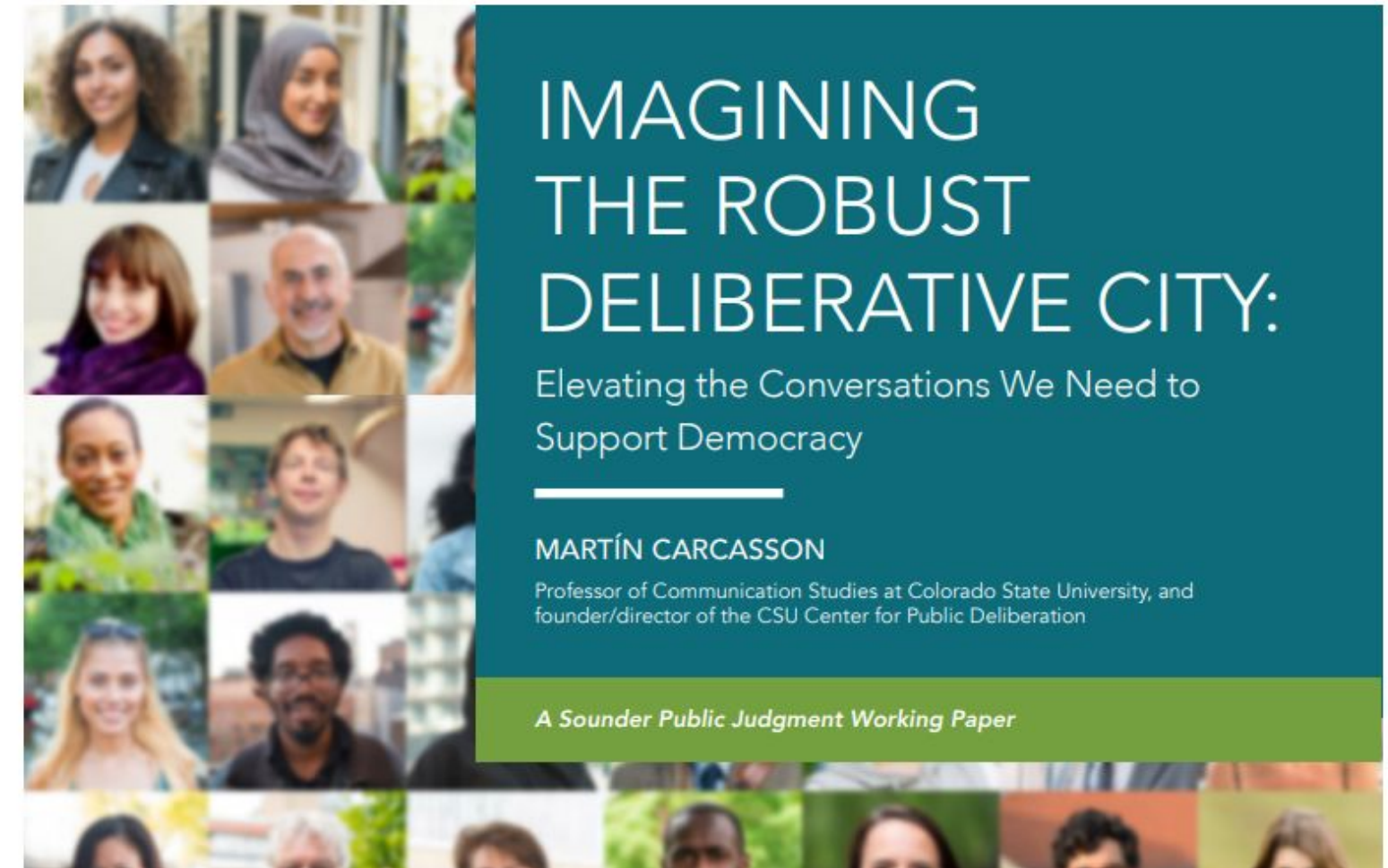
Reliable

Safe

Environmentally
responsible

Wicked Problems

Wicked problems call for ongoing high-quality communication, creativity, and broad collaborative action to manage well.



What is deliberation?

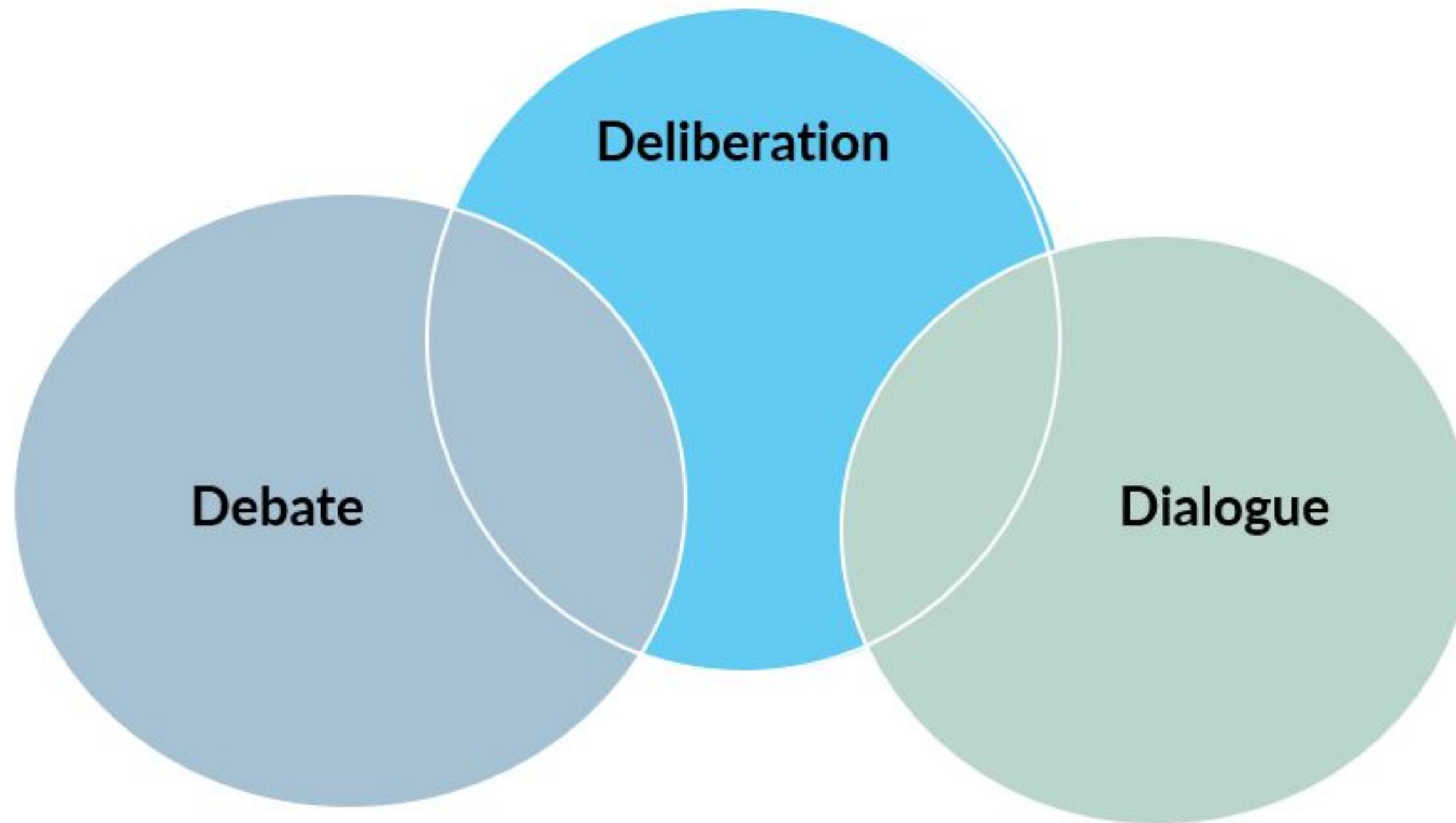
Deliberation is a democratic practice for addressing complex issues and solving public problems. It involves:

- considering diverse perspectives
- weighing options and possible solutions
- working through tradeoffs
- identifying common ground for acting...



...for the public good.

What is deliberation?



Why Deliberate?



Talk

Decide

Act

Deliberation: From Talk to Action

National research indicates that while a strong majority of **Americans feel a responsibility to engage across difference (70%)** and **prefer collaborative, goal-oriented efforts (74%)** to dialogue alone, structural opportunities to act together remain limited.



Link: <https://moreincommonus.com/publication/the-connection-opportunity/>

What happens when communities deliberate?



Youth as Civic Leaders

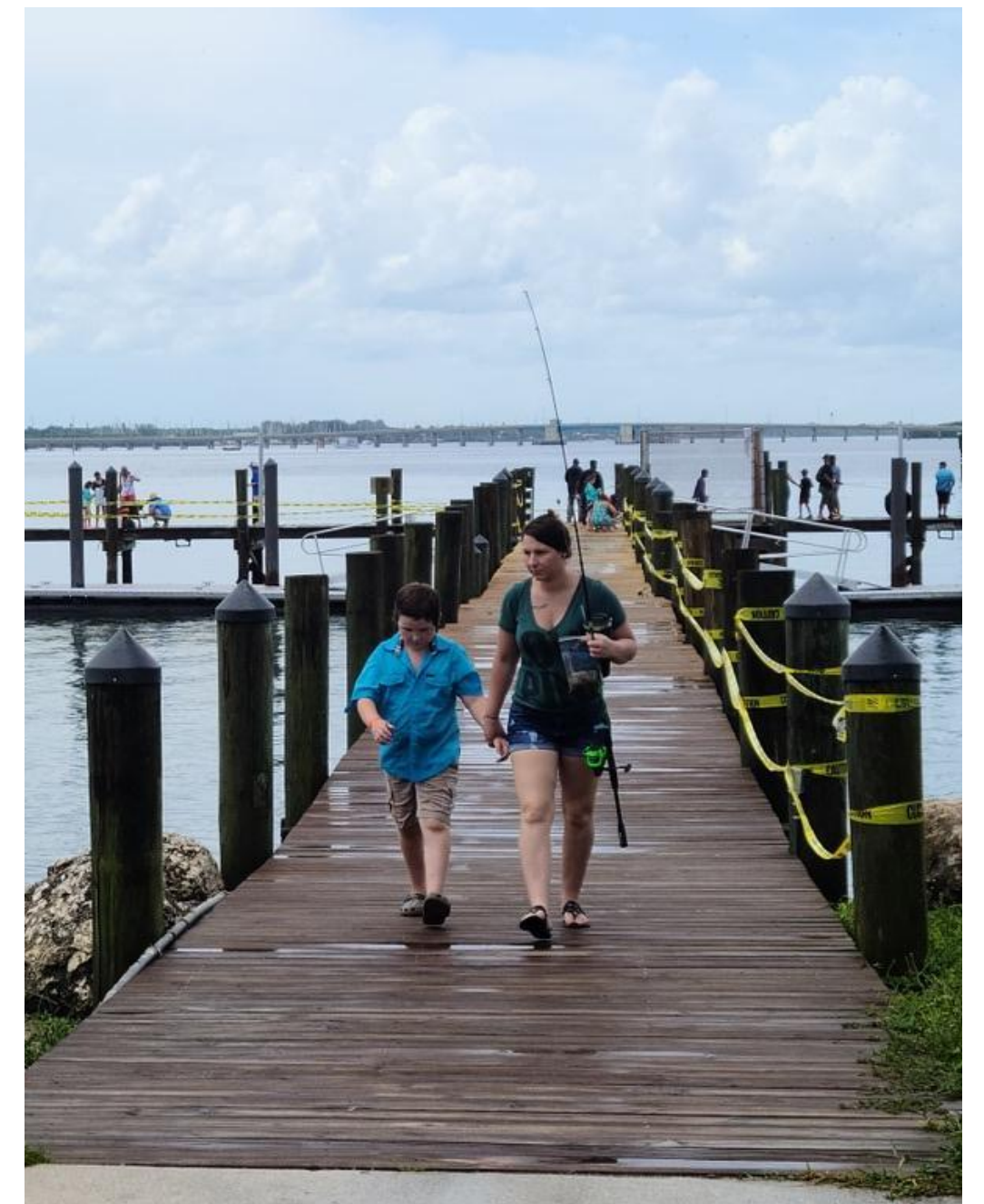
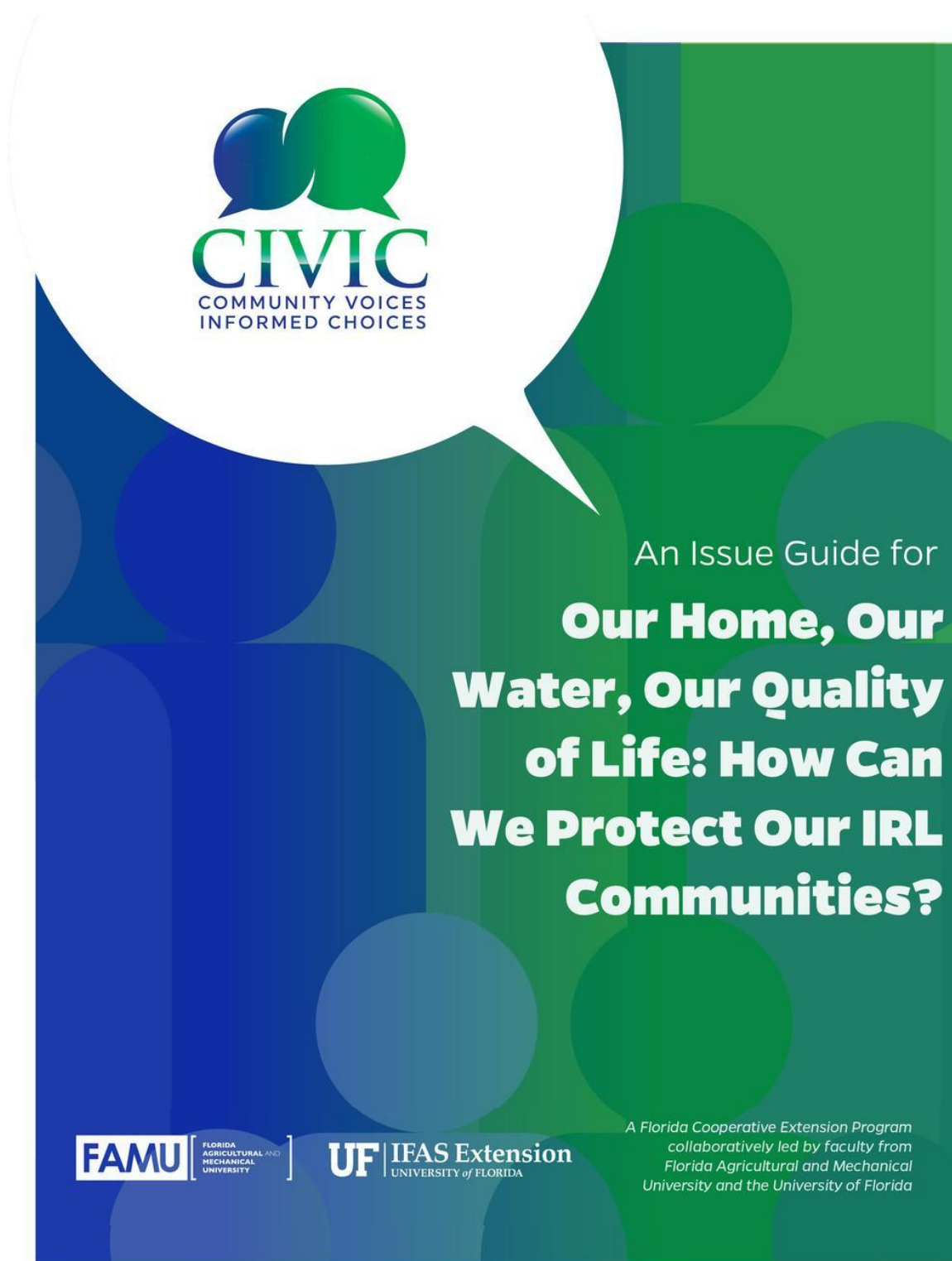
MJCC Mission: To improve youth civic engagement and quality of life.



PROTECTING OUR BOYS, MEN AND CITY

A Chat with the Mayor and Friends
 Scott's Village Rear Lot
 June 2, 2020
4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Montevallo, Alabama



Indian River Lagoon Fort Pierce, FL



Deliberation for the Public Good



A Few of the CPD's Projects, 2006-2026

- Civic mission of schools
- Grade configuration of Poudre School District schools
- Statewide dropout rate
- Colorado Health Care Reform
- Student housing
- Improving higher education
- Childhood obesity
- Bicycle safety
- Diversity Dialogues at CSU Diversity Conference
- STEM education in K-12
- Arts Engagement Summit
- School budgeting issues/school closures
- Medical Marijuana
- Regional visioning process
- Water and growth issues
- Poverty in Larimer County
- Fort Collin Climate Action Plan
- K-12 school improvement
- Improving higher education through student-faculty reciprocity
- Politics of food
- Issues surrounding aging
- Early childhood education
- Senior transportation
- Campus smoking
- Downtown Fort Collins

Florida

Colorado

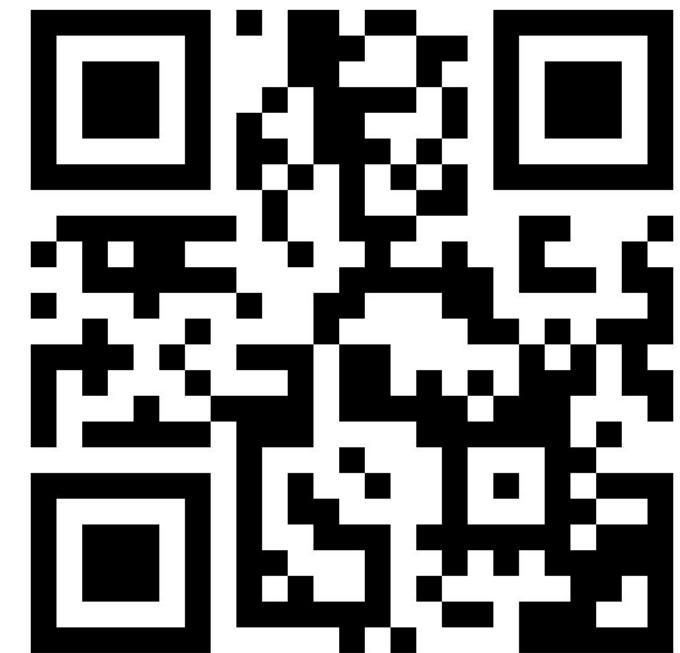
NATIONAL CIVIC REVIEW

Building Community Capacity in Toxic Times: The Critical Role of Bridging Institutions

BACK TO WINTER 2026: VOLUME 114, NUMBER 4

By Martín Carcasson and Willow Paul

<https://col.st/ly8bn>



Deliberation & Community Development

Deliberation can strengthen community development by:

- Surfacing knowledge institutions may not otherwise hear
- Making values, tensions, and tradeoffs visible
- Expanding who sees themselves as part of the work
- Building relationships across roles and sectors
- Creating greater ownership of difficult choices
- Connecting engagement to shared action

**Communities need
more than an
invitation
to deliberate.**

Tools for Deliberation: Issue Guides

A shared
Question

Distinct
Approaches
for Acting

Clear
Benefits +
Tradeoffs

Underlying
Values

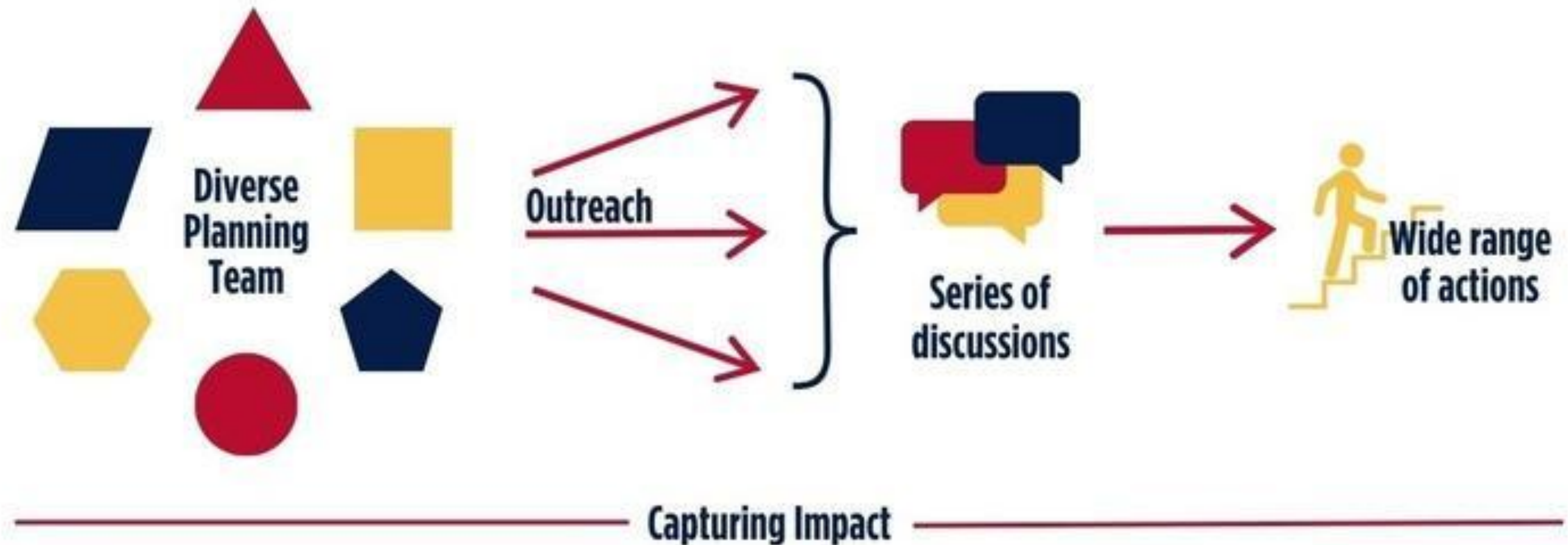
Deliberative issue guides are **decision-making** tools.



A national conversation rooted in
local communities.



What's Next, America?



What's Next, America?
in action: Where are
we now?

Roundtable Discussion

Think about your
community: **What**
are its greatest
strengths?



Share your
community's
greatest strength
(3 words or fewer)



Using Poll EV, submit one of your community's greatest strengths in three words or fewer. We want to see the range of assets represented across the room.

Nobody has responded yet.

Hang tight! Responses are coming in.

Roundtable Discussion

Think about your
community: **What**
are it's greatest
challenges?



Share your
community's
greatest challenge
(3 words or fewer)



Please submit one of your community's greatest challenges in three words or fewer

Nobody has responded yet.

Hang tight! Responses are coming in.

What's Next, America? Resources



www.whatsnextamerica.com

What's Next, America? Community Grant Fund



NIFI
Invests
\$250k for
the next
250!



Questions?

Thank You!

cbrowner@nifi.org

mcarcas@colostate.edu

hollie.cost@auburn.edu

lseals@ufl.edu