

January 5, 2010

EXPANDED LEGAL GAMBLING: OVERVIEW OF THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

On February 13th, 2010, NH citizens from across the state will have the opportunity to participate in community-based deliberations to address the question: ***What's At Stake: Community Conversations to Weigh the Benefits and Risks of Expanded Legal Gambling in NH.*** These facilitated, small-group dialogues will engage citizens in discussion of the issues currently under consideration by Governor Lynch's Study Commission on Expanded Gaming in New Hampshire.

The results of the community conversations will be presented to the Commission later this spring.

Goals:

1. Engage several hundred citizens of NH in informed, thoughtful, and productive discussions about the benefits and risks of expanded gambling in New Hampshire;
2. Achieve an open, fair process that considers all points of view.
3. Balance discussion groups to achieve the widest diversity possible by demographics, walks of life and lifestyles, as well as by attitudes toward gambling, to ensure that the conversations represent the diverse experiences and views of NH citizens;
4. Produce a summary report of citizen views for the Study Commission that is impartial, useful, valid, and reliable.

The Process:

Recruiting Participants. To assure a representative sample of NH citizens by age, gender, occupation, education, income and by cultural diversity, we will:

- a. Actively recruit as many participants as possible, with a minimum goal of 200, and a maximum goal which will be limited by the number of available locations and facilitators;
- b. Seek advice and work with regional, county and locally-based organizations throughout the state;
- c. Access participants from random-sample polling (conducted by the UNH Survey Center) who identified themselves as willing to discuss the matter further;
- d. Ask NH media outlets for help with our outreach program.

Facilitators

With the assistance of NH Cooperative Extension, we plan to identify and train impartial facilitators to work with each discussion group.

How It Works:

- a. On Saturday February 13th, 2010, participants will meet in small groups (approximately 6-15 people) in 11 different communities throughout the state for a full day (9 am – 4 pm) of facilitated discussion (with check-in and refreshments beginning

at 8:30am). Lunch is included. February 20th, 2010, is scheduled as a backup “snow date;”

- b. The media and the public will be invited to attend and participate when each group reports its conclusions beginning at 3:30 pm on the day of the community conversations.
- c. The discussion sessions themselves, once they begin, will be open only to registered participants and their facilitators. This policy is essential so that participants will have no distractions and interruptions, providing them the opportunity to listen and ask questions of each other in an open, safe environment;
- d. This public engagement session is not intended to reach a single conclusion or group consensus;
- e. This public engagement session is intended to capture the essence of the participants’ diversity of views—and why those views are important to this issue—as well as their hopes, concerns, and new ideas for the Study Commission to consider.
- f. Each group will submit a report of its deliberations and outcomes. These reports will be summarized and submitted to the Governor’s Study Commission in March.

Sites:

Community conversations will take place in the following locations:

Berlin	Littleton
Concord	Manchester
Conway	Portsmouth
Keene	Rochester
Laconia	Salem
Lebanon	

Assessment of results:

Participants will be asked to fill out pre and post questionnaires to track changes in their thinking, if any. Additional assessment measures of the process itself will be developed.

Staff:

Bruce Mallory, Professor of Education, Carsey Institute Fellow, UNH
Martha Parker, Doctoral Student, Department of Education, UNH
Michele Holt-Shannon, Associate Director, Discovery Program, UNH
Mica Stark, Director of Outreach and Engagement, Carsey Institute, UNH
Charlie French, Community and Economic Development Specialist, Cooperative Extension, UNH
Jim Noucas, Noucas Law Office, co-founder, Portsmouth Listens, Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Funding:

Because this project is addressing a critical public policy question in a way that engages citizens directly through a community-based deliberative process, it is expected to serve as a national model for similar efforts in other states. Thus, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and W.K. Kellogg Foundation have generously provided core funding to the UNH Carsey Institute for *What’s At Stake*.

Additional in-kind support: UNH Cooperative Extension will assist with community outreach and facilitator training, and the Carsey Institute at UNH will provide logistical support.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Visit our website: <http://whatsatstake.unh.edu>

Telephone number: 877-338-5322

Email address: whats.at.stake@unh.edu or maparker@unh.edu