



# UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE

December 15, 2009

## OVERVIEW OF THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

During February, 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 next spring.

### Goals:

1. Engage several hundred citizens of NH in informed, thoughtful, and productive discussions about the costs and benefits of expanded gambling in New Hampshire.
2. 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.
3. Produce a summary report of citizen views for the Study Commission that is impartial, useful, valid, and reliable.

### The Process:

1. **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 the NH media for help with our outreach program

2. **Facilitators**

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



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### 3. **How It Works:**

- a. On two Saturdays in February, participants will meet in small groups (usually 8-15 people) at 8-10 selected meeting sites throughout the state for a ½ day of facilitated discussion.
- b. The media and the public will be invited to attend and participate in opening and closing sessions on both Saturdays. At the closing sessions, discussion groups will summarize and “report out” their findings
- 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. These sessions are not intended to reach a single conclusion or group consensus;
- e. These sessions are 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.

### 4. **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:**

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#### **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 will provide logistical support.



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