



# PUBLIC DEBATING

## PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE

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In 2011, the Anna Lindh Foundation and the British Council jointly launched the ‘Young Arab Voices’ regional programme. A programme that aims at providing opportunities, tools, and capacity building for the involvement of youth in running and managing effective debates for the purpose of enriching the pluralistic democratic dialogue existing in the Arab world.

The ‘Young Arab Voices’ programme depends on establishing partnerships with the education sector, as well as the civil society sector; from NGOs, youth groups, culture centres, schools and universities, as well as the concerned ministries in the targeted countries: Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

The Anna Lindh Foundation and the British Council jointly develop and manage the programme out of their regional responsibility, co-financed through the Arab Partnership Fund of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the European Union, in addition to receiving the institutional support of the League of Arab States.

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## Public debating in principle and practice

### An introduction to public debate

**Debate** is a formal method of presenting arguments that *support* and *oppose* a given issue, expressed in the form of a debate topic or *motion*. *Debaters* critically discuss the motion, presenting reasons and evidence to try and persuade an audience or a group of judges to adopt their position on the topic. Debate is governed by sets of rules, and debaters must adhere to these rules throughout the debate

#### **Informal debating**

*Informal* debate occurs in many settings – for example in families, schools, work places, but the quality and depth of a debate improves with the knowledge and skill of its participants as debaters. Acquiring this knowledge and skill takes practice and preparation.

#### **Debating in democracies**

Debate is part of democratic systems of government where *deliberative bodies* such as parliaments and legislative assemblies engage in debates. Formal debates between candidates for elected office, such as the leaders' debates in the UK and the presidential candidates' debates in the USA are also common in democratic states. The outcome of such debates is often decided by a vote by members of the public, elected legislators, or by franchise holders through a general election.

#### **Competitive debating**

In many countries, including many European states, competitive debate is often encouraged in secondary schools and universities. Debates of this type take the form of a contest between two or four teams, during which half of the teams support and the other half oppose a given motion. Motions- debate topics- can also be called *resolutions*.

Competitive debates begin with a *resolution* that is subjected to critical analysis by both teams. The team supporting the resolution speaks first and is referred to as an *affirmative team* (since it affirms a given resolution). The other team must then oppose the arguments offered by the affirming team and offer arguments against adopting the resolution (it is referred to as a *negative team*).

#### **Responsiveness**

Apart from presenting their arguments in favour of or against the resolution, each team is expected to respond directly to the arguments offered by their opponents. It is the job of a *judge* (or judges), a neutral third party, to listen carefully to the arguments presented by both sides and decide which set of arguments is most persuasive. In most competitive debates speakers have an opportunity to

both defend and attack the same resolution and they present the best arguments on both sides rather than express their personal views on a given topic.

### **Public debating**

This toolkit is designed to help youth leaders, teachers and young people themselves to prepare for and participate in *public debates*. Public debates are open events which involve not only debaters and judges but also members of the public. While public debates can be competitive, the main goal of this type of event is to engage large, diverse audiences in discussion on an important issue. The purpose of debating in such a context is not so much competition between debaters but raising awareness, education and *advocacy*.

Public debates facilitate the development of public discourse. Put more simply, public debates use debaters to equip other members of their communities with the knowledge, insight and skills necessary to understand and campaign on important public issues. Debaters make important controversies accessible to a wide audience; they help people to understand how issues of governance, law, economics and international relations can affect their lives. Debate is a democratizing activity.

This toolkit will present you with basic information on preparation for and organization of public debates. Debating is both educational and fun- we wish you a lot of success in organization of public debates- for your enjoyment as well as the enjoyment of your local community!

## **The role of debating in communities and organizations**

Convincing audiences and potential participants of the value of public debating can be difficult. In many societies and cultures, certain assumptions and popular stereotypes are attached to debating. These can include belief that debate is little more than a platform that distant and unaccountable politicians use to spread their views. Debate may also be seen as the preserve of students and intellectuals only; the community in which you want a debate to take place may see debating as a complicated exchange of abstract arguments and dense, technical language. Still other organizations may see debate as a distraction or a waste of time. Technical and medical universities may see debate as an activity exclusive to humanities students.

It is likely that, at some point, debate organizers will find themselves in the position of having to explain the value and benefits of debating to a youth group or organization, a local government official, a potential opponent or expert guest, or an organization that may be in a position to sponsor public debates.

The following sections of the manual have been designed to provide young people and the organizations that work with them with arguments and reasoning that support the use of debate in a wide variety of contexts. Debating, above all else, is a teaching technique. It allows people to communicate knowledge and to test and expand the ability of other people to understand and apply that knowledge. This principle means that debate can have value for people and organizations far beyond the areas it is usually used in.

### **1. Public Debates Build learning skills**

Learning skills enable people to more effectively understand, memorize and apply information imparted to them in work or educational settings. More generally, learning skills help to build habits and behaviors that compel people to continue learning about the world and expanding their professional skills on their own initiative.

#### *Communication Skills:*

The ability to impart knowledge is central to effective teaching and to monitoring learners' progress. Delivering comparative and descriptive information via debate arguments helps debaters to examine their own knowledge of debate topics. The members of a debate's audience have the opportunity to develop active listening skills, in addition to be introduced to new and disruptive perspective on subjects that they may have had limited awareness of.

**Debaters:** When addressing a diverse range of audiences, speakers will have to employ effective presentation techniques: using variety and emphasis in voice; developing eye contact with the audience; controlling and employing facial expression, gesture and movement; creating and communicating clear organization and clear logical connections; and selecting concise, appropriate, memorable, and vivid language. Public debates also emphasize extemporaneous presentation; a

style in which the speaker is neither presenting memorized or pre-written material nor speaking from the top of her head, but is instead actively fitting prepared knowledge and ideas to the needs of the moment.

**Audience:** For the audience members, the public debate also provides a setting in which to develop the communication skills of listening, evaluating, and in some settings, participating as a speaker as well.

### *Critical Thinking Skills*

**Debaters:** Through public debate, debaters learn how to analyze, criticize, and advocate ideas, to reason inductively and deductively, and to reach factual or judgmental conclusions based on sound inferences drawn from unambiguous statements of knowledge or belief. Public debate – by adding additional elements such as moderator and audience – has the potential to promote a deeper experience in critical thinking. Speaking in front of a given audience, debaters need to think critically of how to appeal to the audience’s beliefs, prior knowledge as well as how to respond to potential questions and arguments.

**Audience:** Attentive audience members at a public debate will hear and appreciate the speakers and they will also follow and evaluate a line of argumentation. This means critically understanding claims, searching for their logical support and implication, and weighing the relative strength of competing claims. In this way, the active audience member of a public debate will be participating in a critical thinking process that parallels the thinking of the debaters.

## **2. Public Debates Contribute to the Public Sphere**

Public debates have the potential to encourage the general population to experience an actual and sustained engagement with issues. By promoting a dialogue between parties on opposing sides, and between experts and non-experts, public debates facilitate a deeper level of interaction than that which is normally afforded by vehicles of mass communication (television, radio, press). While an audience member may choose to be passive at a public debate, as much as they are passive as a television viewer, the dynamics of the public debate provide several incentives for a greater level of involvement:

*a) participation*

Audience members attending a live public debate have a direct opportunity to be heard. By their comments, their applause, and their very presence at the debate, they send a message.

*b) evaluation*

The exchange encourages audience members to investigate and re-examine their own views.

*c) improved information*



Public debates provide a better chance to develop arguments fully as well as a better chance to learn more about given issues- whether they are more general concerns (national or global issues or ethical consideration) or whether they are issues related directly to community or neighborhood life.

### **3. Public Debates Help Organizations Meet Their Goals**

A final category of benefit relates to the organizations that support debates. Whether they are community groups, activist organizations, government agencies, educational institutions, or youth clubs or organizations or any group that seeks to carry a message to the public can benefit from public debates. While potential benefits may be as numerous and specific as the goals of these groups, public debates can be seen as yielding the following general outcomes for organizations:

- *Promoting visibility* by allowing the group receive attention for its message
- *Providing information* by educating audience in a dynamic way
- *Attracting new membership, audiences, and partners*
- *Leveling the playing field* by allowing smaller, less recognized or less powerful groups to compete on an equal footing
- *Motivating existing membership* by providing an exhilarating and even addictive experience

In addition, as it was mentioned before public debates in neighborhoods provide opportunity for members of the public from different backgrounds to meet together and to get to know their views on different issue in a friendly environment, conducive of dialogue and exchange of ideas.

### **The role of advocacy in civil society organizations**

The 1960s witnessed renewed vibrancy in American civil society. Gains in civil rights occurred, citizens engaged in sustained activism, and public discourse about the state of affairs was rich and lively. In the 1990s, post-communist countries in Eastern Europe began actively pursuing non-Communist versions of contemporary civil society with the hope of ushering in meaningful participatory democracy.

From 2010 to the present day civil society activism and a new culture of political protest have brought about dramatic changes in the Middle East. The Arab Spring has challenged the frontiers of political protest and discourse throughout the world. Yet despite its recent popularity, the concept of civil society is still ambiguous, unmanageable, complicated, and even in some ways unreachable.

Given its varied history, contemporary scholars have suggested that civil society lacks a cohesive framework for sustainability. Civil society- as an idea- is not yet clear and understandable enough. This means that the process of developing civil societies in states undergoing political changes is difficult. The process of sharing ideas and experiences between countries undergoing changes in civil and political dialog is informal and inefficient. But still, most of us believe that civil society is an important component to democracy. However, we also know that in many of the wealthiest democratic states, there is growing political apathy, declining membership in civic organizations, and a burgeoning, network of market and government forces that can disproportionately influence major social, legal, economics and political decisions.

While activists and leaders in government, business and education in the west have been clamouring for a renewed civil society since the 1960s, very little has been done to achieve a more vibrant sense of public space and discourse. In short, cynicism, apathy, lack of access, the seductions of television, economic inequality and other social pressures have caused deterioration in American and European civil society. So in areas of the USA and Europe where civil society seems to be thriving, we would do well to notice how it is sustained, improved, and perhaps how it can be emulated in the Middle East, North Africa and beyond. In this paper

An essential component of many strategies to sustain civil society appears lacking from current literature. What is missing is a strategy for training or encouraging citizens to participate more fully in civil society. And this is one of the objectives of this toolkit – to make the case for using advocacy training and skills to revive and maintain emerging civil society movements. This section of the toolkit will trace the concept of advocacy and discuss its role in shaping contemporary civil society.

#### **The Importance of Advocacy**

It has become common knowledge that American civil society has waned. When we look at some of the reasons why American civil society has waned, we realize they are premised on the possibility that Americans simply don't know how to *be engaged* in a civil society. The political theorist

Richard Putnam adamantly proposes that the popularity of televisions directly proportional to the decline of civil society. But another theorist, John Ehrenberg, convincingly argues that television is not enough to explain this process. Instead, Ehrenberg declares, civil society is constructed and threatened by a number of factors, including political, cultural, economic and social forces.

Why is this relevant to the organizations, societies and institutions that this manual was produced for? What can the people helping to foster the growth of civil society in the Middle East learn from the political culture of the USA? Because by looking at the example of one country that has experience sixty turbulent years of growth and change in its civil society movement, we can find concepts that help us to transcend the different challenges other civil society movements are facing today.

One possible element that rises above the challenges facing new civil society movements is *advocacy*, since the skills associated with advocacy help foster critical thinking and provide opportunities for communities to voice their opinions on larger cultural trends.

For different reasons, many people living the US, and many more people living in societies that are recovering from authoritarian rule or failed governments do not know how to discuss, much less research, important contemporary issues and controversies. In fact, there is a correlation between the inability to advocate and the collapse of civil society.

### **The beginnings of advocacy**

It is perhaps no coincidence that advocacy, as a concept, has similar origins to civil society movements. The ancient Greeks and Romans discussed advocacy as a means of speaking on someone else's behalf. There were two types of advocates in the ancient world: the *advocatus*, the advocate for civic engagement and improvement of society, and the *jurisconsult*, the advocate for someone else.

The role of *advocatus* was highly respected; it was seen as a special gift and eventually became a frequently sought-after profession, particularly with the development of complicated systems of law. The *jurisconsult* was precisely that – a counsel to the court. The *jurisconsult* was less respectable than the *advocatus*, since the *jurisconsult* was an “advocate for hire” and lacked the passion to change society for the better. Five concepts emerged from this early understanding of advocacy that are still used by debate trainers today: *Invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery*.

J K Hanrahan, a modern legal scholar, helps explain that these “five canons” are used “to appeal to a jury’s sense of ethos, pathos, and logos”. At its core, advocacy requires persuasion. Other contemporary argument and persuasion scholars also view advocacy as tied to persuasion. It is the advocate’s job to persuade others as to the seriousness of a problem, i.e., to get other people to recognize the existence of a problem, as well as persuade others that the advocate’s solution to the problem is a wise and workable one which should be adopted.

## Advocacy's role in civil society

What does this mean for civil society organisations? That advocacy should be taken seriously, and should form a part of any strategy of community outreach and engagement. *The role of advocate is concerned with influence and power.* An advocate wants to be effective, to be able to influence person A to accept solution X when otherwise A might accept solution Y or no solution at all. The art of persuasion is the art of convincing someone else of some item or belief. Advocacy demands that speakers practice *unique forms of persuasion.*

Aside from arguing a problem and supporting a solution, advocacy includes special persuasive skill sets by attempting to avoid coercion. Civil society organisations are not demagogic institutions; irrespective of their goals they do not aim to tell people what to believe or how to think. According to current legal scholars, advocacy is the impassioned presentation of a case. The case's delivery and content are prepared and presented in ways that are integrally tied to the advocate's identity, ensuring that the onus to communicate effectively is on the advocate, rather than there being an onus on the audience to adopt the role of students or learners. This form of rhetoric minimizes the degree of coercion since the advocacy is, by definition, offered up to the audience, rather than forced upon them. This does not eliminate the coercive impulse of persuasive exchanges, but it does provide a rhetorical situation where the advocate has a degree of control over the content of their persuasive message.

In addition, the persuasive role of advocacy could be seen as a "gravitas placitum" – a plea of severity. In short, the advocate has something serious at stake in the communicative exchange; the nature of advocacy requires it, otherwise the debater would be engaged in simple deliberative speaking, and not the involved as an advocatus – someone personally engaged in representing the views of a community. To advocate, as we have already clarified, suggests a higher duty for civil society workers who have received debate training than simply speaking on someone's behalf or articulating a certain position. The advocate, armed with sharpened oratorical and reasoning skills, must persuade others- audiences who, whether they know it or not, are part of civil society- about issues of extreme importance.

## The skill of advocacy

Contemporary training in advocacy directly corresponds to some of the lessons learnt from the ancient approach. S Coale, a former law clerk in the Fifth Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals and currently a private attorney in Dallas, convincingly argues that the Greek philosopher Aristotle's formula for effective advocacy- ethos, pathos and logos- is the key to successful legal advocacy today. Additionally, James S. Gifford, who is an attorney in Hawaii, defends Aristotle's description of advocacy is laying the groundwork for constitutional law – the type of law that searches of norms and values that can be used to united communities and peoples together into nations and polities. The cause that he or she supports is, for the advocate not a simple rhetorical situation, but one of enormous significance, such as the future of the society, the appropriate methods of governing that society, questions of war, peace, justice and everything else besides. In essence, the gravity of the

advocate's cause creates a persuasive situation distinct from other persuasive episodes – such as competitive debating or persuasive writing. They relate to the ability to persuade, including the skills of ethos, pathos, logos, and the “five canons” of public speaking discussed above. Advocacy also relates to persuasion by means other than coercion. In other words, advocacy is premised on the advocate's passion for, and stake in, the content he or she is delivering. While the goal of persuading the audience is always obvious during a debate, the actual meaning underlying the content of advocacy is centred on the advocate's role, not the audience's.

Advocacy also helps campaigning organisations to relate a problem to a solution in clear terms. And because advocacy is a public persuasion technique, it also helps audiences to make this link. This emphasis requires us to learn basic skills of research, argument composition and construction, delivery, style, and evidentiary proof (and each of these can be linked to the “five canons” mentioned above). Of course, if advocacy generates discussion, particularly in the public realm, then skills of refutation must also be acquired.

### **Advocacy and citizens**

Thomas Jefferson referred to the new American democracy of the eighteenth and nineteenth century as a “free marketplace.” Not capitalism run amuck, but a free-flow of open possibilities for citizens to discuss political affairs. This “freedom” occurs on two levels, both *inquiry* and *advocacy*.

*Inquiry* refers to the ability of individuals to make rational judgments. and advocacy as a form of persuasion. Advocacy grows and develops as citizens and organisation attempt to influence others through argumentation and- in doing so- are exposed to new persuasive arguments. In essence, advocacy enables citizens to perform their roles citizens by learning about what other citizens think citizenship should entail.

If civil society is meant to provide a space of civic engagement separate from political or economic interference, then discussions should emerge about political and economic affairs that avoid the coercive influence of the state or free markets. So what does advocacy bring to the table? What can it do to bring civil society organisations closer to citizens? What can it do to help civil society organisations assimilate the views of the citizens they are working with? By definition, a citizenry trained in the skills of advocacy would do the following:

1. Learn to recognize and avoid arguments of coercion.
2. Learn to research and reflect on civic issues of importance
3. Learn to be impassioned by means of reason to issues at hand
4. Learn to prepare and deliver effective arguments about the issue
5. Learn to refute oppositional claims and sustain credibility

These are also the skills that civil society organisations- whatever area of society and citizenship they focus on- should provide to their members.

Skills, not just ideals, can help propel citizens to become better citizens. Some of the greatest philosophers of all time have clamoured for individual citizens to take a more active role in areas of governance that affect them personally. Advocacy skills can reinvigorate civic participation and deliberative democracy. Learning how to engage in advocacy can also help citizens understand the importance of civic engagement, there by curtailing some of the distracting societal forces that have discouraged civic participation in the past. Sectarianism, generation gaps and class boundaries can all temporarily overcome in properly organised public debates, using rules and roles that give citizens from all backgrounds an equal opportunity to explore ideas and persuade an audience.

Advocacy skills must be taught. Elementary and middle school classes in citizenship and civic participation are a good start. But many organisations forget- in the heat of revolution and rapid social change- that civic engagement is a process; a process that requires sustained influence, especially when considering the number of distractions and barrier to participating in civil society that exist.

Educating the public about their responsibilities and duties to civic engagement is also a start. Advocacy is an important part of this process, which helps to give value to civil society. Advocacy, while not a cure-all, can help jumpstart the civil society process in many areas of the world.

Where civil society is already taking root, the ability to advocate salient public issues can galvanize additional support and help maintain the spirit of civic engagement that is so critical to a functioning democracy. Again, advocacy will not necessarily usher in a utopia, particularly in societies with traditions of dictatorship, or even democracies with entrenched party politics. Nevertheless, with a renewed and vibrant civil society, these countries can start to travel along a path of social transformation which may create opportunities for important political and cultural change.

Perhaps the most important question to ask is: How can advocacy help civil society? The skills associated with advocacy should already appear significant when drawing a connection between advocacy and civil society. In addition, there are a number of events and opportunities that can use advocacy skills to maintain or construct notions of civil society. Besides training students and citizens about the skills of advocacy, public forums and/or public debates could help with reviving civil society. Academics and NGOs such as the OSF and IDEA have already argued that public debates can help foster a sense of community and inclusion. This toolkit has been designed to utilize the infrastructure that already exists within collegiate debate- debates that take place in schools and universities- to facilitate planned public debates about issues central to our communities. Aimed at encouraging student and citizen participation, these debates could help lead to additional discussions and possibly even generate additional public spaces where deliberative, civic discussions take place. Venues for a civil society can all be improved through the process of advocacy.

An advocacy-rich culture of civil society is central to creating successful deliberative democracies. Many scholars point to civil society's contribution to democracy, some even arguing that civil society is the *sine qua non* for democracy. But what is the role of advocacy in securing a functioning and prospering democracy? Advocacy is the lynchpin for preparing and delivering arguments. For a functioning democracy, public discussions about the merits and disadvantages of different courses of action are vital. Only through thorough research and development of arguments can this occur.

Advocacy, then, is essential for both civil society *and* democracy. In a society where conflict, confusion, cynicism and apathy run rampant, learning how to advocate might just be the antidote for a disease of despair.

Civil society for contemporary society should be seen as an autonomous sphere of social life, separate from governmental or economic influence. The "third space" theory minimizes the undue influence that can emanate from the state or the market.

Venues for a civil society conceived as a third space, such as mosques, unions, voluntary organizations, schools, women's groups and other arenas can all be improved through the process of advocacy. As the training program that accompanies this toolkit will demonstrate, advocacy skills are important for citizens not only to appreciate their role in civil society, but also to advance and refute positions regarding civic involvement and efforts at improving society.

It is hoped that incorporating advocacy into civil society will foster more meaningful discussion, less coercion, and more productive civic engagement. Civil society is not without its flaws, one of which is that it is not sustainable on its own. Something else must also be present for civil society to flourish. Its existence may depend on multiple factors, but one that seems most evident is a citizenry and civil society organisations capable of using the skills of advocacy. The relationship is simple: Civil society requires civic engagement and advocacy generates the ability and skill sets necessary to engage in discussions affecting the populace.

Advocacy is a panacea. Around the world, civil societies- however young or old- are struggling over other factors as well, such as the distractions of sports and television, the collusion between politicians and their constituents, economic demands preventing civic participation, and so on. However, assuming there are enough citizens who have the ability and willingness to engage in civil society, how could their participation be improved? How could civil society be more influential in its relationship with the state and trade markets? How can citizens feel more secure and enthusiastic about their participation, especially in developing democracies?

Civil society serves as a tool for citizens to engage with each other as well as the affairs of society. Only through a process of civic discourse, respect, and argument can this discourse serve any purpose. The ancient principles of advocacy are a reminder of how each individual has a part to play in civic engagement. Advocacy, not acrimony, can improve and resuscitate our civil society. And, in turn, perhaps it can improve our democracy.

## Using advocacy skills to further grass-roots campaigning and outreach

The case for the importance of teaching advocacy skills to grass-roots campaigning and outreach workers in CSOs- the people interacting and liaising with communities directly- is made very eloquently in a study by two debaters from the West Washington University in the US, Korry Harvey and Steven Woods. In the early 2000s WWU set up a community debating program called “Let’s Talk”. The program was designed to extend the skills acquired by the university’s competitive debaters into community campaigning activities.

The authors of the study explained that both college students and coaching staff felt that having a high degree of training in research and speaking skills were advantages that could be channeled into building discourse and action in the community outside WWU.

“Let’s Talk” was a campus community forum organized to promote public discourse by bringing together students, faculty and community members. On entering its fourth year of operation, the project averaged an attendance of 60 to 80 people per session.

While “Let’s talk” events utilized the specialist knowledge of a few campus and community members on particular topics, its emphasis was placed on facilitating an open forum wherein everyone in attendance was encouraged to speak and contribute from an equal footing, by asking questions, answering questions, making comments and generally sharing their opinion or perspective.

- **Maintaining a community focus**

The contours and objectives of “Let’s Talk” broadly matched the approach taken by many NGOs and CSOs that have a focus on advocacy activities, as opposed to public debating. CSO workers could benefit greatly from an approach to training that contextualizes public speaking skills with local and regional communities – just as YAV does.

- **Responding to society-wide crises**

Advocacy oriented CSO outreach work can also be useful in helping volunteers, workers and community members address significant social and political crises in a safe, supportive and productive fashion. In WWU, the “Let’s Talk” program was used by students and members of the community surrounding the university to discuss the 9/11 attacks, which occurred only a few weeks after the program’s inception.

Discussion of the 9/11 attacks was out-of context in the classes that many WWU students were taking, leaving them without an avenue to address their anxieties and questions about the causes of the attacks. People were scared, confused and looking for answers to their questions. At the same time there was a rapidly growing intolerance toward public expression that was anything other than the predominant (and damaging) notion of anger and resentment.



“Let’s Talk’s” organizers responded by adapting the program to allow attendees to present ideas they were interested in, contextualized into real world issues in a “safe” expressive space, free of many of the social pressures that the attacks had created. However, there was also an emphasis during program sessions of providing information to help people who came to observe become more educated about the topics under discussion.

The core objective of the “Let’s Talk” program was to offer students practical experience of advocacy and public dialogue. The intent of the project was to serve as a resource for the community to help build critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills.

The training techniques provided in this toolkit will allow CSO workers to mount similarly robust challenges to similar social crises. Debate training enables CSO workers to create environments and training events that allow communities to take the role of advocates, while feeling empowered to discuss a diversity of viewpoints on key controversies.

### **Choosing a debate format**

One of the first things that will need to be decided on when preparing for a public debate is what *format* it is going to have. A debate format is the collection of rules, formalities and roles that decide how the debate will be displayed to an audience. A debate's format includes the following characteristics:

- The number of speakers in the debate;
- The length and order of the debate's speeches;
- The opportunities given to speakers to question each other;
- The number of opportunities given to the audience to respond to the debater's speeches.

There are many debate formats used in competitive debate. No one format is more or less suitable for running a public debate. One of the debate formats that is often used for public debates is *Public Forum Debate Format*.

Public Forum Debate is conducted by two teams of two speakers each. After the first two *opening* speeches, the first speakers for the affirmative and the negative teams engage each other in a *cross-fire*. Cross-fire is a question and answer session (with the first question being asked by the speaker from the team affirmative team). Just as in *cross-examination*, debaters ask revealing questions in an attempt to expose a weakness in the opponents' arguments and often use the *cross-fire* period to develop and attack each other's arguments. Following the first cross-fire, the second speakers of each team take the floor in *rebuttal* speeches, when they respond to arguments presented by the opposite team and further develop their own team's arguments.

Rebuttal speeches are followed by a second round of cross-fire questions, this time happening between the second speakers.

After the second cross-fire the first speakers present concluding *summary* speeches. These are followed by the *Grand Cross Fire* which is similar to the first crossfire except that all four debaters can ask and answer questions of each other. The speaker that gave the first summary speech begins Grand Crossfire by asking the first question.

After Grand Crossfire, each team's second speaker has a chance to give a one-minute speech called the *Final Focus*, with the first team giving this speech first (this speech is also referred to commonly as *The Last Shot*). A *Final Focus* speech gives teams one last chance to explain exactly why their respective arguments have won the round. No new arguments are allowed in the Final Focus. This speech is often the determining factor for a judge's and audience's decision in a closely contested round, as it allows the judge to hear which arguments/evidence each team views as the most important to their debate case, and summarizes the entire debate. In addition, both teams are given total of two minutes each of preparation time which they can use before any of their speeches to confer and adjust their notes.

4 min.	Affirmative team. First speaker constructive arguments.
4 min.	Negative team. First speaker constructive arguments.
3 min.	<i>Cross-fire</i> between the first affirmative and negative speakers.
4 min.	Affirmative team. Second speaker rebuttal.
4 min.	Negative team. Second speaker rebuttal.
3 min.	Cross-fire between the second <i>affirmative</i> and <i>negative</i> speakers
2 min	Affirmative team. First speaker summary.
2 min	Negative team. First speaker summary.
3 min.	Grand cross-fire (all speakers)
1 min.	Affirmative team final focus ( <i>last shot</i> )
1 min.	Affirmative team final focus ( <i>last shot</i> )

### Involving the audience

When organizing a public debate it is important to involve the audience in the debate and designate a special time when the members of the public can express their views on the debated topic and/or ask debaters questions. This session should be conducted by a *moderator*. It is usually best if the audience is given opportunity to speak towards the end of the debate, once most of the arguments by both sides have been presented.

In Public Forum Debate, a good time to allow audience participation is after the last summary speech or after the grand cross-fire, so that both teams have an opportunity to respond to the issues raised by the audience in their *final focus* speeches.

To account for the needs and expectations of different audiences, adjustments can be made to the timing of the speeches and preparation periods (e.g. preparation time could be altogether – since it is often the least interesting part of debate from the point of view of the audience). Organisers could even design their own debate format to suit a particular event – e.g. the number of speakers that want to participate, lengths of time, etc.

When designing a debate format make sure that:

- It involves orderly, structured development of arguments – constructive speeches followed by responses and further development of arguments and summary speeches at the end of the debate;
- Both teams have equal and alternating speaking time;
- The format involves variety – it should mix speeches, interrogation and audience participation to ensure that audience members remain entertained and engaged with the subject under discussion.

Page 87 of this manual includes timing charts and descriptions of several popular debating formats. Please consult this information when running an event in a format other than Public Forum debate.

### **Selecting and wording a debate topic**

Choosing a good debate topic is one of the most important and yet also one of the most difficult tasks for debate organizers. A good debate topic will make for good debates. Similarly, a bad debate topic will result in poor debates and potentially a lot of disappointment on the part of debaters, judges and the audience. When selecting a topic area and eventually wording it in a form of a debate resolution, the following criteria should be taken into account:

1. A good debate topic should be interesting – a topic that will motivate members of the public to attend the debate, by playing on their curiosity.
2. A good debate topic should be controversial – which means that it should contain the potential for disagreement or pose a problem with many potential solutions
3. A good debate topic should be balanced – it should provide enough arguments and evidence for both sides in debate- the affirmative and negative.
4. A good public debate topic should avoid being too abstract and should instead focus on issues that both debaters and the audience understand and can relate to. It should not be necessary for a debate’s organisers to prove to potential audience members that they should care about a subject. The debate itself should be the point at which audience members are educated in new and disruptive ideas.
5. At the same time a good debate topic should avoid being too narrow and technical- some issues related to science may make for good debates between scientists or experts specializing in a given narrow field but would be too complicated for most *layman* debaters and audiences.

A good topic for a public debate should address the following questions:

1. Have there been any recent events that are dominating public discussion right now (in the media, etc.)?
2. When friends or family among your debate club meet, what subjects do you discuss?
3. What are prominent political leaders currently arguing over?
4. Are there any new or proposed laws that have been the subject of controversy or criticism?
5. What topics are being covered on the opinion pages of local newspapers?
6. Are there any subjects that members of your debater society already know a great deal about?
7. Are there any subjects that the planned public debate’s audience will have an interest in learning more about?

Once a topic has been selected it must be *worded* as a debate motion. In other words, the topic must be expressed in language that will help the debaters discussing it build compelling arguments that play on and extend the audience’s knowledge. When wording the topic it is important to insure that:

1. It is expressed in a declarative (affirmative) sentence
2. It is expressed in a clear manner (it avoids ambiguous words and phrases)
3. It is worded neutrally (it avoids biased terms)

Sometimes a debate resolution will begin with the phrase “Resolved” or “This House would”, to indicate that it is declarative (e.g. “Resolved that protection of environment is more important than economic development”). Here are a few examples of debate topics on different issues:

- Resolved: The European Union should admit Turkey
- This House believes the international community should impose sanctions on Syria
- This House believes that paying small bribes should not be criminalised
- This House would allow women to train as imams

### **Preparing to participate in a public debate**

Preparation for debate is an important process, since the amount of time that organisers and debaters spend readying their arguments and researching the debate's topic will determine the quality of the event and consequently the level of the enjoyment of the debate by the debaters and the audience. Usually the process of preparing for debate involves the following steps:

- Step 1            Coming up with ideas on how to discuss the topic
- Step 2            Researching the topic
- Step 3            Formulating arguments
- Step 4            Conducting additional research to gather supporting evidence
- Step 5            Developing debate cases
- Step 6            Dividing arguments, examples and responsibilities between speakers
- Step 7            Developing persuasive style, organization and delivery

#### ***Generating ideas***

This is the stage in preparation during which debaters approach the topic and try to generate and organize ideas, *arguments* and examples related to the topic. Very often debaters will want to come up with arguments both *for* and *against* a given debate resolution-even if they know which side of the debate they will be addressing. Identifying the arguments an opponent may use allows a team to prepare responses to those arguments and think up defense strategies. Debaters' main objective at this stage is also to find out what they already know about the topic and what areas need to be researched further.

At this point, participants should focus on the *quantity* of ideas they generate rather than their *quality*. The best approach is to list different points and arguments as they come to mind (brainstorming) and at a later stage try to group the arguments into *pros* and *cons* as well as different categories (e.g. economic, political, ethical, etc.). The debate team should nominate one person to be the *facilitator* and note down ideas that team members come up with.

#### ***Research and collecting evidence***

One of the outcomes of the first stage of the preparation for debate is identifying areas of knowledge that need to be developed further by consulting reference materials.

Few people (including debaters) are experts on everything on which they speak. It is for this reason that in preparation for debates debaters are all but obliged to seek external support for their arguments by studying the ideas and knowledge of others – in other words, by engaging in research.

The effective use of external support is *the golden mean* of supplementing one's own reasoning with the careful use of authoritative material. Citing outside sources that are neutral and authoritative allows debaters to build credibility in the eyes' of an audience and to make their arguments more persuasive.

The process of researching and collecting evidence will involve the following steps:

1. Identifying the areas where more information needs to be found - often these areas involve specific information like statistics, specific facts, data, views and opinions of experts.
2. Identifying sources of information: brainstorming ideas on where the missing and important information can be found. The advantages of different sources of information should be considered here. Is it better to conduct research in a traditional library or via the internet?
3. Reading and identifying the information that supports your position in a debate or potentially *refutes* the arguments of the other side – one of the skills required for this stage is *skimming* of the text locating the most useful paragraphs, sections and quotes.
4. Evaluating the information – analysing the information in a text, applying *critical thinking* skills and deciding whether the information is relevant the *case* being prepared, if it is up-to date and credible, etc.
5. Recording of the evidence - the last stage in the process involves correct recording of the evidence to be later presented during the debate. It is best done on a small piece of paper (e.g. *index card*), identifying the publication and the author as well as making sure that the quote presents accurate information. It may be a good idea to label each piece of evidence so that it can be easily filed and found prior to or during the debate.

***Developing arguments***

The next step in preparation for debate will involve making persuasive points in support of a position. The debaters will need to connect the evidence and apply *reasoning* to it to support various aspects of the resolution. They will need to develop *arguments*. Argument can be defined as a *claim* that is *warranted by data*.



***The claim***

A claim is what a debater wants his/her audience to ultimately accept. This might mean a piece of information, proposal or a solution that you would like your audience to accept or believe in. For example, *“By admitting Turkey to the European Union help to diversify the European economy”*, might be a claim advanced by the side that is supporting Turkey’s accession to the EU in a debate on the resolution: *“Turkey should join the EU”*

***Data***

Data is additional information given to the audience in order to support the claim. Data is usually introduced by the word *“because . . .”* and it explains to the audience why your claim is correct. For example the evidence that: *Turkey will be the only country in the EU with majority Muslim population* might be used as data to support the previous claim.

***The warrant***

Warrant is a logical relationship that connects the data to the claim and makes your argument stronger and more persuasive. In the previous example, a good way to relate the need to *advance ethnic and religious diversity in EU* (Claim) with the examples of *Turkey having the majority Muslim population* is to argue that *accepting a predominantly Muslim country into the Union is a good way to enhance ethnic diversity in the EU*. Warrant serves as a logical bridge between the data and the claim. It is important to emphasise at this point that warrants themselves are claims which can be argued about and often need prove to be accepted by the audience.

In a debate, the claim is usually presented as the first part of the argument followed by the word *“because”* or *“since”* introducing data. In many arguments, the warrant is not explicitly expressed by it is understood by the debaters and the audience and can be emphasised in response to a question or counter-argument.

Speakers can use a number of different types of argument to state or defend the claims that their debate case is based on. Often speakers will base their reasoning on examples (e.g. something is true because we have an example to support it), somebody’s authority (e.g. something is true because an expert or a panel of experts have concluded that it is true), or an analogy (something is true because it is similar to something else which is believed to be true), etc. More information about the different types of argument that can

be used during the debate, and the logic that underlies them, can be found among training materials for argumentation that starts on page 48.

### ***Developing debate cases***

Once a topic has been researched and persuasive arguments developed, these elements will need to be brought together as a *debate case*. Debate cases are argumentative strategies that debaters use when arguing for or against a given resolution. They constitute a framework for debaters' arguments and evidence – the specific content of debate.

Since debaters will not be able to present all the arguments in a limited time-frame debate in support of a given issue or all possible solutions to a given problem, teams will need to make strategic decisions on which arguments are best presented and how to effectively link them with each other.

Most of the time debate case will depend on a type of resolution that is being defended or attacked. Some resolutions will require a focus on *facts* and arguments that something is the case (for example: “Resolved that: CO2 emissions cause global warming” or “This House believes that increasing government spending is the fastest way to end a recession”). Others concentrate on values and evaluation of some custom, law or policy (for example: “Capital punishment is immoral”). Still others require teams to argue in support of some policy in order to address an existing problem (“European Union should increase trade with the middle-east”). In most debates however, a number of facts and issues are addressed in each debate case, along with arguments about values and changes to policies (for example debaters may need to persuade the judges or the audience that CO2 in fact cause global warming and propose a policy to protect our environment more effectively).

It goes without saying that developing an effective case is an important part of debate preparation. *Affirmative* teams' speeches should fulfil the following objectives

1. The speech should clearly introduce the topic and define the most important terms that the debate topic contains. These definitions should be simple, clear and used to make the audience feel more engaged with the debate.
2. The speech should present the teams' interpretation of the main themes of the debate, along with an assessment of their importance to the debate. The team should clearly describe why the issues they have identified in the debate topic present a problem or a challenge to the community that their audience is part of.
3. The speech should present proposals and policy that address the problems identified in objective 2.
4. The teams' speeches should consider potential flaws in this policy and guard against them or prove why they are not significant.
5. The debaters should explain to the audience how they should assess the debate and what criteria they should use in determining the winner.

Negative teams' speeches should meet the following objectives.

1. Negative speeches could question the definition of key terms in the motion, or key assumptions about human behaviour, current affairs or the functions of government provided by the affirmative team.
2. When a negative team questions and affirmative teams world view, they should make the challenge that they are presenting clear to the audience. The negative team should enable the audience to make a clear choice between their interpretation of the motion and that of their opponents.
3. Negative speeches should assess the consequences and efficacy of the affirmative team's policies. The negative team should consider whether the affirmative policy will have the effects that their opponents claim it will.
4. If possible, the speech should defend the status quo policies that may already be in place to tackle specific social problems, demonstrating why they should continue to be preferred over the new policies suggested by the affirmative team.

### ***Division of tasks***

After developing their cases the debaters will need to decide on the order in which they will speak during the debate.

They will need to take into consideration the roles and responsibilities of each speaker and the function of their speeches in a debate. The main objectives and the roles of speakers in most debate formats are described below:

#### *Constructive speeches*

These speeches are presented by the first *affirmative* and the first *negative* speakers. The main responsibility of these speakers involves: introducing the topic in an attractive and interesting manner, defining the main terms of the resolution, outlining the main arguments of the affirmative and the negative team (*debate case*) and presenting the teams' strategies. The negative speaker should also respond to the arguments presented by the affirmative speaker.

#### *Rebuttal speeches*

During these speeches, the second speakers *extend* (further develop) arguments presented by the first speakers on their team, by providing additional reasoning and evidence. The second speakers also respond to the arguments presented by their opponents – both attacking new arguments as well as *re-building* their teams' cases.

#### *Summary speeches*

These are usually the last speeches in a debate and their function is to summarize the main points and conclude the debate for each side. The last speakers have the last opportunity to demonstrate to the judges or the audience why their team should win the debate and finish

their respective speeches with a powerful conclusion. In some debate formats (e.g. *Public Forum Debate*) the speakers may have the last final chance to bring the main reasons for supporting their side in a *Last Shot* speech which is very similar to a summary speech.

### *Refutation*

With the exception of the speaker opening the debate (1<sup>st</sup> speaker) all speakers participating in a debate should be ready to not only support the arguments prepared by their teams (through the process of *research*, *argument* and *debate case development*) but also critically respond to the arguments presented by their opponents. In debate jargon the response is called *refutation*. Refutation is one of the most important elements of debate- it is the disagreement between speakers of opposite sides that makes for the clash of ideas and makes a debate possible. Without refutation, your event will become a presentation of two opposing views on a topic but it will not be a real debate.

By refuting arguments of the opposite team debaters reduce their impact on the audience. However it is not enough, to simply say that an argument of your opponents is untrue; rather, a debater has to *prove* that an argument is wrong, irrelevant or not significant in the context of a given debate –using reason and evidence.

### *Cross-fire, cross-examination or points of information*

In some debate formats (including Public Forum Debate), there are special periods during the debate, when debaters can ask each other questions that relate to their speeches as well as their general position with regard to debated topic. The main purpose of asking questions is to show some flaws in the opponents' case and expose weak arguments or evidence. When asking questions speakers should keep them short and to the point and try to “steer” the respondent into admitting something that may seriously weaken the opposite team's case. In this respect, cross-examination in debate is very similar to the cross-examination in a courtroom, when advocates for respective sides (prosecution and defence) try to get *admissions* and *concessions* from witnesses and experts that would strengthen their case or undermine the case of their opponents.

Cross fire and cross-examination are often the liveliest elements of debate since this is when debaters interact directly with each other and can respond immediately to what their opponents are saying. Cross- examination provides a wonderful opportunity to speakers to demonstrate their wit, knowledge of the subject area and public speaking skills. It is important however that debaters remain courteous toward their opponent and treat them with the same respect and friendly attitude as you express in other speeches in the debate.

In some debate formats (e.g. parliamentary debate) not all speakers can ask questions (e.g. Karl Popper format) and in some other formats, cross-fire or cross-examination questions are replaced with points of information – brief interjections by speakers made *during* the speeches of their opponents (see the page 60 for more information).

Debate organizers or team leaders may prefer to assign speakers to a position in the debate, rather than letting them choose. When assigning speakers to their positions in a debate, organizers should take into consideration the range of skills that each place on the table requires. Having said that, it is important for the development of debaters in your society that they be encouraged to test their skills in different speaking positions.

### ***Presenting your arguments***

The last element of preparation involves deciding on how the arguments the make up a debate case will be communicated to the audience so that a team's presentation is equally as effective as their content (reasoning and evidence). The main aspects of the presentation include:

- Style (the words and the language you use)
- Organization of the speech (how you structure your main points in the speech)
- Delivery (the way you speak as well as your body language)

When deciding on the style, debaters will need to relate their approach to the content of their speeches, using humor and *pathos* when appropriate. Debaters must remember to use memorable, vivid language that will have an emotional appeal to their audience and will emphasize the central messages of their speeches.

Speech organization is equally important – a good speech has an introduction, main body and a conclusion. A story, anecdote or a memorable quote can be used to open a speech in a compelling fashion. The main body of a speech should be divided into a series of main ideas, which should be link together in an appropriate manner (using phrases like: *it follows that, as a result, in my last point, etc.*)

A large part of communication relates not just to arguments and words but to speaker's voice, body, and movement.

The elements of good delivery parallel the elements of good conversation. The audience should feel that a speaker is speaking with them, not presenting to them, so in most settings, it helps to use the voice and body language in a natural manner. Speakers should avoid reading from speaking notes as if they were a script; pauses can be used to speakers' advantage; establishing eye contact with an audience is also useful for making a message more compelling.

### ***Advertising and publicising a public debate***

Preparation for a public debate involves all the steps and aspects presented in the previous sections of this toolkit but there is one more important consideration that must be accounted for when preparing for a public debate - promoting the debate to the local community and assuring audience attendance.

Publicizing a public debate is in a way similar to marketing a product and organizers will need to assure that the debate is something that potential audience members will be interested in attending. This means that the organizers must ensure that the topic for debate is interesting and attractive, that the debate is organized at a convenient time for your audience to attend, that it is organized in a convenient venue and that it is promoted in an appropriate manner.

When the general public is invited to a debate it is usually good to organize it in a late afternoon or evening when most people have finished work or on a weekend or any other holiday. It may be a good idea to link the debate to another event that will have a large audience in attendance: for example an *open day* at school or university, public festival, sports event, etc.

Choosing a place for debate is important - the location will affect not only the size of the audience, but the character and mood of the event as well. The natural choice may be to host the debate at the school or university that the organizing club is part of (e.g. in a gym or assembly hall). This could also help with promotion of linked community debate program. Besides, many of the members of the audience- parents and community leaders- will already know how to get to the venue. Depending on how big or prominent the debate is likely to be, a different venue may be required. Good venues include town halls, sports venues, theatres, university lecture halls or town squares. Remember that it is important to reserve the venue long in advance however and also sometimes consider its cost implications (rent). In choosing the place for the debate organizers should consider its location (the more central- the better) and ease of access (including access by disabled members of the audience).

Once a topic, time and location for the debate event has been determined, promotion can begin. There are many ways in which a debate can be publicized and they will depend on a number of factors - for example how many volunteers from the organizing society can engage in promotion as well as how funding is available for promotion activities. Some effective ways of promoting public debates include: posters and *direct mail*, media (newspapers, radio, possibly TV) newsletters of various organizations, bulletin boards, etc. A good method of promotion is free coverage in the media - e.g. local radio station inviting debate society members onto a program to talk about a given issue.

In promoting a public debate, debate societies will need to plan in advance, Debaters are encouraged to seek assistance from teachers and parents, show a lot of ingenuity and enterprising spirit and most importantly be professional and pay a lot of attention to detail.

### **Debating ethically: empowering communities**

Like any other social and public activity, debate should be governed by rules. Since debate involves investigation of controversial issues, both debaters and debate organizers should consider ethical aspects of their actions and decisions before the debate (e.g. when choosing a debate topic and conducting research) or during the debate itself (when presenting arguments to a public). When addressing a public gathering, debaters of all ability levels have a unique opportunity to influence both public opinion and the public profile of the organizations they represent.

To better illustrate the importance of ethical consideration in public debates, we would like to present the following true story:

A 2001 debate tournament and youth activist forum held in Saint Petersburg, Russia, ended with a final debate before an audience of more than two hundred students and teachers from twenty-six different countries. The two teams of debaters, who themselves represented several different nations, focused on the issue of cultural rights, with the affirmative side advocating a United Nations role in increasing educational opportunities for Europe's Roma population. The negative side was responsible for opposing this policy. The Roma are a formerly nomadic ethnic minority, who reside in a number of different European states, with the largest Roma communities found in eastern and southern Europe. The Roma have been subjected to discrimination, social exclusion and racism for most of their history. Despite the growing culture of tolerance and integration within Europe, Roma continue to be the subject of race hate and prejudice in many areas.

While other options certainly existed, the negative team in the Roma debate chose to argue that there was no need for the United Nations to increase educational opportunities for the Roma. Appealing to broad racial stereotypes, these debaters argued that Roma children have no interest in learning anything and simply cannot be taught. At a factual level, there are good reasons to doubt this conclusion. Even in the audience there were living refutations to this claim since two Roma observers attended the program outside of their normal school year in order to gain education. Believing that the claims were not only wrong but insulting as well, both of these Roma participants left the room in protest, returning only when the debate ended and then only for the opportunity to address the audience and to defend, as forcefully as possible, the idea that the Roma should not be stereotyped as a people who don't seek out or benefit from education. Others spoke as well, the problem was laid bare and in the end both teams apologized for the way they had handled the issue.

One could hopefully say that these remarks from the final debate served to instigate an important discussion and may have raised the consciousness of those who witnessed it or heard of it. Still, there are better ways to promote understanding, and the story of this debate gone wrong serves as an important reminder to all involved: participants and audience members alike need to view public debates from an ethical perspective, understanding that debates are better or worse, effective or worthless, noble or disgraceful based upon the degree to which the participants adhere



to the principles that maintain debating as an accessible, education and democratizing activity: honesty, respect, and dialogue.

Public debating, because it involves practical communication, reasoning, and adaptation, always involves choice. All issues involving choice are potentially moral issues. Because a public debate is aimed at a general audience, unethical debaters might be tempted to engage in *demagoguery*: appealing to popular emotions and prejudices, rather than making arguments. The fact that most public debates are specific and solitary events also means that opponents and audience members will rarely have a chance to use the “next time” in order to point out an erroneous quotation or criticize a suspect strategy. The importance of ethics is further emphasized by the fact that public debates take place in a context in which it is impossible to check on the validity of each bit of information and unwise to call attention to each act that is arguably unethical. Few audiences enjoy watching debaters bicker over who is more moral, and that is why the ethics of any public debate should be established and understood before the debate even starts. Good public debates can be found where event organizers, advocates, and audiences are committed to a positive view of responsible communication.

We can identify four cornerstone responsibilities of the public debater:

- *A commitment to full preparation*
- *A dedication to the common good*
- *A respect for rational argument*
- *A respect for ideas and people*

We shall consider each of these responsibilities in greater detail and look at some of the resulting guidelines.

### ***A Commitment to Full Preparation***

By spending time at a public debate, an audience is doing more than simply spending; they are actually investing. The time and the effort that it takes to follow a public debate attentively are given in the hope that there is some sort of return or benefit for the listener. The audience’s reasonable expectation of benefit creates an obligation on the part of the debaters to do their best to provide the audience with useful information presented in a way that is interesting and engaging. Without full preparation, opportunities for productive dialogue are limited. Thus the need for public debaters to commit to full preparation, and this obligation includes a number of elements that debaters should internalise:

- *Plan in Advance of the Debate*: a public debate demands thorough preparation. This includes previewing the necessary arrangements, selecting and developing arguments, planning speeches and all of the other steps mentioned below.
- *Know Your Subject*: complete preparation for any public debate requires that advocates seek out answers to a number of different questions: What is the factual foundation of the

controversy? Who are the major parties? What has happened up to now? When debaters only rely on what they already know (or think they know) then they are limiting the potential for clash and the possibilities for genuinely informed dialogue. Solid knowledge is essential for a successful debate.

- *Make Reference to External Research Material When Necessary:* by researching the subject matter, you are avoiding error and presenting a more comprehensive argument in favour of your side. Turning to external authorities doesn't limit a debater's originality; rather, it allows debaters to participate along with others in an on-going discussion of the topic.
- *Avoid Representing the Thoughts of Others as Your Own:* when presenting the thoughts and ideas of other people – give credit to them and indicate the original sources of information
- *Identify Your Sources:* instead of saying, "I remember reading somewhere that . . ." or "Scientists say . . ." debaters should let listeners and opponents know where their information comes from. Information from a source that is unidentified or vague is difficult to evaluate and may simply be discarded the audience. Identifying a source of information you are citing will make you appear more credible to your audience.
- *Ensure That Your References Are Not Exaggerated or Distorted:* when you refer to an author to support one of your arguments, make sure that you are giving the argument as much force as the author would give it, *but no more*. When you represent an author's views, the critical question of fairness is this: Would that author agree to the way in which you have used his or her words, including your selection, emphasis, and implication?
- *Ensure That You Are Using Fully Accurate and Legitimate References:* fabricating support by inventing an expert who doesn't exist or creating a quotation that was never published represent the absolute lowest points of debate. Even if you believe that something like this was probably said by someone, it is never acceptable to lie about evidence. Because it is impractical to verify independently every reference used in a public debate, the survival of intelligent debate in this context depends on trust.

### ***A Dedication to the Common Good***

Inherent in the act of choosing debate over other potential means of persuasion is a willingness to place the common good over one's own interests. The purely self-interested persuader would probably prefer an uninterrupted monologue to a debate in which an opponent receives equal billing and equal time. By choosing debate, debaters commit to a process that allows both sides of an argument to be presented to an audience — a process that may or may not help their "side", if conceived narrowly, but a process that will serve the common good by promoting complete understanding and fair judgment. The following considerations will allow debaters to reach the goal of achieving the common good:

- a) *Address the Debate to the Audience's Level of Understanding:* in public debates you usually address a general audience, and while audience members have a responsibility to try to understand, ultimately the question of whether the debate is enlightening or incomprehensible is in the debaters' hands. Addressing the audience using terms that they

don't understand or in a style of speech that they find incomprehensible makes as much sense as debating in French for an audience that understands only Russian.

- b) **Share Information:** those focusing on the debate as a battle might be disturbed at the prospect of sharing information with the “enemy.” Viewed from the perspective of the debate’s larger goals, however, sharing information (specifically, main arguments and sources of information) can only improve the quality of debate. For those still focused on individual performance, remember that you can only look good if your opponent presents a reasonable challenge—sharing information will help that happen.
- c) **Choose Depth Over Breadth:** while you may put maximum pressure on your opponent by including every good argument that you can think of, that strategy is also likely to overwhelm the audience and result in insufficient development and explanation. A few fully developed arguments are always going to be more conducive to dialogue than a presentation of more shallow arguments.
- d) **Privilege Content Over Competition:** showing your skills and besting your opponent can be an important motivator in debate. However, the emphasis on the common good requires you to remember that audiences are rarely interested in personal rivalries and instead want to see debate as a contest in ideas. During the debate, your attention should focus on showing that your arguments have the most merit, not on showing that you are the best debater.

### ***A Respect for Rational Argument***

Public debates are more than an opportunity to showcase speaking skills or broadcast a point of view. They are opportunities for argument and for the reasoned exchange of views. This interest in dialogue requires an emphasis on reasons.

1. ***Make Your Reasoning Explicit:*** a central factor of *argument* is that it always addresses the question “why?” In a public debate this question may be silent or it may be quite vocal, but debaters have a responsibility to provide an answer in each argument that they make. Statements like “my support for this is . . .”, “here is why . . .” and “the reason for this is . . .” should run throughout the debate. In order to prevent the debate from becoming a simple exchange of position-statements, debaters should identify their reasoning and not rely on what they assume to be true or obvious.
2. ***Avoid Basing Arguments Solely Upon Your Audience’s Prior Beliefs:*** reasoning in any public context must *account for and include* audience beliefs, but this is not a license simply to parrot audience views without offering reasons. Speaking to an audience of hunters, for example, you could probably rely on their belief that people should have the right to own guns but providing rational justification for gun ownership will make your case stronger and more defensible against your opponents’ attacks.
3. ***Attack the Argument Not the Person:*** “My opponent is still very young and inexperienced . . . scarcely knows English . . . can’t grasp the complexities of my argument . . . looks funny . . . dresses badly.” Statements like these- known as *ad hominem* attacks- fail to promote rational dialogue by substituting an attack on the person for an attack on the argument.

While there are a few circumstances in which the character and honesty of the advocate is a relevant issue (for example, in a debate between political candidates one *may* argue that character predicts future policy choices), in many cases the character assault merely covers for an inability to address the arguments. In most public contexts, debates are best conceived as contests between ideas, which happen to be represented by people, not contests between people.

4. *Avoid Appeals to Fallacious Reasoning*: reasoning solely based on audience beliefs may be termed *argumentum ad populum* just as attacking the person rather than the argument may be termed *argumentum ad hominem*. Like other fallacies, these strategies subvert reason by offering an appearance of proof. Other “tricks” of reasoning include popular appeals (“everyone thinks it is so . . .”), reasoning from too few or atypical examples (“I know in my town it is true that . . .”), slippery slope (“if we require licenses for guns, what is to stop us from requiring licenses for everything?”), and many others.
5. *Evaluate Arguments Based on the Reasons Offered*: as an audience member or judge of a public debate, you may be tempted to base your assessment of the debate on the credibility or speaking skills of the debater, or the extent to which the debater’s views mirror your own. While these considerations can’t be dismissed, you should be committed—whether as a spectator, participant, or judge—to the debate’s main function of allowing a comparison of reasoning rather than other considerations.

### ***A Respect for Ideas and People***

An essential element of a debate is that it is a human encounter, one that respects reason over force, arguments over assertions, and persuasion over demagoguery. Aside from a simple recognition of respect for all parties in a debate and the process itself, there are several important elements that we see:

#### ***1. Avoid Name-Calling, Personal Categorization, and Harassment***

While most of us are smart enough to avoid insulting our opponents and hosts during debates, many public debates still provide opportunities for insensitivity and incidents such as the one described at the beginning of this chapter.

The negative team in the example debate wrapped their arguments in gross generalisations and ethnic stereotypes of Roma people. By doing so, they failed to show respect to specific audience members, for the reasoning process, and for simple human diversity. Even if there had been no Roma in the audience, arguments along these lines would have been offensive – perhaps especially so. That is, it would have been even worse if no Roma had been there to defend their community.

In these and other situations, there is a tension between a desire to promote an open forum free from restrictions on speech and the desire to maintain a civil dialogue.

#### ***2. Appeal to the Best in Your Audience***

It has already been mentioned that in a context of public debate, debaters can appeal to the beliefs and values that their audiences understand to be important- for example compassion, intelligence

and honesty. We dishonor dialogue, however, when we appeal to vanity, nationalism, pure self-interest, or prejudice of any kind. For example, let's say that in a debate before students, a student debater argues that a change to their school's exam regulations is a good idea because it will allow students to cheat more effectively without getting caught. In this case, he would be communicating a specific image of the audience—namely that he sees them as people who would applaud the opportunity to cheat. He communicates not only his own views in the subject but also implicitly suggests that his audiences share the same view.

### 3. *Preserve the Value of Free Expression*

All debates will at least attempt to restrict discourse to a more or less specific topic but there is a world of difference between topic restriction and viewpoint restriction. Consistent with the values of debate in the public sphere, organizers and participants should avoid any *a priori* effort to exclude a particular viewpoint. While adhering to the principles articulated above, advocates should consider themselves free to pick the best available argument and should not restrict themselves to whatever the audience considers most acceptable. Sometimes in public dialogues, those who advocate unpopular viewpoints, and are criticized for it, will answer their opponents: "I have the right to my own views!" Certainly so, but as long as their opponents are saying, "You can express your view, but you are wrong," and not, "You can't express your view" - then they are not censoring. On the contrary, we avoid censorship precisely in order to allow criticism.

### **Ethical compacts**

When debaters deal and interact with their opponents they know that they can rely on an unspoken understanding with regard to respecting ethical aspects of public debate. In other contexts it may be advisable to make ethical commitments explicit. One way to adapt the need for clear ethical commitments to the one-time nature of the public debate is to use a signed *ethical compact*. The purpose of an ethical compact is to set forth the advocates' mutual views on appropriate debating behavior in the form of an agreement that could exist on its own or could be incorporated into a larger agreement to debate that includes other elements such as format, topic, schedule and physical arrangements. While an ethical compact in itself is not likely to be enforceable on debaters who may after all still behave unethically even after agreeing not to, the existence of such a compact has several advantages nonetheless. First, it is explicit and thus reduces the possibilities for misunderstanding. Second, the positive act of affixing one's signature can serve as a strong inducement to follow those commitments. Finally, the existence of the signed agreement can substantially increase the chance that an advocate who violated one of the principles can be effectively criticized for doing so after the fact.

The possibility of being criticized for ethical violations is a powerful deterrent— especially so in high profile debates that involve the possibility of coverage by the mass media. In settings that are likely to be highly contentious, the compact could even be made public or be distributed to the audience prior to the debate. While it isn't always necessary, a signed agreement can promote clear understanding and deter unethical behaviour, something that is in the interests of both sides.

We offer the following as one example of an ethical compact. Because agreements of this type, and ethics more generally, can be seen as the product of dialogue, compacts drawn up for other events may differ.

***Ethical Compact for a Public Debate***

We, the undersigned, having agreed to a debate on [your topic] on [a given day and time] and having committed ourselves to the belief that a free, fair, and full exchange of rational arguments contributes to a public dialogue that is more important than either of our personal goals, do agree and promise to uphold the following principles of ethical practice during our debate.

1. We see the debate as a forum for rational disagreement, not simply a vehicle for personal expression and competition.
2. We agree to make arguments and to support them explicitly with our knowledge, evidence or logical analysis.
3. We agree to state every argument in the clearest possible manner at the earliest opportunity and to the best of our ability, and not to hide, disguise, or delay arguments for the purpose of trapping our opponent.
4. We agree to address our arguments, in both matter and manner, to the audience's level of understanding, not allowing technicalities, jargon or rate of speech to interfere with audience comprehension.
5. When relying on factual knowledge, we agree to identify the source of our information whenever possible and to avoid knowingly misrepresenting a fact or inflating the certainty of our knowledge. At the same time we realize that the debate is not a quiz show and we will not expect our opponent to know every fact or detail.
6. When using evidence, we agree to identify and qualify our sources, and to quote and paraphrase in ways that are accurate and in keeping with the original author's manifest intent.
7. We agree that we will to the best of our ability avoid the use of unrepresentative

examples, personal attacks, appeals to popular opinions and other logical fallacies.

8. We agree, within the limits of time, to respond to each important argument of our opponent at our first opportunity to do so, realizing that an argument not refuted is an argument granted. We will refrain from introducing new arguments into the debate at a time that would deprive our opponents of the opportunity to respond.

9. Whether we believe that the audience agrees with us at the start of the debate or not, we agree to use the debate to advance audience knowledge and understanding and to challenge and deepen their opinions, and not to simply tell them what we think they already believe.

10. We agree to treat each other with respect and to avoid name-calling and to focus on the arguments at hand and not on the irrelevant personal qualities or the debating skills of our opponents.

11. We agree, through our own behaviour and our arguments in the debate, to treat all people and groups with respect and to avoid appeals to broad and unsubstantiated stereotypes regarding race, ethnicity, nationality, age, sex, sexual orientation or language.

12. We agree, within the constraints of relevance created by the topic, to respect free expression and understand that freedom of expression is not the same thing as freedom from criticism – all views are open to both expression and refutation.

13. We agree to encourage our supporters in the audience to show respect to both sides in the debate and to avoid any disruptive partisan displays.

14. We agree to exchange basic information no later than one week prior to the debate by sharing simple argument outlines and sources of information.

15. We agree that in comments to mass media organizations following the debate neither we nor our representatives and agents will emphasize the contest nature of the event as if it were a sports competition. Rather than declaring a winner or concentrating on debating



feats or foibles, public comments will focus on the ideas presented.

x. \_\_\_\_\_

x. \_\_\_\_\_

Signature

Signature

### **Organizing a public debate**

After a period of preparation, the big day will come and the teams will meet with each other and their audience in the venue set aside for the debate.

Public debate, like any other organized public event that involves hosting large numbers of people (if even for the short duration of the debate), will require some degree of formality, courtesy and hospitality. Organizers will need to ensure that there are volunteers manning the front entrance, handing out leaflets, offering refreshments, making sure that there are enough seats available and taking care of less able guests. Organizing a public debate will require a lot of effort, both prior to the event (*preparation*) as well as during the event. It is best if the debaters themselves are not directly involved in any activities other than the debate on the very day of the public debate- their main focus should be preparing and deploying arguments!

Debate clubs should have few problems finding volunteers among their own members. Many debate clubs and societies require members to assist with the running of events and activities as a condition of being selected to speak at other public debates or academic debate competitions.

It may be useful to seek support or sponsorship from academic or community organizations in order to cover the cost of providing hospitality for an event's guests. However, debaters should always be aware of possible allegations of bias that might result from entering into agreements involving the provision of goods or money with other organizations. Partnerships should only be entered into after a care period of conversation, and with an assurance that potential partners understand that they will be unable to involve themselves with the format of the event they will be sponsoring, or the content of participant's speeches.

The area from which debaters will address the audience should be uncluttered, wide and open. The debaters should be able to see and hear each other, in order to accept POI's or face their interrogators during cross-examination periods. Seating for audience members should be well spaced; if a debate involves questions or floor speeches from the audience, a moderator will need to move around in order to hear and repeat individual audience member's contributions.

## **Moderating a public debate**

One of the most important persons during a public debate, apart from debaters, is a *moderator* or an MC (*Master of Ceremonies*). The moderator is the guardian of the debate format who must see to it that rules are followed and ensure fairness. The more specific responsibilities of the Moderator include:

- Welcoming the audience,
- introducing the debate topic and the speakers,
- explaining the rules of debate,
- ensuring the smooth conduct of a debate,
- facilitating the process of audience participation
- and providing a closure to the event.

### *1. Addressing the Audience: Setting a Tone and Establishing Purpose*

The moderator serves as host for the event and generally will be the first person to speak to the audience. As a result, the moderator has a responsibility to set a tone for the event; in his/her opening comments, the moderator helps to establish audience expectations for the debate that will follow. The moderator should remind the audience of the importance of the question being debated and should characterize the conflict in an evenhanded way. The moderator's opening remarks should be strong, and should demand the attention of the audience; they should establish a relationship with the audience; and they should create a context- albeit a neutral context- for the debate.

### *2. Introducing the Speakers*

The moderator's second major responsibility is to introduce the participants in the debate. This is not simply a matter of reciting names and job titles; rather, the moderator must introduce the speakers in a way that says to the audience, "Here is someone you will find interesting." The moderator can do that by highlighting something in particular from the speaker's résumé of experience, or, if possible, by telling the audience something that they don't know about the speaker. In making the introductions, the moderator must be scrupulously evenhanded: if one speaker's introduction is festooned with mentions of awards and accomplishments, and the other speaker is introduced with only a name, the audience will in all likelihood become predisposed toward the speaker with the longer introduction. It is true that all debaters are not created equal, and some will arrive with more impressive resumes than their opponents; nonetheless, the moderator should try to minimize this imbalance, rather than maximize it.

### *3. Explaining the Structure of the Debate*

Public debates can take many shapes and forms. The public debate audience often does not know how much time has been allotted to each side; it does not know the ground rules governing direct exchanges or questioning periods; it may not even know exactly what the resolution is. It is the

moderator's job to inform the audience about these matters, so that they will know what to expect during the debate. The moderator must begin by articulating the resolution or the question at stake precisely. The purpose of this introduction is simply to give the audience some idea of the rules that are in place, so that they can follow the sequence of events.

#### *4. Maintaining Order*

It is part of the moderator's job to make sure that those rules are followed. The moderator is a bit like a traffic controller—that is, someone who manages the flow of the debate, makes sure that participants stop when they are supposed to stop, and go when they are supposed to go.

A large part of the moderator's job, then, is keeping track of the time – although that does not mean that the moderator needs to time the event personally. Indeed, it is probably more efficient to have another person keep time and display it in a way that is visible to both teams and to the moderator.

Generally, the moderator should interrupt only when he judges that the violations—exceeding allotted time or breaking other rules—represent an imminent risk to civil and productive dialogue. Because an overly intrusive moderator can do as much harm to the debate as an unruly advocate, the moderator must exercise careful judgment before interrupting.

#### *5. Facilitating Interaction and Engagement*

The moderator's final responsibility—to facilitate interaction and engagement— will be shaped largely by the ground rules of the debate as determined by the participants. At one extreme, the ground rules may limit the moderator's job to introducing the event and enforcing the rules. But it is also possible for the moderator to be more significantly involved, both formally and substantively. When the audience participation is incorporated into the design of the debate the moderator might take an active role in determining which members of the audience are allowed to speak. The moderator might also determine which audience questions are posed to the debaters.

It is also possible to design a debate in which the moderator poses his or her own questions (in this case, of course, the moderator must remain a neutral party- that means that the moderator cannot cross-examine a speaker the same way that an opponent would; it is certainly possible, however, for the moderator to raise issues with both of the debaters (or teams) involved.

#### ***Choosing a Moderator***

When choosing a moderator for a public debate the organizers may want to take the following recommendations into consideration:

- The moderator should be someone who is publicly neutral about the issue at hand.
- The moderator should have good public speaking skills.
- The moderator should be a person with flexibility and good judgment (maintaining order requires the ability to respond to situations as they unfold, as well as sufficient assertiveness to control the situation when necessary).

- The moderator should be genial and good-humoured (a good moderator provides a calming centre when exchanges become intense and keeps the debate on track with an easy hand).
- The moderator should be familiar with the topic and with the process of debate.

### ***The Moderator's Preparation Before the Debate***

The moderator must make sure that he/she comes prepared to the debate. Although his/her level of preparation does not have to match that of the debaters' the following are the minimum requirements:

- The moderator must gather necessary information beforehand from the participants (in order to introduce them).
- The moderator should also prepare her/his opening remarks before debate: the shorter the speech is, the longer it takes to prepare it.
- The moderator should check on the facilities where the debate is being held. (although setting up the debate physically (e.g., supplying chairs, lecterns, microphones) is the primary responsibility of the debate organizers, but the moderator should ensure that the facilities are appropriately arranged, and that everything is in working order)

### ***The Moderator's Participation During the Debate***

- *The Opening*

These are the steps that the moderator could follow in the process of opening the debate:

1. Welcome the audience
2. Identify the event
3. Identify himself/herself and his/her role
4. Identify the topic and justify its importance
5. Identify the participants and build credibility for them
6. Explain the format
7. Highlight any particular audience involvement
8. Introduce the first speaker

- *After the First Speech*

After the debaters begin speaking, the moderator has a choice: his participation can be regular and automatic, or it can occur on an "as-needed" basis. Regular and automatic participation would involve managing every transition in the debate: after the first speaker finished, the moderator would introduce the next step ("Ms Johnson, you have two minutes for your opening statement."). Subsequently, the moderator would indicate the time allotted for questioning, for refutations, and so on.

If, on the other hand, the moderator chose to participate on an as-needed basis, he/she might speak only when a time limit or rule had been violated or to introduce a major change in procedure (e.g., “At this point, we will open the floor for questions.”). The moderator should choose his/her model of participation to suit the occasion.

- *Dealing with Problems*

When dealing with infractions committed by the debaters, the moderator must ensure that time limits and rules are respected. The moderator also has a role in controlling the audience. There is no universal law governing the behaviour of audiences at public debates; rules and standards need to be determined as appropriate for each particular situation.

In most debates, audience activity will follow the rhythms of the debate itself: audience members are likely to talk to each other at the conclusion of a speech, when one speaker is stepping down from the lectern, and another is stepping up—even if that change takes place in a matter of seconds. It is the moderator’s responsibility to see that those sporadic eruptions of conversation remain sporadic, rather than constant. The debate will not succeed if there is an unbroken undertow of noise, and the moderator needs to admonish the audience as necessary.

- *Closing the Debate*

The moderator generally closes the debate. Minimally, this means that the moderator announces that the debate is over and thanks each of the participants individually. As in the opening, it is appropriate for the moderator to make brief general remarks about the debate—although such remarks must be neutral and impartial. Some public debate may incorporate judgment into their model—that is, some mechanism that allows the audience, or a panel of judges, to say who “won” the debate. When such a mechanism is used, it is the moderator’s job to manage the process, and to provide ultimate closure by announcing the winner, before bidding the audience a final farewell.

## **Evaluating a debate**

Although in a public debate, competition is less important than in its competitive equivalent (e.g. at a debate tournament), however, since debate is an inherently competitive event (it is a contest of reason) an element of judging and deciding who the winners are is often introduced – both for the benefit of the debaters (who will want to know who has done a better job persuading the audience) as well as for the benefit of the audience (for whom coming up with the verdict may be yet another way of participating in a debate).

In a public debate, the job of judging can also be done by the panel of judges as well as the audience themselves (or by both judges and the audience).

### **Panel of judges**

The panel of judges can be composed of audience members or you can ask individuals who have some expertise in debate and or the debated topic. These can be student debaters, debate coaches as well as experts in a given area (e.g. a lawyer, politician, journalist, etc.). You may also have a mixed panel of judges. It is important however that before the debate, the judges are briefed on their responsibilities as judges, debate rules, etc.

The judges may decide to declare a winner of the debate or simply provide evaluative comments at the end. When declaring a winner, they can do so independently of each other (with each judge making his/her own decision) – with the verdict being a sum of votes for and against a given team – it is important to make sure then that the number of judges is uneven. The judges may also deliver a joint decision, usually preceded by a discussion.

Some public debating formats, such as the Debate Matters format that is used in the UK, operate two separate panels of judges – a panel of lay judges and panel of judges with expert knowledge on the topic under discussion. This approach can be useful in helping the audience to see through any factual errors or misstatements made by the debaters. The expert judges can also provide feedback on the quality of the debaters' research and preparation, while the lay judges consider how effectively the debaters used persuasion, logic and stylish speaking to put across their cases.

### **Audience**

Organizers may also decide to ask the audience to evaluate the debate and decide who the winner is. In such case it may be useful to provide a brief explanation before the debate what the evaluation criteria should be (this can be done by a moderator) or providing a short evaluation sheet with some simple guidance). It may be important to emphasise to the audience that debate can be judged with respect to the skills of the debaters rather than the audience's preference with regard to the side (based on their prior beliefs). The moderator can thus explain that members of the judges should base their decision on which team did a better job of persuading (arguments, evidence, presentation).

However, a public debate may also serve as a tool for finding out how the audience feels about a given issue and this is how the audience may be asked to vote. In such cases it may be also interesting for you to determine the audience's view on the topic before and after the debate (to see to what extent the debate changed the views of the audience).

Regardless of which method of *judging* debate is selected, organisers must be fully prepared for the adjudication period of the debate. Considerations include: judges' briefing, preparation of short explanations of judging criteria, ballots for the audience, etc. (when the number of the audience is relatively small, e.g. under a 100, you may want to use a vote by hand, but with larger audiences a simple ballot is recommended).



## **Public Debating in Principle and Practice**

Text adapted from

*Argument and Audience: Presenting Debates in Public Settings* by  
Ken Broda-Bahm, Daniela Kempf and William Driscoll, IDEA Press,  
2004

*The Role of Advocacy in Civil Society* by Joseph Zompetti, IDEA  
Press, 2011

And

*Frontiers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Argument, debate and the struggle for  
civil society*, edited by Alfred Snider, IDEA Press 2008

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