What is a Deliberative Poll?

The basic protocols of a Deliberative Poll involve the following: A random sample of the population is given a pre-event survey and then receives background information on the issues to be discussed. The sampled individuals then gather in small, moderated groups to discuss the topic amongst themselves. They formulate questions to be asked during a plenary session with experts and then gather once again to respond to a post-event survey.

The result of such a process reflects what the community as a whole might think about a particular issue or policy if that community had time to become informed about the issue and discuss it amongst themselves and with experts.

How were people chosen to participate?

We used a few different ways of engaging many different voices in this deliberative poll. One way is called “random sampling,” which is the same way in which regular opinion polls are done. Over 90% of the participants were chosen in this fashion. Another method, called “targeted community-based recruitment,” was used to seek further balance in the representative sample. Statistical techniques will be used to separate out various features of the sample, all of which will be discussed and analyzed in a Final Report. Individuals selected by these methods will receive a stipend of $50 for their participation in this event.

What issues will we discuss?

The theme of the day will be improving government in Allegheny County. Some of the more specific areas of discussion will be: (1) the nature and structure of local government; (2) examples of the challenges and opportunities currently facing local governments (through a “case study” of local government’s role in providing police services); and (3) opportunities for moving forward in light of the challenges, opportunities, and options for delivering quality services. The Educational Booklet “Local Government at the Crossroads” provides detailed background information on these issues and the choices that we, as a community, face.

Who has been involved in organizing this event?

The Program for Deliberative Democracy is organizing this Deliberative poll. The Program is a joint venture between Pittsburgh’s Coro Center for Civic Leadership and Carnegie Mellon’s Center for the Advancement of Applied Ethics and Political Philosophy. The University of Pittsburgh’s Center for Social & Urban Research is helping with recruitment. The Pittsburgh Foundation is sponsoring the deliberative poll and will utilize the results to inform its efforts to build a common agenda for action and change.