



A DCI Deliberation Guide

The COVID-19 Pandemic:

What should be our priorities moving forward, and how should we achieve them?

Format for Deliberation

Before the Deliberation

- I. Read the Deliberative “D” Team Participant Guide (included separately)
- II. Read this document’s Background, Expected Outcomes and Conversation Agreements section
- III. (Optional but Encouraged) Review the *Issues and Controversies* article, “Coronavirus: Are Quarantines and Travel Restrictions Appropriate Responses to COVID-19?” (included separately)
- IV. (Optional) Review any of the resources listed in the footnotes or conduct your own research on the topic for familiarity

During the Deliberation

- I. Introductions - 5 min
- II. Expected Outcomes and Conversation Agreements - 5 min.
- III. Personal Stories - 20 min.
- IV. Priorities and Policies Moving Forward - 40 min.
- V. Reflections - 15 min.
- VI. Debrief - 5 min.

Background

In early 2020, the World Health Organization announced official names for the virus responsible for the 2019 novel coronavirus and the disease it causes. The virus, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), and the disease it caused, coronavirus disease (COVID-19) were first reported as cases of “viral pneumonia” in Wuhan, China in December

2019.¹ The virus and disease began spreading worldwide, resulting in the declaration of a pandemic by March 2020. To date, 2 million people globally and nearly 400,000 Americans have died due to complications from COVID-19.²

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented global shutdowns resulting in massive economic volatility. In May of 2020, 49.8 million Americans reported that they had been unable to work at some point during the previous four weeks because their employer closed or lost business due to the coronavirus pandemic.³ To combat the largest recession in the United States since 2008, the U.S. Congress passed two economic relief bills, one of which was the largest economic stimulus package in history. The \$2 trillion CARES Act⁴ passed Congress in March 2020, and the \$900 billion Consolidated Appropriations Act⁵ was enacted in December 2020.

As a result of global efforts to develop vaccines for the virus, pharmaceutical companies including Pfizer and Moderna have been granted emergency authorization to manufacture and distribute vaccines in the United States. Operation Warp Speed, a program led by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, was established to “produce and deliver 300 million doses of safe and effective vaccines” by January 2021.⁶ The coronavirus pandemic has raised several important questions for citizens and policymakers to consider.

To what extent should the government require individuals to reduce the spread of a dangerous virus?

In October 2020, PEW Research found that public opinion about COVID-19 is more politically divided in the United States than in other advanced economies around the world.⁷ Much of the division in the U.S. has centered around mask mandates, social distancing, and stay-at-home orders. As of January 18, 2021, 34 states require its citizens to wear masks in public locations.⁸ Proponents of universal mask mandates argue that wearing a mask works as a preventative measure against the spread of the coronavirus, while others argue that many non-N95 masks are not as effective as people believe or that wearing a mask should be a personal choice, not a government-mandated requirement.⁹

¹ World Health Organization [interactive COVID-19 timeline](#)

² *The New York Times*, [“COVID-19: Over Two Million Around the World Have Died from the Virus”](#)

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [supplemental data on COVID-19](#)

⁴ NPR, [“What’s Inside the Senate’s \\$2 Trillion Coronavirus Aid Package”](#)

⁵ *The New York Times*, [“The Second Stimulus Package: Here’s What’s Included”](#)

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, [Operation Warp Speed Fact Sheet](#)

⁷ PEW Research, [public opinion data](#) about COVID-19 in the United States

⁸ *The New York Times*, [“See Coronavirus Restrictions and Mask Mandates for All 50 States”](#)

⁹ NPR, [“Why Some People Don’t Wear Masks”](#)

Similarly, there is disagreement about the extent to which state governors or the federal government should institute universal stay-at-home orders that limit public gatherings and businesses' hours of operation. While some maintain that even limited lockdowns reduce mortality and the load on the healthcare system due to COVID,¹⁰ others cite the U.S. economy's recovery in the latter half of 2020, when businesses began to reopen, as direct evidence that further shutdowns will do more lasting damage, especially as vaccines become available.¹¹ Disagreement also centers around the CDC's order to halt residential evictions; proponents claim that such a moratorium helps prevent the spread of the virus and protects those most impacted by the economic downturn, while opponents argue that it unfairly impacts small landlords who depend on rental income for their livelihood.¹²

What role should the government play in stimulating the economy in the context of a global pandemic?

As part of the CARES Act and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, the U.S. government made direct payments to qualifying households, state and local governments, and offered emergency loan assistance to businesses through programs like the Paycheck Protection Program.¹³ While some policymakers argue that even greater economic stimulus measures should be undertaken, others have raised concerns about the long-term impact of this continuing stimulus on the national debt.

How should vaccines be distributed once they are developed?

The federal government has offered guidelines for vaccine distribution as part of CDC¹⁴ and Operation Warp Speed's recommendations, but decision-making authority on implementing vaccine rollouts has largely been designated to state governments. The CDC's guidance has been to vaccinate frontline healthcare workers and long term care facility residents and staff first, but as the speed of the rollout has not met projections, some states are moving on to vaccinate persons over the age of 75 (and in some cases 65) or with high-risk medical conditions. There is disagreement over whether essential workers (who include educators and administrative support staff and make up 70% of the workforce) or frontline workers (who include food servers, law enforcement, and transportation) should be prioritized over people 65 and older.¹⁵ Once doses become more available, they could then be made available to the general public.

¹⁰ *Science News*, "[Coronavirus shutdowns don't have to be all or nothing](#)"

¹¹ *Forbes*, "[The Impact of COVID-19 on U.S. Economy and Financial Markets](#)"

¹² CDC [temporary halt in residential evictions](#), "[Time How Eviction Moratoriums are Hurting Small Landlords](#)"

¹³ *The Wall Street Journal*, "[What's in the \\$2 Trillion Senate Coronavirus Bill](#)"

¹⁴ CDC proposed phased allocation of COVID-19 vaccines [slidedeck](#)

¹⁵ *New York Times*. "[The Elderly vs. Essential Workers: Who Should Get the Coronavirus First?](#)"

Both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines require two separate doses for maximum effectiveness, but some have suggested that more people could be vaccinated if healthcare systems distributed all available doses of vaccines before allowing individuals to receive second doses. However, this has raised concerns about vaccine efficacy and public trust in vaccination efforts.¹⁶

How can similar pandemics be avoided, or their harmful effects mitigated, in the future?

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has left many wondering what could have been done to prevent many of the harmful effects created by the virus. Questions about local, state, and federal preparedness for future public health crises relate to concerns about the structural limitations and inequalities associated with our healthcare systems. Other questions relate to the value and relevance of organizations like the WHO and CDC, the heavy reliance of working parents on education providers, and the importance of internet access in rural communities, among many others. Given these questions, how can we ensure a more effective response to future pandemics?

Introductions (5 minutes)

Facilitators will take a moment to welcome everyone to the group. They will confirm that everyone has signed the consent form included in the Participant Guide, and ask everyone to complete the pre-meeting mini-survey. They'll also introduce themselves and ask participants to briefly introduce themselves as well.

Expected Outcomes and Conversation Agreements (5 minutes)

Expected Outcomes of the Conversation

Given the complexity of this topic and our limited available time, we do not expect to come to any formal agreement or declaration in this conversation. Instead, our focus is on deepening our understanding of the interrelated issues of the COVID-19 response in the United States and sharing our thoughts and feelings about how we move forward in 2021 and beyond. The DCI will follow up with resources for actions that you can take related to this important topic following the deliberation today.

Deliberative Dispositions

The DCI has identified several “deliberative dispositions” as critical to the success of deliberative enterprises. When participants adopt these dispositions, they are much more likely to feel their deliberations are meaningful, respectful, and productive. Several of the Conversation Agreements recommended below directly reflect and reinforce these dispositions, which

¹⁶ *Scientific American*, [“Should We Change COVID Vaccine Doses to Reach More People? What the Data Say”](#)

include a commitment to egalitarianism, open mindedness, empathy, charity, attentiveness, and anticipation, among others. A full list and description of these dispositions is available at <https://deliberativecitizenship.org/deliberative-dispositions/>.

Conversation Agreements

In entering into this discussion, to the best of our ability we each agree to:

1. Be authentic and respectful
2. Be an attentive and active listener
3. Be a purposeful and concise speaker
4. Approach fellow deliberators' stories, experiences, and arguments with curiosity, not hostility
5. Assume the best - and not the worst - about the intentions and values of others, and avoid snap judgements
6. Recognize that no one has all the answers, and demonstrate intellectual humility by asking questions and making space for others to do the same
7. Critique the idea we disagree with, not the person expressing it, and remember to practice empathy
8. Note areas of both agreement and disagreement
9. Respect the confidentiality of the discussion
10. Avoid speaking in absolutes (i.e. "All people think this," or "No educated people hold that view")

Within each section below, please take ~2 minutes each to answer one of the listed questions without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group may take a few minutes for clarifying or follow-up questions, responses, or additional thoughts. Continue exploring the focus of the section as time allows.

Personal Stories (20 minutes)

We know that this topic is one that is personal to many, and each person brings their own unique point of view and different levels of understanding. Please use this time not only to share the particular experiences, relationships, or circumstances that help inform your perspective on this topic, but also to explore the "whys" that underlie your opinions. You may also use this time to express any questions or concerns about the topic.

Personal Stakes and Stories

1. How has your life changed due to the virus? What has been the biggest shift in your everyday routine? What has that been like for you?
2. How has your thinking about the virus shifted from March 2020 to now?
3. When you think about this issue, what bothers you? What encourages you?

4. What experiences or personal relationships have informed your perspectives on this issue?
5. How do you feel this issue has impacted your friends and families, as well as the broader community?

Priorities and Policies Moving Forward (40 minutes)

Naming Priorities and Policies (~20 minutes)

As you consider the following questions, think about what priorities and policies are most important to you, both in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and for addressing future public health crises. Take two minutes per person to share.

1. To what extent should the government require citizens to reduce the spread of a dangerous virus by following mask mandates and stay-at-home orders?
2. What kind of economic stimulus measures, if any, do you think are most important for policymakers to enact?
3. Who do you think should have access to vaccines, and in what order of priority?
4. What strategies do you think would be most helpful in preventing similar pandemics in the future?
5. Are there other issues related to COVID-19 that you would like to discuss? Or are there other related topics you wish you knew more about?

Evaluating Priorities and Policies (~20 minutes)

Now that you have shared which priorities and policies are most important to you, it may be helpful to consider possible trade offs or other opinions about those ideas.

1. Can you identify any key tradeoffs associated with the ideas you shared for responding to COVID-19?
2. Would the policies and priorities you've identified affect any particular groups in different ways that are important to consider?
3. How might people not represented in this group respond to the policies and priorities identified today?
4. Do you think there would be broad public support for the policies or priorities you think are most important? If yes, why? If not, what could be done to increase support?
5. How do your political beliefs influence your opinion about what should be prioritized moving forward?

Reflections (15 minutes)

1. In one sentence, share what was most meaningful or valuable to you during this deliberation.
2. Was there anything that was said or not said that you think should be addressed with the group?
3. Are there any perspectives missing from this conversation that you feel would be important to hear?
4. What did you hear that gives you hope for the future of conversations on pandemic response and recovery?
5. Were there any moments of tension that highlight different values in this conversation?
6. Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the deliberation you just had? What questions remain?

Debrief (5 minutes)

This marks the end of your first Deliberative “D” Team meeting! Please use the closing minutes of your team meeting to discuss how it went with your facilitator. Was the meeting what you expected? Is there something that worked well, or something that didn’t work well? What would you like to see in your future D Team meetings? We hope it has been an engaging and illuminating conversation, and we look forward to seeing you all next time!

About This Guide

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The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative

The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative (DCI) is dedicated to the creation of opportunities for Davidson students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the wider community to productively engage with one another on difficult and contentious issues facing our community and society. The DCI regularly hosts facilitated deliberations on a wide range of topics as well as organizes training workshops for deliberation facilitators. To learn more about these opportunities, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org.

DCI Deliberation Guides

The DCI has launched this series of Deliberation Guides as a foundation for such conversations. They provide both important background information on the topics in question and a specific framework for engaging with these topics. The Guides are designed to be informative without being overwhelming and structured without being inflexible. They cover a range of topics and come in a variety of formats but share several common elements, including opportunities to commit to a shared set of Conversation Agreements, learn about diverse perspectives, and reflect together on the conversation and its yield. The DCI encourages conversations based on these guides to be moderated by a trained facilitator. After each conversation, the DCI also suggests that its associated Pathway Guide be distributed to the conversation's participants.

DCI Pathways Guides

For every Deliberation Guide, the DCI has also developed an associated Pathways Guide, which outline opportunities for action that participants can consider that are related to the covered topic. These Pathways Guides reinforce the DCI's commitment to an action orientation, a key deliberative disposition. While dialogue and deliberation are themselves important contributors to a healthy democracy, they become even more valuable when they lead to individual or collective action on the key issues facing society. Such action can come in a range of forms and should be broadly understood. It might involve developing a better understanding of a topic, connecting with relevant local or national organizations, generating new approaches to an issue. or deciding to support a particular policy.

If you make use of this guide in a deliberation, please provide attribution to the Deliberative Citizenship Initiative and email dcid@deliberativecitizenship.org to tell us about your event. To access more of our growing library of Deliberation Guides, Pathway Guides and other resources, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org/readings-and-resources.