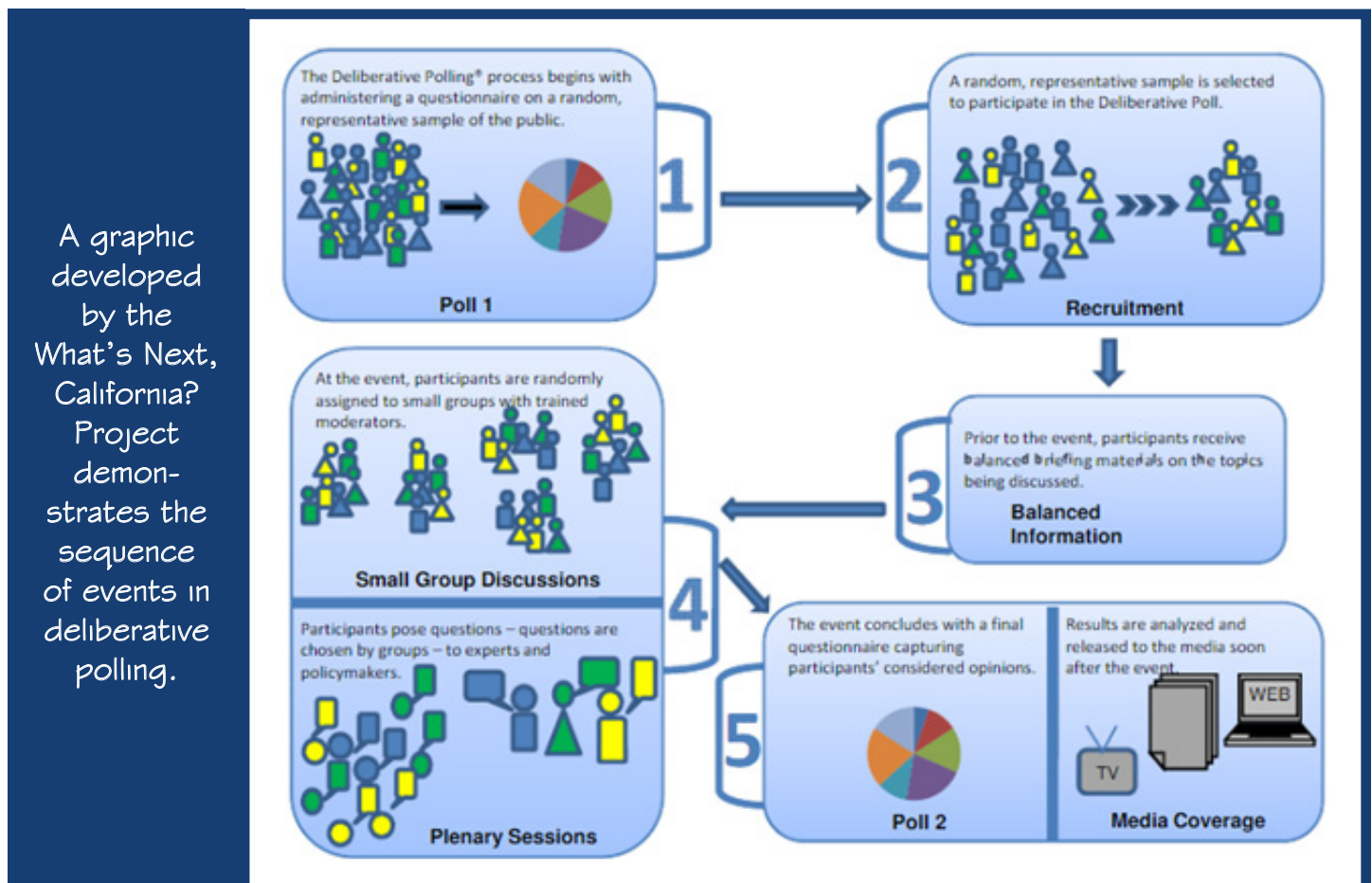## What it is

Deliberative polling measures opinion changes when those polled are given an opportunity to engage in informed and reflective discussion. Usually, a random sample is polled on a certain issue or topic. After the initial poll, members of that sample are then invited to participate (this time, in person) in a more detailed discussion after being given briefing materials in advance. The sample is then polled once more after the detailed discussion has taken place. The differences in opinion before and after the detailed discussion represents how public opinion might be affected if people were better informed about a particular issue or topic.

A graphic developed by the What's Next, California? Project demonstrates the sequence of events in deliberative polling.

1 The Deliberative Polling® process begins with administering a questionnaire on a random, representative sample of the public. **Poll 1**

2 A random, representative sample is selected to participate in the Deliberative Poll. **Recruitment**

3 Prior to the event, participants receive balanced briefing materials on the topics being discussed. **Balanced Information**

4 At the event, participants are randomly assigned to small groups with trained moderators. **Small Group Discussions** Participants pose questions – questions are chosen by groups – to experts and policymakers. **Plenary Sessions**

5 The event concludes with a final questionnaire capturing participants' considered opinions. **Poll 2** Results are analyzed and released to the media soon after the event. **WEB** **TV** **Media Coverage**

Why it Works

Deliberative polling is effective on multiple levels. Gauging changes in opinion before and after educational materials are disseminated and discussions take place is as simple as comparing the poll differences. More than likely, it will be very obvious if a greater depth of understanding results in major changes of overall opinion. Further, supposing that those changes occur, they can serve to illuminate

whether or not a broader education program needs to be developed by an agency and what the format and content of that education should be. Also, the results can be broadcast to the wider public to demonstrate their lack of understanding about a subject and shift the dialogue surrounding it.

When to Use It

The primary objective of deliberative polling is to determine how people's opinions change as they become better informed. Therefore, it should be used in regard to a topic or issue that the public may not be particularly knowledgeable about. Further, it can be used to determine exactly how informed the public is, and whether increased education about a subject actually has a significant impact on how that subject is perceived and evaluated.

Audience

There are multiple "audiences" in deliberative polling. First, the agency that is utilizing the method is attempting to gauge the opinions of the public and how they can use educational tools to more effectively influence those opinions going forward. Second, the participants themselves are (potentially) gaining greater insight into a particular issue that is relevant to them. Third, the broader public becomes an external audience that is shown how the participants' views evolved as they became more knowledgeable. In regard to recruitment, participants will most likely need to be people with an intrinsic interest in the issue or topic at hand who also have the time and resources needed to take an initial and final poll, invest time reading educational materials, and attend a discussion session.

Estimated Level of Effort

While efforts to coordinate deliberative polling may vary, it can be assumed that greater efforts will yield more effective results. First, a poll needs to be designed and distributed and its results must be analyzed. Second, participants need to be recruited to take part in discussions. This step is more complicated than organizing a typical public meeting because educational materials need to be created and distributed beforehand, and knowledgeable moderators need to be recruited and trained to run the sessions. Finally, an analysis of the change in opinion must be performed and the results must be communicated both within the agency performing the deliberative polling and to the participants (and potentially the broader public). More than likely, the entire process may take multiple months from start to finish and will require significant amounts of planning and coordination.

Examples

[Building New Renewable Energy Projects in Texas](#)

['Invent the Future' Workshops - Chicago Metro Area Planning's GOTO 2040 Plan](#)

[Broad-based Public engagement in Kent County, Michigan](#)

Resources

[Participedia article on Deliberative Polling](#)

[Feedbackr, a deliberative polling application](#)

[What's Next California Deliberative Polling](#)

Cost Considerations

The total cost of deliberative polling is an amalgamation of the costs of its component parts: The initial poll, development of educational materials, in-person discussions with moderators, and a final analysis. Of all the potential tools an agency may use for public engagement, deliberative polling is likely to be on the higher end of the cost spectrum. However, given a fitting issue and proper design, the results should be extremely useful.