

THE DELPHI TECHNIQUE

The Delphi Technique was originally conceived and developed by the Rand Corporation as a way to obtain the opinion of experts without necessarily bringing them together face to face.

A perverted offspring of it has become very popular with NH's municipal and school governments in gaining "Community Consensus" for things like school or municipal construction bonds, zoning and planning initiatives, master plans, fighting "sprawl," Main Street projects and the like. **Former Governor Jeanne Shaheen's "Best Schools Initiative" was a prime example of Delphi.**

Either public funds are voted at an annual meeting or a grant is found to do a "study" on a perceived public need and a committee is formed. Local papers will advertise that the public is encouraged to become involved and a group is eventually put together.

A "facilitator," acting as an organizer, gets each person in a group to talk about, for instance, the building project, or spending proposal in question. The facilitator listens attentively, forms "task forces," by breaking up the group. Sometimes they do this by putting people in smaller groups or separate tables, then the facilitator urges everyone to "make lists," of what they think are the most important points about the proposed project or issue. Often the "facilitator" has planted few like-minded "citizen volunteers" in the group.

While this is being done, the facilitator learns something about each member of the target group. He can then pick out people who are more likely to be in favor of, or against, a preordained outcome. People in the group who show "leadership", who might be considered "loud mouths", or who are thought to be "weak or non-committal," as well as those who frequently turn sides during an argument can then be advanced or marginalized as the group moves towards the preordained outcome. **Very soon his/her associates from the divided group begin to adopt the ideas having been made to feel as if they were their own, and pressure the entire group to accept the proposition.**

For instance: You may be against an action and find yourself sectioned off with a group of supporters where your input is the minority view. You will not be the "leader" of that group and naturally, without even suspecting it, participate in the discussions as they steer towards the preordained outcome.

The method works. It is very effective with parents, teachers, school children, and with many types of community groups. The "targets" rarely, if ever, know that they are being manipulated. If they do suspect this is

happening, and they do not know how to end the process, they become disenchanted or upset with the whole committee and leave. The desired Delphi result is for group polarization, then pacification, and for the facilitator to become accepted as a respected member of the group and group process.

See if this looks like something that has happened or you have been involved with in your community.

Example:

A group looking to build something with public funds is formed. Several people spearhead the effort and form a committee. The “committee” seems to be made up of some of the “same old town or school group” that always get involved with school or municipal government projects. The “leader” of the new group is often someone new to town or a person hired through some funding source such as a federal program in the public schools. This would be the “facilitator” because there will seem to be a “fresh start” with someone new.

The project gets lucky with a few talented and respected local tradesmen or business people who do not often work on this type of projects and the process begins.

The “leader” of the new group pushes the project and receives rave reviews in the local papers, but quietly, some of the business people/tradesmen leave in disgust or upset with the process or outcome, and promise never to become involved again. The “regulars” stay on through the ribbon cutting or passage of the issue and do the photo ops. Then they move on to the next project.

This is an example of what the Delphi Technique looks like from the outside. A person who had a talent obviously suited for a given project, becomes alienated and disgusted with the process. In other words... the wrong people are in charge and this is making sure it stays that way. That is the Delphi Technique. Delphi is often used to train public school teachers to go along with school "reform" methods, methods that may seem to make no sense at all.

There are ways to derail it and/or expose it. Contact CNHT if you are interested or you can do further research on the web by looking up Delphi Technique in Google.

Coalition of New Hampshire Taxpayers
8 North Main Street
Concord, NH 03301
www.cnht.org