

PCI-Ruckelshaus Center Seattle Workshop
Center for Urban Horticulture
April 25 -27

Roundtable Discussion: Emerging Issues

Discussion Question: What Are the Challenges When Universities Serve as Neutral Forums?

Moderator: Elaine Hallmark, Oregon Consensus Program, Portland State U.

Central Questions:

- Are we neutral?
- What is a neutral forum?
- What are we neutral about?
 - o Impartial facilitator?
 - o Neutral content?
 - o Neutral process?
- What are the standards for being neutral?

Are we neutral?

Other words for neutral: safe, equitable, impartial, objective, transparent

The perception of a university as a neutral forum is more important than whether or not a university center is in fact neutral

Centers can use boards to create the perception of neutrality to those outside the university

Developing trust requires both transparency and consistency

Interviews with federal and state agency staff members reveal that what neutral means has gotten fuzzed up. Lots of private firms offer “neutral services” and we need to make a distinction between a center and an individual practitioner as neutral

What is a neutral forum?

The university center is a neutral setting rather than the university faculty / individuals being neutral

A university center can provide a structured approach that includes a safe, respectful setting and can use university facilities to bring people together

Example of Martin Carcasson’s Colorado State University Center for Public Deliberation: CPD often brings the name of the university to a place away from the university location for their forums. They create a neutral venue. The idea here is one of inclusion because these forums are brought *to* the communities rather than bringing the communities to the university

Universities can create a neutral forum by laying down ground rules

Three factors go into making a university center a neutral forum:

- Information
- Process
- Participants from all diverse perspectives

What are we neutral about?

The role of neutral data in university centers – are the centers also providers of neutral information? Is that part of the centers’ role? There was discussion around whether universities themselves produce “neutral” information.

Jill Purdy’s chart:

INPUT	TRANSFORMATION / THROUGHPUT	OUTPUT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Resources - \$▪ People –<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Faculty– Champions– Staff– Students▪ Research▪ Process knowledge▪ University reputation / image	<p style="text-align: center;">PROCESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Information▪ Trust▪ Transparency▪ Consistency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Types of issues▪ Outcomes▪ Research▪ Social capital▪ Connections

Standards

A University Network could create standards and principles for neutrality for university programs and centers (as distinguished from universities)

Challenges

How can universities demonstrate that they are neutral or impartial?

Does independence yield neutrality?

How can centers achieve trust?