



National Issues Forums

In California: <http://nifica.org/>
National organization: <http://nifi.org/>

National Issues Forums (NIF) is a nonpartisan, nationwide network of locally sponsored public forums. It is rooted in the simple notion that people need to come together to reason and talk — to deliberate about common problems or issues. As a part of the California State Library's partnership with PBS and the Ken Burns' documentary, *The War*, NIF has expressed a desire to assist interested libraries in facilitating community discussions around this important topic.

Although by no means an all encompassing picture, *The War* does afford us the opportunity to engage in community discussions about the World War II era, exploring both the common themes that united us as well as the unique and often prejudicial experiences that divided us — one American from another based on skin color or ancestral lineage. Then from this historical vantage, further community dialogue can be encouraged about America's role in the world today and our current war in Iraq. The model provided by NIF can assist libraries in engaging their communities in conversations around these deeply meaningful and often highly charged topics in reflective and constructive ways.

National Issues Forums:

- Are organized by a variety of organizations, groups, and individuals
- Range from small or large group gatherings similar to town hall meetings, to study circles held in public places or in people's homes on an ongoing basis.
- Focus on an issue such as war, health care, immigration, Social Security, or ethnic and racial tensions. They provide a way for people of diverse views and experiences to seek a shared understanding of the problem and to search for common ground for action.
- Are led by trained, neutral moderators, and use an issue discussion guide that frames the issue by presenting the overall issue and then three or four broad approaches in response to that issue. Forum participants work through the issue by considering each approach; examining what appeals to them or concerns them, and also what the costs, consequences, and trade offs may be that would be incurred in following that approach.

In this deliberative practice, NIF forums help people see issues from different points of view. Forums help diverse groups of Americans to determine together what direction they want to take, what kinds of actions they favor and what, for their common good, they oppose. NIF forums aim toward shared solutions to complex problems rather than continued frustration and partisan conflict.

For more information about NIF or to contact the California NIF Network, please email consult@nifica.org or director@nifica.org.