

Advise the President: RONALD REAGAN



ADVISE *the*
PRESIDENT

About the Series

Advise the President is a program series created in partnership between the National Archives' Presidential Libraries and the National Issues Forums Institute. Moderators lead participants in guided simulations designed to promote discussion and deliberation based on pivotal issues faced by past Presidents. Teachers, students, the general public, and anyone interested in our nation's history are invited to step into the Oval Office and take on the role of one of the President's most trusted advisers.

For more information and additional resources related to the Advise the President series, visit www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/.

DELIBERATION GUIDE

What Should the United States do to Move Towards Economic Recovery?

When President Reagan took office in January 1981, the U.S. economy was in deep trouble. Millions of Americans were out of work, U.S. companies were struggling, and interest rates and inflation were spiraling out of control. In his first address to the nation, the President affirmed that his first priority was to revitalize the American economy, but it wouldn't be easy. He faced a series of tough choices that would determine the fate of his Presidency and the long-term future of the U.S. economy.

OPTION ONE: Minimize Government

Revitalizing the economy requires trimming the Federal budget and reducing the size of government.

OPTION TWO: Bring Inflation Under Control

Strengthening the economy calls for working with the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates, limit the money supply.

OPTION THREE: Tackle Unemployment

Fixing the economy involves creating jobs, promoting free enterprise, and scaling back the controls that interfere with the free market.

OPTION FOUR: Reform the Tax Code

Stimulating the economy requires changes to the tax code to boost productivity and promote savings and investment.



Presidential Library Issue Forums

Why are we here? What are we going to do?

We are here to participate in the decision-making process for an important policy choice facing the President.

How do we do that?

We do that by engaging in a deliberative process in which we

- Understand the advantages and disadvantages of each option.
- Know the strategic facts and how they affect the way the group thinks about each option.
- Get beyond the initial positions people hold based on their deeper motivations—the foundations they consider to be the most valuable in everyday life.
- Weigh carefully the views of others; appreciate the impact various options would have on what others consider valuable.
- Work through the conflicting emotions that arise when various options pull and tug on what people consider valuable.

Stages of a Forum



Welcome

The convener or moderator introduces the program.

Ground rules

Participants and moderator review desired outcomes and agree on ground rules.

Getting started

One good way to start is for participants to take a few minutes to talk about their personal experiences with the issue and tell their stories. Sometimes the convener or moderator begins by showing a starter video that reviews the problems underlying the issue.

Deliberation

Participants examine all the options.

Ending the forum

Participants reflect on what has been achieved.



If This Is Your First Experience as a Moderator

Remember, the role of the moderator is to

- Provide an overview of the deliberation process
- Ask questions about what is at stake in each option
- Encourage participants to direct their questions and comments to one another
- Remain neutral

You don't have to be an expert on the issue.

Reading the issue guide thoroughly, considering questions that get to the heart of the issue, and thinking through the essence of each option are the critical parts of preparation.

You should stay focused on what the forum is about—deliberation.

Ask questions that help participants explore each option from a variety of perspectives: viewpoints from different levels of government, businesses, unions, and individuals. Consider the tradeoffs that might be required. Look for common ground.

You should keep the discussion moving and focused on the issue.

Sometimes it's hard to move on to another option with so much more that could be said. But in order to make progress, participants need the chance to weigh all the major options.

You should reserve ample time for reflections on the forum.

In many ways, this is the most important work the group will do. The moderator will provide reminders that time is passing, but it is up to all the participants to help preserve the time to reflect on what they have said and what they might want to do about it.





Beginning a Forum

Before the deliberation begins, it is important for participants to review guidelines for their discussion. They should agree that

- Everyone is encouraged to participate
- No one or two individuals should dominate
- The discussion should focus on the options
- All the major options should be considered
- Everyone should maintain an open and respectful atmosphere for the discussion, and
- Everyone should listen to each other.

Ending a Forum

Before ending a forum, take a few minutes to reflect on what has been achieved. Consider the following questions:

- I. Individual reflections
 - Has your thinking about the issue changed?
 - Has your thinking about other peoples' views changed?
 - Has your perspective changed as a result of what you heard in this forum?

- II. Group reflections
 - Are there issues we did not address?
 - Can we identify any shared sense of purpose or direction?
 - Did we discover any common ground?
 - Which trade-offs are we willing to accept to move in a shared direction?
 - Which are we unwilling to accept?

- III. Next-step reflections
 - Are there viewpoints or issues we still need to talk about?

Questions to Promote Deliberation of the Issue

As you examine this issue together, remember that the purpose of this forum is to participate in the process of decision-making as it might have occurred at that moment in the President's administration. As a group, you are weighing the basic values that define us as human beings and as Americans. This is not a reenactment. You are not here to figure out or replicate the discussion that occurred at the time of the event. The Libraries hope you will gain a better understanding of their President's actions in office by exploring the information he had available and the choices he made.

Before you begin, it may be helpful to consider broad questions that need to be addressed in each option. Here are some examples:

OPTION ONE

- What are some ways in which we could minimize government?
- What are some drawbacks involved in reducing government?
- What kinds of programs and services do federal taxes often fund?

OPTION TWO

- What impact can a presidential administration have on the Federal Reserve?
- What is monetary policy and what does it involve?
- What happens when it is hard for consumers and business to borrow money?

OPTION THREE

- How can government help create jobs?
- What is considered a standard unemployment rate?

OPTION FOUR

- What would be some benefits and drawbacks of raising taxes?
- Who creates the legislation (laws) to raise or lower taxes?

BEFORE MAKING FINAL DECISION

- What would be your major concern before making a final decision?
- What political repercussions might there be for the President if he chooses this course of action?
- How do you think the American people would react if the President selected this option?

POST-DELIBERATION

- Did you have a certain viewpoint at the beginning of this discussion? Did you change your mind by the end of the process?
- What do you believe is the most important thing a President can do before making a crucial decision?
- Has this discussion changed your perception of the Presidency, the role of advisers in a Presidential administration, and your duty as a citizen?
- Through this exercise, you learned that Presidents often make tough decisions about involving the United States in foreign conflicts. What are some recent examples of a Presidential response to events abroad? What happened as a result of that President's actions?



