



MosaicLab has the following advice:

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Once the extent of the polarisation is known, it may be necessary for the sponsoring organisation, possibly with support from facilitators, to liaise with interest groups or other stakeholders to assess how committed they are to resolving the issue and whether there is sufficient common ground for the polarised groups to find an agreed solution. This assessment is useful for working out whether the most appropriate solution might be produced by continued conversations amongst these stakeholders, or by a random, representative deliberating group.

It's important to note that some types of polarisation will not cause problems in a deliberation. A deliberative process allows for the group's careful consideration of the full range of issues before it comes to judgement on the best way forward. Polarising issues that are more suitable for deliberation tend to have fewer emotions involved and may not impact the day-to-day lives of deliberating participants. On the other hand, if a deliberating group is tasked with solving a polarising issue that affects group members personally and there are high levels of emotion, it can be very difficult for group members to find common ground. They may feel that they need to defend their way of life. This can be assessed at a preliminary step as described above.

If the polarisation has not been identified early, it may emerge during the deliberation. In these cases, facilitators may need to suspend the deliberation process and spend considerable time identifying the different perspectives and assessing whether there is sufficient common ground and goodwill to proceed.

Like polarisation, community outrage is best addressed before a deliberation begins. Outrage occurs when citizens are deeply upset and vocal about an issue. Outraged

community members tend to mistrust information or experts, and resist any form of considered deliberation. This can be addressed by engaging with those affected and giving them an opportunity to express their outrage, which may be directed at the sponsoring organisation. Once they have expressed their outrage, an assessment needs to be made as to whether they will be willing to work with the sponsoring organisation to find a solution to the issue via a deliberation or other means.

In both cases – polarisation and outrage – community members need to be prepared to work with others and compromise if a solution is going to be reached.

Address deeply held polarisation before deliberating.

We facilitated a deeply polarised deliberation that involved some community members who were long-term environmentalists and some who used their land for hobby farming and wished to clear trees in the area to reduce the risk of bushfires. This topic was so emotionally fraught that the participants struggled to find common ground. Eventually, some compromises were reached but the deliberation process was not able to resolve the issue completely.

Another example of polarisation was when the topic related to increasing the density of housing in a local area, allowing for multi-storey apartments in a suburb that had previously only comprised single dwellings. People felt they were 'fighting' for their way of life. We paused the deliberation process as we felt the group was unable to do the work and we asked participants if they wished to proceed. They were keen to continue, but in hindsight, we believed they simply wished to 'stay in the ring' to continue the fight, rather than working together to achieve a common position.