



## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### **JOINT FACT FINDING**

*An Analytic Deliberation*

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#### **What is Joint Fact Finding?**

“JFF” is a specialized consultative engagement strategy that decision makers and stakeholders can use to resolve or narrow factual disputes over controversial environment, energy, public health, and social policy issues.

#### **Why use it?**

Dueling technical reports often serve as swords or shields in policy deliberations. JFF creates a needed safe harbor for technical and scientific discussions between all sides, gets to the heart of the substantive issues, and reduces some of the unnecessary friction and contention that attend important policy debates. Because findings are jointly developed, the outcomes are likely to be more credible, useful and durable.

#### **What kinds of issues are suitable for JFF?**

Most often, JFF efforts center on the social, legal, public health, or political impacts of (1) emerging or new technologies (i.e., shale oil extraction, genetically engineered plants and animals, vaccine safety, etc.), or (2) the specific or cumulative impacts of proposed new projects (i.e., concentrated animal feeding operations, forest harvest practices, new highway impacts, etc.)

#### **Has JFF been used successfully?**

Yes, for the last 20 years. JFF processes have been deployed on a wide array of problems including the management of fisheries, the costs and benefits of new nuclear energy plants, the design of desalination plants, the management of storm water runoff and the restoration of watersheds and wetlands. In Hawai‘i, JFF has been used to examine community health

impacts from geothermal energy plant emissions in Puna, the impacts of street closures in Chinatown and the management of vacation rentals on Kaua'i. The County of Kaua'i is in the process of creating a JFF procedure on health issues related to GMO and pesticides. Elsewhere, there are many specific examples in different parts of the U.S., Japan, Korea and Australia.

## **What does JFF produce?**

Each JFF process must be tailored to the specific issues it is attempting to address. A group's findings are usually synthesized into a single document that delineates: (1) a narrowed range of factual disagreements; (2) a synthesis of critical information; (3) agreement by all parties on specific research that will advance policy discussions; (4) a report on the range of interpretations being made regarding critical questions and pertinent evidence; or (5) specialized work products that illustrate critical issues, i.e., new estimates and forecasts of important trends; cause and effect relationships; pertinent peer-reviewed literature.

## **Are there key ingredients for success?**

Yes, seven in particular:

- (1) Ensuring strong political sponsorship, a commitment from decision makers, and defining a linkage from the JFF discussions back to the decision-making process;
- (2) Framing the specific factual questions that will be the focus of the effort;
- (3) Providing sufficient time and funding to accomplish the effort and enlisting skillful project organization and facilitation;
- (4) Identifying the kinds of expertise needed to address the questions;
- (5) Securing the participation of respected experts on all sides of an issue who agree to enter into give-and-take science-centered discussions;
- (6) Creating the forum through which information will be exchanged and deliberations will occur; and
- (7) Completing the effort and closing the loop on the linkage back to the decision-making process.

## **How long does it take and who pays?**

Government bodies often commission a JFF procedure however funds can come from a number of sources, as long as they don't jeopardize the independence and neutrality of the effort. Sufficient time and costs need to be addressed on a project-by-project basis.

## **Who can I contact?**

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