Consider It is a new program established by Berks County Community Foundation to promote civil public discourse on divisive or controversial topics. The program is based on the American Public Square initiative in Kansas City. To accomplish this, we worked closely with Allan Katz, founder of American Public Square and former U.S. Ambassador to Portugal.

The concept structures an informational program so that all sides of an issue can be presented in a conversational style rather than as a debate or lecture. Topics have broad appeal in the community, polarize people in partisan or other demographically-measurable ways, and lack public discussion or lack facts in public discussion.

The initiative’s main annual event is the Consider It Dinner. The topic for the first dinner will be immigration, immigration reform and local impact. The event is scheduled for Nov. 9 at 5 p.m. in the McGlinn Conference Center (460 St. Bernardine Street, Reading, PA 19607) adjacent to Alvernia University. For directions, go to http://www.bfranciscan.org/bfs/English/Directions/
Participants

- Moderator: Karin Mallett, an anchor and reporter for WFMZ.
- Floor reporter: Kristin Boyd, community engagement director at Reading School District, will relay questions from the audience.
- Panelist: David Inserra, research associate in The Heritage Foundation’s Allison Center for Foreign and National Security Policy. He specializes in homeland security issues, including cyber and immigration policy, and the protection of critical infrastructure: [http://www.heritage.org/about/staff/i/david-inserra](http://www.heritage.org/about/staff/i/david-inserra)
- Panelist: Dr. Elizabeth Kiester, Albright College assistant professor of sociology and co-author of the study: “Out of the Shadows: Understanding the Movement to Redefine the Immigration Policy Debate”: [http://jsswnet.com/journals/jssw/Vol_3_No_1_June_2015/7.pdf](http://jsswnet.com/journals/jssw/Vol_3_No_1_June_2015/7.pdf)

Tickets for the event are $10 each and include the dinner and program. The first dinner is sponsored in part by Kutztown University through a grant it received from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Library Association as part of nationwide programming related to the PBS documentary series *Latino Americans: 500 Years of History*.

At the event, applause will be forbidden. A “civility bell” will be placed between the program co-chairs to stop discussion if conversation goes awry or is inappropriate. Civility bells will also be given to those who help advance the Consider It program in Berks County, with the eventual goal of having bells on the desks of many people around the region. Ambassador Katz will return to Reading on Oct. 14, 2015, for a public rollout of the initiative.

Committee members

Co-chairs: County Commissioners Chairman Christian Leinbach and State Sen. Judy Schwank

Members: Tony Balistrere, Steve Elmarzouky, Bill Gage, Mary Kargbo, Eron Lloyd, Joan London, Karen Miller, Art Grim, Kevin Murphy, Michael Rivera, Marilu Rodriguez-Bauer

Associated participants

Kristin Boyd, Reading School District, Consider It floor reporter; Jason Brudereck, Community Foundation; Mary Buerer, Commissioner Leinbach’s staff; Bill Evans, Sen. Schwank’s staff; Karin Mallett, WFMZ, Consider It moderator; Heidi Williamson, Community Foundation