

THE KETTERING FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

# CONNECTIONS

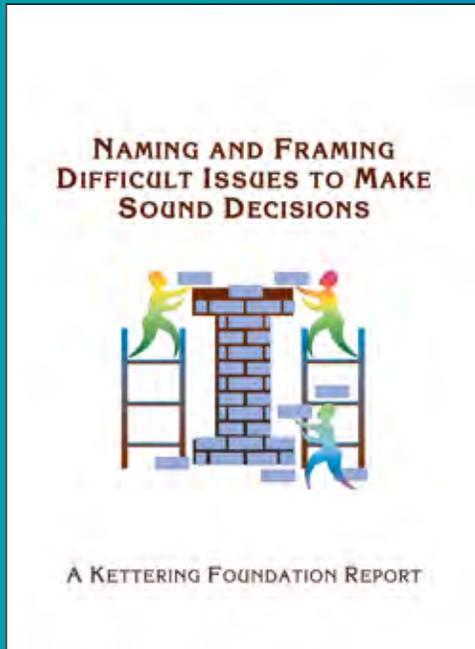
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2013

**CITIZENS**  
in  
Democratic  
Politics



## ADDITIONAL READING FROM KETTERING FOUNDATION



### Naming and Framing Difficult Issues to Make Sound Decisions

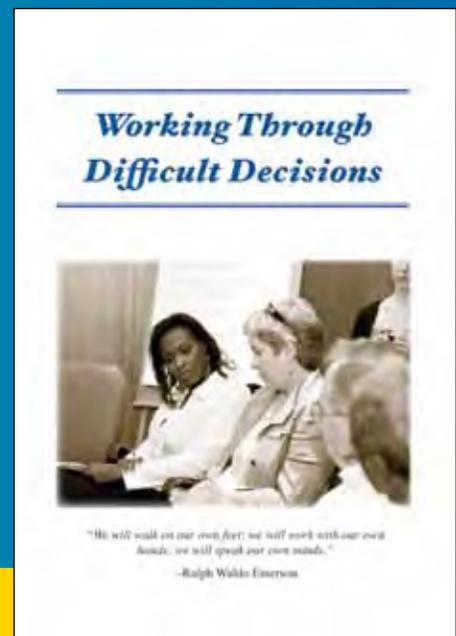
*Naming and Framing Difficult Issues to Make Sound Decisions* is a report for people who want a stronger hand in shaping their collective future and recognize that this requires working through disagreements on what the future *should* be. Replacing an earlier publication, *Framing Issues for Public Deliberation*, this booklet incorporates the foundation's latest insights on how people can describe problems and present different ways to address them so as to encourage sound judgments and avoid immobilizing polarization.

Kettering Foundation | 2011  
**FREE** | 24 pages

### Working Through Difficult Decisions

*Working Through Difficult Decisions* is a brochure for people interested in helping their communities work through their most challenging problems and for anyone interested in moderating forums based on National Issues Forums materials. The brochure speaks to how people can move beyond disagreements to arrive at shared and reflective judgments.

Kettering Foundation | 2011  
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The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering's primary research question is, what makes democracy work as it should? Kettering's research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through interrelated program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. The foundation collaborates with an extensive network of community groups, professional associations, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation's website at [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org).

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# CONNECTIONS

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# Getting OFF the Sidelines

## AND MAKING GOOD CHOICES

*David Mathews*

The foundation's annual research review in 2013 includes looking at citizens and the importance of the choices they make in politics. In many ways, politics is about choice—not only among policies and candidates in elections, but also among the many actions to address and solve problems.

Two difficulties stand out: Too often, people are on the sidelines of the political system. They don't make any choices, or they choose by not choosing at all. Furthermore, simply being involved won't result in good choices unless people make informed and wise decisions about what they should do. Kettering research is both about what motivates people to become involved and about what helps them make sound decisions. The following is a brief overview of what we are learning.

### Why Do People Get Involved?

Many of us become involved with other citizens because we are trying to solve a problem or influence an elected body or major institution. We may be supercharged by a cause we care about, or we are directly affected by something that is about to happen or needs to happen: "We can't let our school close!" Most people, however, aren't zealots and aren't directly affected by every political decision. Still, all of us are motivated by deeply held concerns about the future and what is at stake for us.

Our most basic political motives—the things that move us to engage with others outside our circle of family and friends—may spring from the lessons our ancestors learned about survival. There is now enough archaeological and biological (DNA) research to make some reasonable assumptions about these prehistoric times. Our earliest forebearers, who survived by hunting and gathering food, likely valued their freedom to forage and look for game. It is also reasonable to think they valued the security that comes from joining forces, which was essential in tasks like hunting. And they may have come to appreciate fairness because the bands they lived in wouldn't stay together unless the benefits from their collective efforts were distributed equitably. Simply put, those who participated in a hunting expedition would want a place in the feast

## Getting Off the Sidelines and Making Good Choices

that followed. Given these formative influences, we humans may be programmed to prize freedom, collective security, and equity.

Early humans were also prone to violent conflict. Yet it is not farfetched to assume that our ancestors would have valued the things that kept them secure from danger and helped them prosper. But regardless of whether these conjectures about our early ancestors are right, when making difficult decisions today, people will often call to mind the things that are fundamental to their well-being.

Kettering has found that when using the word *values* to describe these primary motivations, people naturally think we are talking about "VALUES." Hodding Carter Jr. once told me that he thought of values as "the parts of the Bible printed in red ink." That's not what we are talking about; we are referring to the most essential things that people hold dear. Today, social psychologists recognize these as the ends or purposes of life and the means necessary to reaching those ends.

What is deeply valuable collectively or politically is different from the interests that grow out of our particular circumstances as well as distinct from abstract values or our personal beliefs. Political imperatives are similar to the individual imperatives psychologist Abraham Maslow found common to all human beings, like food, water, and shelter.

It is important to emphasize that the things critically important to our collective well-being are common to most everyone. Most of us want to be secure from danger.

We want to be free to advance our own well-being. We want to be treated fairly by others. These imperatives motivate us to become politically active. They are passions deep in our souls.

Some of the things individuals require are quite tangible (food, for instance), while others (being loved) are less so.

The same is true in collective matters. At Kettering, we learned that from a community that was facing corruption in high places and egregious crimes in the streets. Citizens there asked themselves what they valued most. Nearly all said that,

**Too often, people are on the sidelines of the political system. They don't make any choices, or they choose by not choosing at all.**

more than anything, they wanted to live in a place that made them proud. Pride is a source of identity, a necessity since ancient times. But this intangible aspiration is rarely mentioned in planning documents or lists of goals. Still, the need to be proud of a city can be a powerful political incentive.

The importance of taking into consideration the things people value is illustrated in Wendell Berry's story of an economist who told farmers that it was cheaper to rent land than to buy it, which was factually correct at the time. One farmer responded by telling the economist that his forebearers didn't come to America to be renters. Something the farmer valued in addition to profits was at stake: it was the security of land ownership. My grandfather, who farmed, said of land, "They aren't making any more of it, you know."

### The Importance of a Name

Americans who appear to be uninterested in politics may simply fail to see much connection between what they consider valuable and the policy issues championed by interest groups, pressed by community leaders, debated by politicians, and discussed in the media. The names professionals give issues may be technically precise yet often fail to resonate with the things people hold dear. Getting people off the sidelines may be less a matter of arousing the indifferent than making connections with the things people already care about.

Nearly every day something—perhaps surprising, often troubling—happens. Test



## Getting Off the Sidelines and Making Good Choices

scores show a significant gap in the academic performance of different groups of students. The United States spends more on health care than other countries, but the results aren't as good. When faced with these problems, people begin to talk about what they read or hear. What's the problem? Soon, newspapers, TV shows, and blogs offer explanations. Politicians begin to make pronouncements about what is going on; they give the problem a name like the "achievement gap" and explain what they think should be done.

The names given to problems may seem a trifling matter, yet who gets to name a problem, and the name itself, have everything to do with who gets involved in solving it. It turns out that naming holds a key to countering a serious problem

**Becoming involved is only half the battle. Once involved, people may act together, but it's no blessing unless they act wisely so society as a whole benefits.**

of democracy—people not becoming involved as citizens. For example, the *achievement gap* is a phrase used by politicians and educators, but it doesn't always resonate with people. They see the academic gap as a symptom of many other gaps, such as economic ones. (This insight came from a series of deliberative community forums about helping students succeed.)

### Moving Beyond Hasty Decisions to Sound Judgment

Becoming involved is only half the battle. Once involved, people may act together, but it's no blessing unless they act wisely so society as a whole benefits. Critics worry that the public's participation won't be well informed. And much of the institutional and professional hesitation to involve the public comes from worries that citizens won't make thoughtful decisions.

A woman whose home was surrounded by rental properties saw a fistfight break out in front of one of them. Based on that one incident, which alarmed her, she decided that the problem in her neighborhood was one of loose codes for rental homes. Without the benefit of other information, such as actual crime rates or police reports, she built a huge grassroots movement using e-mail and social media. She and her followers started putting pressure on the city government. A new, very strict rental ordinance was passed that made life more difficult for law-abiding renters. Fear reached an emotional level that didn't allow for thoughtful decision making.

As in this case, being informed politically involves having facts, but facts alone aren't sufficient. People have to exercise sound judgment on issues that are morally charged and can't be resolved with facts alone. These are situations where the issue is about what is "right." The usual response in such situations is to "educate" the people by giving them the correct information—certainly nothing wrong with that. Yet

no amount of information is enough to fully inform the kind of decisions citizens have to make when the question is about the *right* thing to do. Should schools provide more courses in math and science, even if that means reducing those in the humanities and dropping physical education? Should we put stricter controls on the Internet, even if that would infringe on free speech? These questions can be answered in more than one way and require the exercise of judgment. The things people hold dear or consider deeply valuable are at stake and have to be considered. That is why informing our decisions requires more than facts alone.

Here's an example of the difference between questions of fact and questions of judgment: How long a bridge must be in order to span a river and how strong it must be to bear the weight of traffic are factual questions. But whether we should

build a bridge in fragile coastal wetlands is more than a question of fact. Although facts are certainly relevant, deciding to build a bridge to a barrier island requires the exercise of our best judgment about the right thing to do—given all that we consider valuable.

Questions of judgment are especially difficult to answer because we hold a great many things dear. We have to weigh our options carefully against the various imperatives that tug at us. We do that when making individual decisions in everyday life.

Imagine someone coming home from a hard day at work and looking forward to quiet and rest. But his or her spouse, who has been taking care of the home and family, wants to get out of the house and go out to dinner at a new restaurant. The children, however, want to go to a movie. Then, before those conflicts can be resolved, in-laws call, complain of being neglected, and insist the family spend the evening at their house. The spouse, the children, and the in-laws are *all* important. Giving one priority over another usually isn't a good idea. And the must-see movie begins soon, so the parents have to make a decision quickly; there isn't time to negotiate with all the parties involved.

After weighing the pros and cons of possible options, the couple decides to go to dinner and drop the kids off at the movie theater on the way. They postpone the evening with the in-laws to later in the week. They make some trade-offs and balance demands or competing imperatives as best they can. We do much the same thing when making decisions with other citizens.

Making decisions with people outside our circle of family and friends is challenging because we are less familiar with their circumstances. And the things we all hold valuable have different applications in different conditions. For example, I may value security, and because I live in a neighborhood where there are a lot of break-ins, I want a visible police presence. My friend, who also values security, lives in a safe neighborhood and doesn't want it turned into an armed camp. Just because people value the same things doesn't mean they agree.

## Getting Off the Sidelines and Making Good Choices

### The Human Faculty for Judgment

Driving slowly on a wet highway is a sound decision because it makes us safer, even though we may be late for a meeting. Because we value many things—our security from danger, our freedom to act, and so on—we have to determine, given the circumstances facing us, which is most valuable or, failing in that, how best to balance competing imperatives.

Ancient languages have left us a clue as to how we can make use of our faculty for judgment. It is the word *deliberation*, which is found in different written forms, from Egyptian hieroglyphics to old Chinese characters. To deliberate is to carefully weigh possible actions, laws, or policies against the various things that people hold dear in order to decide on a direction or purpose to pursue. Deliberation informs judgment.

The neurosciences help explain how the human faculty for judgment works. Studies have shown that an exchange of experiences with others, exposure to a diversity of opinions, and consideration of all alternatives create the ideal situation

for good decisions. These conditions are found in deliberative practice.

Of course, people don't always make sound decisions. Just because we have a faculty for judgment, doesn't mean we always use it. Public decision making is difficult, sometimes bruising, and there are thousands of ways of avoiding it in a culture that promotes sound bites and partisan debate. All that is natural isn't easy, and it can even be rare.

Having a faculty for judgment, I should add, doesn't mean that the citizenry has a corner on a special wisdom that officeholders, institutional leaders, and professionals don't have. Furthermore, even if people's conclusions are consistent with what they value, there aren't any guarantees that their decision will prove to be the best one. We have no way of knowing

what a decision will produce until its effects have played out over time.

### The Bottom Line

Often research can be distilled into one or two lines. In this case, what we've

**Studies have shown that an exchange of experiences with others, exposure to a diversity of opinions, and consideration of all alternatives create the ideal situation for good decisions. These conditions are found in deliberative practice.**

learned is that deliberation is basically the exercise of the human faculty for judgment. That has been a key insight because the deliberation that Kettering studies is often confused with a facilitated group process that takes place in a forum. Some facilitation is useful in most group meetings. However, public deliberation is a natural act that belongs anywhere and everywhere public decisions are being made—in city councils, school boards, and civic associations. One of the most promising lines of new foundation research looks at deliberative elements in everyday speech—the ultimate public forum that is held at lunch counters, over the office water cooler, and on the bus ride home.

The articles that follow describe a variety of experiments in how naming and framing problems encourages deliberation. These experiments, and others, offer critical insights into how citizens can get off the sidelines of the political system and make sound choices about their shared future.

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# Deliberative Opportunities in

## Everyday Political Talk

*Amy Lee and  
Erika Mason-Imbody*

**T**he only local grocery store closes its doors. A high school is having difficulty getting its students to graduate. A country reexamines the structure of its health-care system. A town struggles to rebuild after a natural disaster. In the everyday course of their lives, people in communities are constantly responding to challenges that require working together to develop a collective course of action. Coffee shops, public libraries, and church parking lots are often overflowing with community conversations that include statements like:

**"I think what the real problem here is . . ."**

**"So that's the trade-off, but the upside is . . ."**

**"We could do that, but we would have to be willing to . . ."**

Statements like these are examples of what we might call "deliberative language"—language that allows people to identify key concerns, realize what is valuable to them, and weigh the trade-offs in possible courses of action—being used in everyday life. Unlike what happens in a more formal public forum, deliberative conversations aren't a discreet event—they're more like the rainfall in a given area: a little bit here, a little bit there, sometimes a great big thunderstorm, but over a year, the ground gets watered and the crops grow. These deliberations are often fragmented, episodic, unstructured, and involve different actors at different times—but over time, connections are made and progress can be tracked.

This is the hypothesis underlying Kettering's new line of inquiry into

## Deliberative Opportunities in Everyday Political Talk

“organic” deliberative decision making. We begin with three premises:

1. Deliberative decision making is a practice, not a technique; one that is as old as the idea of community itself.
2. Communities are making sound, collective decisions together on wicked problems and this can be documented.
3. For each wicked problem addressed by a community, at some point naming, framing, and choice making (deliberative or not), as well as perhaps other communicative practices occur.

As these decision-making practices are visible primarily through communication, we have assembled a team of speech and communication scholars who are also familiar with Kettering’s ideas about democratic practice to examine everyday discourse around wicked problems in five different communities. In each case, researchers are examining:

- the existing communication practices that community members are using to deal with a wicked problem
- how those communication practices align (or do not align) with the practices of naming, framing, and choice making (in the neutral sense), and
- to what degree any of these communication practices accomplish the same function as *deliberative* naming, framing, and choice making.

We hypothesize that at least some of the communication practices will reveal speech acts that accomplish the same functions as deliberative naming, framing, and choice making. Our long-term hypothesis is that, if such “moves” can be identified, documented, and shared, a citizen who is conscious of these moves could use them to move a group into a more productive, i.e. deliberative, way of addressing a wicked problem.

Many of the most pressing problems that communities face require community members to make sound public decisions together. People talk every day, and some elements of deliberative decision making occur in these conversations, although they may not be recognized as such and could be improved. The Kettering Foundation has partnered with a team of researchers, representing seven states, who are studying community conversations in seven different locations to learn

more about “everyday deliberation.” The research team is examining situations in which citizens are trying to address a wicked problem to see what communication practices are used by the community while dealing with that problem.

Thanks to linguist Ekaterina Lukianova, currently a post-doctoral fellow at the Kettering Foundation, we know a fair bit about how the public talks together in organized deliberative forums. And many scholars have studied the structured group settings, which are intentionally designed to create a public discourse that is likely to result in a decision that people can live with. These spaces encourage participants to name problems in light of what is most important to them, to consider trade-offs and consequences of possible courses of action, and to find ways to work together and move forward with other participants.

But we also know that not every community is organizing these structured public meetings, and yet these communities seem to be able to work together to make collective decisions. While individuals might not agree on every detail, communities as a whole have worked through difficult public problems and come to decisions about how to address them. These decisions are often provisional, but the decisions have at least temporary public legitimacy.

Our research team is exploring what people do outside of those structured spaces that might help communities come to some kind of collective agreement on a course of action. We are looking for “everyday deliberation”—the kinds of conversations that are happening at PTA meetings, around kitchen tables, and over backyard fences. Ultimately, our goal is to learn more about the communication practices in everyday life that help people and communities move toward a sound public judgment and about the

communication practices that inhibit or block that movement.

As you might imagine, this type of conversation—the everyday talk that happens in both formal and informal settings—is difficult to capture. But we’re trying: our research team is listening, taking field notes, recording where possible—to learn how people talk when they come together and work through difficult problems. We fully expect to have to sift through a lot of people repeating partisan talking points, debating, and solution-warring, but

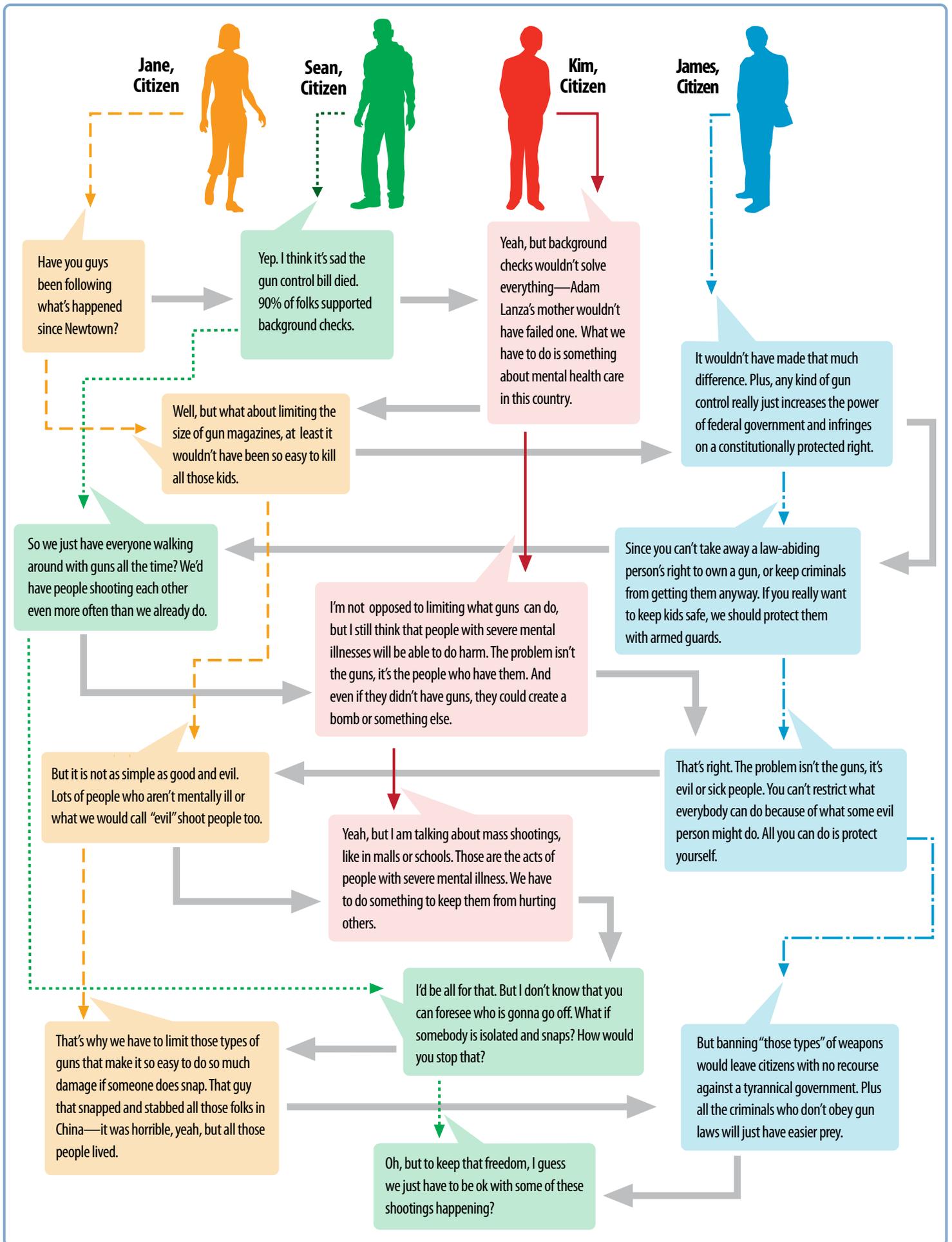


Unlike what happens in a more formal public forum, deliberative conversations aren’t a discreet event—they’re more like the rainfall in a given area: **a little bit here, a little bit there, sometimes a great big thunderstorm, but over a year, the ground gets watered and the crops grow.**

we also think we’ll hear at least some conversations in which people are:

- naming problems in terms of the things they hold valuable, in a way that a shared concern becomes apparent;
- framing or reframing options for what should be done, based on those things they hold valuable; and
- weighing the trade-offs of a course of action against those things held valuable and trying to come to a course of action everyone can live with.

We’re listening closely for the questions people ask, the comments they make, and the shifts in conversation to a more deliberative mode. We’re also examining how existing relationships and other contextual factors influence how people come to judgment over time.



## Deliberative Opportunities in Everyday Political Talk

Consider the conversation in the flow chart. This hypothetical conversation is based on real conversations that members of our team both heard and participated in following the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The diagram imagines a discussion between four friends at a local coffee shop.

In this conversation, we believe we have examples of people naming problems and framing options in a deliberative way. Look at how inseparable the naming, framing, and weighing of trade-offs are in this conversation—to say nothing of public life as a whole! The conversation explores various ideas about what a public response to the tragic shootings might include: Is it an issue of gun control? An issue of mental health care? A combination of the two?

Look at Kim's first comment, near the beginning of the conversation:

Yeah, but background checks wouldn't solve everything—Adam Lanza's mother wouldn't have failed one. What we have to do something about is mental health in this country.

No sooner had one option been proposed (framing) than people begin to surface disadvantages and trade-offs. This move allows other participants to inject their own ideas about the “real” nature of the problem (naming), while offering possible critiques and downsides to others' ideas (framing). Now, Kim isn't noting a trade-off, but a disadvantage of the action of requiring background checks for gun purchases—the fact that a background check at the time of purchase doesn't necessarily mean that the gun owner won't develop mental health issues after the time of purchase or that the gun won't fall into a mentally ill person's hands.

In response to the proposal of armed guards for elementary schools, Sean puts forth a clear trade-off in the middle of the conversation: “So we just have everyone walking around with guns all the time? We'd have people shooting each other even more often than we already do.” He's certainly escalating the scope of the action James, a second amendment defender, proposed, from armed guards

at schools to “everyone,” but he's not saying that guards wouldn't protect some people, just that it could also result in some other less defensible deaths. What's interesting is how people discuss an inherent trade-off differently than they do a disadvantage.

And take a look down at the end of the conversation, where the friends are still naming the problem:

**James:** *The problem isn't the guns, it's evil or sick people.*

**Jane:** *But it's not as simple as good and evil. Lots of people who aren't mentally ill or what you would call “evil” shoot people, too.*

**Kim:** *But I'm talking about mass shootings, like in malls or schools. Those are the acts of people with severe mental illness.*

James and Kim are both talking about the same problem—shocking acts of mass violence—and they believe the root problem is a person with a condition. Jane is talking about the incidence of violence at all levels throughout society, and to her the root problem is the violent act, which is made possible via a tool, a gun. This confusion about actors and root causes is one of the signals that lets us know that we're overhearing people struggling with a wicked problem.

Overall, this conversation appears to be thoughtful, respectful, and considers issues on a deeper level. Although many people have probably been having similar conversations in response to the Newtown tragedy, there are many polarizing conversations happening as well. How many times have we heard television pundits from the right and left arguing, or expert panels discussing the efficacy of different gun control laws in other countries? How many Facebook arguments have we seen, and how many times have we heard people hastily change the topic when they sense disagreement? How easily could this conversation have gone differently—but why didn't it? Was it some combination of speech acts—the active listening, the validation of each other's viewpoints before pushing back, the respectful questioning? Why did these people use these speech acts and not more adversarial or avoiding ones? And finally, will this conversation have any

lasting impact on the judgments these four citizens will come to about gun control? How much?

These are just the questions raised by this one anecdote. We're interested in learning not only about individual conversations, but also about the implications for the public life that they add up to. Are there ways that this conversation could have been even more productive? Are there ways that it might have been completely shut down? How was this conversation influenced by previous ones each person had had before, and what from this conversation will each participant recall next time this issue comes up? How do all these tiny instances of deliberative naming, framing, and choice making add up—is it a question of critical mass or culture change? How do these conversations influence more traditional political behavior? What other results can be traced to this kind of talk?

The two paragraphs above contain no fewer than 12 questions. As you can see, we've got our work cut out for us.

So why are we asking these questions? Too often, deliberation is misunderstood as a specialized technique or method. By examining everyday speech acts, we can show that deliberation is a natural part of talk—a native plant, not some exotic flower you have to import and carefully nurture. If deliberation is a native plant that grows everywhere—perhaps it might only need a bit of water or soil amendment. If our research reveals communication practices that people already perform and use, then we can show people that the skills needed for deliberative decision making are already part of their everyday lives. We can also help people ask concrete, productive questions to figure out why their community is stuck on a problem and which skills they already have that can be used to help them get through it.

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# Public Deliberation

## from the **JURY ROOM** to Initiative Elections

*John Gastil*

**T**he Kettering Foundation has worked with political communication scholar John Gastil for more than 20 years. In two recent visits to the foundation, he described his research, which reflects how citizens can be affected by single, but powerful, experiences of deliberation, and citizen capacity for deliberation. Gastil responded to questions about whether citizens are apathetic, what he has learned about citizen engagement over time, what he has learned about collective decision making, and what he sees for the future. This article draws his words from transcripts of Kettering meetings, as he recounts research about citizen juries and the Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review, two deliberative processes.

**John Gastil:** I look at deliberation through the lens of cultural cognition. Mary Douglas spoke of value orientations, for example the orientation to lean toward one tension or another, as with hierarchy versus equality or individualism versus communitarianism. The US public is distributed all across these values. The dimensions are quite powerful. You could say a more efficient political process has more carefully aligned with one dimension or another, resulting in a more polarized system. However, if you use these dimensions as cultural short cuts, they can predict attitudes. Deliberation can be used to structure situations that reduce the power of these value orientations so people will pay attention to a message before judging it good or bad.

When I first started working with Kettering, deliberative democracy was an interesting and provocative abstract idea discussed by almost no one. Interest in it has grown steadily and has not yet peaked. Instead, there is now a very crowded market. It is actually a really vibrant marketplace of tools for deliberation that have been tried, used, and tested.

But they are not really demonstration projects anymore. The world out there is full of things from the National Issues Forums (NIF), to participatory budgeting, to citizen juries. There are so many experi-

ments that they have grown into quasi-institutionalized practices the world over. I cannot help but be optimistic about the trend line. I realize there are other less promising trend lines, but I feel optimistic that we can move forward well.

Part of the reason for my optimism is that you can get people, even people who have historically been excluded, to engage and work on problems together in ways that make effective decisions based on the hard choices under the right circumstances. I focus on four structural elements, but they are more like ways of building our lives together. They are not just institutions, but habits and culture. The elements are time and space, information, responsibility, and structured interaction.

I've been doing a study called the Jury and Democracy Project, which examines the jury in the United States. What got the study going was a natural experiment. We took archives from courthouses all over the US and got records of who served on juries and then got electoral histories and matched them with the voter lists. We had their voting histories for years long before and long after serving on juries. I want to start with a quote from a juror who got our attention when I was writing the book, *The Jury and Democracy: How Jury Deliberation Promotes Civic Engagement and Political Participation*, with Pierre Deess, Philip Weiser, Cindy Simmons. In 1984, an anonymous letter writer described himself as a "common laborer" in a complaint to district attorney Elizabeth Holtzman about an experience in the King's County, New York, court. Here is a verbatim quote from his letter to the district attorney's office about the experience of trying to be on a jury:

There were at least sixty or seventy people sent to room 574 to pick a jury of twelve plus two alternates. The majority of the groups sent were Blacks. . . . After telling us what the law expected of us as possible jurors, which, as the judge stated, was common sense and a promise from each of us to be fair and impartial, then the selection began; it made no difference to the judge, the district attorney or the defendant's lawyer that the majority of the prospective jurors were Black. They

## Public Deliberation from the Jury Room to Initiative Elections

managed to pick thirteen whites and one black *second* alternate, making sure of an all-white jury. . . . And so I ask you Mrs. Holtzman, if we Blacks don't have common sense and don't know how to be fair and impartial, why send these summonses to us? Why are we subject to fines of \$250.00 if we don't appear and told it's our civic duty if we ask to be excused? Why bother to call us down to these courts and then overlook us like a bunch of naïve or better yet ignorant children? We could be on our jobs or in our schools trying to help ourselves instead of in court house halls being made fools of.

It's a powerful note. Again, you'll never know who wrote it. But do you understand the sentiment? And it contrasts so effectively with exactly what the jury is supposed to be and what is supposed to have been instilled. You see someone who completely gets what the jury is supposed to be even though he hasn't personally experienced it that way. And hence he is incensed.

To mesh that powerful story with dull statistics, a colleague, Michael Neblo, did a striking study in the *American Political Science Review*, "Who Wants to Deliberate—and Why?" It looks at the question of whether people truly do want to deliberate. It had become fashionable to say that people don't really want to deliberate, and this whole business is too hypothetical.

Neblo found that people actually *did* want to deliberate, but what I'm focusing on from his article is that the top four reasons that people said, "You know, I think I won't participate," was not knowing enough about the issue. That is, people were afraid they would make a mess of things.

Second, they're too busy. You've got to give people a situation where there's real responsibility, there are things for them to do, as that prospective juror said. "Look, I've got work and school and family to take care of if you're not going to have me do something."

The third was that they dislike conflict. Again, structuring the interaction in a

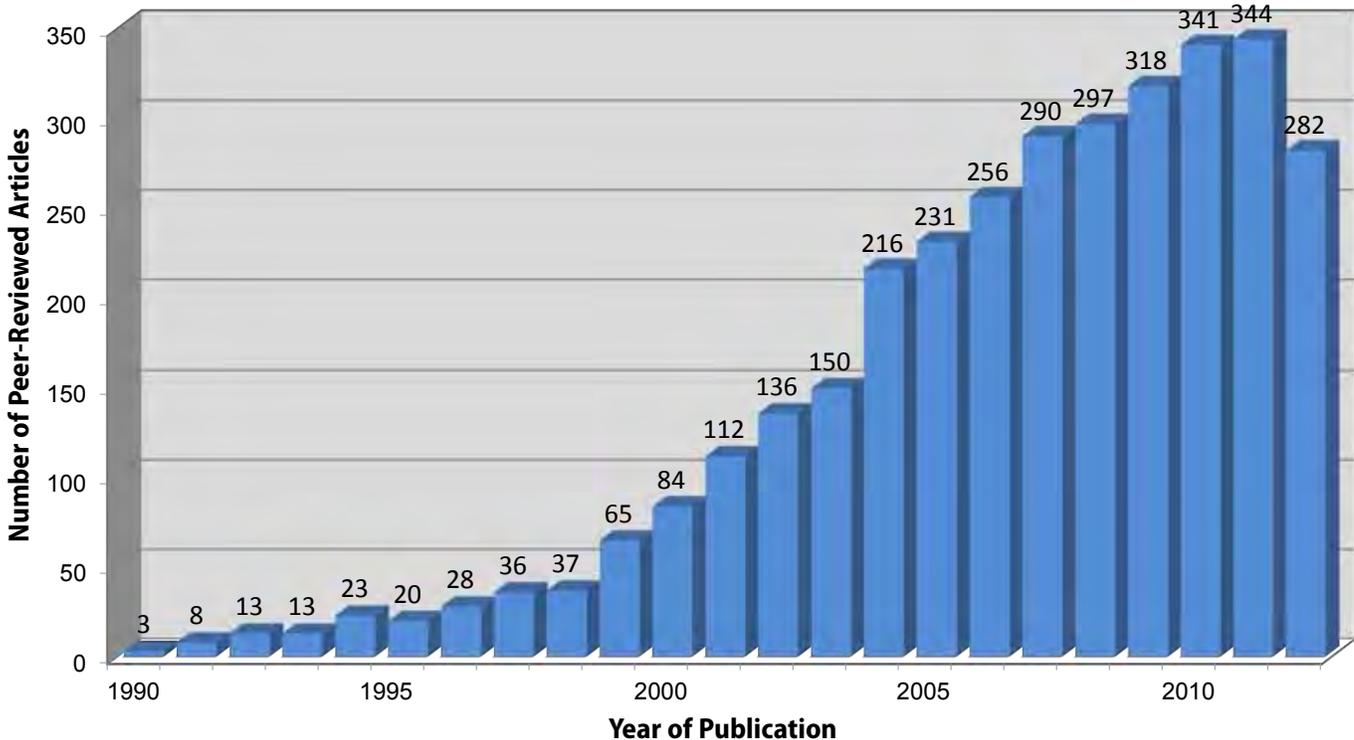
way that will make it a more meaningful deliberative experience as opposed to just bickering.

And then finally, "There's no binding decision there. So I don't know why we show up for this kind of an event." Again, this reason speaks to the question of responsibility, giving them real responsibility.

So if we translate these four circumstantial features that promote deliberation and civic engagement in the context of NIF, the time and space for the first criteria is absolutely created. That's what the forum is for. We create forums in many forms to create a place and sufficient stretch of time for deliberation. Information that is necessary and that these people want is provided by the NIF issue guides, among other things.

The sense of responsibility is proving more of a challenge. Some people will come away feeling like, "I talk and I don't know if I connected." That is something the foundation is very interested in; the emphasis on action reflects that potential deficit.

## Articles on Deliberative Democracy



Number of peer-reviewed articles with search terms in record fields. Terms = (Deliberation OR Deliberative) AND (Civic OR Political OR Public OR Democracy OR Democratic). Full-text article search yields roughly 10x as many hits. Prepared by John Gastil & Jason Gilmore.

## Public Deliberation from the Jury Room to Initiative Elections

Structured interaction is also important. Both the moderator and the choice framing itself are meant to structure the interaction in a way that can be powerful.

Now the reason we studied and wrote about the jury was that we were afraid that here we were thinking about deliberative democracy and forgetting about this incredibly important institutionalized form of deliberation so taken for granted that it didn't even come up in common conversations about deliberative democracy. But yet I can walk down those same four criteria, and you can see the masterful job the jury can do here.

Some dismiss this research as irrelevant to larger problems. But, juries change our understanding of criminal and civil law and are important to the community. We cannot ignore the jury as a delibera-

the things we are called upon to do as a citizen.

We just looked at impaneled jurors. The experiment was totally beyond their control—whether they ever got the chance to deliberate and who don't. We had such a large sample that enabled us to make many comparisons. If you deliberated, you became 5 percent more likely to vote after the experience. It is the deliberative complexity of your task that was key. The jury is a site for compassion and for community. If you reached a guilty verdict on a criminal jury you make me happy, because I asked tons of questions about how serving on a jury affected your community activeness. If you found a criminal guilty, you became more active in community life, and this is really encouraging.

There is very strong evidence that this citizen-to-citizen body does deliberate. The stereotypes of juries as irrational tend to be based on exceptional cases, or discriminatory jury selection.

As I said, we are now in this marketplace of tools and ideas and so obviously the jury is the oldest, right? It's actually one of the most venerable of the modern forms of deliberation, but there are many new ones. I

mention just one here, the Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review, which was created in 2009 to try to create institutionalized forms of deliberation. The state of Oregon has established a state law that in every initiative cycle, that is every two years, a couple of issues will be targeted for a special citizen deliberation. They select 24 random citizens, registered voters all, to study an initiative. They have a full week to study the issue, hear from pro and con advocates, bring in lists of witnesses, and develop a one-page statement that goes into the official voter's guide sent to every Oregon household. Time and space is given. A week is quite sufficient to study these issues. Information is provided through intensive study and meeting with witnesses and advocates. The responsibil-

ity is tremendous; they feel it. They know what it's like to be a voter, but here they are responsible for helping the voters understand the issue. And as they see the complexity, they even start debating about *how* to effectively convey information, not just what they need to know, but how to get it to busy voters.

And then finally, the structured interactions. I couldn't say enough positive things about this. When they ultimately wind up writing pro and con arguments on the measure, they split into pro and con caucuses on this citizens' panel and then they come back together to critique each other's arguments. Not to make final judgments together but actually to say, "Those arguments are okay, but what about this?" "Ah yeah, that's right." They edit each other's statements.

It is such a collaborative affair that many citizens have said that in the end they were surprised that they could not say what political orientation the other members had. They truly did not know. They had done such a good job of just being an evidence-driven body.

The quality of deliberation actually made people less certain of their views. It raised doubt. The deliberation was remarkable. In one panel, they turned on a very popular issue. In another case, the pro side won. They were very thoughtful in what they arrived at. In 2011, a divided legislature made this permanent.

So that is, in a sense, my answer to the totality of the questions about getting citizens to engage, making good decisions, decisions oriented toward the common good, and even including people who are historically marginalized. You see all these things coming together in a jury. You see them coming together in Oregon. And I think you see them in the National Issues Forums.

To wrap up, we do know how to deliberate, and in Oregon they are finding ways to get past simply cognitive shortcuts we usually rely on and can enable people not only to make better decisions, but also to feel better about themselves.

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**Juries change our understanding of criminal and civil law and are important to the community. We cannot ignore the jury as a deliberative body and continue to speak of deliberation without them.**

tive body and continue to speak of deliberation without them. Public confidence in the jury is incredibly high and has been for a long time. This applies particularly to criminal juries. So, the public believes in the rightness of these juries. The jury has been the flame-keeper for the very word *deliberation*. Jurors talk about being jurors, even 50-60 years later, showing how powerful the experience is. The US public has much more confidence in a random sample of citizens than in any elected body. The jury does remind people about random selection and their ability to work effectively.

Our project was not to study the effectiveness of juries, but we focused on what happens to a person when they serve on a jury. It is a unique experience among

# Issue Guides and ISSUE FRAMEWORKS

Brad Rourke

**K**ettering research suggests that one reason citizens avoid getting involved in public issues is that what they hear from professionals—politicians, issue analysts, news reporters, and others—does not seem to speak to their everyday concerns. Kettering research, however, focuses on ways to name public issues that connect more directly with what people are seeing in their daily lives.

Our research also suggests that the conventional professional discourse fails to identify the trade-offs that citizens will inevitably face in dealing with issues that require public decision making and action. So we study ways to frame public issues so that the options for action are clear and reflect things that people hold deeply valuable—and the trade-offs and downsides of these options are equally clear. We think framing issues in ways that deliberately reveal the choices people face will more likely result in sound collective decisions.

As a research organization, one of the ways Kettering makes its findings avail-

able is through issue guides designed to promote deliberation. These National Issues Forums (NIF) issue guides are used in locally initiated forums convened each year in hundreds of communities around the country. Kettering studies what happens as citizens engage with the guides in public, deliberative forums. (Issue guides are available through [www.nifi.org](http://www.nifi.org).)

Over the years, the nature and format of the issue guides has changed. The changes reflect Kettering's learning about the things that support deliberation and that discourage it. Those familiar with NIF issue guides may have noticed that they are now more brief, typically around 12 pages. We made this change intentionally, based on observation and reports from people who use them. We are trying to develop guides that provide necessary information without being overwhelming.

From interviews with moderators and forum convenors, we have learned that *the chief element that can support deliberation is the framework itself. A framework is simply the main options for action to*

address a specific issue, along with the likely consequences of those actions. Many forum moderators tell us that this is fundamentally all that is needed. While it is ideal for people to have read the issue guide before participating in a forum, very often only a few participants have done so. The summary at the end of the guides is therefore useful. Just as important, we hope to avoid setting up a situation where those who had a chance to read ahead are "experts" who endeavor to teach the others what they ought to know. In some cases, moderators will, in essence, take apart an existing issue guide, distill it down to its core framework, and use that in a forum, instead of the more complete guide.

Kettering is exploring this phenomenon by experimenting with shorter issue advisories that outline just a basic issue framework. The first one, *How Can We Stop Mass Shootings in Our Communities?*, was published in February 2013, and more are planned. We want to learn more about the minimum that can support productive public conversations. What is too much? What is too little? This should yield insights on what is essential and what is ancillary.

Kettering is also beginning to experiment with different ways of making issue frameworks available. We will be sharing aspects of the background research that goes into issue framing in ways that, we hope, others will be able to adopt and adapt for their own purposes. Here again, we are motivated by a question about what is necessary to spark deliberation.

## Questions, Concerns, and Strategies

Less noticeable, but perhaps more important, is how the issue frameworks themselves (not just the guides) have changed over the years. This again reflects Kettering's evolving understanding of how people make choices. The kinds of issues that require deliberation are ones that pit things held deeply valuable against one another, so that there are trade-offs to any course of action—otherwise the issue would have long since been addressed and solved. The deliberative framework needs to make these trade-offs clear. For instance, many issues tend to expose a fundamental tension between security


ISSUE ADVISORY

## How Can We Stop Mass Shootings in Our Communities?

**The tragic attack at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, has raised concerns among many people across the nation.** Other violent episodes, such as the killing of a teenager who was gunned down after returning home from the president's inauguration, have also drawn attention. While mass shootings are infrequent, they may be increasing. Each has devastating effects on a whole community.

Overall, the United States has become safer in recent years. Yet mass shooters target innocent people indiscriminately, often in locales where people ordinarily (and rightly) feel safe—movie theaters, college campuses, schools.

How can we stop such violent acts and ensure that people feel safe in their homes and communities?

**This issue advisory presents three options for deliberation, along with their drawbacks.**

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**Option One: Reduce the Threat of Mass Shootings**

Option	Actions	Drawbacks
<p><b>The problem is that we are too vulnerable to violence.</b> Communities and homes should be places where people are safe. The means for carrying out mass shootings are all around, and those who might perpetrate them are free among us. It is too easy for individuals to obtain weapons that are designed to kill a large number of victims in a short time.</p> <p>We cannot stop all violent impulses, but we can and should make it much more difficult for people to act on them. We need to restrict the availability of dangerous weapons, identify potentially dangerous people, and prevent them from carrying out their plans.</p> <p><b>A Primary Drawback:</b> We would give the government extraordinary control over cherished freedoms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrict assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, and armor-piercing ammunition.</li> <li>• Make involuntary commitment to mental health facilities easier to achieve and reopen closed mental institutions.</li> <li>• Require citizens to show cause for concealed carry permits.</li> <li>• Require that citizens keep firearms outside of the home in secure places, such as gun ranges.</li> <li>• Require a mandatory 28-day wait to purchase firearms and background checks for all, including purchases from private individuals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stable, law-abiding citizens will lose some of their rights under the Second Amendment.</li> <li>• Some people may be unnecessarily institutionalized; surrounding communities will have to tolerate living with these institutions.</li> <li>• This might limit people's ability to defend themselves as it is hard to anticipate threats that warrant self-defense.</li> <li>• This will make it impossible to use a weapon in self-defense against animals or other individuals.</li> <li>• This will delay people's ability to defend themselves. Background checks may weed out criminals but miss mentally ill individuals.</li> </ul>

1

and freedom: more security entails restrictions on movement and therefore less freedom.

Early issue books in the 1980s were intended to be “briefing books for citizens”—similar to the briefing books that

of the trade-offs between things held valuable less apparent and may provoke conversations that reflect the dominant expert view of the competing options.

Recent neurobiological research suggests that, when human beings make

decisions, they weigh the likely outcomes of a chosen course of action against the likely downsides. (Some research indicates that this is hardwired.) In other words, *it appears that decision making fundamentally involves consideration of trade-offs.* This is especially true when it comes to certain kinds of public problems.

There are different kinds of problems that people face in communities:

- Some are *technical* and can be solved unilaterally—for example, how to build a new jail,
- Some are *difficult* yet straightforward or with solutions with known conse-

quences—for example, how to increase police presence and enforcement, and

- Some are *wicked*; the problem is disparately located and has tensions between things held valuable that must be worked through—for example, what should we do about a growing sense of personal vulnerability in our community.

While, in this taxonomy, “difficult” problems are usefully deliberated over, “wicked” problems *require* such deliberation.

This insight has led us to focus more strongly on rooting issue frameworks in things that are held deeply valuable (for instance, the need for security, the desire to be treated fairly, the desire to have freedom to act) by starting with the concerns held by the public. Our initial research when developing an issue framework focuses most importantly on gathering an understanding of people’s concerns when they consider the topic at hand.

Taking into account what we have learned about how people decide, three key questions drive the development of a framework for public deliberation:

1. What concerns you about this issue?
2. Given those concerns, what would you do about it?
3. If that worked to ease your concern, what are the downsides or trade-offs we might then have to tolerate?

Responses to these questions, together, can generate a framework that makes clear the drawbacks of different people’s favored options. Facing these drawbacks is the ultimate concern of public deliberation.

The practical effect of this is that, over time, it is possible to see issue guides move from a “policy-centered” approach to a more “concern-centered” one.

This leads to questions that Kettering is continuing to pursue. When people deliberate together on an issue that is named and framed in public terms—that is, the issue expresses the things held deeply valuable and the options are rooted in the concerns people bring to the table, along with expressing the drawbacks—the resulting conversation can be at odds with the dominant conversation taking place among policymakers. In fact,

**From interviews with moderators and forum convenors, we have learned that *the chief element that can support deliberation is the framework itself.***

policymakers often get, which lay out the top experts’ views on issues. This paradigm can result in issue frameworks that have elements of exactly that approach: Here are strategy A, strategy B, and strategy C. Pick one. This is one way to approach difficult problems, but it can make some

this is often the case. This gap is of interest to us. How do policymakers view a public voice when it can be different than how they view the same issue? And vice versa? These questions lie at the heart of the broader NIF experiment.

**Issue Framing as Practice**

Kettering has engaged in research to develop many issue frameworks and guides and has exchanged insights with others who are also doing similar work. These partnerships and exchanges, in particular, have led to an insight that the work of issue framing is best thought of not as a technique to be mastered but as a practice to be pursued.

Our research suggests that there is no perfect way to frame issues. Even more strongly, it suggests that there is no book or article that one can read that will guarantee one can create a useful issue framework. Like any practice, doing this work yields new learning, and doing it repeatedly yields insights that don't come from one-off efforts.

We can learn most by exchanging insights with others as they go about doing their public work. Sometimes, however, partners believe Kettering has a specific process that they need to be trained in before they can move forward. Other times, we get questions about how "our process" differs from others. The answer is that we don't have a process at all; we are studying the practices people engage in as they go about public work. As we learn with others, we try to keep in mind: What is helpful in conveying the practices of deliberative politics? What kinds of things get in the way?

What Kettering tries to do is share insights about alternative ways to go about the same tasks. Our chief aim is not to spread the word about a particular insight, but to learn more so that we might have new insights to share. As you learn from your own experiments with naming and framing in your communities, we hope that you will share what you are learning as well.

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*To learn more about these issue guides, visit [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org).*

*Hot Topics for Deliberation*

**New NIF Issue Guides**

**>>Political Fix**  
How Do We Get American Politics Back on Track?

**>>Immigration in America**  
How Do We Fix a System in Crisis?

**>>What Should Go on the Internet?**  
Privacy, Freedom, and Security Online

**>>America's Role in the World**  
What Does National Security Mean in the 21st Century?



2011 Learning Exchange

# Learning Exchanges with Centers for Public Life

*Alice Diebel and Randall Nielsen*

Citizens seeking active roles in their communities face a fundamental challenge. Community-based organizations, which were once the vehicles for bringing citizens together into public work, have changed in essential ways. Civil society is now the realm of professionally managed organizations that are defined by particular problems or needs. Professional managers are trained to see citizens and their informal associational interactions only in the context of the problems that the organization itself is charged to solve through its programs. Citizens are no longer seen as necessary assets in public work. Rather than active decision-making actors, they are clients or customers to be served, victims to be aided, or donors to support work designed and governed by the professionals.

With the growth of professionally managed nongovernmental organizations, the active involvement of nonprofessionals in the governance of their own communities has been stifled. Many studies suggest that the Tocquevillian notion

## Learning Exchanges with Centers for Public Life

of civic work—done by ever-shifting interactions among loose associations initiated and driven by coalitions of citizens—is disappearing from the minds of citizens and professionals alike. Those citizens who do try to take responsibility are faced with the administrative routines of community-based organizations that are focused on the never-ending search for operating revenue and organizational sustainability.

Meanwhile, however, a counter-trend appears to be occurring. In *Doing Democracy*, Scott London reports on the emergence of a growing network of organizations that are exploring ways to act as “centers for public life.” What distinguishes these centers is that their work is not focused on any particular problem or on advocacy for particular groups. Instead, the centers act as community and regional hubs for experiential learning about the practices that shape the capacity of people with different convictions, interests, and abilities to work in complementary ways in combating common problems as they emerge.

While they take a variety of forms, the centers are all exploring practical ways to strengthen the ability of people to shape the futures of the places where they live, and by extension, of the country. The core idea is that democratic public life depends on citizens as fundamental decision-making actors. The centers help design and support interactions among citizens that can facilitate the recognition of common purposes and ways to constructively work through the inevitable tensions that emerge as people attempt to act in concert toward shared goals. That is to say that they are working to encourage a more democratic and *deliberative public life*, surely a mission of great importance at a time when incivility, hyperpolarization, and citizen disengagement undermine our democracy.

The centers for public life have been an invaluable resource for Kettering Foundation research. For more than three decades, the centers have engaged in learning exchanges with Kettering. Some of the centers focus on the challenge of developing and recognizing a “public voice” on federal policy issues. Other centers work with people attempting to develop the ability of their commu-

nities to address the local concerns of citizens. Such centers have much to share about the ways that the quality of public decision making affect citizen-based public acting; the ways that deliberative practices can make the interactions in a place more complementary and reinforcing; and the ways that people can more effectively learn together about the practices that determine the strength of public life in their communities and sustain their efforts.

In 2011, Kettering began a learning exchange with prospective new centers. We want the new centers to begin with recognition of the insights derived from the years of experiments by the network of organizations attempting to encourage democratic public life. We wanted to emphasize the challenges of entering

public life in a constructive way, of which deliberative forums was only one part. This history provides new centers with a sense of practical possibilities, clearly aligned with a theory of democratic public life. Another goal is to introduce new centers to the existing network of centers and so encourage the ongoing development of learning exchanges among them. Centers that participate in these exchanges learn from each other’s experiments, and the Kettering Foundation also gains from the exchange by learning from the centers’ experiments and insights.

Each year, nearly a dozen prospective centers identify themselves to Kettering, mostly by word of mouth or referral from other centers. In the context of our learning exchanges, Kettering works with those that meet the following criteria:

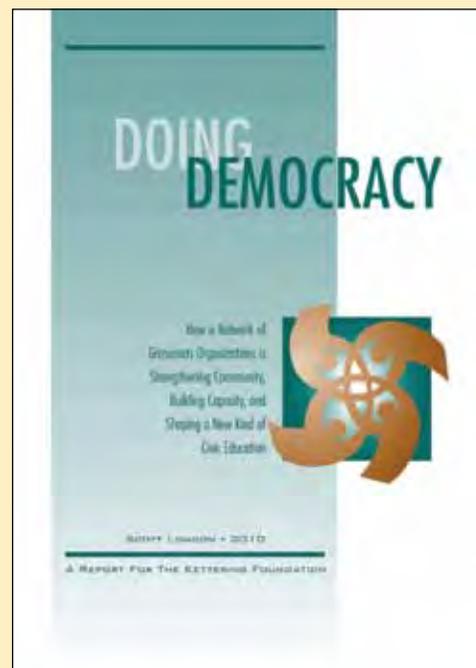
### ADDITIONAL READING FROM KETTERING

## Doing Democracy:

**How a Network of Grassroots Organizations Is Strengthening Community, Building Capacity, and Shaping a New Kind of Civic Education**

*By Scott London*

This report examines a burgeoning network of organizations that is inventing new forms of community renewal and citizenship education. Their common aims: tackling tough public issues, strengthening communities, and nurturing people’s capacities to participate.



Kettering Foundation | 2010  
**FREE** • 36 pages  
ISBN 978-0-923993-32-0

To read this report, visit [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org).

## Learning Exchanges with Centers for Public Life

1. They recognize opportunities in bringing citizens into deliberation on public issues. Some are concerned that democratic participation of citizens is low and that they can't get things done in their communities and others that political rancor alienates citizens and alienates the young people that we will depend on in the future. They are willing and *eager* to experiment with something new. They are not particularly interested in a single issue.
2. They are interested in using National Issues Forums as *one* vehicle to address problems.
3. They have an interest in conducting workshops for other organizations in their communities to encourage convening and deliberating about public issues.
4. They have an association with an organizational entity and a potential network of partners in the work.
5. They are interested in, and have the capacity for, learning from and with other centers. They see themselves as part of a larger effort to invigorate democratic public life in communities and the nation.

practitioners to begin thinking about networks and partnerships early in the work. It also creates a greater opportunity for sustainability should one partner move on.

Second, each cohort consists of 9 or 10 new centers that agree to attend a series of workshops at the foundation to share the challenges this work can bring, as well as create new ideas and opportunities for practice. In these workshops, they talk about what they are doing and what they are learning. This reflective practice helps develop the habit of intentionally engaging lessons from community work that often goes unexamined in people's busy lives, a practice we hope they will use within their own networks. The cohort also includes four or five people from longer-standing centers. These veterans' experiences help new centers realize the potential for their own centers and various ways the efforts can be organized. The resulting exchange is also an opportunity for the veterans to become more self-conscious of their practices as the new centers critically interrogate the politics embedded in the work. Working together in this way helps create a community of practice

that can serve as a network for ongoing learning long after the 18-month exchange has ended.

Another important part of the exchange is working through a "curriculum" that exposes the new centers to democratic practices in theory and in practice. Centers are asked to experiment in their own communities with ideas and then report on what they learn. The kinds of experiences they

attempt include finding ways to hold meaningful National Issues Forums, thinking through the best design for the problem they face and the community they engage. They also prepare forum moderators through their networks to expose these networks to deliberative discourse

and help spread the work and ideas. In addition, they examine their networks of interaction and identify how they might bring diverse voices into exchange on difficult issues. Part of that network building occurs through actually framing issues with public actors.

Finally, at the end of the 18 months, we invite the new centers to consider exploring one of Kettering's research questions in their community. In this way, centers strengthen their roles as scholar-practitioners. By thinking about the practice changes they are making through a democratic lens, they can better understand what they might want to advance, eliminate, or revise in their approach. As part of their research, they also write what they are learning so we may share it with other new centers.

Two new centers involved in the exchange that began in 2011 help reveal approaches to change in public life these centers are initiating.

Georgia College is impacting the public life of Milledgeville, Georgia, by working with students in communities. Gregg Kaufman, working with Jan Clark, describes the work this way:

First, the university administration was not open to creating a new center. We are part of a university system of 35 colleges and universities with specific definitions for institutes and centers. The way we got around this was to take an established university entity, in our case the American Democracy Project, and create a democracy project within the ADP. We call our "center" the Public Voice Partnership.

Second, we began to establish community partnerships and provide facilitation for community issues. We teach public deliberation courses, and our students become the facilitation team members to support our deliberative work in the community and region. My colleague teaches rhetoric courses, and I teach several sections of a course in "Critical Thinking: Public Deliberation." We also train campus and community members to become facilitators. Consequently, by embedding deliberative work in the curriculum, we have credibility and student participants at all times.

**While they take a variety of forms, the centers are all exploring practical ways to strengthen the ability of people to shape the futures of the places where they live, and by extension, of the country. The core idea is that democratic public life depends on citizens as fundamental decision-making actors.**

The 18-month exchange with a cohort of new centers has several components intended to foster learning. First, at least two people from each organization participate in the work. The need to find a partner early in the exchange encourages independent-minded academics and

## Learning Exchanges with Centers for Public Life

Third, . . . we are involved in a two-year research project . . . Cultivating Deliberative Democracy in Milledgeville . . . using the Shaping Our Future national conversation as our first issue. We kicked off a series of public forums last week, which will continue throughout the academic year. Several students . . . have become “research associates” with the Public Voice Partnership. . . . My students and I will hopefully present our Shaping Our Future year’s effort at the American Democracy Project meeting in Denver next June.

The efforts at Georgia College reveal how two faculty members have identified a need for a change in public politics in Milledgeville. They are doing this work in conjunction with students, recognizing that they can become future community-based change agents if they are involved in community work as part of the curriculum. They are creating a change in pedagogy and working to strengthen the capacity of students. Furthermore, they are engaging a variety of new networks typically not involved in deliberation about education, including African Americans and lower-income residents. Kaufman reports that the people typically attending public events “are disproportionately white and economically secure relative to the total population. Consequently, there is a gap in the ‘public square’ that could be filled by a more inclusive approach to seeking the public’s voice on a variety of important community issues.” This center has changed the conversation.

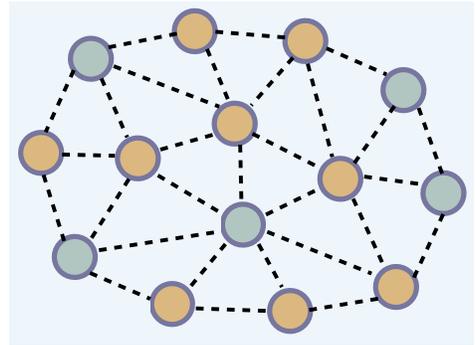
Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is developing a center for public life to create change in the community’s political discourse and capacity for democratic practice. They recognized a challenging problem in the local immigrant neighborhood, which includes North Africans, Somali Muslims, Ethiopians, and Eritrean Christians. They saw that issues are raised in unhealthy ways, through violence and religious and ethnic division. These groups did not recognize nor exercise their capacity for shared discourse. This center wanted to begin cross-cultural work that would lead to stronger democratic practice. They started The Common Table, a space to gather for meaningful

### The 18-Month Learning Exchange

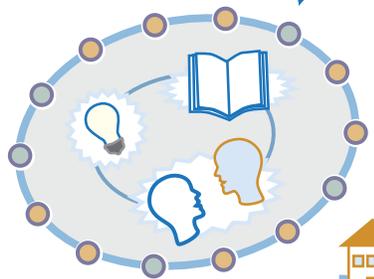


Research exchanges are comprised of 3-5 veteran organizations and 9-10 new organizations. At least two people from each organization participate in the exchange.

Early in the exchange, participants begin to think about the politics they encounter.



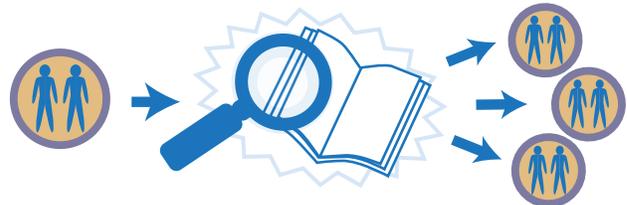
An exchange “curriculum” exposes the new centers to democratic practices.



Centers are invited to experiment in their own communities with ideas gathered in the exchange.



As part of their research, participants write what they are learning so that their experiences may be shared with other new centers.



conversations, respectful exchanges, and better framing of issues.

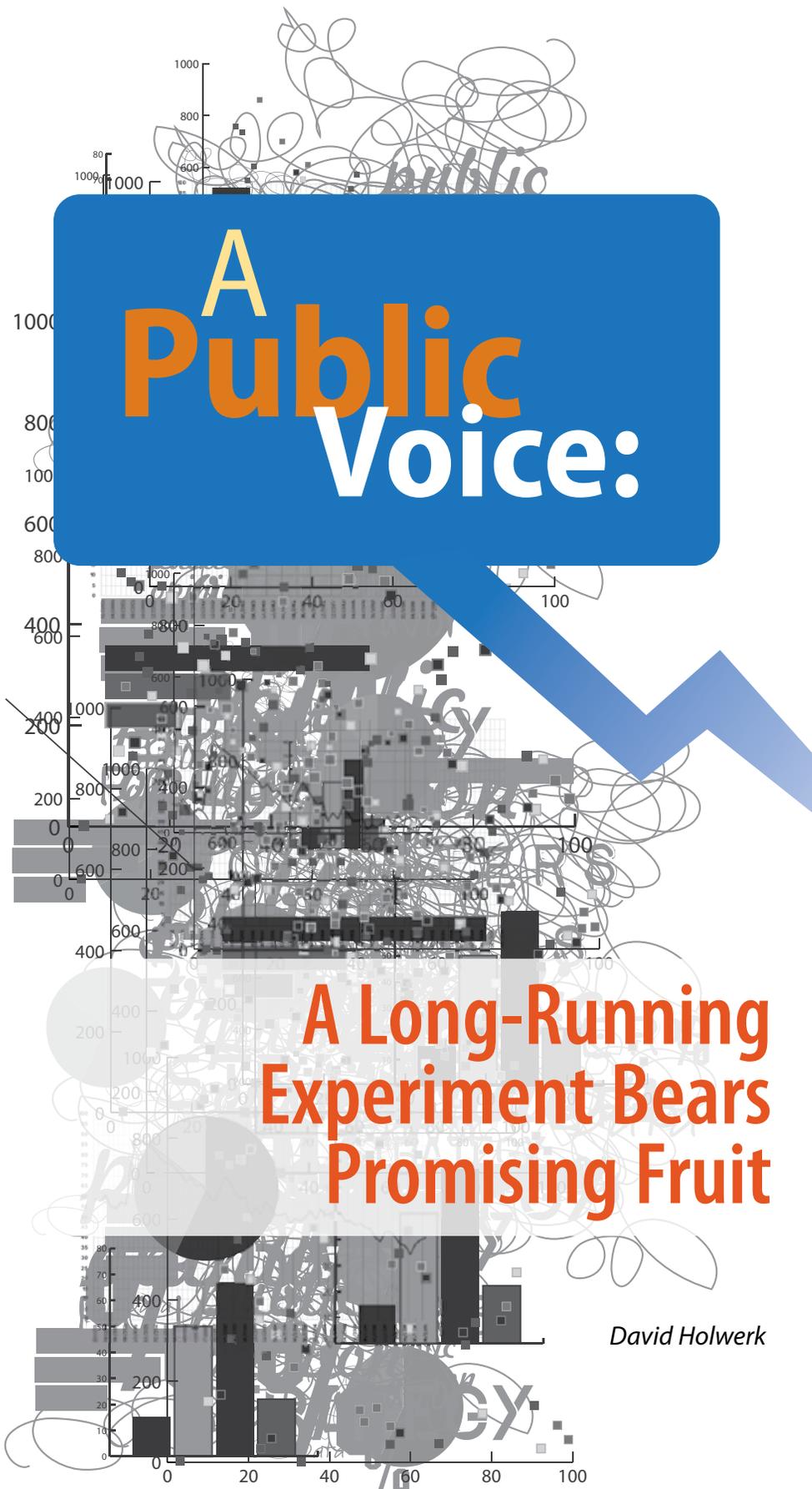
They see The Common Table as more than just a space to build relationships; it is also a place to tackle difficult topics and community stressors. By encouraging deliberative forums and other means of discourse, the self-interests of the groups can become a collective interest. The university and the students are all part of the community and, by providing neutral space, they are opening the community to change. The community recognizes its role in the exchange with Augsburg by encouraging Augsburg not to study them, but to study with them. This sort of exchange is consistent with Kettering’s idea of change in political practice through learning exchange. It is also consistent with the democratic practice of

naming and framing issues and deliberating about them to recognize what is held valuable.

We have much to learn from such efforts and on the actions that will follow. We need more opportunities to learn about the challenges civic innovators face in creating and sustaining entities for learning-based change. The connective practices they work through are the key to understanding how communities can continue to develop as places where people can prosper together. If you are interested in creating a center for public life, we want to hear from you.

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# A Public Voice:

## A Long-Running Experiment Bears Promising Fruit

*David Holwerk*

**W**hy would the Kettering Foundation tinker with a long-established rite of spring? Maybe it's because, like Charles Kettering and the other inventors who made Dayton a hotbed of experimentation and research in the early 20th century, we're always on the lookout for a way to do something better.

The case in point is the Kettering Foundation's annual program in Washington, DC, known as A Public Voice. Every spring since the late 1970s, the Kettering Foundation has produced this vernal ritual as reliably and predictably as the blooming of redbuds is followed by the blooming of tulips, which is then followed by the blooming of dogwoods.

The format and details of A Public Voice have varied over the years, but its aim has always been the same: to demonstrate to policymakers and elected officials the value of a deliberative public. To do that, the foundation has presented the outcomes of deliberative forums hosted by members of the National Issues Forums (NIF) network.

Some years, the program seemed to resonate with the policymakers who attended. Other years—well, not so much. But through the years (according to those whose association with A Public Voice is much longer than mine), all these efforts have faced an enduring challenge: how to overcome policymakers' skepticism because of the nonstatistical nature of the information that emerges from deliberative discourse.

That skepticism is often voiced in a few questions: How many people attended? How many women? How many men? Were the groups demographically balanced? Were the forums held in geographically balanced locations? What was the party registration of those who took part? And so on.

Anyone familiar with NIF forums knows that they don't produce the kinds of answers to those questions that will satisfy policymakers accustomed to dealing with a tsunami of scientifically produced polling data. So dealing with such questions has often been not just challenging but ultimately frustrating for all concerned.

All of which made our experience in Washington in late 2012 encouraging. A group of Kettering staff members and

## A Public Voice

associates held a series of meetings with congressional staff members and other members of what might be termed the Washington policy community. At those small-group meetings, we presented the outcomes of NIF forums on how to deal with the national debt. The forums used an issue guide *A Nation in Debt: How Can We Pay Our Bills?* produced by the Kettering Foundation.

What made the 2012 meetings so notable was that almost no one asked the usual quantitative questions about the forums. Everyone seemed willing to accept the proposition that forums produce a different kind of information about public thinking and that this information is valuable and useful. And they all were eager for just such a different sort of information.

Why the change? My guess is that it stems from the basic facts of life for DC policymakers these days. They are awash in a sea of polling data. Every congresswoman has access to her own polls about the views of her constituents on a wide range of subjects. Hundreds of interest groups flood every senator's office with polls proving the worthiness of their views and the worthlessness of views that disagree. Every week brings new polls—all bulletproof in their professionalism, many designed to prove one particular point of view, all purporting to show definitively what the public thinks—contributing to what eventually and inevitably becomes a wall of indistinguishable noise that contributes to the gridlock now afflicting Washington. They have plenty of information, but it doesn't tell them what they really need to know, which is what citizens really are willing to support when it comes to debt and spending.

No wonder, then, they were receptive when Kettering showed up offering to share information that was qualitative rather than quantitative, nuanced rather than blunt-edged, thoughtful rather than knee-jerk.

The Kettering folks left those December meetings elated by the reception that our presentations received. But we also left with a question: how can we build on the momentum of those meetings going

forward? Thinking about that question led us to a new formulation for the 2013 edition of *A Public Voice*.

We decided that this year, instead of reporting to policymakers on what happened at forums, we would ask them to join with us in framing a new issue guide around questions of the role of government in a time of deep deficits and a corrosive mutual distrust between citizens and government. And we would try a new means of conveying the value of the information that would emerge from these forums.

In preparation for this year's *A Public Voice*, Kettering conducted research forums in the late winter and early spring to gather citizens' concerns on that range of issues. We then did some preliminary groupings of those concerns.

Up to that point, we were pretty much engaged in business as usual. But then we did something highly unusual. Instead of inviting Washington policymakers to a meeting at which we would unveil the results of our research, we invited policymakers and leaders of a wide range of deliberative democracy organizations to join us for a meeting. Our goal was to set up an exchange unlike any we'd had before. If the meeting worked as we hoped it would, policymakers would speak about what kinds of information regarding public thinking would help them do their jobs. People from the deliberative democracy organizations would listen and respond frankly about the kinds of information that emerge when citizens deliberate. And both groups would leave with a renewed and expanded sense of the value that a deliberative public brings to difficult policy decisions.

That meeting, *A Public Voice 2013*, took place June 5 at the National Press

Club. Like all tinkerers, we were curious to see how this experiment would work out. In a word, the answer is: promisingly.

The interaction made clear that policymakers are aware of the limits of the information that they now get about public thinking and are frustrated by their interactions with citizens. It also became clear that they had little idea of the existence and scope of deliberative actions that routinely take place across the country.

On the other side, the exchange revealed that deliberative democracy

**What made the 2012 meetings so notable was that almost no one asked the usual quantitative questions about the forums. Everyone seemed willing to accept the proposition that forums produce a different kind of information about public thinking and that this information is valuable and useful.**

groups would benefit from a deeper understanding of just what kind of information policymakers need about public thinking.

So now we're moving forward on developing our framing on budget cuts and the role of government, incorporating the insights we gleaned from the June 5 meeting. We're setting up meetings to stay in touch with the people who participated in *A Public Voice 2013*. And we're moving ahead to select a new topic that we will ask policymakers and deliberative convenors to help us frame next spring.

It turns out there's always something to tinker with.

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# Reinventing HAMPTON

Connie Crockett

As the oldest continuous English-speaking settlement in the United States, the port city of Hampton, Virginia, is rich in history. In 1608, English captain John Smith pronounced the area a “little isle fit for a castle.” Today, it is a racially diverse, mid-sized city of about 140,000 with a deep natural harbor, good schools and universities, and a host of stable employers. Back in 1984, however, Mayor James Eason feared that Hampton was “dying in slow motion” because of economic stagnation and population loss. His shared concerns brought municipal leaders together to declare a community challenge: Hampton would reinvent itself as the “most livable city in Virginia.”

Hampton’s story of transformation has been studied and widely praised. The German publisher Bertelsmann Stiftung even honored the town in a worldwide competition for innovative and exemplary efforts supporting and strengthening democracy. Hampton is worthy of such note, but even residents must take all the praise with a grain of salt. After all, no place is perfect, and no story of community life is ever complete. They are all

works-in-progress. And while Hampton’s efforts are worth noting, they are not perfectly replicable; no community-building effort is.

Stories like Hampton’s present research opportunities for Kettering because they allow us to learn more about the way key democratic practices, like naming problems in public terms and deliberating together, are employed when communities take on difficult problems. What we can take away from looking at Hampton are their intentions, their practices, and their insights.

Hampton’s transformation began with insightful leadership, but it is not a story of top-down changes alone. What makes the Hampton story interesting is their diffused, conscious effort to change both the way the community thought of itself and how it functioned. Instead of applying a one-time visioning process, they took the time to consider what would make their community “most livable.” Hampton understood that people would not “own” change without having decision-making power at the neighborhood level. People accustomed to griping about what the

city should do had to learn to work together on issues where they could make a difference.

By all accounts, city manager Bob O’Neill had a huge impact on the nature of the transformation that began in 1984. But this is not a story of a great man working alone. As a proposed highway that would dissect Hampton became highly controversial, the city relinquished space for the public to come to agreement on what to do, even though it would slow economic development plans already in motion. The problem was not viewed as simple or technical, but rather a fundamental community question along the lines of, “What kind of city do we want to be?” Once the residents had worked through that big problem together, many more people saw themselves as being able to make a difference, and their government became ever-more inclined toward using collaborative problem solving.

Reinventing Hampton meant making the city leadership’s commitment to harnessing “the resources of business, neighborhoods, community groups, and

## Reinventing Hampton

government” a full citywide commitment. The effort to do that is of research interest to Kettering because Hampton developed a practice of shared decision making. The city provided structure for conversations that needed to happen and kept up the momentum for comprehensive actions, while the neighborhoods gained strength by working through issues close to home. Neighborhoods, as defined by residents, became responsible for carrying mutually agreed upon initiatives forward.

One of those issues was the problem of disengaged youth. With help from a federal grant, the mayor pushed Hampton to take a collaborative approach to engaging young people in the life of the city. Five thousand young people and adults spent a year considering how to build the economy by fully realizing the latent potential of young residents. The coalition decided that 4 elements were necessary: strong families, healthy neighborhoods, youth as community resources, and greater investment in the development of human potential in the first 20 years of life.

Profound shifts in thinking were taking place in Hampton. As evidence, Alternatives, Inc., a local youth-development organization that had been working on problems of substance abuse, began to see its work in a new light. The organization changed its approach from a narrow problem focus to facilitating community work around the question, what does it take *as a community* to foster a drug-free climate? This more embracing approach is asset based, which recognizes what people have to offer rather than what they lack. It takes problems that could be narrowly defined into shared space and invites public decision making.

The residents of Hampton didn't see the problem of young people abusing alcohol and getting expelled from school as a problem specifically related to substance abuse, schools, or youth; they saw it *as a problem of community*. Groups engaged in the problem made the effort to reach out further and widen community deliberation. They never fell into a complacent stasis, but kept broadening their horizons. “Good enough” was not trumpeted, “success” was never declared, and the issue of disengaged youth was

never handed back to professional youth developers. Stories like Hampton's present research opportunities for Kettering because they allow us to identify and understand more about the ways key democratic practices are employed when whole communities take on difficult issues.

While it may be typical for government officials to begin and end public engagement efforts with surveys gathering input for officials to ultimately make decisions, it is not how Hampton takes on challenges. They continue to make a real effort to share decision-making power. Alison Mathie of the Coady International Institute, who recently participated in a meeting at Kettering, described this as leadership “by stepping back.” Stepping back seems to prompt communities to harness more of their available resources.

The city of Hampton's early 1980s effort to reinvent itself was the prompt for experiments with large-scale dialogues to address Hampton's future. Efforts to make public decisions, decisions in which most people feel they have had time and opportunity for a good “give and take” on a problem, require our ability to learn from one another's experiences. Whether such exchanges happen in formal settings like board rooms or informal ones like barber-shops, they cumulatively make up what Kettering calls “public talk.” We assert that developing a habit of public talk is conscious work that leads to healthier civic environments, places where everyday people have a stake in what is going on around them and feel that they are able to make a difference.

Kettering has learned and recognized (along with John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute) that every community has resources, although sometimes they go untapped. Disengaged

young people might be viewed as problems, but Hampton chooses to see them as resources. Government might be seen as key to acting on problems, but Hampton chooses to see it as one resource among many. How we interpret what we see when we look around us makes a difference in our political behavior.

In a democratically inclined community, such as Hampton, power generated by working on problems appears more diffuse and far less centrifugal than in other communities. The small city has gone a long way in 30 years to develop a habit of public talk that has helped it thrive through tough economic times. Hampton has become a place where residents are accustomed to being asked to take part in supporting



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their community, and that, alone, might be what makes it great. The Hampton Neighborhood Initiative is today a mature, hybridized system of support incorporating government, business, nonprofits, and neighbors working to be inclusive, collaborative, and effective. Hampton strives for a culture in which government and residents coproduce solutions to difficult challenges.

The habit of thoughtfully weighing the trade-offs inherent in all pathways toward action is apparent in the Hampton story. How does it get started in other communities? How is such work sustained? We would love to hear the story of how your community works its way through problems.

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# Learning Exchanges with Professional Organizations

*Phillip D. Lurie*

People often report that their efforts to engage with others around the problems they face in daily life are discouraged by the indifference or outright hostility of institutional actors. That being said, Kettering has found that many organizations are attempting to create pathways for more effective citizen-to-citizen interactions.

What motivates such institutional actors? Self-interest is one reason. They have recognized that strengthening the capacity of citizens to do what they need to do can reinforce what the institutions need to do to meet their obligations. Government agencies and administrative officials are also motivated because they are concerned with combatting hyperpolarization that can paralyze institutional efforts. Professionals are left with a challenge: how can normal institutional operating routines be aligned with the practices citizens use to do their work? Said another way, how can the ways institutions do their work and the ways citizens do theirs be interconnected?

When will organizations attempt such realignment? What challenges emerge when they attempt to design such changes? What affects do they attribute to such realignment? The Kettering Foundation is exploring these questions through learning exchanges with a number of innovative organizations.

For example, the Southern Growth Policies Board has been working with the National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO), which is interested in improving the decision making of their membership. NASBO hopes to accomplish this through a better understanding of what citizens' value, what they are willing and not willing to do, and what citizens understand to be the implications of their choices. One of the key struggles Kettering has identified is the tendency of the interactions among citizens to be framed around the details of budget and spending decisions. The processes that budget officers are familiar with seem to underscore this approach to decision making. This approach has been particularly evident in past experiments with participatory budgeting and other like-minded efforts. The problem is that a focus on line items of budgets offers little information about citizens' priorities and the tensions among the things everyone holds valuable. NASBO is looking to uncover a deeper understanding of such value tensions, and in so doing help citizens understand the implications of their choices. They feel that this will improve collective decision making—in specific contrast to what they are seeing in the partisan political world.

We are exploring these challenges in Kettering's research exchanges. The focus is on the problem behind the problem,

namely how to promote a more useful kind of civic discourse among citizens around the problems they face together in communities. The outcomes of that choice work can then become reflected in budget decisions. The promise of the approach for institutional actors is that when their budget decisions are popularly seen to resonate with a citizen-driven sense of direction, the sense of legitimacy of the budget outcomes will be strengthened.

Identifying the characteristics of such a civic discourse and putting it into practice presents a distinct set of challenges in the research with the budget officers. How can the things people consider valuable be identified? How can the tensions among those things be constructively identified in terms of the actions people and institutions might take? How can opportunities for people to come together to work through these tensions be created and supported? How can the outcomes of these deliberative discussions be conveyed in ways that can assist policymakers in their job of making budget decisions? Exploring ways to deal with these challenges serves as the crux of these research exchanges.

Kettering is also working with a number of organizations interested in naming and framing issues for public deliberation as well as convening and moderating deliberative forums. They, too, believe that the character of citizen involvement can be enhanced by opportunities for people to engage with others over the problems they face in daily life. The Association of Centers for the Study of Congress and several of its member organizations are in the midst of framing an issue on the problem of working together in a democracy. These congressional centers are concerned that it is increasingly difficult for people to interact with those who have differing views or experiences. Public life is filled with angry rhetoric, and in private life, more and more we associate primarily with others like ourselves (or who agree with us). This makes it difficult to face problems together. The question, then, is, how can we work together even when we disagree?

The American Bar Association (ABA) is another group experimenting with creat-

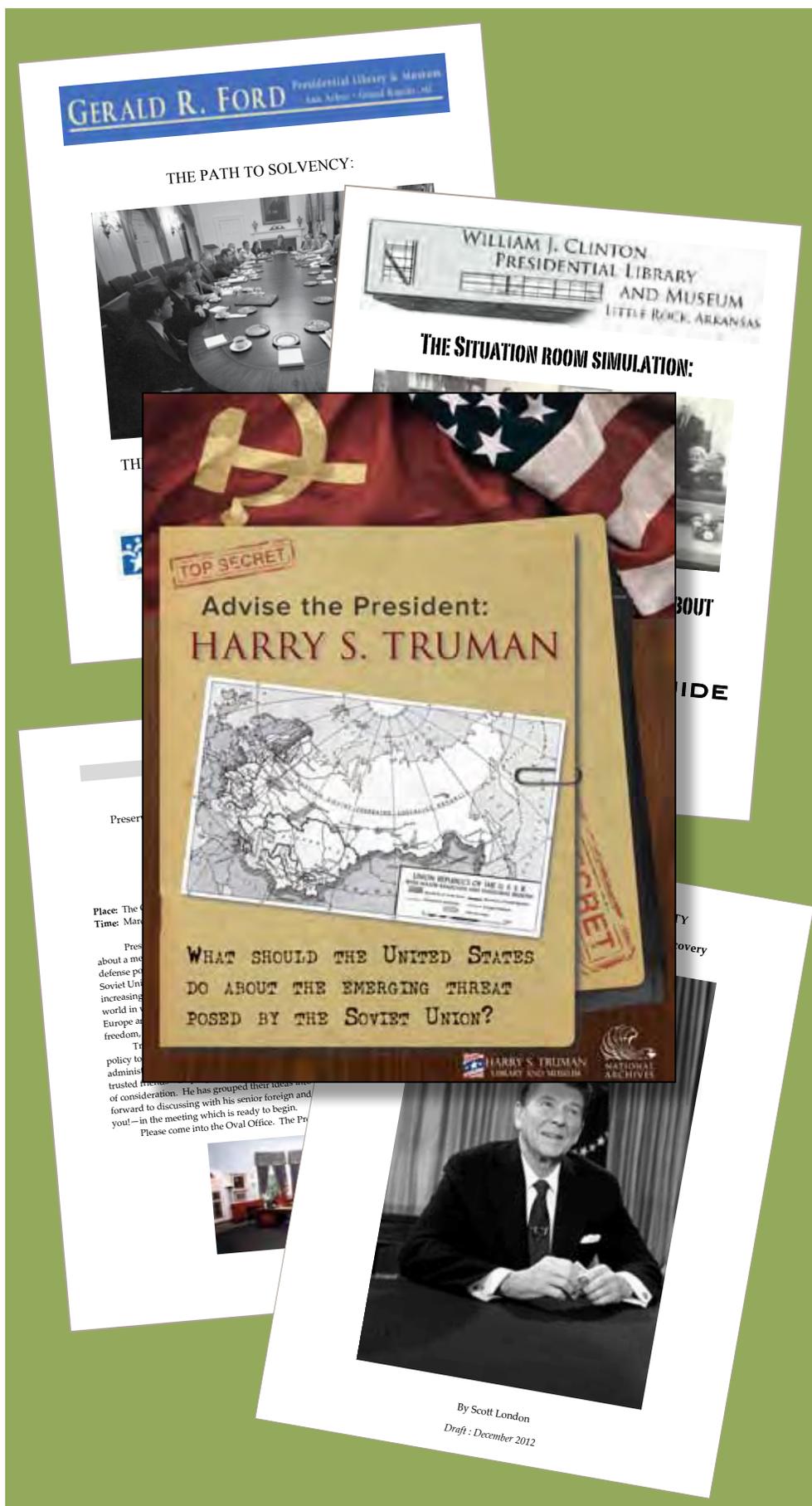
## Learning Exchanges with Professional Organizations

ing pathways for citizens. The ABA is in the testing phase of a framework they have designed on the issue of the role of the judicial branch in democracy. This approach builds on past research that attempted to understand how citizens see the judicial system as compared to the way those in the system see it. Are there those in this system who see a problem in a loss of public confidence? If so, what are they doing about it? Preliminary findings show that many participants in our learning exchanges deeply believe in the integrity of the judicial system's foundation and core values, but that they worry greatly about distortions and shortfalls in the way the system currently operates. Judicial institutions are just one of the many types of institutions that suffer from a loss of public confidence.

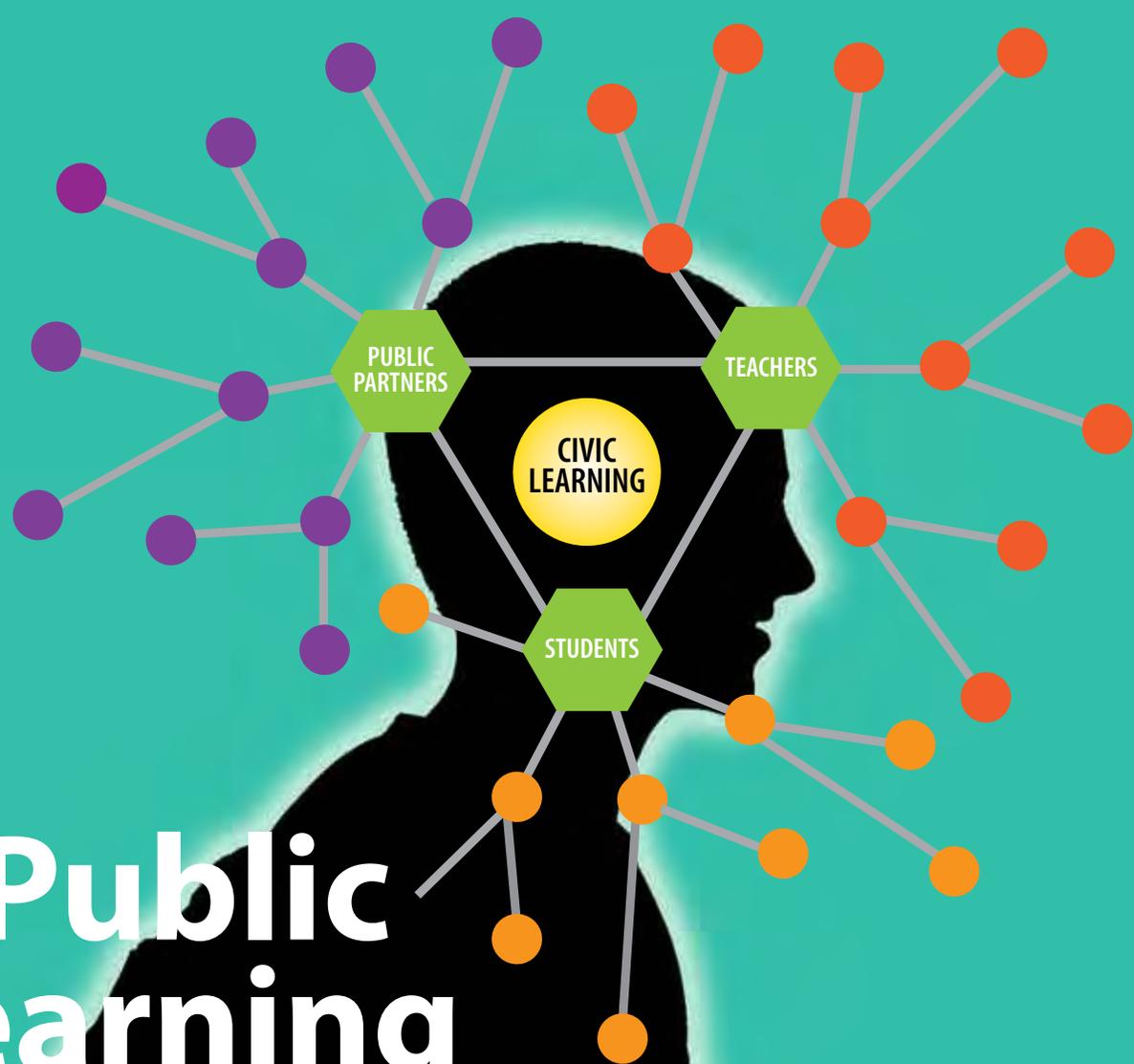
Finally, for the last several years we've been working in cooperation with the Truman, Eisenhower, Ford, Reagan, and Clinton Presidential Libraries. Each library is attempting to document—in the form of issue guides—the range of choices about possible actions that their respective president faced in making significant policy decisions. The libraries hope that those who use these issue guides in their deliberations will gain a better understanding of their president's actions in office by exploring the choices he made. We are also interested in whether this manner of posing historical decisions will encourage library visitors to recognize that all policy decisions require making choices that involve working through the trade-offs among multiple things that people hold valuable.

Learning exchanges with professional organizations promise to shed light on fundamental questions about democracy. How do these organizations understand self-rule, and how do they understand what citizens should do? How does the work done in institutions affect the work that citizens must do? How can these organizations facilitate an active role for citizens in deciding and acting on problems they face in daily life? What does the work of a deliberative public contribute to the work of institutions? Stay tuned for future reports!

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By Scott London  
Draft : December 2012



# Public Learning *in* Public Schools:

## How Networks of Teachers and Public Partners Can Support Civic Learning

*Stacie Molnar-Main,  
with Libby Kingseed*

**S**ome citizens may wish to build bridges between the types of learning our communities need to solve problems and the learning that occurs in our public schools, but it is difficult to know where to start. Indeed, this was one of my concerns when I first joined a Kettering Foundation research exchange focused on civic education. I had spent much of 2004 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, working alongside teachers who were exploring ways of using National Issues Forums (NIF) issue guides and deliberation in their classrooms. After a promising year of engaging students with NIF, I had expected teachers to seek out additional opportunities for integrating public issues and deliberation in their classrooms. Yet three years after our work together, little evidence of public deliberation could be found in the

## Public Learning in Public Schools

school. In part, this was because many of the staff involved in the project were reassigned to other schools or had accepted positions in other school districts.

Was this a failed experiment in linking education and community issues, or are schools just resistant to the type of work deliberation demands? While it is tempting to answer yes to both questions, I believe such a response overlooks the important work done in Lancaster and, more recently, in other communities across the United States.

Several years later, I am still involved in Kettering's ongoing research on civic education. My colleagues in this research have been able to sustain and deepen their work with deliberative decision making in ways that reinforce connections between communities and their public schools. Through rich conversations with these educators, I have come to recognize how an education rooted in deliberative decision making can transform classrooms, pedagogical practices, and participants' lives. These transformations have not occurred among teachers in isolation or as the result of a single dynamic professional development experience. Changes have occurred, over time, as a result of intentional relationships among educators and citizens committed to exploring potential uses of deliberative practices in classrooms and communities.

In retrospect, I learned a great deal in Lancaster about the potential for classroom deliberation to connect learning in schools with problems facing communities. Our efforts demonstrated how public deliberation can be used across disciplines to support civic learning, while also supporting higher-order thinking and engagement among students.

More recently, through the work of regional teachers' networks—in Birmingham, Alabama; Wausau, Wisconsin; State College, Pennsylvania; and communities on Long Island, New York—diverse groups of people (including practicing teachers, retired educators, school board members, community organizers, and university staff) have come together in Kettering research exchanges to expand their understanding of classroom deliberation. Teachers' institutes associated

with these networks have created ongoing opportunities for K-12 teachers to come together to talk, learn about, and practice deliberation with an emphasis on teachers' authentic interests and needs. In the school systems associated with the teachers' institutes, teachers and students have been able to deepen their work with deliberative decision making over time. This transformation has involved a multiple-year effort to integrate deliberation into school curricula and a sustained engagement between teachers and professional learning partners committed to nurturing networks focused on deliberative decision making and educators' practice-based needs.

Many of the educators I speak to have a difficult time imagining a classroom where students learn and practice deliberative decision making. Some educators question whether general education students can engage in the complex social and intellectual processes that deliberation demands. Others are worried that including public issues and deliberation in their classrooms may limit teachers' ability to cover important content and skills, especially those assessed on state tests.

In the nearly 10 years that I have spent working with K-12 teachers who are using NIF, I have encountered few examples of teachers who report that their students could not deliberate. I have also observed many rich examples of deliberation enhancing instruction and enriching teachers' coverage of core content. This was the case in Lancaster, where high school teachers integrated the study of public issues into several classes and hosted forums in which students deliberated about end of life care. In the week leading up to forums conducted in grade-level groups, classes were abuzz with questions like: What is the meaning of a "good life"? What does the US Bill of Rights suggest about the right to die? And what are limitations of science for solving human problems? In order to answer these questions, students read and interacted with many different kinds of texts: an NIF issue book, a popular biography, the Bill of Rights, the Hippocratic Oath, and media accounts of the contemporary case of Terri Schiavo before the US Supreme Court.

When classroom forums were held, students deliberated about a difficult and often taboo issue with great interest and maturity. In social studies and English classes, students were eager to share their thoughts and experiences and were quick to adopt an analytical mind-set when asked to consider the strengths of others' perspectives and potential consequences of various actions. Gifted students and struggling learners engaged together in powerful conversations that revealed their command of factual information and knowledge rooted in each person's unique lived experience. Students' emotional and intellectual engagement with the issue provided a bridge that supported rigorous application of academic standards.

Based on the reports of educators involved in teacher networks, I have concluded that a single experience with deliberation is not enough to transform classroom practice. Initially, many teachers experience deliberation simply as a new approach to classroom discussion or as a tool to enhance disciplinary learning. However, as teachers remain engaged in teacher networks and receive support from network convenors, their understanding of the role of deliberation in the classroom and in the community changes. Sara Schneck teaches at a Wausau charter school for students considered at-risk of dropping out of school. For four years, she has participated in teachers' institutes convened by the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service. When asked why she continues to use deliberative practices in her teaching, Schneck talks about how it has affected her students' abilities to work with others, across perceived differences. She describes her students' experiences in this way:

After the forum, now I don't see you as a girl who stares me down every day. Now you're someone at the locker I chat with or we're eating lunch together. And that's the forming of a relationship. It changes kids. It forms these new relationships and then they can move on to other places.

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Other teachers, like James Gilmartin of West Islip High School on Long Island, use deliberation in their classrooms because it changes how students view and approach public issues in their lives. According to Gilmartin, a participant in Hofstra University's network, students "become more aware . . . they really start to become critical thinkers in regard to understanding what sources are, and biases, and analyzing where they get their information, whether that information is whole." This type of critical engagement, combined with a willingness to work across differ-

Effects of National Issues Forums (NIF) on High School Students," which concluded that those students who experience deliberation using NIF in the classroom are more apt than other students to reframe issues that are presented to them and advocate for the inclusion of citizens in public decision making.

While the impact of deliberation on student learning is notable, teachers' networks that focus on linking deliberation to classroom practice can lead to important changes in how young people and adults interact with each other in both schools

and communities. On Long Island, for example, teachers associated with the Hofstra teacher network, their students, and fellow citizens, participated in the Deepening Democracy Project during the months surrounding the 2012 presidential election. As part of this initiative, more than 100 deliberative forums were held throughout the community on issues, such as the national debt, immigration, and bullying. According to the project's assistant director, Etana Jacobi, about half of the deliberative forums were held in local schools and half were held in local libraries. The forums not only provided students a seat at the table in discussing important national issues but also raised awareness among youth and adults of students' capacities to

engage as citizens. After a forum on the national debt, a Long Beach high school student commented, "This was the first time I got to hear this is actually an open issue looking for a solution. The only times we've talked about it, I've been talked at and not spoken with." Newspaper and blog accounts of the project publicized the perspectives of youth, presented the students as citizens, and opened doors for continued youth civic engagement. This

contrasts with media portrayals, which often mischaracterize youth as politically disengaged or disaffected.

So what does it take to build bridges between the types of learning our communities need to solve problems and the learning that occurs in our public schools? Stated simply, I believe it takes networks of citizens and educators working together to ensure that real-life public problems are studied in schools and students have the opportunity to engage in deliberative decision making. This is not something most educators can do alone. According to Peggy Sparks, convenor of the Birmingham NIF in the Classroom Leadership Team, bringing deliberation to public schools requires collaboration. The Birmingham teacher network includes more than 40 educators from 2 different school districts, supported by Sparks, local school administrators, a community coalition, university and business partners, and a local history center. In describing the work of this group, Sparks highlights the benefits of having school-community partnerships focused on supporting the use of deliberation with youth:

We have learned that it is mutually beneficial to work together in exchanging services and providing teacher support. Each group has blended their mission, goals and objectives while allowing others to maintain their own identity as we build consensus and build community. Partners, who contribute their resources and reputations, increase the visibility, credibility and sustainability of deliberative democracy in our classrooms.

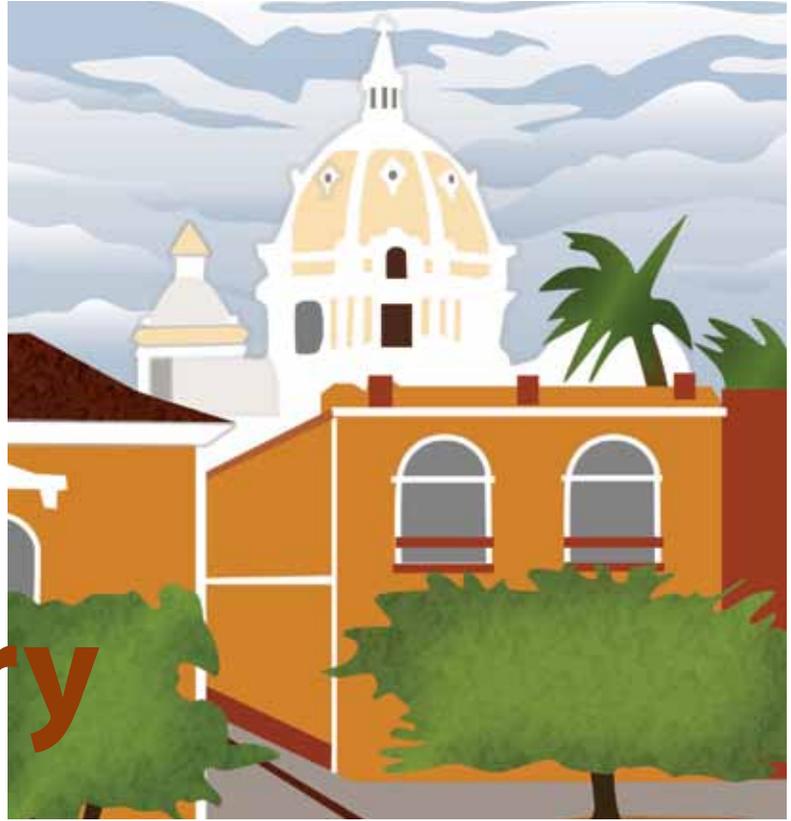
More simply put, Sparks reports, "We have achieved greater results together than any one of us could have alone." This is possibly the greatest lesson I have learned from working with the NIF teacher networks. While many claim it takes a village to raise a child; I now believe it also takes a village to build and sustain opportunities for democratic deliberation in public schools.

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ences, can lead to powerful civic outcomes. Long-term participants in teacher institutes have reported many notable examples of student learning, including an increased interest in politics and public issues, a desire to understand others' perspectives, and improved listening, oral communication, and problem-solving skills. These observations are consistent with the research findings of John Doble and Lara Peng's 1999 study, "The Enduring



# Active Citizenry *in* Cartagena de Indias, Colombia:

## A Case of Citywide Deliberation, Collective Acting, and Civic Capacity Building

*Germán Ruiz and Ileana Marin*

Cartagena de Indias, founded in 1533, is a city of one million inhabitants. Since 2004, some Cartagena communities have been learning about the power of deliberation. People have begun naming issues and framing them to discover different actions that they might take, and they have started to do things to address their problems. In the past, people seldom have taken into account the tensions that exist among the different actions they could take, and they have often failed to consider that there are several approaches to addressing a problem or that there are trade-offs implicit in every decision. This led to the inception and subsequent implementation of a program called Cartagena Deliberates.

### **Deliberation and a New Form of Political Platform**

The polarized discourse prevalent in electoral campaigns is one of the things that stands in the way of deliberation. In such campaigns, citizens cannot see their

way forward past the arguments. The things citizens care about are not usually reflected in political campaign platforms.

In politics-as-usual in Cartagena, candidates typically contract with experts to write their election platforms and governing programs. In many cases, consulting businesses write these programs, which are based on an agenda proposed by the media, the current government, and the results of opinion polls. Cartagena's electoral processes have also been

eral things: 1) the candidate's governing program was the result of a diagnosis of the problems by the communities and through the generation of alternative solutions devised by the communities themselves; 2) the candidate and his campaign team were able to assess and share the diagnosis and the alternative solutions proposed by the citizens directly rather than through intermediaries; and 3) the discourses of the candidate, their conceptualization and argumentation,

were developed out of public deliberation. The media made ample reference to this new manner of developing a political campaign, but perhaps the most important development was that citizens came to understand the importance of their power.

In this campaign, the candidate and his inner circle initially viewed the idea of creating his governing program through

traditional structure of large meetings in which one or several speakers present and the people of the community are just passive attendees. In the forums, people sat in a semicircle so everyone could see everyone else. The moderator started with a brief introduction of deliberative practices, while pointing to the rules of such a conversation. The citizens present in the room were taken by surprise, but when participation was encouraged, it was obvious that the citizens had things they wanted to talk about and they wanted to be heard. In a number of instances during the forums, if one of the traditional leaders tried to dominate the conversation and present the usual discourse, one of the participants would interrupt him or her, explaining that they were there for a different reason: "We came here to find a way to solve our problems," one participant put it.

After an initial phase, in which the deliberative process seemed unusual to the campaign team and the candidate, a protocol was established in which every member of the team assumed a role. For example, the driver of the bus that transported the candidate's election team started to use the language of the forums: he spoke as though what had happened in the forums was something he had known his whole life. It was truly captivating to hear him say, "Did you realize that you could hear a different voice, a voice that wasn't that of the leader?" One of the traditional leaders who began to accompany the forums from his area of influence commented, "This works by itself, people feel like they can talk."

The governing program that was created as a result of the forums reflects the issues that are of real importance to the residents of Cartagena. Moreover, it established alternative solutions that have the potential to contribute to a transformed politics of and for the city.

### Deliberation and Political Discourse

The unfolding of deliberative practices that occurred in the city during the electoral process had the fortune of relying on a candidate who had not been tainted by

**In the 2011 mayoral campaign, one of the candidates, a young business owner named Dionisio Vélez, introduced a new innovation in his political campaign: deliberative forums. This initiative is of particular interest to Kettering because unlike the relationship that elected officials usually have with citizens, this political candidate's campaign was informed by citizens.**

marked by manipulation of a large portion of the electorate through vote buying.

However, in the 2011 mayoral campaign, one of the candidates, a young business owner named Dionisio Vélez, introduced a new innovation in his political campaign: deliberative forums. This initiative is of particular interest to Kettering because unlike the relationship that elected officials usually have with citizens, this political candidate's campaign was informed by citizens.

In this process, more than 4,000 citizens from all areas of the city and different socioeconomic backgrounds actively participated in more than 200 public forums. These forums helped them achieve sev-

public deliberation at a community level with some misgivings. After holding three pilot forums in three neighborhoods in the city, their doubts were cleared away as they were able to fully grasp the potential of deliberation in understanding what was troubling the citizens of Cartagena. For the citizens, it was surprising to encounter a candidate who didn't arrive to make promises to them, offer them incentives, or create a laundry list of the most pressing needs of the people.

In these forums, everything looked different. A moderator and a rapporteur facilitated the conversation, during which the candidate participated like any other citizen. This broke away from the

## Active Citizenry in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

traditional politics. As a business owner, he saw that the city needed a manager, but he did not realize that a leader is much more than a manager because he administers public resources, unites forces, and builds alliances. His discourse changed during the deliberative process. He not only became aware of citizens' concerns, but also elaborated and re-elaborated arguments and concepts that were presented in the forums. Traditional political discourse in the city is filled with commonly used phrases, which politicians adopt, assuming that this is what citizens want to hear.

The discourse that emerged during the forums was different in both its shape and content as it connected to what really mattered to the people. For example, gangs are a problem that concerns the citizens of Cartagena. Some may see gangs as groups of youth who require attention and need opportunities generated for them. Others feel it is necessary to protect the population from their criminal activities and are concerned about police assistance and controlling disruption. Still others look at gangs as a product of marginalization and a lack of control on the part of the state. The discourse that emerged from the deliberative approach revealed that people see this as a structural problem related to quality of education and lack of employment opportunities for youth, which leads to violent behaviors that could have otherwise been prevented, treated, and contained. These vastly different perspectives on the problem lead to different approaches to addressing the problem that the candidate could take into account if elected.

### A New Way to Address Collective Problems

For a population accustomed to seeing politics and democracy as matters related to secret pacts between financiers, candidates, community leaders, and citizens, to start a process of public deliberation where the voice of the communities is heard and taken into account has two effects: 1) it reduces one's sense of being ignored and leads people to feel their

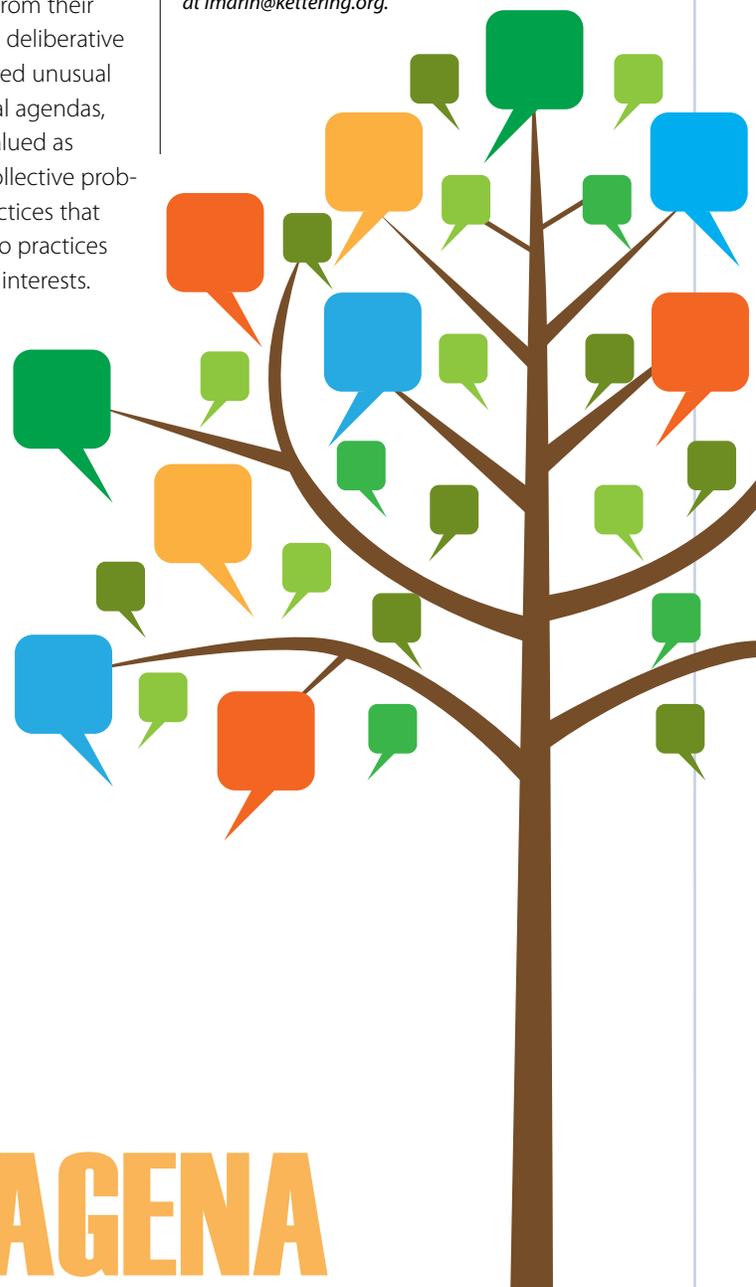
concerns are taken into account and paid attention to and 2) it helps people begin to consider options toward the building of a shared future.

During these forums, everyone involved learned how to understand and put into practice distinct notions of politics, which is usually dominated by political professionals and characterized by the distancing of citizens from their institutions. In Cartagena, the deliberative forums were initially considered unusual practices with hidden political agendas, while later they have been valued as essential practices to solve collective problems: they changed from practices that privilege particular interests to practices that prioritize general shared interests.

Dionisio Vélez was elected city mayor on July 14, 2013. It will be interesting to see how public deliberation will continue to be used in the community.

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# CARTAGENA

# DELIBERATES!



# Online Deliberative Decision Making

Amy Lee

**T**ake a look at newspaper comment sections, Reddit forums, and your friends' Facebook feeds: people are talking past each other, denouncing other points of view, generally hyperventilating. It's easy to get the impression that deliberative decision making doesn't—and simply *cannot*—occur online.

But, actually, this is much like the impression you can get from watching too much cable news—that the only sane thing to do is buy a lot of water and canned goods and move to someplace way, way off the grid. This instinct can certainly strike any of us (particularly when stuck watching something like *Headline News* in an airport), but it isn't entirely rational—and neither is dismissing the

possibility of deliberative decision making online out of hand.

The problem is that there's so much conversation online that is so unproductive and infuriating that it produces what psychologists call an "availability error" in our judgment about it. The partisan bickering (or echo chambers), conspiracy theories, flaming, and general trolling, particularly in political conversation, is so repellent that one can subconsciously come to believe that online political talk can't be anything more than this. But deliberative decision making is a product of conversation, and it is clear that conversation today increasingly occurs online.

Of course, not all conversation produces deliberative decision making. Forums designed to encourage deliberation have ground rules used to promote

active listening and the confrontation of trade-offs and tensions. While it is true that few spaces online promote or enforce such rules of discourse formally, neither do most places of face-to-face talk. And yet, at Kettering, we're gathering evidence that people can indeed find ways to bring deliberative reasoning to their everyday talk. (See Erika Mason-Imbody's article "Deliberative Opportunities in Everyday Political Talk," p. 8.) There is no reason to believe that online conversation cannot do the same or at least be a valid part of an organic deliberative system.

That said, the online medium itself has characteristics that may inhibit deliberative reasoning; for example, the shorter attention span and lack of face-to-face social cues. Again, however, face-to-face situations have their own inherent chal-

lenges—they're just different from those online. All of this means that the arena is ripe for experimentation and innovation. Some of these innovations might take the relatively subtle forms of questions or interventions that can be used in everyday communications online. Other innovations might more directly introduce participants of online dialogues to deliberative decision making in more structured ways.

Kettering is closely observing a number of experiments using a variety of platforms and tools to hold online deliberative forums: Joni Doherty (Franklin Pierce University) recently conducted an A Nation in Debt forum using a time-limited, asynchronous online message board format. Betty Knighton (West Virginia Center for Civic Life) is currently partnering with the design firm Intellitics to test its new online engagement platform, which uses a similar set of tools and features, using the center's early childhood issue framing. We're also observing a diverse range of other experiments with online deliberation—from Lucas Cioffi's [onlinetownhalls.com](http://onlinetownhalls.com) to the Civic Commons (funded by the Knight Foundation), to games and planning platforms developed by the Engagement Lab at Emerson College. We want to learn how these innovators are working to take advantage of the medium and how they are overcoming its challenges.

We will continue to encourage learning from other experiments. Beginning this fall, Kettering will work with San Jose-based Conteneo to develop an online game engine. The objective is to provide an online experience where people can deliberate with others in order to identify or create as much common ground as authentically possible. Many games exist that help citizens to deliberate over a particular *issue*, especially in the fields of planning and budgeting, but this template should enable participants to deliberate over *any* wicked problem, from budget priorities to immigration to privacy. That's the hypothesis, anyway—the experiment will be the games themselves.

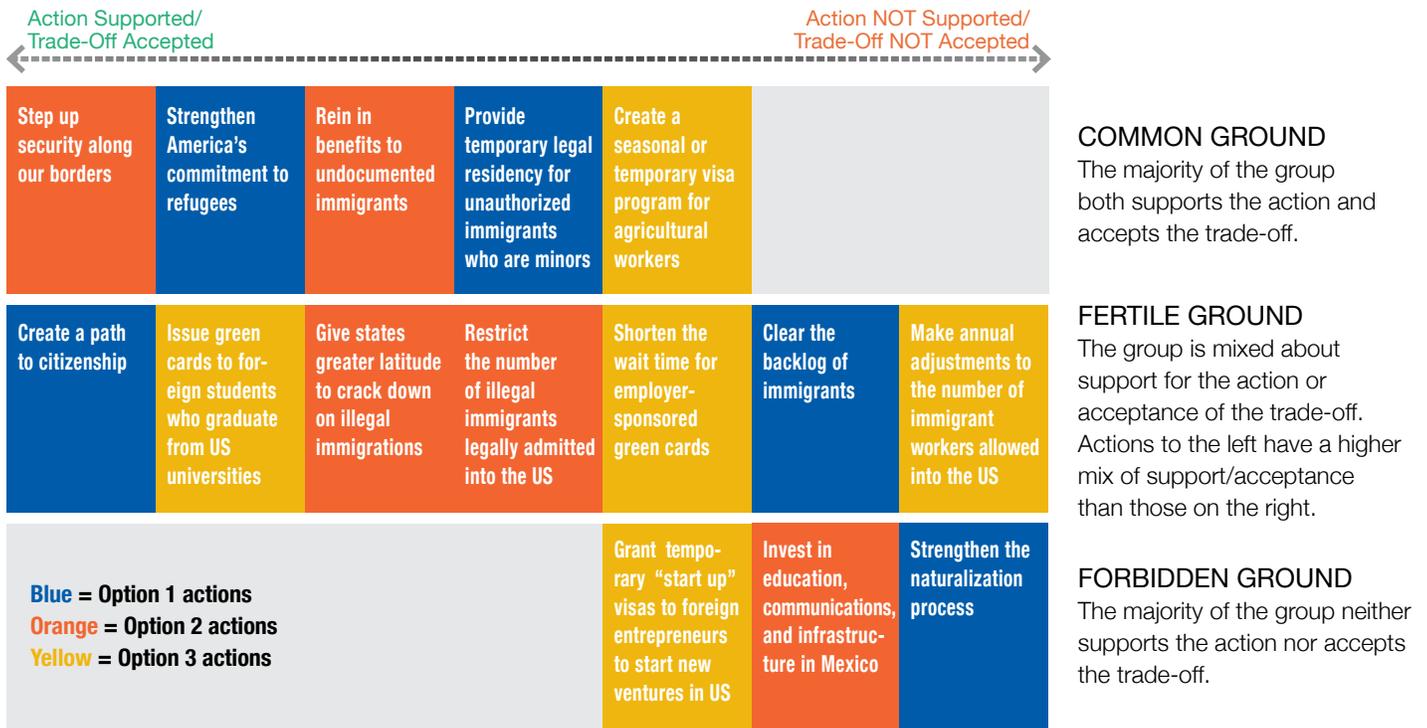
How the game will be played:

- Participants will join a game with no more than seven other participants, plus a moderator. They'll watch the beginning section of a National Issues Forums (NIF) starter video introducing

## Advantages and Challenges of Online Deliberative Decision Making

Advantages	Challenges
Removes location barriers to participation (though does depend on Internet access).	People currently tend to use online communication platforms more for self-expression than active listening.
Removes time barriers to participation (in some formats).	Anonymity can undercut some of the conversational norms that normally support deliberative talk.
Easier to capture conversations and reports about forums.	People most commonly use the Web for shorter interactions than fully deliberative naming, framing, and choice making require.
Popular with younger citizens, which is necessary to keep the deliberative democracy movement vital.	Can be intimidating to older or less tech-savvy citizens, who make up much of the current deliberative network.

## Online Deliberative Decision Making



*An example of the screen participants in the online forum/game based on the NIF issue guide about immigration, A System in Crisis, might see at the end of their deliberation. The game is able to instantaneously compile the final deliberations of each individual and show the group where there is common ground for action, as well as where there is disagreement. The technology allows participants to clearly visualize the results of the deliberation, and, in the next slide, to contrast the results of the conversation they had together with what would have resulted from simply aggregating the individual preferences submitted before the deliberation began.*

them to the issue and the options. Participants will choose and rank their top seven actions. This information is aggregated and saved but not revealed immediately to the participants.

- Then the actual deliberation begins. Guided by a moderator, participants will discuss options just as they would in a regular NIF forum, but via chat (text, not voice, for reasons to be discussed below). At the end of the discussion, participants will be asked to choose the actions they now support and to rank them. They will then be asked to choose whether they accept, reject, or are conflicted about the trade-off and to enter their reasons in a comment box. All of the participants' responses will be combined into a single visual graph that will distinguish three kinds of actions: Those that are supported and involve trade-offs that are acceptable, those that are supported but involve unacceptable trade-offs, and

those that aren't supported.

- This graphic is a visual representation of the common ground they were able to identify or create together. The moderator will then reveal a second graphic showing the pre-deliberative rankings the participants submitted. The group can then compare and contrast the decision the group would have made with the decision they made after deliberating together.

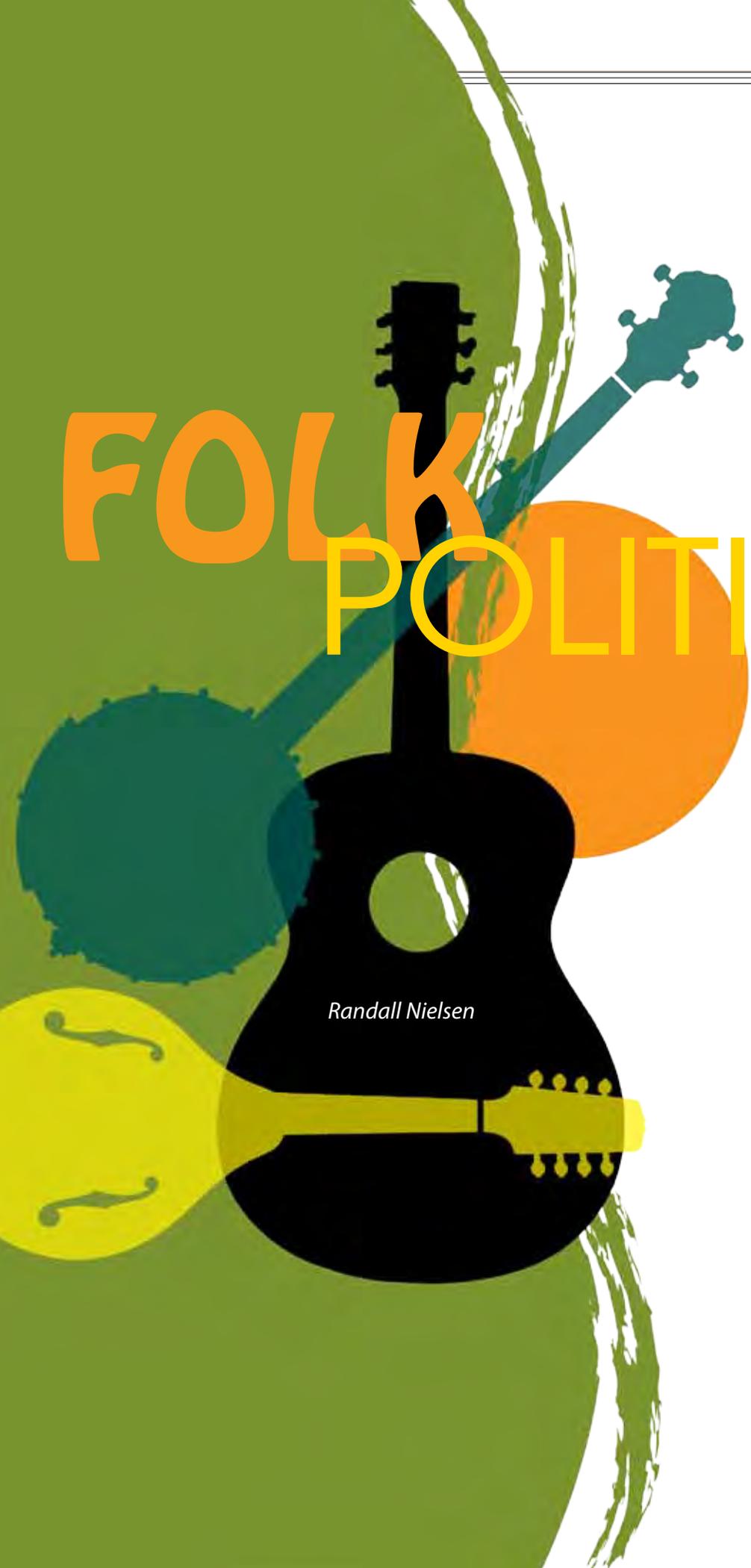
These gamelike features were added to the basic NIF forum design to keep people actively engaged for the length of time it takes to examine options and trade-offs despite the lack of in-person stimuli and to take advantage of the medium's ability to track the evolution of thinking in a much more detailed way than can be done without digital media. This is the reason we're beginning with text-only chat, rather than voice—capturing all those citizen conversations and choices will provide a wealth of data to

analyze. And because the information is captured as it is entered by the participant, rather than being paraphrased or summarized in a moderator's report, we think it may be even more useful for policymakers and citizens alike.

We're designing this game template so that, eventually, any and all NIF issue guides can be used within it. As people participate, they'll be helping us to test it, which will give us new ideas for changes or additions to the game design. Over time, we'll be able to test and compare various iterations and really zero in on the factors that affect deliberation.

We're very excited about the research possibilities—if you have ideas about possible experiments in this area, or know of research we should consider as we begin, please get in touch. Just, you know, no flaming.

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# FOLK POLITICS

Randall Nielsen

*"It's only the last 50 years  
or so that people have  
let TVs and radio do their  
singin' for them."*

—Arlo Guthrie

In the 2008 issue of *Connections*, Bob Cornett writes about the use of traditional music in the education of young people. Readers may not know that Bob, his wife Jean, and their family are renowned among musicians for their annual festival of Appalachian music in Lexington, Kentucky. Their Festival of the Bluegrass began in 1974 and is now the longest running music festival in the region where the distinctive form of music began.

Bluegrass festivals can appear odd to modern concertgoers. They typically run for days rather than hours, and people come as families to camp on festival grounds. Most do not come just to attend a concert. They bring their own banjos, guitars, and mandolins. And they bring their voices—they come to do their own

## Folk Politics

*When Woody Guthrie was singing songs on a Los Angeles radio station in the late 1930s, he would mail out a songbook to people who asked for the words. On the bottom of one page appeared the following:*

**“ This song is Copyrighted in U.S., under Seal of Copyright #154085, for a period of 28 years, and anybody caught singin’ it without our permission, will be mighty good friends of ourn, cause we don’t give a dern. Publish it. Write it. Sing it. Swing to it. Yodel it. We wrote it, that’s all we wanted to do.”**  
—Woody Guthrie

singing. Bob Cornett emphasizes the point. “People really sense that festival belongs to them . . . they really do sense they’re coming to their own show. They’re not just buying tickets to come and sit at an event.” Music at the festival never stops, as people break off into self-organizing ad hoc concerts. Yes, people also go to watch the professionals paid to play on the “main stage.” But it is common to find those professionals at the campground jam sessions as well.

Bob regards the sense of community as a critical part of a good festival and of bluegrass music itself. The music began in places where people came together on front porches to talk and to entertain each other. “The music was a part of it,” Bob says. “It was a self-forming community.” The music that they made on those porches and are still making at the Festival of the Bluegrass is folk music in

Arlo Guthrie’s sense: people are doing their own singing and the music is theirs.

Of course bluegrass music is not unique in its origins. Just a few generations ago most people would rarely experience a stranger playing music for them. Yet music and singing have been fundamental parts of the everyday lives of people of all cultures. Throughout human history, songs have been sung around tribal campfires, in homes, in churches, and in workplaces. Before the advent of the printing press, people used songs to share and make sense of things happening in their lives.

The resulting songs and the insights they contained could not typically be attributed to particular authors. Copyright ownership of music and lyrics is a recent institution. The songs were ever-changing emergent phenomena, appearing at points in time as artifacts of an ongoing conversation—a melodic public voice that took different forms in different contexts while retaining the identifiable plots of human life. The resulting music has taken a *mélange* of intertwining forms: sea shanties and field hollers, rhythmic drumming and complex narrative poems, love songs and murder ballads, drinking songs and gospels, beer hall polkas and street corner raps.

Folk music is thus distinguished not by the subjects of the songs or the instruments used but by the nature of the interactions among people in the process through which the music is created. Folk songs are public works.

As Arlo Guthrie notes, people doing their own singing—the practice of folk songs—has only recently come to appear odd. The nature of music and its roles in the lives of people has changed in fundamental ways in the 20th century. By the mid-1900s songs and stories had become the purview of professionals who write, copyright, and perform them for the folk. Today if you ask people what the term *folk music* means, most will say that it is a professional form of music that takes “everyday people” as the subject and audience.

In this way music, like many other things that people create and exchange, has been transformed in just a few generations. The concept of music as

## ADDITIONAL READING FROM KETTERING FOUNDATION PRESS

something produced for people by professionals was part of a larger 20th-century movement. Many of the challenges people once saw themselves and their fellow citizens responsible for—individual and social security, caring for the ill, the gathering and sharing of news, the education of youth, organizing people for community work—have become widely seen as distinct responsibilities of agencies staffed by experts in the administration of services.

The results have been transformative. Professionally managed programs built affordable housing, provided clean water supplies, constructed schools and hospitals, and built national highway systems. They virtually eliminated many life-threatening communicable diseases. The programs have been so successful that their administrative protocols for analyzing, planning, and evaluating are seen as the paragons of governance.

The meanings of citizenship and community have been transformed as well. People—the folk—have become the subjects of public administration rather than its fundamental actors. As Arlo Guthrie has seen the loss of the folk as players in popular music, we have seen the loss of the folk from the work of popular governance.

What can be done? As shown in this issue of *Connections* the promise is not in the molding of a new kind of citizen for a new kind of politics. People become singers by singing, and they become citizens by doing the things they have always done to shape their futures together. Indeed the most interesting stories seem always to begin with people seeing and building on what is already happening in the life of their community. While folk songs have come to appear relatively insignificant, people never stopped singing together.

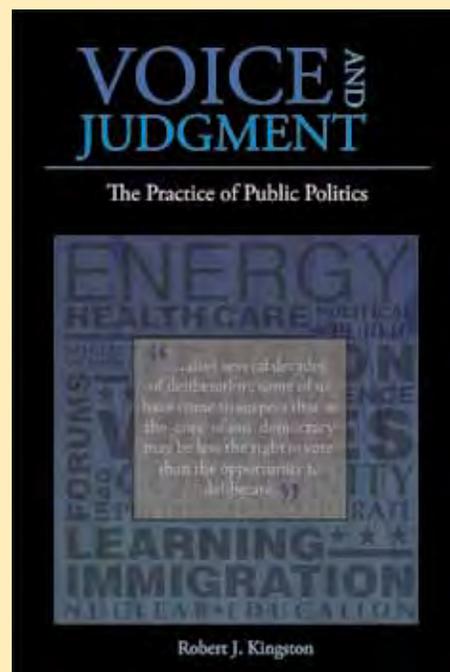
We know what the songs sound like and we know how they feel. We also know how it feels to work together *in concert* with others in community, and that feeling is at the heart of every story in this issue of *Connections*. The stories are songs of folk politics.

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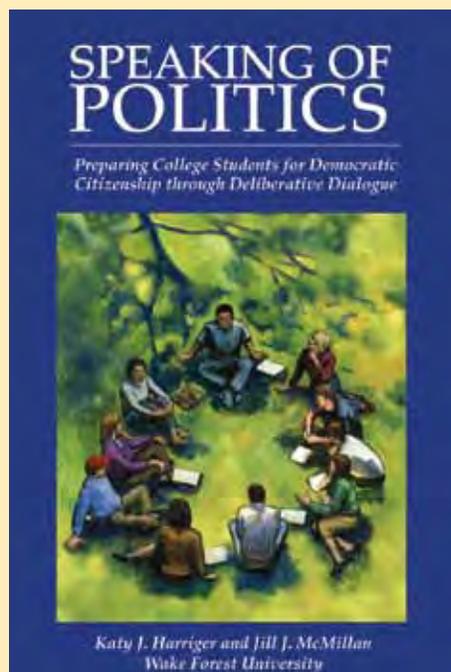
### **Voice and Judgment: The Practice of Public Politics**

By Robert J. Kingston

*In Voice and Judgment: The Practice of Public Politics, Robert Kingston, senior associate of the Kettering Foundation, provides a comprehensive analysis of the continuing public deliberations carried out, nationwide, over the past 30—some years, under the auspices of the National Issues Forums and other organizations. This study responds to critical and controversial domestic and multinational issues that have challenged—and sometimes still do challenge—citizens' relations to each other and their degrees of trust in their elective government. The continuing practice of public deliberation itself reveals, in this book, the slow-paced movement that translates the idea of change into the conceptualizing of public action.*



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\$15.95 • 224 pages • ISBN 978-0-923993-22-1

### **Speaking of Politics: Preparing College Students for Democratic Citizenship through Deliberative Dialogue**

By Katy J. Harriger and  
Jill J. McMillan

*The authors in this study follow a group of 30 college students during their 4 years at Wake Forest University to discover whether their experiences in learning and practicing deliberation might counteract the alienation from public life that has overtaken so many young Americans today. Their research design included classroom learning and practical experiences in organizing and conducting deliberative forums both on campus and in the larger community.*



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