

# CONNECTIONS

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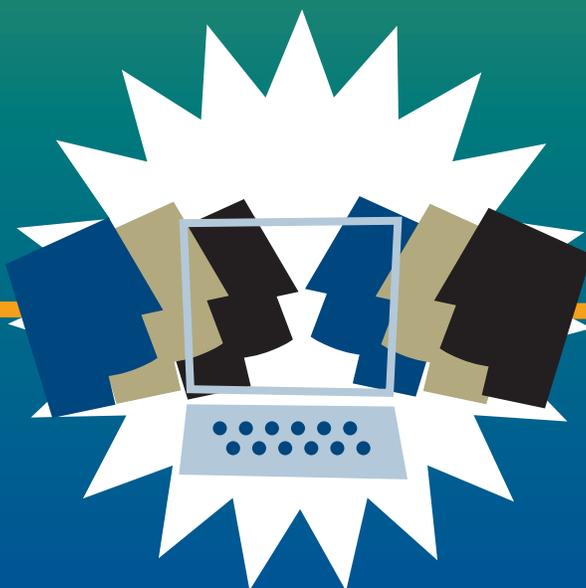


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# The International Civil Society Consortium for Public Deliberation .Org

By Ileana Marin

**T**he International Civil Society Consortium for Public Deliberation (ICSC) is an international, nonprofit network of civic organizations from Europe, Asia, the Middle East, the Americas, and Africa whose main focus is to enhance cooperation in promoting responsible democratic institutions and public deliberation around the world.

In an effort to further define, support, and encourage collaborations within the consortium, its Web site has been redesigned—[www.icscpd.org](http://www.icscpd.org). The new Web site offers a more engaging experience for the members and supporters of the

consortium. By adding new capabilities, its members have the ability to collaborate more effectively, allowing the consortium to provide a more robust presence.

Members of ICSC have been gathering since 1991, when they started meeting informally under the coordination of the Kettering Foundation. Since then, the network has grown to include civil society activists, researchers and academics representing nongovernmental organizations, university departments, foundations, and journals. The following countries are currently represented in ICSC: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Hungary, Ireland, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Kosovo/FRY, Lebanon, Morocco, New Zealand, Nigeria, Poland, Puerto Rico, Romania, Russia, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, the United States, Yemen, and Yugoslavia. Their primary goal is to enhance international cooperation in promoting responsible, democratic, and widely participatory deliberation over public issues around the world. The consortium believes that such deliberation is essential for the reinforcement of democratic progress and welcomes the inclusion of other organizations.

Today, ICSC members regularly participate in exchanges to learn from one another and to strengthen democratic practice by enriching democratic thought.

Our challenge is to spur new interest in the site from people in the network, who historically have not stayed in contact outside of KF-related events (such as the March and June multinational workshops). We aim to create an online space where people in the network can engage and support one another.

In the mid-1990s, I initiated a quarterly newsletter that included news and outlines of reports that a variety of folks in the consortium provided for wider distribution. The newsletter was distributed via "snail-mail."

Then in 1999, I created the first ICSC Web site. The newsletters became a distinct part of this site. But later, due to a lack of response from people in the consortium, it became clear that the collection of materials was too thin for a quarterly distribution. Overall the Web site proved to be a good background for the network's activities; nevertheless, it became obvious that ICSC members were more actively involved in communicating amongst themselves around events organized by KF.

In 2004, I conducted a large effort to update the content of the Web site, while also redesigning it. All member organization representatives were contacted and requested to provide updated materials, as well as ideas for better communication through this Web site. While some updates arrived in a timely manner, the communication within the network continued to lag, except during Kettering events. A message board was added to the Web site with the expectation for more interaction. But only those network members who had always been responsive used the forum.

The new ICSC Web site, however, has been created with the following ideas for best usage in mind:

**1. A content initiative to give members a sense of investment in the site and to develop the roles that we want the international fellows to fill in the ongoing management of the site.**

The fellows have been tasked with making direct contact with each member organization for the purpose of obtaining a responsive point-of-contact, in addition to defining and then acquiring the content used to make up each member's presence on the site.

The advantage we have in this area is that the fellows rotate out approximately every five months. This gives us an opportunity to review the process and make adjustments in between each group of fellows. It also removes the often-tedious aspects of breaking established work patterns and approaches in order to refine the processes.

Additionally, when we become aware of fellows who are not returning immediately to full-time work in their home country, we have the option of enlisting them to continue their efforts on our behalf even after they have left the United States. From the fellows' perspective, and from the perspective of prospective employers, the investment of time in this pursuit demonstrates commitment and work ethic that will contribute to the fellows' attractiveness as potential employees, as well as introducing the fellows' employers to our work.

**2. Capitalizing on already existing groups of former fellows and others who are already collaborating on a variety of initiatives.**

The consortium's Web site has the capacity to offer the initial structures and collaborative environment and tools that people need in such instances.

There is a web of good relationships that have been developing for years with some of the participants in one endeavor or another. Capitalizing on these relationships and using the work papers and communications that were passed back-and-forth in the production of, let's say, a new publication, we can translate this into a model to demonstrate how the site can be used to facilitate collaborations of this type in the future.

For example: A newly drafted chapter has been prepared by a member and is ready for review and input from the larger group. By posting the new chapter in the online Discussion area that has been created for this group, an area that only the assigned participants can access, they can give their feedback in a threaded discussion format.

**3. Defining areas of expertise and professional experience among the members and creating specific centers of collaboration to match, complete with sample material demonstrating experience and expertise.**

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For example: Not all ICSC member organizations have an expertise or focus in journalism, so if a member is looking to start a new initiative in this area, it would be helpful for them to know specifically who in the consortium to contact for collaboration.

The primary mission of the ICSC Web site is to offer yet another venue to exchange insights and knowledge. Any contribution is welcome; we look forward to having various perspectives, as well as many questions, to allow for an authentic and professional exchange to unfold.

*Ileana Marin is a senior program associate at the Kettering Foundation. She can be reached at [imarin@kettering.org](mailto:imarin@kettering.org).*

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*edited by Derek W. M. Barker and David W. Brown*

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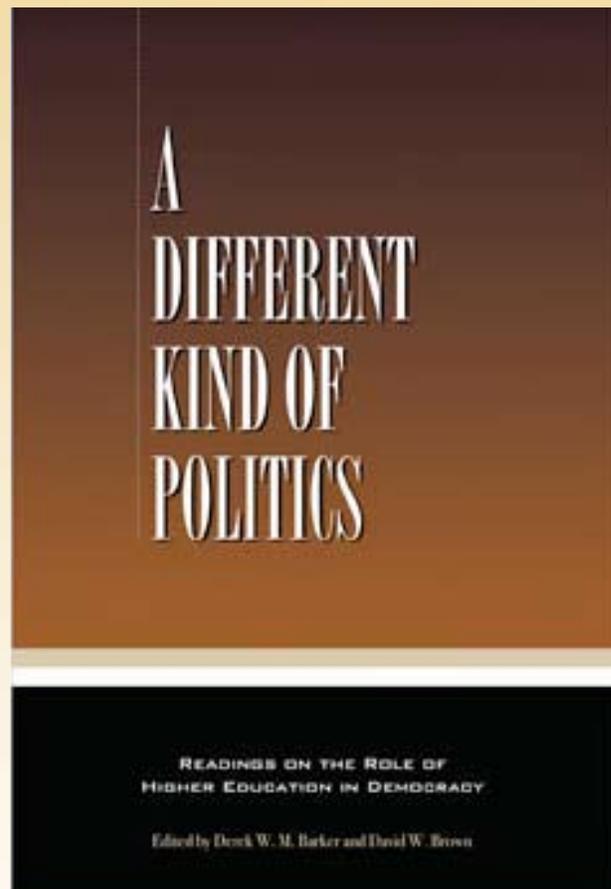
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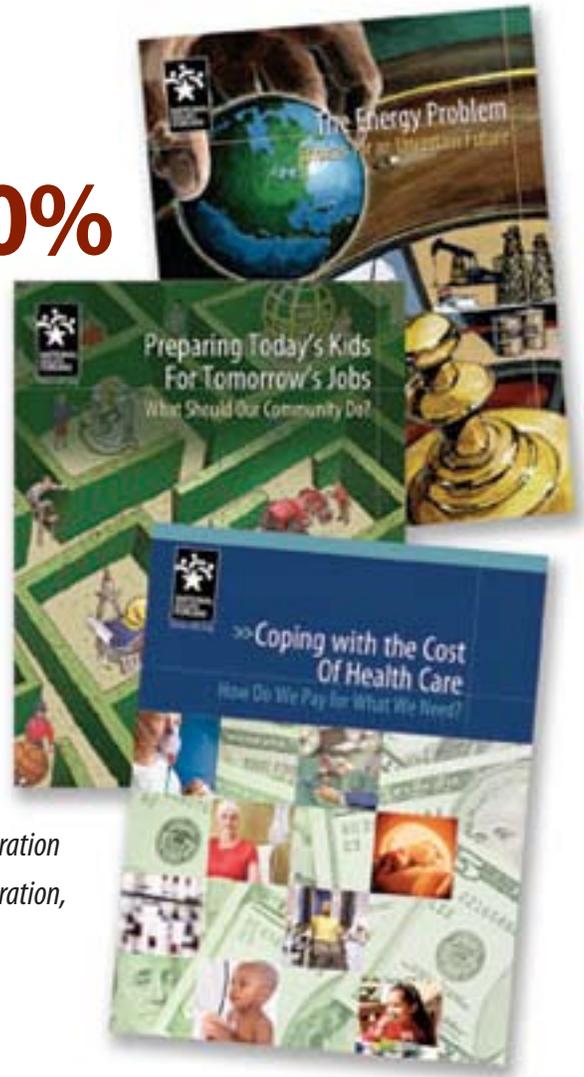
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The foundation today continues in that tradition. The objective of the research now is to study what helps democracy work as it should. Six major Kettering programs are designed to shed light on what is required to strengthen public life.

Kettering is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) research organization supported by an endowment. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation’s Web site at [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org).

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**Editor**

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Lisa Boone-Berry

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200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2799; (937) 434-7300

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6 East 39th Street, New York, New York 10016; (212) 686-7016

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