

THE KETTERING FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

# CONNECTIONS

[www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org)

2010



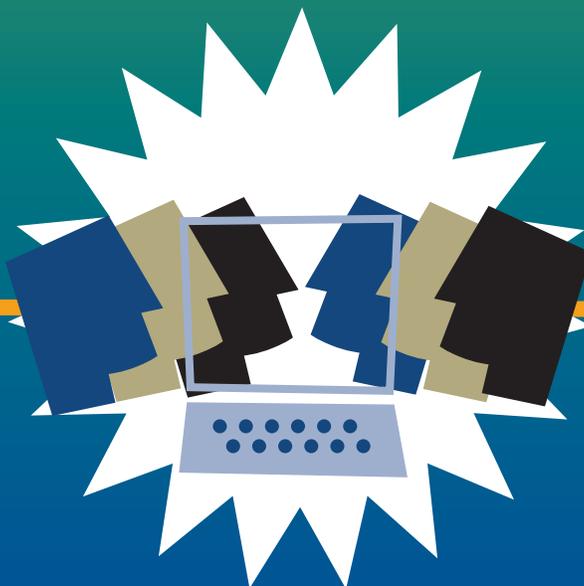
The role of  
**Civic**  
**Organizations**  
in today's  
society

READERS' FORUM

*Your*  
Connection...

*Engage*  
others,  
exchange  
stories

in the Readers'  
Forum on  
[www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org)



# CONNECTIONS

## CONTENTS



### 4 **Tocqueville in 2030?**

*David Mathews*

## **The Challenges of Civic Life**

### 7 **Citizens, Organizations, and the Gap in Civil Society**

*Derek Barker*

### 9 **Developing Democracy's Hubs: Building Local Capacity for Deliberative Practice through Passionate Impartiality**

*Martín Carcasson*

### 12 **Uncovering Organic Community Politics: A View from the Inside**

*Dorothy Battle*

### 15 **Hot Passion and Cool Judgment: Relating Reason and Emotion in Democratic Politics**

*Scott J. Peters, Theodore R. Alter, and Timothy J. Shaffer*

### 18 **Multinational Perspectives on Civil Society**

*Paloma Dallas and Ileana Marin*

## **New Forms of Organizations**

### 21 **How the "Body Politic" Thinks and Learns: The Roles of Civic Organizations**

*Randall Nielsen*

### 24 **The Evolution of Centers for Public Life: NIF and the Return to Civil Society**

*Alice Diebel*

### 26 **Collaborating for Education: The Dynamic Citizenry**

*Connie Crockett*

### 28 **Governmental Agencies as Civic Actors**

*Phillip Lurie*

### 30 **Finding a Different Path**

*Janis Foster*

### 32 **Books Worth Reading**

**Democracy and Higher Education: Traditions and Stories of Civil Engagement**

*By Scott J. Peters, with Theodore R. Alter and Neil Schwartzbach*



# Tocqueville in 2030?

By David Mathews

**K**ettering's annual review of its research in 2009-2010 has looked into what Alexis de Tocqueville reported in the 1830s, the unique American reliance on all kinds of civic associations in its political life. These associations have become today's civic organizations, and they have been changing recently. To be sure, citizens are still forming ad hoc alliances for all kinds of purposes, but major civic organizations may no longer be playing the role they once played as vehicles people could use for their collective initiatives. Citizens and communities have rea-

son to be concerned. So the foundation is trying to look ahead to what are, or could be, emerging as new vehicles for people who want to come together to act on their common problems.

As in past issues of *Connections*, we describe what we are learning from our research review through stories much as a journalist would write. If you would like to read about the concepts behind the stories, see the *Kettering Review*. And the *Higher Education Exchange* explores the implications of our findings for colleges and universities.

The trends affecting the civic or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that make up what has been called the "independent sector" have been documented in a number of studies and reported in various media. Articles in *Connections* will elaborate, but I'll note some of the major trends. For instance, organizations representing particular interests now seem more prevalent than those attempting to represent the general interest. Some argue that protecting individual rights has eclipsed protecting the good of all in our highly litigious society. An extreme case: a park visitor trips on a sidewalk and sues, forcing the facility to close because it can't afford the cost of defending the park against future lawsuits. While individual rights should be defended and special interest groups have a legitimate role, the balance in civil society may have shifted.

Other studies suggest that large civic organizations are less available to the local concerns of citizens and their communities. In fact, some organizations with local chapters that once served to organize the citizenry have closed those chapters and relocated to Washington in order to lobby Congress and federal agencies. And as the government has delegated responsibility for more programs to NGOs, federal agencies may have colonized these independent bodies with their own professional and bureaucratic modes of operation. Even though that was not the intent, compliance with government rules and financial requirements has made colonization unavoidable. This may partly explain why Kettering has found that citizens do not necessarily distinguish between governmental and nongovernmental

---

---

## Tocqueville in 2030?

organizations but see them as much the same. In addition, according to a Harwood Institute study done with the Kettering Foundation (*The Organization-First Approach*), some national nonprofits now tend to be oriented inward, focusing on strategic planning, professionally designed programs, and measures of their impact. As bureaucracies with their own agendas, these organizations are less responsive to citizens and communities that have agendas of their own. Furthermore, pressure on nonprofits to demonstrate the impact of their programs is a disincentive to build local civic capacity because it is more difficult to demonstrate that changes came from their interventions and not indigenous forces.

While rank-and-file citizens aren't up in arms over these trends, less accessible, less responsive civic organizations may be contributing to what we have found, which is a growing anxiety about where the country is heading (a concern certainly heightened by the downturn in the economy) and about people's inability to control their future. These concerns, which we plan to study in more depth, appear to grow out of a perception that the political system isn't working to solve our problems and that there is little citizens can do about it.

Given the trends just cited, it would be logical to expect new types of civic associations and new ways of organizing civic action to emerge in response. Stories in this *Connections* suggest this may be happening. For instance, while many nonprofits are intent on demonstrating their impact and follow best practices to "get up to scale," some small, place-based foundations are defying these conventions. They are not insisting that everything done locally has to follow the conventions and expand. They see value in indigenous projects that begin small and stay small, which can give citizens a greater ability to chart their own course. Other community foundations are interested in how citizens come together to strengthen communities and the roles that foundations can play other than just financial. There are also a few school boards willing to talk about how they can better represent the community to

the school and not just the school to the community. That might lead them into community building and not just community mobilizing. Adding to the list of possibilities, some cooperative extension divisions are turning their attention to building the civic capacities of communities. Perhaps most intriguing of all, we are seeing some governmental organizations trying to function more like citizen-centered NGOs. They aren't just regulating communities; they are trying to rejuvenate them.

All of these initiatives, in one way or another, could give the citizenry more vehicles for acting on their problems. That is what civic organizations are supposed to do. The foundation has been particularly interested in a group of centers for public life that seem to be taking on the role of NGOs. They are reinforcing the practices citizens use in collective work.

These centers started by using public deliberation to inform public opinion and then came to see deliberative decision making as key to effective civic action. For collective work to go forward, someone has to decide what the work will be, and yet there are likely to be disagreements over just what the work should be and who should do it. Who makes these decisions and how they make them is crucial, which is why the centers began by focusing on decision making—the choice work that is a necessary part of collective work. In addition to stories about these centers in this publication, you can find a more complete account in the 2010 *Higher Education Exchange* and in a forthcoming Kettering report by Scott London, tentatively titled *Doing Democracy*.

Adding to the information on civic life that was used in this year's review—thanks to a large international network—the foundation had an opportunity to learn from countries just beginning to create NGOs. Having civic ties and associations is critical in developing countries facing a history of internal conflict and divisiveness. So some countries like Ghana are encouraging the creation of inclusive

community organizations. Communities and voluntary associations are also important topics in China, as evident in a recent article in the *China Daily*:

Social organizations . . . are a relatively new phenomenon. . . . For about 40 years . . . most Chinese . . . had been part of administratively assigned work units for life. The units took care of almost all of their need. . . . People hardly had any need for social networking beyond relatives. The developments of the past two decades, however, have allowed more and more people to move from one part of the country to another for jobs and to shift from one employer to another. Many new non-political organizations, not led by government officials or CPC members, have mushroomed in the past two decades.

---

---

## What would Tocqueville say about our civic associations if he were to visit us again on the 200th anniversary of his trip to see democracy in America?

Our research to date only identifies potentials in new vehicles for civic enterprise. We are left with questions that beg for answers. Irrespective of what we or others think is desirable, what kind of civic organizations do citizens want, and what will they work to create? What roles do people want to play in the political system, and what kind of vehicles will they need to carry them where they want to go? Most basic of all, who is going to control and set the directions for tomorrow's civic organizations? What would Tocqueville say about our civic associations if he were to visit us again on the 200th anniversary of his trip to see democracy in America?

*David Mathews is president and CEO of the Kettering Foundation. He can be reached at [dmathews@kettering.org](mailto:dmathews@kettering.org).*



## The Challenges of Civic Life

### *Editor's Note:*

*The foundation has a longstanding research interest in understanding some of the barriers to democratic practice. During the past year, we have focused our attention on the kinds of organizations that help promote civic skills and opportunities to address collective problems within communities. We are not alone in noting that a once thriving network of civic organizations has become less “civic” and more “organized,” limiting the opportunities for citizens to feel they can make a difference. The first section of this issue describes some of the challenges this change has had on collective self-rule. Derek Barker provides a brief history and literature describing the reduction in civil society. Martín Carcasson highlights the polarized nature of public discourse and describes a center for public life that is passionately neutral, and thus an honest broker of difficult conversations. Dorothy Battle describes the gap between what citizens might bring to collective problem solving and how organizations often fail to recognize these citizen resources. Scott Peters and others relate the need to connect different ways of communicating and how cooperative extension might weave connections among different perspectives. Finally, Dallas and Marin share a series of multinational perspectives on the need for an independent sector; without it, democracy fails to deliver its promises.*

---

**NEW from  
Kettering  
Foundation  
Press**



# SELECTED WRITINGS OF LI SHENZHI

This volume offers the first English translations of work by Li Shen zhi (1923-2003), a leading Chinese statesman and academic, who was a premier architect of China's liberal intellectual revival in the late 1990s and an uncompromising campaigner for political reform and democracy in China.

In these pieces, written between 1991 and 2002, Li Shen zhi considers centuries of history; presents a worldwide view of cultural, social, and political differences; and offers glimpses of the possibilities for a truly free and democratic People's Republic of China.

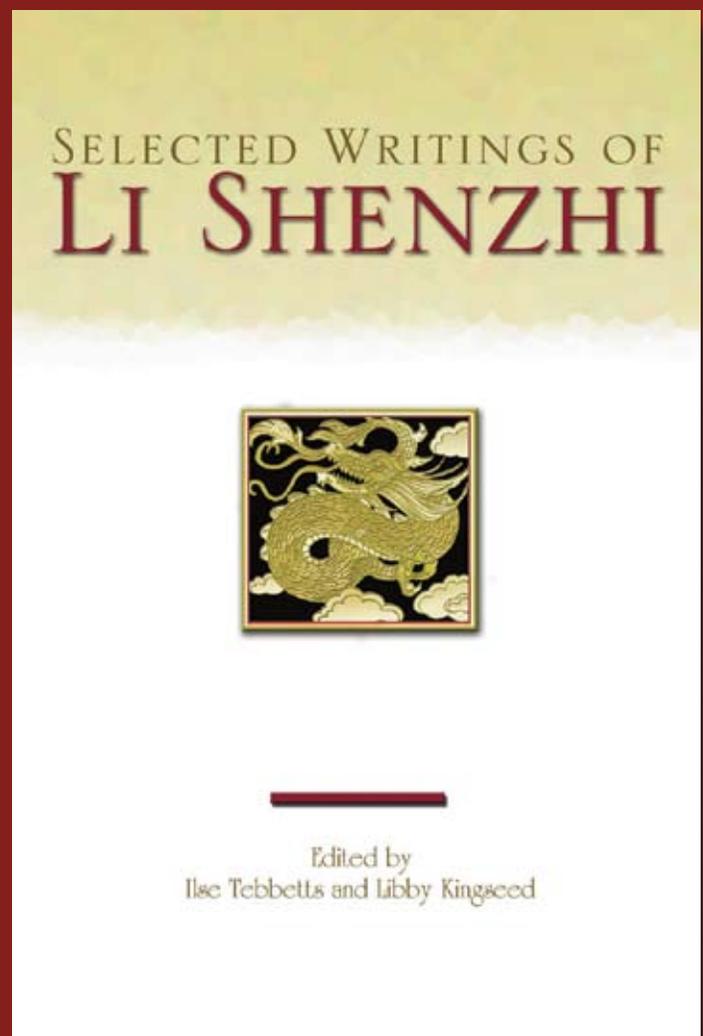
---

### To order this book:

Contact Agency for Instructional Technology at 1-800-600-4060.

You can also FAX your order to 1-812-333-4218 or send an e-mail to [info@ait.net](mailto:info@ait.net).

---



Kettering Foundation Press | 2010

**\$19.95** • 188 pages

ISBN 978-0-923993-29-0

Visit the Kettering Foundation Web site at [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org).

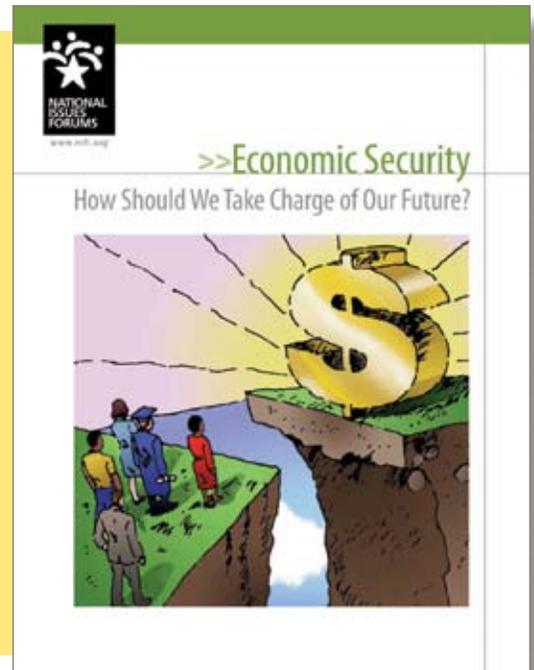
# Hot Topics for Deliberation!

## New NIF Guides

### Economic Security: How Should We Take Charge of Our Future?

As the nation slowly recovers from its worst recession in decades, it is a good time to ask how we can best take charge of the future, so families can feel reasonably secure, parents can help their children prosper, and everyone can move toward a financially stable retirement.

12-page NIF Issue Guide **\$2.49**  
**Free** 4-page Issue in Brief



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

It is time for us to take stock of America's role in the world. How shall we approach the world in an environment of diminished power, increased volatility, more competition, and global threats?

12-page NIF Issue Guide **\$2.49**  
**Free** 4-page Issue in Brief



To order these NIF publications, contact **Agency for Instructional Technology** at 1-800-600-4060. You can also FAX your order to 1-812-333-4218 or send an e-mail to [info@ait.net](mailto:info@ait.net). For a complete listing of NIF issue guides, visit [www.nifi.org](http://www.nifi.org).

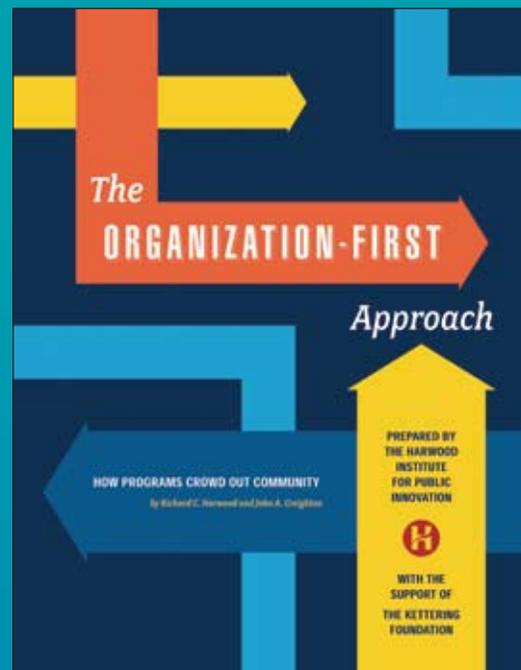
# The Organization-First Approach

## How Programs Crowd Out Community

by Richard C. Harwood and John A. Creighton

*“The Organization-First Approach reveals the troubling trend of nonprofits, foundations, advocacy groups, and others becoming increasingly focused inward, consumed by an ethos of professionalization that leaves little room for authentic engagement or deliberation. The report finds that many of these groups have replaced engagement with outreach and interface with the public around the organization’s programs and agenda instead of the community’s needs or aspirations.”*

— David Mathews, President & CEO, Kettering Foundation



Kettering Foundation and the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation | 2009

**FREE** • 24 pages

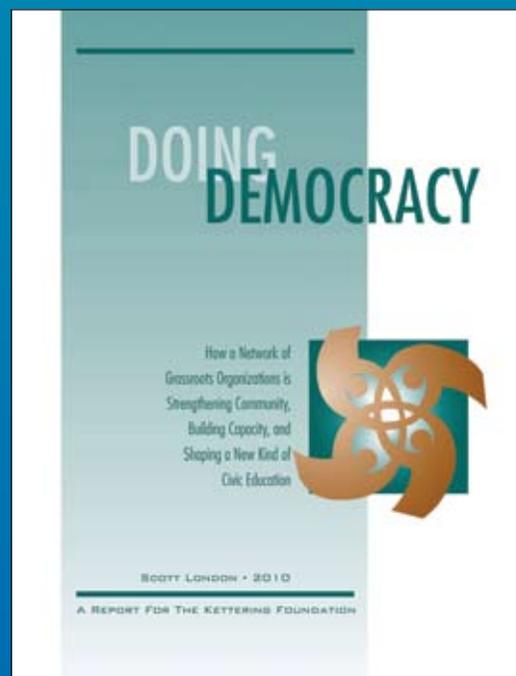
<http://64.239.243.19/>

# Doing Democracy

## A report for the Kettering Foundation

by Scott London

Some organizations are reversing the trend toward a decline in civil society by creating the spaces and the means for public deliberation on a wide variety of local, state, and national issues. This report by Scott London describes how many centers across the country are building the capacity of citizens to tackle tough problems. They promote public life in classrooms by developing skills. And they promote public life in communities by encouraging citizens to work to address problems and by affecting the decisions public officials must make.



Kettering Foundation | 2010

**FREE** • Coming soon

To order these publications, contact **Agency for Instructional Technology** at **1-800-600-4060**. You can also FAX your order to **1-812-333-4218** or send an e-mail to [info@ait.net](mailto:info@ait.net).



© Copyright 2010 by the Kettering Foundation  
200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2799; (937) 434-7300  
444 North Capitol Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001; (202) 393-4478  
6 East 39th Street, New York, New York 10016; (212) 686-7016  
www.kettering.org

Nonprofit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Dayton, OH  
Permit No. 638

Kettering Foundation  
200 Commons Road  
Dayton, OH 45459-2799

The Kettering Foundation, chartered in 1927, is a research foundation rooted in the American tradition of inventive research. Its founder, Charles F. Kettering, holder of more than 200 patents, is best known for his invention of the automobile self-starter. He was interested, above all, in seeking practical answers to “the problems behind the problems.”

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).

---

*Connections* is published by the Kettering Foundation, 200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2799. The articles in *Connections* reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the foundation, its directors, or its officers.

**Editor**

Alice Diebel

**Copy Editor**

Lisa Boone-Berry

**Design and Production**

Long’s Graphic Design, Inc.

**Illustrations**

Long’s Graphic Design, Inc.