Democracy and Economic Change
Your Connection...

Engage others,
exchange stories

in the Readers’ Forum on
www.ketterering.org
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Democracy and Economics</td>
<td>David Mathews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>How Citizens Talk about Responding to Economic Change</td>
<td>Steve Farkas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Discovering Capacity</td>
<td>Harold H. Saunders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Chattanooga Chugging</td>
<td>Ramón E. Daubón</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Journalism as a Civic Practice</td>
<td>Doug Oplinger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Cooperative Extension and Community Development: How Politics and the Academy Mix</td>
<td>Alice Diebel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>University Outreach in Communities: The Limits of Expertise</td>
<td>Joe Sumners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Getting Grounded: An Interview with Linda Hoke on Listening to Southern Communities</td>
<td>Alexandra Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Institutes Using NIF Strengthen Civic Life</td>
<td>Alice Diebel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Experiments in Communicating the Results of Public Deliberation</td>
<td>Phil Stewart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Jordan's Public Forums Initiative</td>
<td>Ibtesam Al-Atiyat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Effects of Deliberation on Secondary School Students: The Experimental Sowing the Seed of Deliberation Project in Nigeria</td>
<td>Moshood Folorunsho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>The International Civil Society Consortium for Public Deliberation.Org</td>
<td>Ileana Marin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Books Worth Reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democracy as Problem Solving: Civic Capacity in Communities across the Globe</td>
<td>By Xavier de Souza Briggs, reviewed by Zach Vanderveen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies</td>
<td>By Scott E. Page, reviewed by Dana Walker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the fall of 2008—just as the nation began feeling the enormity of the current economic crisis and the federal government began gathering its response—the Farkas Duffett Research Group was conducting a series of four focus groups with Americans on economic issues. The purpose of the research, conducted in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation, was to understand: 1) how citizens name and talk about the economic issues that affect their lives and their communities; and 2) how people see the possibilities for organizing and acting with others to deal with economic challenges. Here’s what we found.

When it comes to the national economic picture, citizens talk as if they are bystanders. The focus groups were an unusual chance to track the evolution of an economic crisis in “real time” through the eyes of ordinary Americans. Core financial institutions were experiencing meltdowns, the federal government responded with unprecedented initiatives to salvage them and press attention was intense. But ironically, the people in our focus groups talked about the situation as if they were bystanders. They were alert, they were worried, and they were already taking steps to prepare their households for harder times. But no one thought they had any say or influence over what was going to happen on the national stage. Most did not even understand the basics of what was happening.

I think it’s to the point now where there’s nothing anybody sitting in this room can do. We can change things years from now . . . but right now we’re kind of just along for the ride. All they’re doing is arguing in Washington. I just think we kind of got to see what happens, and then decide where we go from there, just be ready to change what you need to change. (Centerville, OH)
People make personal adjustments in hard times.

Certain aspects of people’s immediate economic circumstances—for example, whether they have a job, what happens to their 401K plan—are beyond their control. A bit of fatalism is perhaps inevitable.

If I get downsized—if I get laid off, I get laid off. There’s nothing I can do about that. . . . Just going to go. Do I worry about it each and every day? I probably could but I don’t, because if the day comes, the day comes, you know? If it’s going to happen, it’s going to happen. (Westchester, NY)

But people do have some sense of control over their personal economic situations. In the focus groups they talked about saving more and spending less, for example, by taking fewer or more modest vacations, shopping more carefully or postponing major purchases. They may not be able to control whether they get laid off, but they can prepare in case it happens.

Citizens seem better equipped to understand local economic trends in their communities.

Citizens have their own take on the economic strengths and weaknesses of their communities, using their own leading economic indicators: How busy are the restaurants? How crowded is the mortgage company’s parking lot? People also understand the interconnected nature of their local economy—knowing for example that abandoned property in their neighborhood will affect the value of their home or that the opening of a megastore will push out the local mom-and-pop retailer down the street.

In places like Sunnyvale, California, they refer to the role of talent, innovation, or diversity when talking about economic growth in Silicon Valley, making connections that are not obvious or simplistic. In Greenville, North Carolina, they traced the trends transforming their community in recent years.

Greenville was a farming community at one time, but because of the hospital, we have gotten all these different people from everywhere. If you’ve got different people from different walks of life, and those people can come together, and communicate together, I mean that’s what you want. You got different cultures, and it’s more interesting. (Greenville, NC)

Values often drive citizen discussions of economic concerns.

Incidentally, we found that when people talk about local economic issues, values and core priorities are often behind the talk. For example, after discussing their resistance to a new stadium for a while, residents of a Raleigh, North Carolina, suburb revealed that beyond concerns about traffic was their sense that for several years their neighborhood had been losing its identity, that they were becoming a community of strangers. Meanwhile others in the focus group pointed to the benefits that change had brought—better roads, rising property values, and greater diversity. In Centerville, two focus group participants contested what should be done with undeveloped property in their area: one thought it should be developed so that jobs and the tax base improve; the other wanted to keep the area wooded—green space and biodiversity were more important to her, she said. It may not be newsworthy, but it is worth keeping in mind: questions of economic change are intimately tied to values in people’s minds.

Citizens look to leaders to respond to economic challenge—even when talking about the local economy.

In our focus groups, people found it hard to articulate how they could respond civically, together with others, to economic challenges. Even when the challenge is
local, citizens often defer economic issues to leaders to handle.
You can’t control any of this stuff…. I’m completely powerless. Not unless you’re involved and you’ve been tasked with some sort of resolution on that, or you’re an expert in the area, or you’re some sort of contributor to the committees at the end of these things.
(Sunnyvale, CA)

In Centerville, when the conversation turned to what to do to help Dayton’s downtown area, several participants began playing the role of “amateur experts”—what they would do if they had the responsibility and power to act. But they quickly returned the role of leadership—the real power, they believe, is in the hands of leaders.
You tell me to go dig a ditch, I’ll dig the ditches as hard and fast as I can, but [we need] to have visionary people who have an idea of where they can leverage the community, leverage the Dayton area for the future. I don’t think Dayton has had that type of leadership.
(Centerville, OH)

Impressions from a Washington, D.C., roundtable

On March 11, Kettering convened a panel of discussants to talk about the problem of creating opportunities for citizens to engage economic challenges. Some of the issues raised echoed the focus groups findings:
• Several comments during the panel discussion noted that the most promising level for citizens to have an impact was the local community.
• Several discussants brought up the relationship between the American public and its leaders and organizations. One commentator rhetorically asked: “What do leaders need of us?” The point was that citizens have a role to play but that leaders need to call upon them—an echo of what we found in the focus groups.
• Related to the above was the sense that mediating institutions through which citizens would make an impact were necessary—local government agencies or nonprofit or religious organizations. And indeed, when people reported civic action on economic issues in our focus groups, they talked about channeling their actions through their local church or a local governing board or homeowners association. Otherwise, it was very difficult for them to imagine having an impact in concert with other citizens.
• Part of the panel discussion revolved around the issue of moral culpability. Some felt that people needed to vent grievances before moving forward—“How did we get to this point anyway? Who is responsible for the economic mess?” Others felt that such a conversation would get muddled and that it was more important to talk about what to do next rather than how we got there. The “who-is-to-blame” conversation also surfaced in the focus groups we conducted. In Centerville, for example, some people talked about irresponsible neighbors who took on mortgages they could not afford, spent frivolously, and lost their homes to foreclosure. But others countered with personal stories about having to resist the entreaties of institutions—banks, mortgage companies, and credit card companies—that had been busy exhorting them to take on debt they could not afford.

Responding to Economic Change

Efforts to foster conversations among citizens need to be structured around two questions: what is the problem in our community? and what can we do about it? Research has identified some promising topics: sprawl and economic growth in communities; homes and foreclosures; jobs and unemployment; tax revenues and public services in local jurisdictions; saving and spending, consumerism and credit; and concerns about younger generations: their work ethic, capacity to endure hard times, and their American Dream.

But the research also points to a number of challenges to fostering public engagement of economic concerns. First, economic challenges shift from community to community, making the naming of concerns to be addressed a distinctly contextual problem. Moreover, economic issues are in many ways moving targets.

Citizens typically can feel like victims or bystanders, rarely like people who can act with other citizens to influence the economic destinies of their communities. The question, what can we do about it? can imply readiness to roll up your sleeves or a shrug of the shoulders.

In the fall of 2008, the downturn was mostly defined as a financial crisis. Now jobs are the key public concern. Indebtedness and overconsumption were a key topic of the discussions then—but experts are now more worried about cutbacks in consumer spending. It’s not inconceivable that six months from now the context will shift again.

But perhaps the greatest challenge for citizens is to recognize that they have something to say in the economic realm, an issue where the ground has been ceded for so long to the experts. Citizens typically can feel like victims or bystanders, rarely like people who can act with other citizens to influence the economic destinies of their communities. The question, what can we do about it? can imply readiness to roll up your sleeves or a shrug of the shoulders.

All of this means that innovation and experimentation will be necessary and that the only guaranteed result is that there will be surprises. At the end, the most important question we will ask is, what do we learn from the process?

Steve Farkas is president of Farkas Duffett Research (FDR) Group. He can be reached at sfarkas@thefdrgroup.com.
A Different Kind of Politics: Readings on the Role of Higher Education in Democracy

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

A Different Kind of Politics presents Kettering Foundation research on the democratic implications of the civic engagement movement in higher education. The contributions reflect on efforts to treat students as active learners and engaged citizens, undertake new forms of professionalism that treat citizens as the primary actors in politics, and build genuinely democratic relationships with communities.

Contributors featured in this book include:

Harry C. Boyte, Center for Democracy and Citizenship
David D. Cooper, Michigan State University
Allison N. Crawford, University of Georgia School of Law
Sean Creighton, Southwestern Ohio Council for Higher Education
Joni Doherty, Franklin Pierce University
William J. Doherty, University of Minnesota
Albert W. Dzur, Bowling Green State University
Katy J. Harriger, Wake Forest University
Matthew Hartley, University of Pennsylvania
Elizabeth Hollander, Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service
Nan Kari, Center for Democracy and Citizenship
Abby Kiesa, Tufts University
David Mathews, Kettering Foundation
Jill J. McMillan, Wake Forest University
KerryAnn O’Meara, University of Maryland
David Pelletier, The Pennsylvania State University
Scott J. Peters, Cornell University
Jay Rosen, New York University
Marguerite S. Shaffer, Miami University
Nan Skelton, Center for Democracy and Citizenship
Adam Weinberg, World Learning/SIT

ISBN paper 978-0-923993-28-3 • $10.95

To order the book:
Phone: 1-800-600-4060
FAX: 1-937-388-0494
E-mail: ecruffolo@ec-ruffolo.com

Visit the Kettering Foundation Web site at www.kettering.org.
Receive from 10%, 20%, up to 30% Discount on NIF Issue Books

Order today and Save on Any of These NIF Issue Books!

Day Care Dilemma
Environmental Protection
Illegal Drugs
Gambling
Protecting Our Rights, Internet Jobs, Preparing a Workforce
Alcohol
Alcohol, abridged
A Nice Place to Live
Violent Kids
Violent Kids, abridged
Money & Politics
Money & Politics, abridged
Racial & Ethnic Tensions
Racial & Ethnic Tensions, abridged
Racial & Ethnic Tensions, Spanish
Terrorism
News Media and Society
News Media and Society, abridged
New Science of Food
New Challenges of American Immigration
New Challenges of American Immigration, abridged
Making Ends Meet
Social Security Struggle
Democracy's Challenge
Life and Death Decisions
Americans Role in the World
The Energy Problem
Too Many Children Left Behind
The $9 Trillion Debt, Breaking the Habit
What Is the 21st Century Mission for Our Public Schools?
Preparing Today's Kids for Tomorrow's Jobs
Coping with the Cost of Health Care
Coping with the Cost of Health Care, abridged
Unit cost $3.90

For a complete listing of NIF issue books, visit www.nifi.org.

0-49 receive 10% discount
50-99 receive 20% discount
100+ receive 30% discount

To Order:
Call 1-800-600-4060
FAX 1-937-388-0494
E-mail ecruffolo@ec-ruffolo.com

www.nifi.org
HAVE YOUR SAY... Discuss the ideas
explored in Connections

in Kettering’s Readers’ Forum at
www.kettering.org
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.

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
Randall Nielsen

Copy Editor
Lisa Boone-Berry

Design and Production
Long’s Graphic Design, Inc.

Illustrations
Long’s Graphic Design, Inc.

© Copyright 2009 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