

THE KETTERING FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

# CONNECTIONS

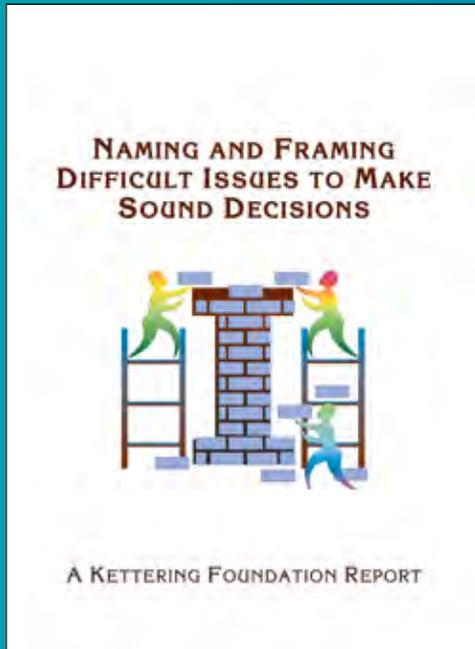
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2013

**CITIZENS**  
in  
Democratic  
Politics



## ADDITIONAL READING FROM KETTERING FOUNDATION



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

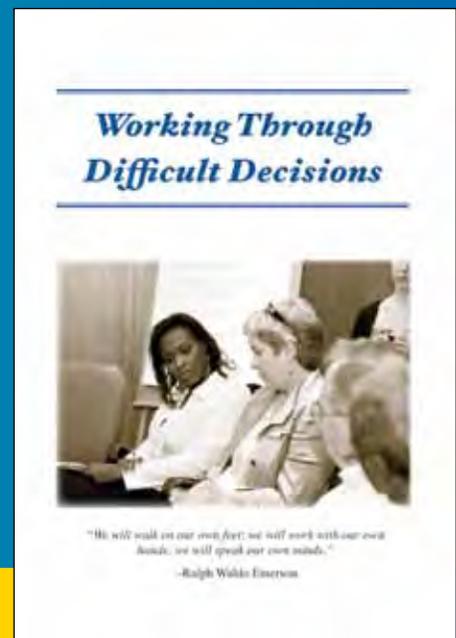
*Naming and Framing Difficult Issues to Make Sound Decisions* is a report for people who want a stronger hand in shaping their collective future and recognize that this requires working through disagreements on what the future *should* be. Replacing an earlier publication, *Framing Issues for Public 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  
**FREE** | 12 pages



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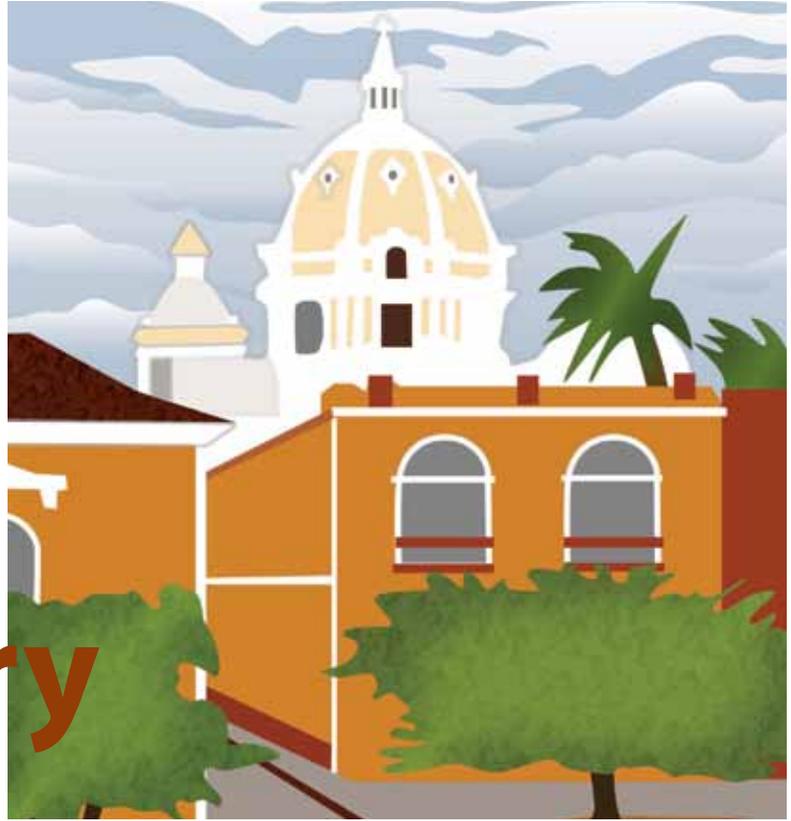
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# Active Citizenry *in* Cartagena de Indias, Colombia:

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

*Germán Ruiz and Ileana Marin*

**C**artagena 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

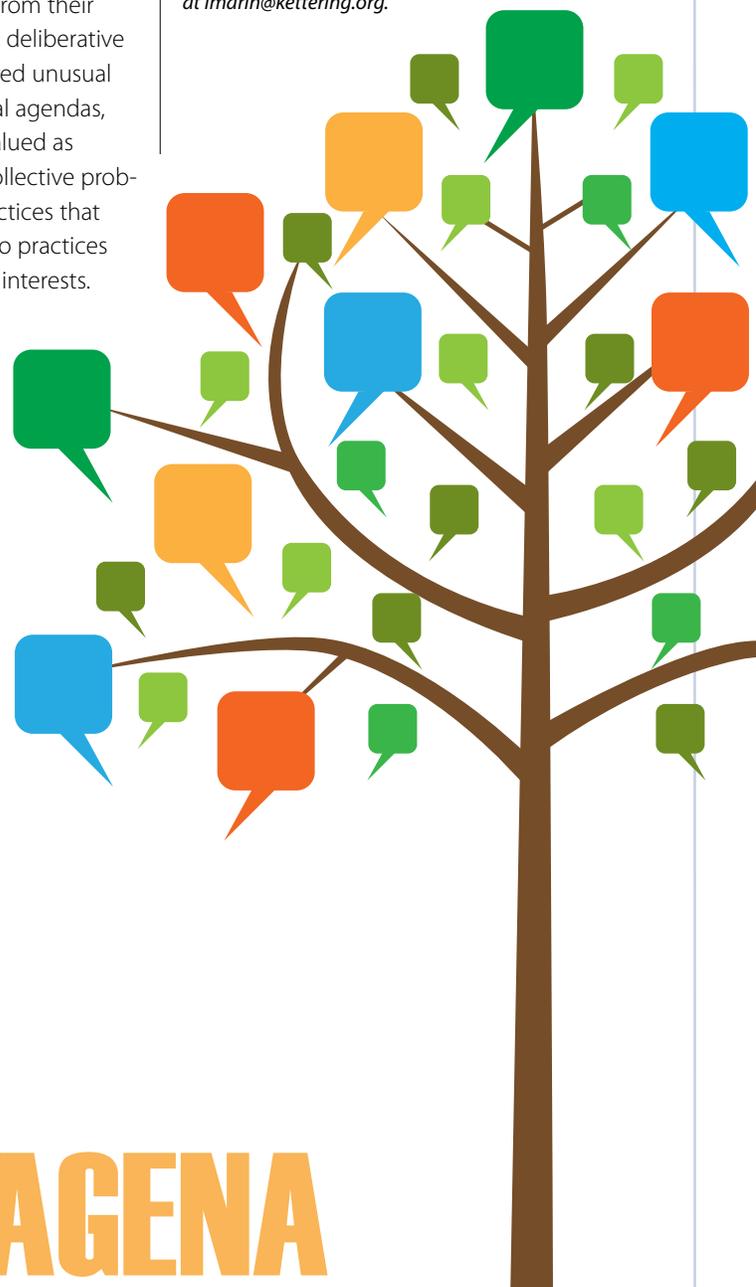
concerns are taken into account and paid attention to and 2) it helps people begin to consider options toward the building of a shared future.

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!



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