

CONNECTIONS

An Annual Journal of the Kettering Foundation | 2021

To Work Together, Learn Together

By David Mathews p. 2

Libraries as Islands of Trust

By Ellen Knutson p. 30

**Getting to We: Bridging the Gap
between Communities and Local
Law Enforcement Agencies
in Virginia**

By Brian N. Williams p. 53



THE PUBLIC AND INSTITUTIONS:
Fractured or United?

The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering's primary research question is, what does it take to make 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.

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

© Copyright 2021 by the Kettering Foundation
ISSN 2470-8003

Executive Editor
Melinda Gilmore

Editor
Maura Casey

Copy Editors
Laura Carlson
Amy Dragga

Design and Production
Long's Graphic Design, Inc.

Illustrations
Long's Graphic Design, Inc.



CONTENTS

- 2 **To Work Together, Learn Together**
David Mathews
- 11 **Citizen Space and the Power of Associations:
An Interview with John McKnight**
Scott London
- 17 **How Participatory Journalism Created
Collaborations between Law Enforcement,
Assault Survivors, and Community
Advocates**
Sammy Caiola with jesikah maria ross
- 25 **Community Building in an Old-Fashioned Way**
Maura Casey
- 30 **Libraries as Islands of Trust**
Ellen Knutson
- 38 **Rural Life: What Keeps People from
Getting Involved?**
Lorie Higgins
- 46 **Redefining Public Safety:
Professionals and the Public**
Valerie Lemmie
- 53 **Getting to We: Bridging the Gap
between Communities and Local Law
Enforcement Agencies in Virginia**
Brian N. Williams
- 59 **Democracy Is a Snowball Rolling Down a Hill:
The 2021 Kettering Multinational Symposium**
Wendy Willis
- 66 **Catalyzing Change: Unleashing the Potential
of Communities**
Richard C. Harwood

Redefining Public Safety: Professionals and the Public

By Valerie Lemmie



In February 2018, the Kettering Foundation convened the first in a series of learning exchanges with communities where citizens were leading efforts to redefine public safety as a shared responsibility between professionals and the public. There were four meetings over three

years, with the last meeting taking place on Zoom after the May 25, 2020, Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd sparked worldwide protests.

People from communities in New York, Virginia, Georgia, Florida, Ohio, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Northern and Southern California participated in this research. The foundation was interested in gaining insights on how these communities overcame the mutual mistrust that burdens the relationship between citizens and government as well as the ways public officials worked with citizens as coproducers. Each community had at least three representatives that included elected and/or appointed officials, members of community-based grassroots organizations, and police officers. The community teams reflected gender, race, immigrant identity, and age diversity.

Most of the communities had experienced a police-involved incident that sparked community protests and demands for changes in police policies, procedures, and practices. Additionally, many of the community representatives had participated in public protests and came to recognize that the change they wanted to see required them to engage with police, public institutions, and other citizens to make

visible, sustainable change. They could not leave this responsibility to government alone. While protests garnered public attention and created a sense of urgency, changing the system required public work—citizens and government working in democratic and complementary ways to keep communities safe.

Learning exchange participant John Thompson, whose friend, Philando Castile, was shot and killed by police in Falcon Heights, Minnesota, in July 2016, expressed it this way: “I went from an angry protestor to an angry activist. Now I’m like a walking magnet. I took two hundred people to the polls with me to make a difference. I wanted to make a difference. I kind of shifted because I saw a lot of positive things happening. . . . I started wanting positive change and positive people came into my life. I’m changing stuff and I’m learning.”

For participants, the foundation provided a safe space for team members to reflect on the work needed in their respective communities, learn from the experiences of other communities wrestling with similar challenges, energize their batteries after what was often difficult and challenging work in the trenches at home, and think creatively about engaging more of the public in the work to be done. All were open to learning and noted that Kettering’s

democratic practices provided a useful framework for their work. Many participants expressed that being part of a diverse group of people from across the country representing different views, opinions, and experiences was helpful in enhancing their internal group dynamics and teamwork.



People from communities in New York, Virginia, Georgia, Florida, Ohio, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Northern and Southern California participated in this research. The foundation was interested in gaining insights on how these communities overcame the mutual mistrust that burdens the relationship between citizens and government as well as the ways public officials worked with citizens as coproducers.



While struggling to discover how to create shared responsibility for public safety between the community and governmental institutions, they discovered that the term *public safety* was contextual and meant different things to different people, often depending on one's job or the community in which they lived or worked.

communities safe, or does the public have a role to play? What would it look like to share responsibility for keeping communities safe?

Participants grappled with a fundamental insight in the foundation's research: the need to address the problems behind the problem. While struggling to discover how to create shared responsibility for public safety between the community and governmental institutions, they discovered that the term *public safety* was contextual and meant different things to different people, often depending on one's job or the community in which they lived or worked. For example, some participants felt safety could be increased by reducing gang activity, while others noted that safety involved changing neighborhood conditions by improving schools and economic opportunities and by providing services like after-school programs for youth. Others believed a lack of safety was related to historic patterns of racial segregation where the safety of minority groups was deprioritized or infringed upon. They were actively excluded from determining policing practices and policies, and their interactions with police were primarily related to calls for service or traffic stops. Many participants believed that defining safety required adoption of cultural humility, an attitude of respect when

NAMING THE PROBLEM

In our meetings, learning exchange participants shared how easy it is to name an enemy—police—and how difficult it is to name the problem they were trying to solve. Is the problem police behavior or is there something more fundamental that needs to be addressed? Is there a difference between policing and public safety, and if so, what is it? Are police alone responsible for keeping

approaching people of different cultures and a commitment to actively engage in a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique.

In addition to struggling with how to name the problem, discussing potential options to ensure public safety also proved challenging. Participants questioned the extent to which public space is truly public and whether naming the problem as public safety limited the role of citizens to work with government in nonpublic spaces. Concerns were also expressed about what constitutes public spaces. Who is invited and who is excluded when thinking about safety in public spaces? To what extent is a public space shared and when is it used to exclude certain people or groups? Is there a perceived need to keep it safe from someone else? Are restaurants (like Starbucks) public spaces? One participant noted, “A lot of people think that public space, a public park in a residential neighborhood, for example, is their space—it belongs to their residents/group and it’s not the public’s space. If others use the park, they feel that they’re not safe because this is their space, rather than understanding that it’s a public space where we should all be able to feel safe.”

Other issues participants worked through in their respective communities included the extent to which

communities “police themselves” and act on norms and expectations that are agreed upon within that community, what happens prior to the arrival of the police that leads to their presence (the feeling that a situation can’t be handled by the community), which problems require police response and who defines them, and the role of power in police-community relationships (how much is a function of power dynamics). A community activist summarized the challenges associated with creating safe communities this way: “What I’m really trying to get at is less the police response issue and more about what this says with respect to how we [citizens] could work in our community. Is this a community problem, one where there could be more conversation, more dialogue, more deliberation?”

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING

In most of the communities participating in the learning exchange, citizens recognized their agency—the power to act—after first experiencing anger and frustration over a controversial police action. Citizens wanted to do something to demonstrate that their community was better than a single act by police that was contrary to their values and expectations. Often their first action was to demand change by the police



department and city council, usually through organized protests and marches. When nothing changed (which it didn't initially), citizens mobilized and moved from protests outside city hall to advocacy and representation of citizen interests inside city hall. It was in their role as advocates for change, representing their neighbors, that our civic participants started to negotiate with local government officials on what change might look like.

In several communities, this led to a renaming of policing from an institutional responsibility to safety as a community responsibility. To continue working on public concerns beyond policing, many learning exchange participants who began as protestors and advocates later ran

successfully for public office and/or created and led community-based organizations. Each of the communities noted that while protests brought attention to issues, it was when they worked with city hall, other citizen groups, and NGOs that substantive change occurred and was institutionalized. In Kettering's research terms, these communities demonstrated that by renaming and reframing issues, creating an environment for honest conversations, and reaching agreement on the work to be done together (public deliberation), they were able to share responsibility for ensuring community safety (complementary public acting). Most importantly, all spoke about plans to create a culture of democratic public engagement.

One of their key insights was that safety (and most public problems) had to be understood in the context of competing values that were often in tension with one another. This insight encouraged them to talk with others in their communities about the values that were in tension, opening the possibility for broader public engagement through deliberation (some called it community forums or conversations) as a vehicle to discuss trade-offs and find common ground on which to act.

Learning they were not unique in the problems they faced helped participants become more open to other perspectives. Community teams were inspired to act after hearing commonalities and differences in problems and problem-solving approaches from around the country, especially from people they identified as “from the other side of the fence,” people who had perspectives that community teams were critical of, or people they could not previously empathize with.

The broad range of knowledge and perspectives presented encouraged participants to build on the experiences of other communities and explore new opportunities for complementary acting, despite the challenging nature of the issues they worked on. Observing the passion and persistence demonstrated by

others encouraged community teams to keep working together to address their shared problems, despite their differences.

Public work is hard work. There are no quick fixes or easy answers. It requires the whole community, not just the experts or public officials to address what are often termed “wicked” community problems. When communities find common ground for action and solutions they deem viable, they own the results and honor their responsibility as citizens. They know their contributions matter, that their work adds value to the quality of community life, and that they are creating a culture of democratic and complementary work with others in their community. Some of the innovative ideas and



In most of the communities participating in the learning exchange, citizens recognized their agency—the power to act—after first experiencing anger and frustration over a controversial police action.



Public work is hard work. There are no quick fixes or easy answers. It requires the whole community, not just the experts or public officials to address what are often termed “wicked” community problems.

approaches participants explored were relatively small and simple, yet on further examination were quite profound. For example, they had a robust discussion about the power of the simple act of smiling as a strategy to erode hostility and fear.

While most of their activities related to creating safe communities were associated with the tangible goods produced from public work, there was agreement that the intangible work of fostering mutual recognition, empathy, cultural humility, and an appreciation of history was critical to building trusting relationships and common ground for action. They also recognized the importance of having a safe environment in which they could share

experiences and learn from others—a community of practice—where there was trust and participants could share what they were struggling with, and where they felt vulnerable without judgment and shared mutual concern and respect. A city manager and elected official may have explained it best:

Part of what I had been probably searching for, for quite some time, has been a group like this or a place because in our respective communities—well, at least I’ll speak for myself—oftentimes, you find yourself in a place to where it’s very difficult to maintain optimism. It’s very difficult to find kindred spirits. It’s very difficult to find allies when the forces that are out there seem to be working so much against the direction that you’re trying to forge. . . . I believe that folks that are doing this kind of work—the work that we do in our communities—need a safe place, need a place where we can go and really be able to connect with people outside of your environment, wherever it’s at.

We plan to reconvene these communities to see if the coproduction of public work between citizens and public institutions remains visible. ■

Valerie Lemmie is the director of exploratory research at the Kettering Foundation. She can be reached at vlemmie@kettering.org.



200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459; (937) 434-7300
444 North Capitol Street NW, Suite 434, Washington, DC 20001; (202) 393-4478
www.kettering.org

Kettering Foundation
200 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459