



**RESEARCH ON CIVIC CAPACITY:
AN ANALYSIS OF KETTERING LITERATURE AND RELATED SCHOLARSHIP**

Derek W. M. Barker, PhD, Program Officer, Kettering Foundation

Angela D. Allen, PhD, Independent Scholar

Alexandra Robinson, Research Associate, Kettering Foundation

Foday Sulimani, Research Associate, Kettering Foundation

Zach VanderVeen, PhD, Independent Scholar

Dana M. Walker, Independent Scholar

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Introduction

This working paper aims to not only synthesize recent work by the Kettering Foundation and related scholarship on the topic of community, but also to analyze the literature through a conceptual framework that has been developed through our research. The central theme of the research that we review is the “civic capacities” of communities: the characteristics of communities that allow them to come together across their differences to face their challenges. These civic capacities have to do with how a community functions *politically*. The term refers to how well different sectors of a community—businesses, government agencies, schools, civic organizations, diverse groups of citizens, and so on—recognize interrelated interests so they can function together, across their different goals and perspectives. Development of civic capacities allows communities to address the political dimensions of complex problems, such as the inevitable value conflicts that must be worked through and trade-offs that must be made when a community faces a difficult decision. They allow for communities to overcome problems of organization and collective action, when the short-term interests of each are counter to the long-term interests of all.

Civic capacities are distinct from, and complementary to, technical capacities of institutions and organizations. Technical capacities, such as money, communications technologies, scientific planning, and administrative efficiency, while important in their own right, are apolitical in nature, in the sense that they have little direct effect on the political work of bringing diverse groups together to make difficult choices and act collectively. Technical capacity is an important resource in getting things done, but it is most effective when joined with civic capacity, so that all the different entities in a

community are brought into coordination with one another. Ideally, a community will be strong in both its civic and technical dimensions.

Civic capacity includes the basic elements of “social capital” that provide a foundation of fellow-feeling and togetherness, such as a community’s social networks and shared norms of trust and responsibility.¹ However, civic capacity is more than just a general sense of community as a “cure-all” for society’s problems.² Rather, civic capacity also includes the ability of communities to deal with conflict and make difficult decisions, collective tasks that are the essence of politics. Civic capacity thus also includes the norms, habits, skills, and public spaces within a community that enable collective decision making and acting together to accomplish change.

A recurring problem of large-scale political systems is the persistent invisibility of communities’ civic capacities. Rather than a property of discrete organizations, civic capacities are dispersed over entire communities. In contrast to institutional actors, this means that communities have few distinct entities to tout their successes or advocate on their behalf. Communities evolve incrementally over time and work together in complex interactions, in ways that cannot be easily measured or observed under controlled circumstances. Communities may be tempted to internalize popular narratives of citizens as passive, powerless, or apathetic, and fail to see their potential for playing a more active

¹ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

² Xavier de Souza Briggs, *Democracy as Problem Solving: Civic Capacity in Communities across the Globe* (Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2008), 9.

role. All this means that the dominant understandings of political systems, in scholarly literature and in the practices of organizations and institutions in society at large, are likely to privilege improvements in technical efficiency over the building of civic capacity.

As a result of this systematic neglect of civic capacity, a fundamental challenge to democracy may be a “misalignment” between the technical and civic capacities within political systems. In principle, the two can coexist, with each addressing the appropriate tasks. However, across fields like public policy, urban planning, and philanthropy, the dominant practices reduce complex problems of political conflict and democratic judgment to matters of scientific planning, objective measurement, and rational modeling. In such cases, technical capacities go beyond their appropriate functions and colonize the political tasks of decision making and coping with conflict that are best addressed through the civic capacities of communities. Although communities may have the potential to come together and work through difficult issues, institutions within them appear to be better equipped to act in technical modes of resource administration, strategic planning, and service delivery. This misalignment may not only fail to create civic capacity, it could actually further weaken it by approaching political problems as technical in nature, treating communities as passive and reinforcing relationships of clientelism and dependency. Organizations may not, on their own, be able to create “willy-nilly” cultures and habits of democracy, but we are hopeful that they can at least become better aligned with the work citizens need to do in communities and act in ways that nurture their civic capacity.

Drawing on scholarly research as well as Kettering Foundation workshops and partnerships, we hope to clarify the political importance of civic capacity and make the case for renewed attention to how communities work. One of the central hypotheses we seek to test is that the civic capacities of communities and technical capacities of institutions must function together for a democracy to work as it should. Why are these civic capacities so important? What are the problems that seem to require them? How do civic capacities work in practice? How can the technical and civic capacities of communities be better aligned with each other? To focus the discussion of these questions, the sections that follow articulate the key components of civic capacity and review several specific case areas that illustrate the concept of civic capacity and its importance in practice.

The first section begins with a comparative overview of the basic concepts of civic and technical capacity. This piece illustrates the differences between civic and technical capacity by considering several of their key dimensions, such as the relative roles of citizens and professionals. By understanding the conceptual distinctiveness of civic capacity, we hope to provide a framework for inquiry into how citizens do their work, together with the technical work of organizations and institutions, to build strong and flourishing communities.

With this broad concept of civic capacity in mind, we next turn to two types of capacity that may be especially important. We begin with the capacity of communities to reach collective decisions. Although a scholarly literature has emerged on the concept of “deliberative democracy,” most empirical research in this area focuses on specialized decision-making techniques implemented in formal, controlled settings. We distinguish

this focus from decision-making practices that occur through the informal spaces and networks of a community's civic life.

Similarly, the next piece considers the qualities of communities that enable them to change and adapt to the problems they face. Political systems have a natural inertia that makes change difficult. The dominant theories of change often focus on questions of "leadership" and the characteristics of special authoritative individuals that inspire others to act. We describe a series of attempts to shift instead to focus on the broader characteristics of communities as a whole that allow for change experimentation, leading to a distinctive concept of "civic innovation."

To further demonstrate the distinction between civic and technical capacities, and their role in a balanced and functional democracy, the next set of discussions applies this framework to selected case areas. We begin with a review of research on the role of communities' civic capacities in response to disaster situations. This section explores the disaster relief literature to see whether attention to these crises might help to make visible similar aspects of civic capacity that may be difficult to observe in the everyday life of communities.

The next section applies the civic capacity framework to the emerging literature on the "civic engagement" movement in higher education. Although universities routinely tout partnerships and outreach efforts with organizations in their communities, we review evidence that the dominant models of service delivery and dissemination of information seem to be focused on building technical rather than civic capacity. A final piece applies the civic capacity framework to communities' educative capacities. This

suggests a larger concept of community-based education as distinct from the conventional model of public education as a school-based activity.

This paper would not be possible without the contributions of the many scholars and innovators that have informed the research of the Kettering Foundation. The first draft of this paper was presented at the Communities around the World meeting of the Multinational Workshop Week at the Kettering Foundation, March 29-31, 2010. Participants also provided helpful feedback in the Workshop on Building Relationships between Universities and Communities, May 26 and 27, 2010, and the Workshop on Place-Based Philanthropy and Democracy, May 27 and 28, 2010. We have found in all of these discussions that the concept of civic capacity resonates with practitioners of citizen-based democracy around the world and across varied professions and institutions. We hope that this document will continue to inform conversations around practical efforts to improve civic life and to strengthen democracy.

Civic and Technical Capacity

The concept of “civic capacity” is beginning to emerge as central for making sense of the ability of citizens in communities to come together across their differences to solve problems. For example, Xavier de Souza Briggs argues that civic capacity is essential to the “management of collective life beyond the formal instruments of government.”³ John McKnight’s asset-based approach to community development was developed after years of focusing on institutions, rather than the capacity of citizens to work together.⁴ Elinor Ostrom suggests that many problems require polycentric forms of governance, in which local community actors work together with large-scale institutions to manage collective resources.⁵ Civic capacity contrasts with the technical capacities of institutions that address problems but without contributing to the civic life of the community. Both civic and technical capacities are necessary in the modern world. However, Kettering Foundation's research asks whether an overemphasis on the creation of technical capacity makes it difficult for communities to develop civic capacity. These

³ Xavier de Souza Briggs, *Democracy as Problem Solving*.

⁴ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Evanston, IL: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, 1997).

⁵ Elinor Ostrom, "Polycentric Systems as One Approach to Solving Collective-Action Problems," in *Climate Change and Sustainable Development: New Challenges for Poverty Reduction*, ed. Mohamed Salih (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2009).

two concepts can be further compared across several key dimensions to provide a framework for understanding community.

Role of citizens. The primary difference between civic and technical capacities is the role that citizens play. The technical aspects of collective problems often require professional actors in a top-down role, disseminating knowledge or providing services to clients. If the civic dimensions of such problems are ignored, there is little for citizens to do. At most, they must be informed of the positions of experts so they can vote between them or hold elites accountable in some way. If, on the contrary, citizens have civic capacity, they can deliberate about what needs to be done and act accordingly. As David Mathews writes, “Deliberation is a process of decision-making that is tied to action. While it doesn’t necessarily result in agreement, it can produce a general sense of direction and point to shared or interrelated purposes.”⁶ It is in the process of deliberation and action that a community comes to public judgment about what should be done.⁷ They can then engage in what Harry Boyte calls “public work.”⁸ John McKnight contrasts these two roles of in terms of “clients” and “citizens,” or as passive recipients of services and cocreators rather. He argues that we often suffer from the “institutional assumption” that people are

⁶ David Mathews, "Can Public Life Be Regenerated?" in *Measuring the Impact of the Nonprofit Sector* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2001).

⁷ Daniel Yankelovich, *Coming to Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

⁸ Harry Boyte and Nan Kari, *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996).

clients to be served by institutions, such as hospitals, universities, or governments, rather than being citizens who can actively shape their collective future.⁹

Role of professionals. While citizens are critical in development civic capacity, professionals tend to be the key actors in harnessing a society's technical capacity. Acting through centralized institutions and complex organizations, elites perform top-down tasks, such as disseminating knowledge or providing services for clients. If the political aspects of collective problem solving are not fully understood, people may be shut out of politics, and technical solutions are likely to dominate. The ideal of expert rule has led to institutions that are, as Harry Boyte writes, "abstract, bureaucratic, and largely impervious to culture change."¹⁰ However, when the civic dimensions of collective problems and the capacities that are required to address them are more clearly recognized, professionals play a more circumscribed role: "Community is the living context for evaluating expert knowledge." That is, in Boyte's words, experts should be "on tap," not "on top." For example, Boyte argues that in higher education, academics should see themselves not as producers of knowledge for citizens to consume but as fellow problem solvers that have as much to learn from citizens as they have to teach. They attempt to align their expertise with an active public rather than solving problems

⁹ John L. McKnight, "Regenerating Community: The Recovery of a Space for Citizens," in *IPR Distinguished Public Policy Lecture Series* (Chicago, IL: Northwestern University, 2003).

¹⁰ Harry Boyte, *Civic Agency and the Cult of the Expert* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 2009).

on the behalf of passive clients. Albert Dzur terms this role of experts “democratic professionalism,” in which experts are self-critical of the limits of their knowledge.¹¹

Organizing model. Because each kind of capacity requires citizens and experts to play distinct roles, they are characterized by contrasting relationships. Civic capacity depends upon “horizontal” relationships between citizens rather than “vertical,” or top-down, relationships through which experts act. Top-down relationships have come to dominate many different areas of life. For example, as James Scott argues, in the designing of cities or organization of transportation, “officials took exceptionally complex, illegible, and local social practices ... and created a standard grid whereby they could be centrally recorded and monitored.”¹² These top-down relationships are necessary for centralization, but they do not help and may even hinder citizens from acting together. This depends upon horizontal relationships from citizens to citizens.

Horizontal networks that connect citizens, civic organizations, and institutions empower citizens to deliberate and act. David Mathews writes that, “For public life to flourish there must be space, that is, events and meetings, where people can join to talk about and organize action on common problems. There must be institutions and

¹¹ Albert Dzur, *Democratic Professionalism: Citizen Participation and the Reconstruction of Professional Ethics, Identity, and Practice* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

¹² James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

associations willing to organize those gatherings.”¹³ These networks of associations are what have enabled some communities to respond to changes, like economic crises, while others stagnate, as Vaughn Grisham documented in a detailed study of economic development and civic life in Tupelo, Mississippi.¹⁴

Key assets. As John McKnight has noted, a community’s recognition of its own assets can be a crucial step in addressing its challenges.¹⁵ In a large-scale and complex society, however, technical capacity is often located in centralized institutions and specialized organizations that are external to the communities that are affected. Civic capacity, in contrast, depends upon assets within communities that enable collective actions, such as diverse networks of association, skills and habits of decision making, and shared norms. Civic capacity is related to social capital, a term that refers to the general social connectedness of communities.¹⁶ However, the concept of civic capacity promises to further enrich discussions of social capital with particular attention to the civic assets that play a role in the *political* tasks of deciding and acting collectively.¹⁷ We discuss a few of

¹³ Mathews, "Can Public Life Be Regenerated?"

¹⁴ Vaughn L. Grisham Jr., *Tupelo: The Evolution of a Community* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 1999).

¹⁵ McKnight, "Regenerating Community: The Recovery of a Space for Citizens."

¹⁶ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

¹⁷ Mathews, "Can Public Life Be Regenerated?"

these specific civic capacities in the following sections on community practices of decision making and civic innovation.

The similarities and differences between civic and technical capacity are summarized in the following table:

Dimensions of Civic and Technical Capacity

	Civic Capacity	Technical Capacity
Role of citizens	Cocreators	Clients/Recipients
Role of professionals	“On tap”: public work <i>with</i> , civic professionalism	“On top”: service <i>for</i> , dissemination, outreach
Organizing model	Citizen to citizen (horizontal)	Expert to citizen (vertical)
Key assets	Community networks (social and political capital)	Expertise (intellectual capital); economic resources

Community Decision Making: Practices and Techniques

A key component of a community's civic capacity is its ability to reach collective decisions on difficult issues. Over the last 20 years, we have seen a burgeoning scholarly and practical interest in deliberation. While there is by no means a unified perspective on deliberation, scholarship has been surprisingly consistent in its focus on analyzing deliberative procedures within structured, institutionally sponsored deliberative fora. Research on deliberative democracy has focused primarily on experiments to provoke deliberation through a variety of approaches, including formal forums. However, emerging research, both in the scholarly literature and in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation, is beginning to recognize that such approaches are only one small part of a larger deliberative system.¹⁸ This research sees deliberation not as a *technique* to apply to issues of public concern, but as a community *practice* occurring within the context of community life and through which public concerns are named and collective decisions made. The context of deliberation, therefore, cannot be easily bounded in time and space because it happens in informal gatherings, ad hoc associations, and the discussions people have when they make meaning of their everyday experiences.

¹⁸ Jane J. Mansbridge, "Everyday Talk in the Deliberative System," in *Deliberative Politics: Essays on Democracy and Disagreement*, ed. Stephen Macedo (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999); David Mathews, "Afterword: Ships Passing in the Night?" in *A Different Kind of Politics: Readings on the Role of Higher Education in Democracy*, ed. Derek W. M. Barker and David W. Brown (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2009).

Deliberation as Technique

In the academy, by the early 1990s, democratic theory took a so-called “deliberative turn” toward a new conception of democracy.¹⁹ Offering an alternative to traditional views of democracy that see the nature of politics as a process of will formation determined by competition among autonomous individuals, deliberative theorists argue that politics is a process of reasoned, norm-driven discussion to produce fair and legitimate outcomes. This alternative is certainly appealing and has become a dominant viewpoint, spawning a whole subfield of political theory scholarship and empirical studies. Concurrently, the nonprofit and philanthropic sector has increasingly organized and supported various practical efforts in deliberation and democratic governance.²⁰ This nonprofit support has resulted in the organization of thousands of local and national deliberative forums, the training of hundreds of forum moderators, and the staging of televised events.²¹

¹⁹ Jon Dryzek, *Discursive Democracy: Politics, Policy, and Political Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁰ Matthew Leighninger, "Funding and Fostering Local Democracy: What Philanthropy Should Know about the Emerging Field of Deliberation and Democratic Governance," (Denver, CO: Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement, 2009).

²¹ Michael X. Delli Carpini, Fay Lomax Cook, and Lawrence R. Jacobs, "Public Deliberation, Discursive Participation, and Citizen Engagement: A Review of the Empirical Literature," *Annual Review of Political Science* 7 (2004).

Empirical research, for example, has examined the process, effects, and political significance of forums initiated by nonprofit organizations, such as *AmericaSpeaks*, Everyday Democracy, and the National Issues Forums Institute.²² In the governmental sector, policymakers, and public administrators have reported on their own cases of deliberation in administrative decision making, urban planning, city budgeting, and economic development.²³ While the types of forums produced in these different sectors vary in their focus and intended outcome, each use specific techniques to encourage a particular kind of discourse including: formal background materials developed for prenamed (mainly federal) issues; moderators trained explicitly to facilitate forums; and technical experts to provide information to forum participants.

Research on deliberative democracy has gained a deeper, more nuanced understanding of participatory politics from efforts to promote and study formal deliberation. This restricts the study of deliberation in several ways: the critical actors in deliberative events are the moderators and convenors; the issues upon which citizens deliberate are (commonly) national in scope and framed by convenors; the locations are formal, consciously organized deliberative events; and the hoped-for outcome of deliberation is to affect government policy. As a consequence, the prevailing depiction of

²² John Gastil and Peter Levine, *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the Twenty-First Century* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005); David M. Ryfe, "The Practice of Deliberative Democracy: A Study of 16 Deliberative Organizations," *Political Communication* 19, no. 3 (2002).

²³ Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, "Deepening Democracy: Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance," *Politics & Society* 29, no. 5 (2001).

deliberation is that it is a technique, a specific methodology for the purposes of discrete events. This perspective, while not always explicit, is seen throughout the literature. A recent report targeted to philanthropic funders, for example, listed an array of organizations working in the field of deliberation each employing different “models” or “approaches” to facilitate discussion including: Question Formulation Techniques, citizen juries, Choice Dialogues, and 21st Century Town Meetings.²⁴ Others have argued that high-quality deliberation requires special leaders to organize projects: “Good deliberation is not self-generating. The instances of poorly organized public participation that fall below the threshold of proper deliberation ... far outnumber the properly organized deliberative encounters.... In practice, a small group of self-selected leaders must actually organize any process.”²⁵ Far less attention has been paid to deliberative democracy as practiced in everyday life, outside institutionalized settings convened and moderated by trained experts and volunteers.

Deliberation as Community Practice

In contrast to the prevailing view of deliberation as a technique, research in partnership with the Kettering Foundation has attempted to articulate a different understanding of decision-making practices of whole communities. Research on the historical practices of collective decision making in different international contexts

²⁴ Leighninger, "Funding and Fostering Local Democracy: What Philanthropy Should Know about the Emerging Field of Deliberation and Democratic Governance."

²⁵ Gastil and Levine, *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the Twenty-First Century*, 274-275.

indicates that even the earliest political systems relied on organic deliberative practices as a way to make collective decisions.²⁶ The indigenous people of New Zealand, for example, used the term *hui* to describe the meetings used to talk about community concerns. According to David and Kayt Robinson, *hui* are open-ended meetings, without time constraints or predetermined outcome. “People talk about issues for as long as it takes to reach understanding (and possible agreement). If there is no agreement, then the meeting continues later.”²⁷ In his case study of the Baka people of Cameroon, Joseph Sany Nzima examined traditional decision-making processes.²⁸ Nzima explains that the Baka have distinguished themselves through the participative and inclusive nature of their traditional institutions. He describes the public decision-making process of the Baka as community-defined, inclusive, self-regulated, shifting, and deliberate, writing:

When a person or a group of people identifies an issue that calls for a decision, the band comes together to talk through the issue and make a decision. The person calling the meeting leads at the initial stage of the conversation, but as the conversation progresses, leadership (in terms of the direction the conversation may take) can shift as individuals make suggestions and bring forward alternatives or options that resonate with the audience. The responsiveness of the audience ultimately determines

²⁶ Ileana Marin, ed., *Collective Decision Making around the World: Essays on Historical Deliberation Practices* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2006).

²⁷ David Robinson and Kayt Robinson, "Pacific Ways of Talk: Hui and Talanoa," in *Collective Decision Making around the World*, ed. Ileana Marin (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2006).

²⁸ Joseph Sany Nzima, "Traditional Decision-Making Processes: The Case of the Baka People in Cameroon," in *Collective Decision Making around the World*, ed. Ileana Marin (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2006).

the validity of the different alternatives or options. . . . Deliberations last days, sometimes weeks, during which all opinions are heard. There is no moderator, in the sense of someone who manages the flow of the conversation between participants or helps the group delve deeper into the issue. In the case of the Baka, the conversation is self-regulated, as members both from the audience and those speaking give each other the chance to speak and to listen as they form their own judgments on the issue (27-28).

This work highlights the locally situated, self-regulating, and community-defined nature of deliberative decision making. It also helps highlight the distinctions between deliberation as technique and deliberation as community practice.

This distinction is crucial for it implicates four critical components of democratic life: first, who are the key actors in political life; second, what and in what manner are the issues of public concern named and framed; third, in what locations or spaces and under what conditions are deliberative, political discussions engaged; and fourth, what is the intended outcome of deliberative practices. In order to explicate our conceptualization of deliberation as community practice versus the dominant one of deliberation as technique each of these four components will be taken in turn.

Decision-Making Practices and Techniques

	Deliberation as Community Practice	Deliberation as Technique
Key political actor	Citizens	Trained moderator, governmental entities
Issues named	Local, deeply felt, and self-defined	Mainstream issues in national media
Deliberative spaces	Informal, across time and space	Discrete forums
Intended outcome	Development of civic skills and habits	Reports to policymakers

Key political actors. To make a difference in our own community's future, we need to have the power to act together, wisely and deliberately. Public deliberation is useful when there is a discrepancy between what is happening to people and what they think should be happening—yet there is no agreement on what should be happening. There is no such thing as an expert on what should be; that is a matter of judgment. To make sound judgments, citizens must do the work of weighing possible actions against what they themselves consider valuable. In our conceptualization of deliberation as community practice, then, citizens are necessarily the key actors in politics. Under the deliberation as technique perspective, however, the key actor in politics is often either understood as the moderator or convenor who instigates a deliberative dialogue or governmental decision makers who will be the actors who ultimately “solve” the problem.

Issues named. What and in what manner issues of public concern are named and framed are in and of themselves key political practices. Issues on which we, as citizens, deliberate are those issues which affect us on a day-to-day basis and which we understand and name in terms that have meaning to ourselves and our communities. However, in studies of public deliberation the issues upon which the public is asked to deliberate are often presented as a given and focused on problems of national significance. People gather to discuss the health-care crisis or gun violence. Such notions of deliberation take for granted the emergent and often contested nature of commonly held problems. How

problems are described and defined, who gets to name them as problems, and how they are categorized, are all critical features of further discussion or decision making.²⁹

Deliberative spaces. Citizens gather in a variety of formal and informal locations and across time and space to discuss issues of public concern. As such, the context of deliberation when understood as a community practice cannot be easily bounded. It happens in informal gatherings, ad hoc associations, and daily discussions. However, most research on deliberation has as its focus single, one-time deliberative “events” that have been institutionally sponsored, funded, and organized for the purpose of discussing a single (often national) issue.

Intended outcomes. Deliberation as a community practice is not primarily focused on changing federal policy via the production of policy briefings or reports. A community practice of deliberation is more concerned with changing the nature of politics in the community—developing a set of civic skills and habits that will enable the community to work together collectively when other, inevitable, issues emerge.

Sustaining Deliberation

This framework suggests a critical distinction between deliberation as a technique and deliberation as an everyday practice, this does not mean that the two are completely separate. Rather, an important question becomes how the two might be aligned to work

²⁹ David Mathews, *Politics for People* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

together. An important line of scholarship and practice is emerging exploring the relationship between these two sets of questions, specifically the ways in which institutionally organized deliberative experiments may (or may not) become embedded or habitual in a community.

As a way to understand how institutionally organized deliberation can sometimes grow into a regular practice involving different segments of a community and spanning multiple issues, Elena Fagotto and Archon Fung studied local public deliberation in nine communities in the United States in which the practice of regular and organized deliberation has become deeply embedded and taken root over time: “We wanted to understand how what almost always begins as a limited effort to mobilize citizens and convene them to consider a public issue or political problem can sometimes grow into a regular practice that involves many different segments of a community and spans multiple issues that bear scant relation to one another” (1).³⁰ A central thesis of their work is that the impact of deliberation can be sustained only when deliberative practices initiated by formal techniques become embedded in a community’s institutions, organizations, and social practices—in essence, when deliberation becomes a habit. A community that has embedded deliberation, “utilizes methods of more or less formally organized deliberation to consider a range of public issues or problems over a period of several years” (2). In essence, formally organized deliberative efforts can sometimes stimulate and align themselves with larger deliberative practices that exist over time.

³⁰ Elena Fagotto and Archon Fung, *Sustaining Public Engagement: Embedded Deliberation in Local Communities* (East Hartford, CT: Everyday Democracy and the Kettering Foundation, 2009).

Fagotto and Fung argue that the deliberative projects in the communities studied work at a deeper level—addressing more fundamental “democratic deficits.” In other words, these practices of deliberation not only address the urgent problems of a community but also “improve the machinery of democratic self-government” (15).

Civic Innovation and Leadership

Communities in America and around the world have been forced to continuously change in response to domestic and international realities. According to conventional theories, the way communities adapt to the uncertainties they face depends on the quality, character, or skills of outstanding individual leaders. This prevailing concept of leadership contrasts with studies in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation and related scholarship that is putting forward a concept of civic innovation. This concept focuses on characteristics of whole communities as the key factors in social change.

From Leaderful Community to Civic Innovation

According to Richard Harwood, communities have a natural tendency to view the concept of leadership based on the assumptions of who holds authority for change and how change occurs in a community.³¹ Conventional approaches to community leadership have highlighted the impact of great leaders or special individuals on change. In this model, the leaders independently find solutions to community challenges and then invite the public's input. In the 1990s, a series of research partnerships with the Kettering Foundation developed the notion of "leaderful community" to bring a new dimension to the many concepts of leadership already prevalent in communities. The idea was that communities as a whole could embody the characteristics previously ascribed to individuals. Contrary to conventional approaches that focused on individual leaders or experts, the leaderful community concept implied that citizens from all walks of life

³¹ Richard C. Harwood, *The Call for Leaders* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 2004).

become responsible for mobilizing people to face up to the common, complex social problems they share; every citizen within the community is considered a change agent. Research using the leaderful community concept began to make a strong case for a citizen-centered approach to community change. David Mathews proposed a functional concept of leadership that differs from the theory of leadership that is built around what one person—leader—does. It is a concept based on the premise that community change can only happen when citizens “redirect their talents and energies or reorder their relationships to realize their vision of the best community.”³² This concept was expounded in a joint project—Community Leadership Project (1996-1999)—between the National Association for Community Leadership, the Kellogg Foundation, and the Kettering Foundation.³³ This project introduced the leaderful community concept to communities across the United States.

However, this concept was sometimes misunderstood to mean simply “a community full of leaders.” More recently, research in this area has moved beyond “leadership” terminology altogether and instead attempted to address the issue of community change through the concept of “civic innovation.” Civic innovation is closely aligned with the leaderful community concept but makes the most explicit shift from conventional leadership-based theories of change. It more clearly focuses on

³² David Mathews, "Why We Need to Change Our Concept of Community Leadership," *Community Education Journal* 23, no. 1 (1996).

³³ Janice L. Lucas, *Developing Leaderful Communities: Community Leadership Project Report: 1996 - 1999* (Indianapolis, IN: National Association for Community Leadership, 1999).

characteristics of the community as a whole that allow for constant adaptation to new challenges. Civic innovation is a concept that places the primary responsibility of change at the doorstep of the public. Innovative communities are adapting to complex social problems by building the capacities of citizens. In this model, the community—rather than individual leaders—promotes civic leadership as the guiding force of change. This model builds on civic capacities in ways that conventional methods of leadership have not. Examining key features of civic innovation in comparison to traditional approaches to community leadership shows differences between the two concepts and how they impact civic capacity.

Civic Innovation and Conventional Concepts of Leadership

Key leadership actors. The dominant literature on leadership focuses on individuals that have special leadership characteristics. It is the notion that community leaders must be elected, appointed, or anointed—experts. Under this model, the expert—elected or appointed—is expected to have answers to society’s complex problems and citizens are relegated to consumers. Harry Boyte refers to this as the “cult of the expert.”³⁴ He draws attention to the ways in which conventional methods of leadership, which emphasize professionals and professional organizations over civic agency, undercuts “the moral and civic authority of forms of knowledge that are not academic.”

To address this concern, the concept of civic innovation is meant to shift focus to the community as a whole as the unit of analysis. The key leadership actors of innovative communities are citizens; public work is at the heart of civic innovation. Although

³⁴ Boyte, *Civic Agency and the Cult of the Expert*.

professionals obviously play a role in civic innovation, they do so as “civic professionals,” ranging from public administrators and professional organizers to career professionals and community activists, who are aware of the limits of their expertise and see a role for cooperation with community entities in doing their work.³⁵ This helps to articulate a role for experts that does not reduce politics to how a single individual or a handful of individuals impact change; an innovative community is about a community of people implementing new ways of facing challenges. Whereas civic leadership deals with a group of community leaders who serve as catalysts for change, civic innovation is a public process through which an entire community invents new ways of working together and reinvents the responsibilities and opportunities for doing public work.

Mode of problem solving. As stated earlier, in the last century, addressing community challenges was seen as an elite activity. Janice Lucas observed that the conventional methodology for community problem solving is for leaders to seek the council of experts to help them determine what solutions should be presented to the rest of the citizens.³⁶ After this small group of professionals reaches a solution, it is then marketed to the rest of the community; not all of the stakeholders are at the resolution table. Similarly, Harry Boyte cites a deeply entrenched tradition, as reflected in works by elite theorist Walter Lippmann, which sees specialists as best suited to solve community problems.³⁷

³⁵ Dzur, *Democratic Professionalism*.

³⁶ Lucas, *Developing Leaderful Communities: Community Leadership Project Report: 1996 - 1999*.

³⁷ Boyte, *Civic Agency and the Cult of the Expert*.

Conventional leadership efforts primarily focus on developing initiatives that elites can sell to the public. David Mathews cautions that even though community leaders could sell their plans to the public, they might be unable to generate the sustainable civic energy and capacities that are needed for high-achieving communities.³⁸ For example, one conventional leadership approach to problem solving often relies heavily on mobilization—with leaders encouraging followers to rally support for a predetermined agenda. According to Boyte, mobilizing techniques includes mass-communication methods that promote an “us versus them” mentality or defines issues in terms of “good versus evil.”³⁹ He argues that even though problem solving through mass mobilization has won victories for disadvantaged groups and achieved other success on environmental, consumer, and other regulatory issues, it is still “a slash and burn approach, which ravages the public culture, creates divisions, and radically dumbs down public discussion.” Despite often invisible bottom-up organizing at the grassroots level, the civil rights movement is often described in conventional narratives as a victory of mobilization around great leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., obscuring the role of everyday citizens.

What is troubling is that societies imbued in conventional methods of problem solving lose the values of public work. For example, Harry Boyte cites the Obama administration’s current method of governing as an example of how the United States’ political establishment is steeped in conventional methods of leadership.⁴⁰ Although

³⁸ David Mathews, "Afterthoughts," *Kettering Review* (Summer 1993).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Obama's presidential campaign was grounded in broad-based community-organizing techniques, its approach to governing has relied more heavily upon conventional actors and methods, without making a serious change in the culture of the national media and policy-making establishment.

Instead of mobilizing supporters around a predetermined agenda, civic innovation by contrast is experimental; the collective experimentation process is more about how communities work rather than the specific issues they address. Vaughn Grisham's landmark study of Tupelo, Mississippi, illustrates how a public, through experimentation, was able to redefine its interests, see its community as an economic resource, and draw on the work of others.⁴¹ Through experimentation, the community tried what seemed best and then assessed the results for future experiments. Rather than starting with a predetermined agenda, the process of learning and experimentation allowed the community to see their problems in different light and to change the mind-set and habits of how the community organizes and does public work. On the other hand, one intended, often-invisible outcome of innovative communities is increasing civic capacity. Innovative or adaptive communities build civic capacity. A similar example of a community that has made a commitment to experimental learning is Lynchburg, Virginia.⁴² The Lynchburg community started to see positive changes when it engaged itself in dialogue. Through deliberation and collective public action, the community was able to learn more about itself, and engaged stakeholders to find common solutions to

⁴¹ Grisham, *Tupelo: The Evolution of a Community*.

⁴² Suzanne Morse, *Innovation as Civic Work* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 2009).

issues like crime and race relations. Lynchburg's ability to adapt through civic interaction prepared the community to deal with the crises that they faced.

Primary value. Leadership theorist Ronald Heifetz has argued that leadership is not value-free; our notions of leadership are implicitly loaded with norms and values.⁴³ As such, different concepts of leadership will each prioritize certain values in defining good leaders. For example, the traditional notion of leadership aimed at mobilizing followers is often associated with the charisma of particular leaders, both in popular narratives and in sociological studies of leadership dating back to Weber's famous concept of charismatic authority.⁴⁴ In other words, the leader is expected to inspire people to accept his vision of how the community's challenges should be addressed. For example, media coverage—which mostly focus on conventional forms of leadership—of the civil rights era often calls attention to Martin Luther King's charisma and inspirational qualities, rather than the effective community-organizing abilities and collective public action communities generated against racial injustice.

In contrast, innovative communities value resilience when they pull together the necessary tools and resources needed to improve their situation and ensure self-governance. Mathews observes that many citizens want a stronger hand in shaping their future and greater control over their lives in the face of multiple challenges their

⁴³ Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁴⁴ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946; reprint, 1969).

communities contend with.⁴⁵ The main point is that people, as a collective unit, want to be in charge (self-sufficient) of their situation rather than allow experts to control their destiny. And, as Heifetz points out, the examples of Waco and Jonestown are ever-present reminders of potential consequences of over-reliance upon the charisma of individual leaders. Based on such examples, he argues that an entire community's burden is too much for one individual to assume.

Civic innovation, on the other hand, is characterized by citizens acting in concert with others, based on mutual interests. Rather than following or depending on the predetermined agenda of one individual or a group of individuals, innovative practices put the public in charge. They reinforce collective instead of individual responsibility. Innovative communities allow citizens to be coproducers in concert with formal and informal community institutions. This requires that local people must be aware, willing, and able to address complex deeply rooted local problems. Citizens in collaboration with other community actors must be willing to step forward and develop a plan of action for the community's development. The community must be able to tap into a broad spectrum of skills, talents, resources, and individuals since no single individual or group possesses this variety of capabilities that are needed for success. Finally, community change should involve a collective learning, experimentation, and deliberative process that reshapes and restructures ideas that fit the needs of the community. Communities become self-sufficient when they have a better understanding of their situation and develop a plan of action that engages citizens and stakeholders.

⁴⁵ David Mathews, "Afterthoughts," *Kettering Review* 27, no. 1 (Summer 2009).

The dimensions of civic innovation and conventional theories of leadership are compared in the following table:

Civic Innovation vs. Social Entrepreneurship and Civic Leadership

	Civic Innovation	Civic Leadership
Mode of problem solving	Experimentation	Mobilization
Key leadership actors	Collective civic actors (leaderful community)	Elites; great men and women
Primary value	Self-sufficiency	Charisma

Innovation is often thought of as a way to deal with the new economic structure. It allows communities to reinvent themselves, adapt to, and address the changes they are facing. Civic innovation is the public work required for communities not only to survive but also to thrive. It seeks to mobilize social capital in new ways, to generate new institutional forms, and to reinvent these through public policy designed for democracy. As Sirianni and Friedland write, civic innovation provides citizens with robust roles—in their professional and nonprofessional lives, and in their institutional and volunteer activities—for doing the everyday public work.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Carmen Sirianni and Lewis A. Friedland, *Civic Innovation in America: Community Empowerment, Public Policy, and the Movement for Civic Renewal* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

Resilient Communities in the Face of Natural Disasters

In the wake of recent natural disasters like the devastating earthquake in Sichuan Province of China or Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast of the United States, many people are trying to understand how they can better prepare for similar events in the future. Some blame government programs like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or nonprofit organizations like the Red Cross for mismanaging disaster-relief efforts. But a growing number of scholars and practitioners have recognized the importance of developing civic capacity, or the coordination of community resources, for effective preparation and recovery. In addition to helping us understand how to deal with disasters, recent studies by these scholars help show how communities can create civic capacity so citizens can deal with issues like natural disasters. These examples can be helpful points of comparison to bring to light the sometimes-invisible civic capacities that enable communities to act effectively whenever they face serious challenges.

In the field of disaster preparedness, most experts and bureaucrats are trying to understand how government organizations can effectively respond to crises. They assume that citizens, community organizations, and other nongovernmental actors have no role to play. They also believe that a panic-stricken public will create a second disaster for the government to address.⁴⁷ Accordingly, many experts and government actors are concerned with improving the technical mechanisms of communication and

⁴⁷ Monica Schoch-Spana et al., "Community Engagement: Leadership Tool for Catastrophic Health Events," *Biosecurity and Bioterrorism: Biodefense Strategy, Practice and Science* 5, no. 1 (2007).

transportation within bureaucratic agencies and are uninterested in partnering with other potential actors. This is to say that their focus is on the technical side of disaster preparation and relief. When they interact with citizens, they tend to do so in a top-down manner, such as by telling people what kinds of materials they should stockpile.

However, a new paradigm that emphasizes the importance of local communities for disaster response and preparedness seems to be forming. In a recent book, Rebecca Solnit has documented the spontaneous organizations that arise in the wake of natural and other disasters, such as in the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco or the 9/11 attacks in New York City.⁴⁸ She found that people work together to survive rather than form panicking mobs. Though media and elites assume that people will quickly turn to looting, raping, and murdering, it is actually the elites who are most likely to panic or resort to violence. Most people simply want to make sense out of what has happened and to persevere. After a disaster, citizens begin to work together in ways that they had not before, and soon build bonds that span differences in race, class, and gender. In places with rich social traditions, people can draw upon the resources of those in their network. This is especially important in times of crisis, whether these be natural disasters or times of personal need. According to Solnit, “Citizens themselves in these moments constitute the government—the acting decision-making body—as democracy has always promised and rarely delivered.”

The Working Group on Community Engagement in Health Emergency Planning (WGCEHP) at the Center for Biosecurity at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

⁴⁸ Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster* (New York: Viking Press, 2009).

has found that a good “civic infrastructure” is just as important as a good governmental or physical infrastructure for effective disaster response.⁴⁹ They suggest that effective community engagement on the part of local governments “can augment officials’ abilities to govern in a crisis and improve the application of communally held resources in a large-scale disaster” (9-10). The working group’s report helps explain the kinds of associations communities need in order to deal with disaster. A good civic infrastructure can transmit information, coordinate groups, and may provide opportunities for deliberation about difficult choices. There are often decisions to be made, for example, about who should receive priority at hospitals, or who is most in need of food. Similar studies emphasize a wider set of networks in communities that connect businesses, philanthropies, civic groups, and governments.⁵⁰ For example, the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program under the federal Civilian Corps trains local citizens to lead local response efforts.⁵¹ This emerging body of research is a departure from typical conversations about disaster planning that totally ignore the assets of local communities and treat citizens as “bundles of needs”—that is, as passive consumers of services and not as agents.⁵² After Hurricane Katrina, the Kettering Foundation similarly heard from

⁴⁹ Schoch-Spana et al., "Community Engagement."

⁵⁰ Fran H. Norris et al., "Community Resilience as a Metaphor, Theory, Set of Capacities, and Strategy for Disaster Readiness," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 41 (2008).

⁵¹ Courtney Flint and Mark Brennan, "Community Emergency Response Teams: From Disaster Responders to Community Builders," *Rural Realities* 1, no. 3 (2006).

⁵² Kretzmann and McKnight, *Building Communities*.

community leaders who wanted to become resilient—not to have outside groups provide technical assistance to passive and helpless victims. Reflecting on the reconstruction effort following Hurricane Katrina, David Mathews writes:

People with a democratic bent ... don't want to be informed, organized, or assisted as much as they want to be in charge of their lives. And they sense that this means they need a greater capacity to act together despite their differences. That is why they say they want to come together as communities to maintain their communities. Unfortunately, they often have difficulty finding institutions that understand their agenda.⁵³

This research has helped to illustrate in especially vivid terms the larger concept of civic capacity.⁵⁴ The survival of communities in times of crisis turns out to depend upon the same civic capacities that function less visibly in the ordinary lives of communities.

⁵³ Mathews, "Afterword: Ships Passing in the Night?"

⁵⁴ Paloma Dallas, "Studies of a Role for Communities in the Face of Catastrophe,"

Connections (2008).

Higher Education Institutions and Civic Capacity

As essential actors in the production of knowledge, higher education institutions play a powerful role in society. With a variety of resources at their command and long histories, higher education institutions play a central and visible role in the life of their communities. However, higher education institutions are also elite institutions—hierarchical, bureaucratic, and comprised of specialized knowledge workers. Higher education institutions thus offer an opportunity to closely examine how citizens and professionals in partnerships with one another discern civic from technical capacity. Although the higher education literature posits a predominant rhetoric of civic capacity and related terminology, in practice the reality is more complex. Instead, the most common patterns evident across community-campus partnerships seem to put community partners in a passive role as recipients of services or information. Is there evidence within community-campus partnerships of a stronger democratic role beyond traditional service delivery or technical assistance? Are mutually beneficial partnerships a priority to higher education and its efforts to reclaim its public purpose? To begin to address these questions, this essay draws upon recent research on higher education partnerships with community-based actors.

Campus Partnerships and Civic Capacity: An Overview

Among scholars who study democracy and higher education, a growing concern is that the “civic-engagement” movement within universities is largely limited to a conventional technical capacity focus, despite rhetoric to the contrary. A paper by John Saltmarsh and Matthew Hartley, reflecting on a symposium of higher education leaders

cohosted by New England Research Center for Higher Education (NERCHE) and the Kettering Foundation, concluded that while many initiatives and programs were established since the 1990s with the purpose of advancing community-campus engagement, community-campus engagement practices across higher education have reached a “plateau.”⁵⁵ As a result, the dominant epistemology in higher education engagement runs counter to its stated goal of developing authentic civic capacity.

Methods of technical assistance between campuses and communities suggest the expansion of expertise through faculty and students as the primary means of knowledge delivery to society (such as the outreach mission of land-grant colleges and state universities, cooperative extension, and service learning). The conventional outreach model in land-grant colleges and state universities is endemic of the dominant managerial culture across many disciplines in higher education, where vertical, top-down, or otherwise hierarchical delivery of “expert” knowledge from campus agents (such as faculty and administrators like cooperative extension agents) to citizens in community positions the university as the central actor and the community as passive recipient. Scott Peters has written extensively on the subject of the culture of the technical mind-set in land-grant colleges and state universities, stating that the public service ideal of the land-grant outreach mission has been obscured—favoring instead an outreach mission that is,

⁵⁵ John Saltmarsh, Matt Hartley, and Patti Clayton, *Democratic Engagement White Paper* (Boston, MA: New England Resource Center for Higher Education, 2009).

one-directional,” “narrow and instrumental,” “embarrassingly self-congratulatory,” and, perhaps most important, “apolitical.”⁵⁶

Recent studies in community-campus partnership literature indicate a persistent disconnect between faculty and community partners. In one large-scale study, community partners stated that while they gained a range of benefits from these largely short-term collaborations and that they largely worked well with the faculty, they found the most significant challenge to developing the ongoing relationships with the campus was their relationship to the faculty partners and offices that institutionalize the work.⁵⁷ Several recent publications confirm these tensions, but also begin to illustrate ways through which these relationships can be improved. In the first systematic study of service-learning partnerships from the point of view of community partners, Sean Creighton researched the expectations community partners have of their higher education professional partners and their students for successful civic-engagement partnerships.⁵⁸ Creighton found that while the community partners perceived service-learning

⁵⁶ Scott Peters, "Reconstructing a Democratic Tradition of Public Scholarship in the Land-Grant System," in *Agent of Democracy: Higher Education and the HEX Journey*, ed. David W. Brown and Deborah Witte (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2008).

⁵⁷ Marie Sandy and Barbara A. Holland, "Different Worlds and Common Ground: Community Partner Perspectives on Campus-Community Partnerships," *Michigan Journal of Community-Service Learning* 13, no. 1 (2006).

⁵⁸ Sean Creighton, "The Scholarship of Community Partner Voice," *Higher Education Exchange* (2008).

collaborations as positive in their impact on student learning and development, the collaborations were largely exploitative and disrespectful of community partners. They suggested a long-term partnership process of listening more deeply through dialogue, actively reflecting on the effectiveness of the partnership, and coming to mutual agreement on their long-term goals.

Research on institutions of higher education also helps contrast the role of professionals across technical and civic forms of outreach to community. Several conflicting forces and factors drive institutions of higher education, directly affecting the abilities of the faculty, students, and administrators who serve as the face of the academy as they engage communities over the short and long-term. These forces and factors include but are not limited to the pressure to produce new scholarship that critiques the current social order to advance economic and social justice, an underlying epistemology that requires experts to be detached from communities. Moreover, the relationship between institutional mission, administration, and overall receptivity of the climate for community engagement through centralized institutional policies also serve as contributing factors.⁵⁹ Harry Boyte defines this environment as technocratic politics, or domination by experts who have been depoliticized, trapped within a culture based on “an objective set of truths, practices, and procedures ... that decontextualizes the civic

⁵⁹ Susan Ostrander, "Democracy, Civic Participation, and the University: A Comparative Study of Civic Engagement on Five Campuses," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2004).

life of communities.”⁶⁰ Ironically, this means that as professionals in higher education achieve scholarly rigor, they feel increasingly constrained and dissatisfied that what they are required to produce has actual relevance to the public.

Recognizing the potential inherent in the civic purpose of higher education and the citizens who work across higher education’s many professions, scholar Albert Dzur has coined the term *democratic professionalism*, which describes what happens when professionals share authority along with citizens in community, serving as facilitators instead of technocrats.⁶¹ Democratic professionalism results in both professionals and their community partners revitalizing their capacity for civically responsible collaborations. According to Dzur, these efforts in higher education are part of a larger movement across professional fields, such as journalism and bioethics, in which experts are learning to see the civic dimensions of the challenges they are facing. When academic professionals participate as scholars in work with the public work, they are practicing public scholarship, putting academics in respectful and productive relationships with their fellow citizens.⁶²

⁶⁰ Harry C. Boyte, "Public Work: Civic Populism Versus Technocracy in Higher Education," in *Agent of Democracy: Higher Education and the HEX Journey*, ed. David W. Brown and Deborah Witte (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2008).

⁶¹ Dzur, *Democratic Professionalism*.

⁶² Scott Peters, et al., eds. *Engaging Campus and Community: The Practice of Public Scholarship in the State and Land-Grant University System* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 2005).

Emerging Practices and Centers in Higher Education

Other examples from Kettering research demonstrate a different kind of community assistance as universities have begun to move beyond a narrow focus on technical expertise as service delivery. University of Auburn professor Christa Daryl Slaton discussed in the *Higher Education Exchange* her work in Uniontown, Alabama, a rural community that struggled against polarizing economic and social issues.⁶³ Slaton detailed how she facilitated a responsive, citizen-oriented engagement process across this community, her academic institution, and city administrators in just two years. Slaton had recently completed dissertation research with citizens from over 12 deliberative opinion-polling projects and found “an enormous latent democratic capacity in American public life” in which citizens tended to either be more informed or desired to be more informed on issues impacting their communal quality of life, but disbelieving that those in power would care what they thought (37). She worked with the university to hire a local resident, a graduate student, and a university outreach staff member to interview and otherwise solicit feedback from town residents on what they knew about their town and what they wanted most for their community.

Slaton served as a liaison of direct public engagement between community residents, leaders, and institutional agents for community change, with her experience similar to the model that Byron White advocates in his recent paper on the power

⁶³ Christa D. Slaton, "The University Role in Civic Engagement: Serving as a Spark to Community-Building," *Higher Education Exchange* (2005).

dynamics of relationships between institutions and their communities.⁶⁴ White conducted extensive interviews with citizens across several neighborhoods who have partnered with Ohio State University leaders, finding that the strongest power citizens can exercise in working with universities lies in the interpersonal, or micro level, relationship with professionals from institutions like universities. The macro-level relationship, or relationship from the citizenry to the larger institution, is the space where White found citizens use confrontational methods as a means to balance power dynamics. Community representatives of institutions who broker relationships between the institutions they serve and the communities with which they work are, in White's view, the most effective agents to navigate between the macro and micro levels of power dynamics in community-institution relationships. Naming this "the balanced model," White defines it as one where the institutional agent or professional balances their credibility and ability to leverage institutional resources on behalf of the community with their ability to develop and sustain authentic relationships in the community. White's work suggests the possibility within institutions of higher education of a different kind of politics led by professionals who work in and with communities to leverage the higher education resources to build civic capacities.

A group of campus centers with an explicit focus on deliberation and decision making is also beginning to emerge in higher education. For example, a number of institutes affiliated with the National Issues Forums (NIF) network are located within institutions of higher education, including community-focused organizations that provide

⁶⁴ Byron White, *Navigating the Power Dynamics between Institutions and Their Communities* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 2009).

space for citizens to make decisions about difficult issues. Colorado State University houses one of the most fully developed centers, sustained and centered in community, the Center for Public Deliberation. A recent report by director and professor Martin Carcasson details the opportunities and challenges faced by 11 similar centers, as they advance both the field of deliberative practice and the institutionalization of such centers across different types of higher education institutions.⁶⁵ Carcasson proposes that these centers understand themselves as “hubs” for democracy in their communities, or organizations with a distinct focus on building civic capacities for collective decision making. Similarly, Kettering contributor Scott London synthesized the history of these institutes.⁶⁶ London argues that these centers are essential spaces that not only deepen public awareness of issues and strengthen community networks, but also help inform scholarship. According to London, “the institutes are a new kind of citizen-centered politics today” (27). The experience of these campus-based professionals who work with communities suggests opportunities to move beyond the technical, service-delivery paradigm to that of capacity building in partnership with citizens.

The “on tap, not on top” horizontal model of relationship is exemplified by David Pelletier, a nutritional scientist at Cornell University. In a recent interview, Pelletier discusses the results of working over 13 years with local farmers, retailers, and residents

⁶⁵ Martin Carcasson, *Democracy's Hubs: College and University Centers as Platforms for Deliberative Politics* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 2008).

⁶⁶ Scott London, *Doing Democracy: How a Network of Grassroots Organizations Is Strengthening Community, Building Capacity, and Shaping a New Kind of Civic Education* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 2010).

to build the North Country Community Food and Economic Security Network.⁶⁷ Rather than view the issue of food localization and sustainability as a technical problem, Pelletier saw the need for the community to develop its capacity to come together and make its own decisions. Through a series of conferences that gave the community an opportunity to reflect on their food system, Pelletier worked with the community to create a shared history of community values and aspirations. In doing so, the community was also able to conceptualize ways to act and choose priorities from their identified values by visualizing their ideal future. Last, the community organized itself into work groups to implement chosen tasks and goals. Subsequently, Pelletier and his project team stepped back to work with the community as on-call advisors, affording the citizens in community the space to assume their own leadership. As the community came together and made its own decisions to rename the problem, they found doing so required a new set of capacities.

In another example, Kettering partnered with Michigan State University's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) as part of an action-research-oriented initiative to test the capacity-building role of cooperative extension units within land-grant colleges and universities. The group decided that they would approach local communities by making their research resources available on an "as needed" basis, recognizing that merely extending their research to communities was a more vertical than horizontal approach that communities did not find useful. The ANR community-campus partnerships have illustrated decision-making challenges experienced by partner communities who need to navigate their own judgment regarding "what *should* be done

⁶⁷ Peters, et al, eds., *Engaging Campus and Community*.

versus what *could* be done.”⁶⁸ These communities reviewed traditional options, and city staff advocated for a deliberative approach instead of the traditional technical model of strategic planning. As a result, the community came to a better understanding of the issue facing their community, passing a plan of action unanimously through their city council. The ANR community-campus partnership example is another illustration of the possible benefits when institutions of higher education take a capacity-building approach.

In conclusion, research across higher education has found some evidence of higher education professionals who are reconnecting with citizens in community. While land-grant colleges and state universities are only beginning to renew their historical purposes through community-campus partnerships, a stronger democratic role beyond traditional service delivery or technical assistance is more than possible – examples are beginning to emerge. The difference between an active or passive collaborative relationship lies in how community partners are able to act as co-creators of knowledge alongside their higher education professional partners to build civic capacity.

⁶⁸ Alice Diebel, "Community Change and Action Research: The Unrealized Potential of Cooperative Extension," *Change* (2008).

Schools, Community, and Education as Coproduced

In the national debate on public education reform, blame has been pointed at many parts of the system. The possible explanations for problems seem endless and at times contradictory: weak teachers or poor teacher training; broken schools or lack of funds; lack of accountability or excessive standardization. There seems to be little agreement on exactly what to do, but everyone seems to agree *something* is wrong with public education in this country. Educational reform is one of the Obama administration's top agenda items, including the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top Fund, an effort to create a national competition based on education-reform strategies in four areas: adopting benchmarked standards and assessments; improving teacher and principal performance; building data systems that measure student success; and turning around the lowest performing schools. Implicit in this discourse is a framing of public education that revolves around schools, and with that framing a specific set of educational actors are implicated—namely professionals. In this view, the responsibility for public education lies primarily with the public schools, the professionals that staff them, and their related local government bureaucracies. Parents and youth then are viewed as consumers of education as a professional product.⁶⁹ When education is seen as occurring in schools and as the responsibility of professional educators, appropriate school-based reforms might include simply extending the school day or improving teacher accountability. However, if

⁶⁹ John Doble, *A Consumer Mentality: The Prevailing Mindset in American Public Education* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 1999).

the problems were indeed that simple, one would expect them to have been solved by now.

Public Education as Coproduced in Communities

A counternarrative to the predominant discourse on public education places the unit of analysis on the *community* rather than the schools. That is to say, for every child, there is a unique and ever-changing community with educational functions: the family and its social networks; libraries and museums; summer camps; parks, 4-H clubs and community gardens. This does not dismiss schools as important actors in the sphere of public education, but treats them as one of many educative actors in a community.

Just as Elinor Ostrom has found important roles for citizens in managing common resources, from this broader understanding of the various educative forces in a community emerges the idea that education can be coproduced by large-scale institutions, local organizations, and citizens working together.⁷⁰ Although John Dewey saw schools as the primary location of reform efforts, he first raised the possibility that schooling might be part of a larger educational system.⁷¹ Bucking the mainstream view of education as almost synonymous with schooling, Lawrence Cremin built on Dewey's insight, but argued more forcefully for an expansive renewal of the civic sphere and its educative functions. As Cremin wrote, "The important fact is that family life does educate, religious

⁷⁰ Elinor Ostrom, *Crossing the Great Divide: Coproduction, Synergy, and Development* (Global, Area, and Internation Archive, UC Berkeley, 1997).

⁷¹ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1944; reprint, 1966).

life does educate, and work does educate; and, what is more, the education of all three realms is as intentional as the education of the school, though in different ways and in different measures.”⁷² The view of education as a community task has received renewed interest in scholarship in fields such as education theory.⁷³

In light of Dewey and Cremin’s legacies, Kettering Foundation research has attempted to bring civic capacity theory to contemporary education debates. David Mathews’ body of work on education moves education reform beyond schools and government policy, but also proposes that solutions to these problems will require a much broader and more difficult renewal of civic life as a whole.⁷⁴ In fact, through a case study of education in early communities in Alabama, David Mathews has argued that this view of education has deep historical precedent.⁷⁵ This work shows how many civic groups have historically taken up educational challenges that now tend to be seen as the function of schools.

The following table provides some distinguishing concepts between notions of education as coproduced in the community in comparison to education as the task of professionals.

⁷² Lawrence Cremin, *Public Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

⁷³ Hervé Varenne, "Difficult Collective Deliberations: Anthropological Notes toward a Theory of Education," *Teachers College Record* 109, no. 7 (2007).

⁷⁴ David Mathews, *Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2006).

⁷⁵ David Mathews, *Why Public Schools? Whose Public Schools? What Early Communities Have to Tell Us* (Montgomery, AL: New South Books, 2003).

Education as Coproduced and School-Based

	Education as Coproduced	School-Based Education
Locus of education	The community: both formal and informal educative spaces, across time and space	The school: institutional, formal, and structured educative spaces, bounded time and space
Role of citizens	To make collective decisions, coproducer of education	Consumer of education, potentially (un)supportive of the institution (e.g. school)
Knowledge production	Knowledge is coproduced in interactions between and among actors	Knowledge is transferred
Public engagement	Interaction between actors around a matter of public education, the public engages educational institutions	Communication to public by institution around a matter of public education, the institution (e.g. school) engages the public
Accountability	Relational, shared or collective responsibility for educative outcomes	Providing standardized data to measure outcomes
Intended outcome	Locally defined and determined (e.g. development of educated citizenry, capable of self-governing; moral development)	Defined by federal or state policies and standards (e.g. to prepare students for success in higher education or the workplace)

Recent initiatives by the Kettering Foundation and its research partners have attempted to see how a civic capacity approach to education might resonate with citizens' actual experiences. The foundation has worked with community organizations across the country to hold deliberative forums on the issue of the academic achievement gap. In the forums, people identified *many* gaps implicated in the problem of inequality in educational outcomes. Not only failing schools, but also dangerous neighborhoods riddled with drugs and crime, a lack of positive adult mentorship, absent or overwhelmed

parents, and too few character-building extracurricular activities were all identified as contributing to the widening gap between students' educational success. A series of workshops with community educators is also identifying various people involved in the education of a community's youth, outside of the formal education realm. This work is showing that young people often form their most influential bonds with adults outside of school. This research supports the central tenet of a coproduction approach to education—that education starts in the community.

A perennial task of any society is to educate the next generation. In a deliberative democratic view, education is something to be collectively determined and produced—who educates, what, and how we educate is something to be deliberated and decided as a matter of public judgment and responsibility. As David Mathews argues, “This work has to start where citizens start, which is with their communities rather than just schools and with education broadly rather than just schooling.”⁷⁶ This does not necessarily preclude a set of nationally recognized standards or the central function of professional educators, but recognizes the foundational role the public has to play in public education. This broadening of the purview of public education has the power to change the discourse around education reform from what can *they* do, to what can *we* do?

⁷⁶ David Mathews, "The Public and the Public Schools: The Coproduction of Education,"

Phi Delta Kappan 89, no. 8 (2008).

Contributors

Angela D. Allen was a Kettering Foundation ABD research associate from August 2008 to July 2009. Allen holds a PhD in higher, adult, and lifelong education administration from Michigan State University, a master's degree of social work from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, and a BA in urban and regional planning from Michigan State University.

Derek W. M. Barker is a program officer at the Kettering Foundation with a background in political theory. He is the author of *Tragedy and Citizenship: Conflict, Reconciliation, and Democracy from Haemon to Hegel* published by State University of New York Press. His articles have appeared in *Kettering Review*, *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, and *POLIS: Journal of the Society for Greek Political Thought*.

Alexandra Robinson is a research associate at the Kettering Foundation with a BA in international studies from the University of Dayton. Her research areas are K-12 education, higher education, economic development, and health policy. She is particularly interested in youth development and college student community engagement. She has previously worked as the volunteer coordinator for a local nonprofit.

Foday Sulimani is a research associate at the Kettering Foundation. As a native of Sierra Leone, Sulimani experienced the terrible consequences—devastating civil war—of failed leadership. This experience sparked his interest in research and development programs related to democracy and governance.

Zach VanderVeen is an independent scholar who has worked in a number of fields. He has a PhD from Vanderbilt University and was a research associate for the Kettering Foundation for two years. He currently works in the information technology sector.

Dana M. Walker is an independent scholar. Her dissertation, “Networked Public Talk,” focuses on the everyday, informal political conversation that emerges through Internet-enabled discussion spaces.

About the Kettering Foundation

Kettering Foundation is an independent, nonpartisan research organization rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Everything Kettering researches relates to one central question: what does it take for democracy to work as it should? Chartered as an operating foundation, Kettering does not make grants. The foundation's small staff and extensive network of associates collaborate with community organizations, government agencies, researchers, scholars, and citizens, all of whom share their experiences with us.

Dayton Headquarters
200 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459
800.221.3657

Washington Office
444 North Capitol Street, NW
Suite 434
Washington, D.C., 20001
202.393.4478

New York Office
6 East 39th Street
9th Floor
New York, NY, 10016
212.686.7016

