



Developing Deliberative Practice:

The role of
deliberation with
underrepresented
populations in
community politics

A KETTERING FOUNDATION REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The focus of this research was on underserved and underrepresented populations. Specifically:

1. How do underserved and underrepresented populations view their own community engagement activities in relationship to community politics?
2. Can deliberative practices help engage people, particularly underserved and underrepresented populations, in community politics?

Research was conducted with a dual approach—interviews and test case analysis. We examined work completed from Summer of 2006 to Fall of 2008 in order to understand how a center can best work with leaders in public institutions and ethnic/minority-based organizations in a way that challenges traditional methods of convening. A particular area of emphasis was identifying ways of engaging underrepresented populations in deliberative forums and the difference that deliberative forums can make, or not, in surfacing unique perspectives from these populations.

While not all of the targeted subjects could be interviewed within the report's time frame, consistently disappointing results indicated that more work in this area would not necessarily be informative or helpful. The primary goal of the interviews was to assess differences between the thinking of "community leaders" and "average citizens" related to how members of the public are and are not engaged in public processes and policy development. A secondary goal was to determine differences in these attitudes and viewpoints across ethnic and racial identities.

Surprisingly, there were no significant differences in interview results across racial, gender, or generational (age) factors. There was, however, distinct divergence between "leaders" and "average citizens." The common theme among all informants, however, was a general sense of cynicism, pessimism, and disappointment with the status quo.

Generally, leaders tend to see themselves as the uniquely qualified "doers" acting on behalf of the community, based on either interest or expertise in public processes and policy issues. They did not express great faith in, or understanding of, the roles that the general public can play in these processes other than by voting or by writing to elected officials.

Average citizens across the board struggled with questions about the role they play as individuals in advocating for issues they care about. Across the board they viewed community leaders and media outlets as equally untrustworthy and undependable, and out of touch with the real needs and concerns of ordinary citizens. They did not view themselves as having any real ability to make change in the community and were generally uninformed about policy development and public input into governmental processes.

Community leaders also failed to describe any sophisticated role for members of the public in policy development or public processes other than by voting for elected officials and by contacting these elected officials. They did express regret and pessimism about the lack of willingness and ability of the general public to more actively participate in public meetings and to organize grassroots action to address local issues.

Although the results from the interviews did not match up to the researchers' expectations, it was, nonetheless, informative to see that loss of faith in traditional policy development and public processes is widespread among leaders and average citizens without regard to race, gender, or age. It does, however, prove that there is significant work to be done in every sector of the community to change these attitudes and provide more meaningful and effective means for members of the public to play a role in the civic health of their communities.

TEST CASE ANALYSIS

The primary goal of this portion of the research was to determine whether deliberative practices can help engage people, particularly underserved and underrepresented populations, in community politics. Analysis of several projects that infused National Issues Forums (NIF) strategies and techniques into a variety of public events yielded positive results. Generally speaking, these changes in the traditional ways of convening the public were well received by both public leaders and general community members.

Similar to initial interview findings, there were no significant differences in the reactions to these changes across racial or ethnic lines. However, differences occurred between community leaders and the general public with community leaders being much more resistant to changes in traditional convening methods, regardless of ethnicity.

FULL REPORT

BACKGROUND

The Maricopa Community College District Center for Civic Participation (CCP) led a series of statewide deliberative forums on a variety of issues including educational reform, municipal financing, area development plans, aging populations, and tourism. These projects involved collaborations with state and local government agencies, including the City of Mesa.

An area of emphasis for CCP staff in conducting these statewide initiatives has been development of methodologies for including underserved and underrepresented populations as research informants. Arizona, like most of the country, is undergoing dramatic demographic changes. Based on 2005 Community Survey data, 40 percent of Arizona's total population is minority with Latinos comprising 29 percent of the state population. The metropolitan Phoenix area is reflective of these changes with a 25 percent Latino population in the City of Mesa and 42 percent for the City of Phoenix.

Another area of emphasis has been the collaborative work of CCP staff in conducting forums in partnership with public, private, and nonprofit agencies. CCP partners have included Arizona Community Foundation, the Governor's Office of Tourism, the Arizona Business and Education Coalition, the Arizona Association of Nonprofits, the Mesa Association of Hispanic Citizens, and the *Arizona Republic*. The purpose of the collaborative work has not only been to convene traditional forums but also to infuse deliberative practices and principles into the work of partner agencies.

It is our intention to examine the work completed within the last 18 months and work that is in process to understand how a center can best work with leaders in public institutions and ethnic/minority-based organizations in a way that challenges traditional methods of convening. A particular area of emphasis will be identifying



ways of engaging underrepresented populations in deliberative forums and the difference that deliberative forums can make, or not, in surfacing unique perspectives from these populations.

During the July workshop at Kettering the original research questions proposed were further refined to the following:

Question One: How do underserved and underrepresented populations view their own community engagement activities in relationship to community politics?

Question Two: Can deliberative practices help engage people, particularly underserved and underrepresented populations, in community politics?

RESEARCH METHODS

Our research model had two phases: personal conversations with several key leaders in each project and a gathering of leaders and participants from all four of the projects. During our personal conversations, we verified dates and sequences of events for each project. Because none of our participants were familiar with more than one project, it was necessary to give each person in our group event an overview of each project. We created timelines that became part of our background information packet for the group event. In addition, our personal conversations were instrumental in the convening of our group event. We found out who the key leaders were for the actions that resulted from each project, and then we were able to invite the people most likely to give us an accurate view of the project's history, flow, and influence.

In order to tell the story of each project in a compatible and concise way, we decided to give more information than we'd be able to use in our actual time together. We couldn't know what specific reference materials our participants might want, so we provided them with a broad base of information in our participant packets. We'd used the same one-page overview of

NIF deliberation and forum agreements, so we included this document for reference. Of course, each project had its own framing document. The project timelines were added for everyone so our participants could see the timing similarities and differences between the projects. Many of our participants were unfamiliar with the nifi.org website, so a one-page list with categories and topics of issue guides was prepared and included.

In several conversations prior to our community gathering, individuals expressed the hope that we'd spend some time discussing some of the decisions that resulted from our projects—some were public decisions, some were organizational, some were personal. In addition, they hoped to understand more about decisions that affect the public and how the minefield of politics could be navigated for the best results. Three of the four projects included specific public decisions, while the fourth had some significant public decisions already in process. It was obvious to our key leaders in each of the projects that most decisions that were made were politically sensitive.



Consequently, we focused attention in our research agenda on how decisions are made in the public arena. For years, our working assumption has been that a variety of public decisions are made, particularly in the kinds of issues that lend themselves to NIF-based community work. We planned, then, to include some focused

information on public decisions from deliberation practice in our community gathering. Two different perspectives on public decisions were chosen—one that proposes a communitywide decision practice and one that identifies diverse types of decisions in public life.

When we planned our cumulative event, our key leaders shared that some people they felt would be helpful in future planning were completely unfamiliar with the NIF projects. The older projects, particularly, have seen more changes in personnel. Our primary goal was to include agency leaders who could give us an accurate view of project consequences, including their observations on whether the NIF part worked and the role of politics in these outcomes. We decided to adjust our original plan slightly to include voices with very limited knowledge of, or experience with, our NIF specific projects, because we wanted to include their unbiased observations about the consequences of previous actions on their current opportunities and challenges, and we wanted to have their input on our next steps.

When we planned our group event, we tried to be sensitive to the dynamics of the group and tried to maximize the use of our limited time frame. These are all busy people in their “day jobs,” so asking them to spend a three-hour block of time in the evening was risky. It was important to have some help from our key leaders in supporting our invitation with their own call. We were putting four special-interest groups in the same room and expecting interaction—another risky hope.

METHODOLOGY FOR QUESTION ONE

How do underserved and underrepresented populations view their own community engagement activities in relationship to community politics?

In order to explore the perception and attitudinal issues behind Question One, interviews were conducted with a variety of community members ranging from elected officials to nonengaged community members. Interview questions included:

1. What stands in the way of the general public becoming involved in public processes?
2. What stands in the way of the [specific constituency group] becoming involved in public processes?
3. What are the politics of the [specific constituency group] that determines what happens or is accomplished, or not?
4. What is your most critical public policy concern and why?
5. What role do you see for yourself in this issue and how it is defined?
6. [For community members] Do you think leaders of our community see this issue in the same way you do and use the same name for the issue? Why or why not?
7. [For community leaders] Why is the public angry or apathetic about issues? How can they be encouraged to participate in public processes?
8. What are your opinions regarding the following issues: immigration reform, a smoking ban in bars, the war in Iraq, the 2008 presidential election?

INITIAL RESULTS: INTERVIEWS

1. What stands in the way of the public becoming more involved in public processes?

Answers to this question fell into three general categories: (1) process/mechanics—“people are not taught how to be involved citizens”; “there are few appropriate models for active citizenship”; (2) life—“there is too much going on in most people’s lives to allow them to be fully engaged”; “work-life balance is too much to handle for many people”; “there is a difference between surviving and engaging and most people are just trying to survive”; (3) trust—“some people don’t think that anything they say or do is really going to matter so why bother”; past government misuse of public trust or abuse of public trust has led to general

mistrust of government, particularly among historically underrepresented and underserved populations.

One African American respondent clearly articulated a difference between government and political entities in this response. He discussed a range of public-serving agencies, including government offices, nonprofits, educational institutions, and political groups, and charged the political groups with performing the worst in terms of building trust with the general public.

2. What stands in the way of [specific constituency group] becoming involved?

There was general agreement among all respondents that there is not any one issue. Much like responses to the first question, responses to this one ranged from true apathy to life challenges. For example, one respondent stated, "Those who are wealthy and with time on their hands are the only ones who can literally afford to be involved anymore ... unless there is a quid pro quo people don't get involved, so unless they see something for them [a direct result], they turn off."

This response typifies a general inability of the public to connect general policy development processes to issues that affect their everyday lives and personal concerns. In other words, the occasional election issue or public process that voters are able to assess as having something to do with their own concerns is the rare exception rather than the rule. Regular or ongoing civic involvement is now seen as a niche interest or hobby of those who can afford to devote significant time to research and follow policy development issues.

Several respondents acknowledged the transitory nature of our southwest communities in general as an inhibitor to community or civic involvement. They describe cities that have small core groups of engaged citizens with roots in the community, surrounded by swirling masses of disconnected and disengaged residents moving in, through, and out of the community without contributing to it in a meaningful way.

Another common sentiment of respondents was that some groups don't become involved because they don't feel adequately skilled, informed, or "smart enough" to more actively participate in community and policy issues. As one respondent reflected, "If you have an accent or aren't well educated that can feel like a barrier." (This was an Asian respondent commenting about her parents' experience.)

3. What are the politics of the [specific constituency group] that determines what happens or is accomplished, or not?

A common thread among many of the responses to this question is that the "squeaky wheel," no matter from what community, tends to drive the issues that are discussed and acted upon. Both Anglo, African American, and Hispanic community leaders had similar sentiments about the fact that "activists/spokespersons may have earned the right to be listened to and certainly bring attention to an issue, but they aren't necessarily the ones who determine what really gets done." The squeaky wheel can sometimes impede progress on an issue, because "some individuals have their own agenda and aren't really interested in helping others get ahead; they just try to railroad the process to bring people down."

4. What is your most critical public policy concern and why?

A casual review of newspaper and television news coverage in the Phoenix area would give the impression that illegal immigration is the prevailing and common public policy concern of community leaders and citizens at all strata of society. It was therefore surprising that respondents seldom listed immigration issues as their primary concern in answering this question. Responses instead covered a wide range of policy issues, including animal cruelty, health care, and education. Only three respondents mentioned immigration. All three respondents who listed immigration also commented to the effect that the issue had become so divisive and polarizing because "no one is framing it in a different way. . . . Elected officials are

getting away with saying and doing outrageous things and people are forgetting the law of human decency. People aren't using their own personal experiences to connect to the story."

We can, therefore, conclude from these remarks that proliferating more robust issue framing and deliberation skills among policymakers and media professionals could have a significant impact on the quality of news coverage and the willingness of members of the public to increase their awareness of, and involvement in, policy development processes.

5. What role do you see for yourself in this issue and how it is defined?

Responses to this question revealed significant differences of perspective between community leaders and unengaged citizens. The unengaged really struggled with answering this question, and tended to describe themselves as either struggling to find their role or having a very small role, such as donating to a cause or volunteering for a charity. Leaders, on the other hand, immediately described their role as one of advocacy and active engagement with others in the community—including civic organizations, governmental entities, and nonprofits—to bring awareness to the issue in a proactive manner. Some of the leaders saw themselves as being more informed than the general public and thus saw their roles as having to make decisions and take positions that the public might not agree with, but that served the greater good.

Generally, responses to this question did not significantly differ across ethnic or racial groupings. Among the unengaged citizens, there was a uniformly pessimistic assessment of the role of ordinary citizens in affecting policy. Average citizens among the mainstream Anglo community did not express a higher level of involvement or participation in policy development than other groups, as was expected. Neither were there significant differences between males and females in responses to this question.

6. Do you think leaders of our community see this issue in the same way you do and use the same name for the issue? [Question for community members]

The respondents almost uniformly stated that community leaders are "out of touch" with the cares and concerns of ordinary citizens. They indicated that community leaders are either wholly unaware of, or unconcerned with their policy concerns, or that the effort and funding expended on the issues they care about (such as education) do not reflect their true importance.

Again, there was not the expected variation between ethnic or racial groups in responses to this question. All groups expressed a common cynicism and perceived distance from both high-level policymakers (legislators, state and federal executives, and so on), and also for local-level and ethnic-group community leaders. Neither was there any obvious difference between responses based on gender or generational differences.

7. [For community leaders] Why is the public angry or apathetic about issues? How can they be encouraged to participate in public processes?

Community leaders were generally aware of, and concerned with the fact that the way policy issues are framed or presented to the public impacts their willingness to get involved in dealing with the issue. One respondent believes that the public is angry because the information provided to them is often piecemeal, incomplete, and inaccurate, and stated that leaders need to do a better job of informing the public about all issues. "We can't have one extreme so bad that it doesn't hurt the entire community. What happens to one affects all."

Another respondent had a similar view that a lack of connection to human decency and the plight of all humanity is what makes engagement so difficult. "No one is presenting the hard working, decent face of the issue [immigrants] just the one or two bad apples that taint the issue."

8. What are your opinions regarding the following issues?:
 The following excerpts typify responses to these policy issues:

ISSUE	COMMUNITY LEADERS	COMMUNITY MEMBERS	DIVERGENCE
Immigration Reform	A very sad situation. An oxymoron, because nothing is being done to reform it.	A tough, hot button issue. I can see both sides of the issue but clearly something needs to be done.	Very little divergence, but all parties seem to be looking for leadership to come from elsewhere.
Smoking Ban in Bars	Responses ranged from neutral or ambivalent to "Hooray!"	Great! Definitely for it.	Surprising uniformity of support for this position.
War in Iraq	It's an abomination. We need a respectful withdrawal of troops.	It's a shame. We need to be out of it.. .. Innocent people are getting killed.	Little divergence, all parties seem to look for leadership from elsewhere.
2008 Presidential Election	Need to have Dems in control of the White House. Hopefully a transition from the current horror.	Total change is coming. Can't get any worse. Would love to see a woman but if not, at least a Dem.	Some respondents reluctant to comment on this question; those that did tended to lean liberal/Dem.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW RESULTS

While not all of the targeted subjects could be interviewed within the report's time frame, consistently disappointing results indicated that more work in this area would not necessarily be informative or helpful. The primary goal of the interviews was to assess differences between the thinking of community leaders and average citizens related to how members of the public are, and are not, engaged in public processes and policy development. A secondary goal was to determine differences in these attitudes and viewpoints across ethnic and racial identities.

Surprisingly, there were no significant differences in interview results across racial, gender, or generational (age) factors. There was, however, distinct divergence between leaders and average citizens. The common theme among all informants, however, was a general sense of cynicism, pessimism, and disappointment with the status quo.

Generally, leaders tend to see themselves as the uniquely qualified doers acting on behalf of the community, based on either interest or expertise in public processes and policy issues. They did not express great faith in, or understanding of, the roles that the general public can play in these processes other than by voting or by writing to elected officials.

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Community leaders also failed to describe any sophisticated role for members of the public in policy development or public processes other than by voting for elected officials and by contacting these elected officials. They did express regret and pessimism about the lack of willingness and ability of the general public to more actively participate in public meetings and to organize grassroots action to address local issues.

Although the results from the interviews did not match up to the researchers' expectations, it was, nonetheless, informative to see that loss of faith in traditional policy development and public processes is widespread among leaders and average citizens without regard to race, gender, or age. It does, however, prove that there is significant work to be done in every sector of the community to change these attitudes and provide more meaningful and effective means for members of the public to play a role in the civic health of their communities.



METHODOLOGY FOR QUESTION TWO

Can deliberative practices help engage people, particularly underserved and underrepresented populations, in community politics?

The intent behind this research question is to examine how our work with leaders in public institutions and ethnic/minority-based organizations may challenge the traditional methods of convening and engaging the public. Specifically, how can NIF values and techniques be applied by public institutions and ethnic/minority-based organizations outside of the traditional NIF forums? Can these values and techniques be translated to other public meetings and public interactions?

In order to collect data regarding this question, NIF strategies, skills, and values will be infused into non-NIF community politics settings. The goal is to determine whether testing strategies in new ways will help organizations engage the public in a more deliberative fashion. Analysis of new projects and retrospective review of past projects will be utilized.

INITIAL RESULTS—TEST STRATEGIES

Following are descriptions of efforts to embed deliberative practices and values in the work of public agencies and community organizations.

GROUP: CITY OF MESA PLANNING DIVISION

PROJECT: W. MAIN STREET AREA PLAN

CCP staff were approached by City of Mesa planning staff in Summer 2006 to assist with public involvement in the development of a new area plan for an approximately four-square mile area surrounding a future light-rail station. This area includes a very diverse mix of population demographics, housing structures, and mixed residential-commercial use. City staff members were in the midst of this planning process and were looking for new ways to engage the public. A citizen planning advisory committee (PAC) had been

formed and several planning meetings, in which residents were asked to identify the assets, issues, and opportunities found in their neighborhood, had already taken place.

CCP staff began their involvement in this process by conducting an issue-framing session with PAC members and city planners using the raw data collected at these initial resident meetings. The result was a new issue guide entitled, *W. Main Street Makeover: How Will It Affect You?* The approaches in the discussion guide reflected the varying viewpoints of residents of the area, which ranged from giving up and leaving the neighborhoods, to encouraging a new urban identity through transit-oriented design. Subsequently, three forums were held in Fall 2006.

Residents were engaged in a traditional forum and feedback was provided back to city staff for their use in developing the final area plan. Participants were fully engaged in the forums and were able to provide very clear ideas on what the final plan for their neighborhood should look like. The discussion went far beyond what could be considered a typical neighborhood meeting—complaints about traffic and street lights. Rather, residents were able to clearly articulate what they value about their neighborhood as well as a vision for their community. “We should be leaving a legacy of a vibrant community for future generations.” “Diversity in people, incomes, life experience is good for the community.” This process was a major departure from the typical method of plan review conducted by the City of Mesa in which planners would design an area/neighborhood plan with limited resident input and then present a draft final plan to the public. Through the forums, the public was able to provide very clear input prior to the writing of a plan. The process of public deliberation allayed the fears of city staff members who were worried about not only creating neighborhood conflict over building height or landscape design but worried about whether the technical nature of planning ideas would be understood by the general public. Staff members were able to witness the public discussing not only their specific preferences for technical aspects,

such as building height or pedestrian-friendly design, but to conduct a collaborative discussion and thoughtful deliberation about the bigger picture—the future of their community.

One forum was conducted entirely in Spanish for Latino community members. A group of 10 Spanish-speaking women gathered together at a local church for a forum using the same discussion guide as the forums conducted in English. Again, this was a significant departure from typical planning meetings where resource constraints limited the ability to incorporate monolingual Spanish-speaking community involvement. The forum did take place in a much more informal manner with little use of time constrictions or flipchart recording. This method allowed for a much more organic conversation that allowed greater discussion and deliberation among these residents.

Interestingly enough, the results of this forum were not significantly different from the forums conducted in English. This was a surprise to both CCP and city planning staff. In both English and Spanish forums, residents were able to provide specific comments that city planning staff were looking for in the development of the plan (building height, mixed-use design elements) while also providing a much larger, “big picture” view. Neither group got overly hung-up on a specific technical issue or conflict, which had been the fear of city staff.

GROUP: CITY OF MESA PARKS & RECREATION STAFF

PROJECT: RIVERVIEW PARK REDESIGN

In May 2007, the City of Mesa was preparing for a public vote that could authorize a redevelopment project that would effectively eliminate a set of popular baseball fields and reduce an adjoining park site by several acres. If the project were authorized, a redesign of existing park space would be needed. In an attempt to gain resident input on this potential project, CCP staff worked with City of Mesa parks staff and a local community

development corporation, West Mesa CDC, on a public meeting. During the initial planning meeting city staff expressed skepticism about the ability of a public meeting to elicit productive ideas that would be of use to a plan for park redesign. They expressed considerable concern over whether the public could provide ideas that would be realistic in terms of design function and affordability. Would residents come up with such “pie in the sky” ideas as to be a waste of time?

Through the course of several planning meetings the final public meeting agenda included breaking up participants into small groups and asking them to design their own park using a scale model of the existing land and general park amenities. Each group was also provided with a cost sheet that outlined the approximate cost of each park amenity. At the end of the planning exercise, each group was asked to report out to the larger group the cost of their park along with the three values expressed in their park design.

Involvement from city staff was limited to answering technical questions from residents during the exercise portion of the meeting. Each team was provided with a red flag that could be raised to signal that they needed staff assistance with a technical question. Otherwise, staff roamed the room listening and observing the residents in action.

The end result was a meeting unlike any previous city planning meeting, which usually featured city staff presenting their plan and residents responding with vitriolic criticism and verbal attacks as a result of having had so little engagement in the process. Staff really did listen to residents engaging in deliberative discussions as each small group designed their park and discussed what values they prized most in this public facility. Fears over unrealistic price and design went unrealized as residents focused on what they valued most about their park and compared their group designs against other groups and average cost trends.

Residents, too, were surprised by the collaborative nature of the meeting. As one participant commented at the end of the meeting, “I came ready for a fight but you snookered me real good. This turned out real nice.” While he came ready to battle city staff about taking away his park he ended up working with his neighbors on a design that reflected his values—open space and pedestrian mobility.

Each party’s needs were met. The West Mesa CDC was able to realize its goal of full resident engagement in the early stages of this park redesign process. City staff members were able to gather valuable and creative resident input without being made targets by angry citizens. CCP staff members were able to prove to city staff that a nontraditional meeting style, focused on public deliberation and value-based discussion could work with positive results.

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GROUP: MESA ASSOCIATION OF HISPANIC CITIZENS

PROJECT: MESA LATINO TOWN HALL- MAYORAL CANDIDATES FORUM

The Mesa Association of Hispanic Citizens (MAHC) is one of the most active and high-profile Hispanic-serving organizations in the Phoenix metropolitan area. MAHC holds an annual Town Hall event that serves to gather local Hispanic residents to raise awareness about key issues and mobilize community members to take action on those issues. In anticipation of the March 2008 mayoral election for the City of Mesa, MAHC asked CCP to assist them in moderating a session with mayoral candidates.

Instead of the typical format, in which each candidate restates a prepared “stump speech” and attacks the other candidates on personal and policy issues, CCP in collaboration with several MAHC members, structured the workshop as an opportunity for community members to have a more intimate and personal conversation with candidates and have them respond to the concerns of average citizens.

To accomplish these goals, the format developed for this event had each of the three mayoral candidates in a separate meeting room with a group of citizens. Each candidate was given a very limited amount of time to introduce themselves to the audience, after which, a moderator posed a few pre-prepared questions developed by the MAHC board which addressed issues affecting the Hispanic community in Mesa. The bulk of the time allotted, however, was reserved for residents to pose questions directly to the candidate in the room. After a half-hour period, time was called, and the candidates were rotated to a different room and audience. After repeating this process twice, each group of residents was exposed to each of the mayoral candidates separately, and had an opportunity to engage each one in personal conversation.

Because the candidates were given an extended opportunity to speak about their own goals, values, and priorities—as opposed to attacking and criticizing their opponents—participants felt that they really had a chance to get to know each candidate on a deeper level than their prepared sound bites. The setting was informal and intimate and had a markedly more relaxed, personable ambiance than the typically highly charged and combative atmosphere of most candidate forums. Candidates and participants alike uniformly praised the format as refreshing and rancor-free and expressed hope that future candidate events would be handled in a like fashion.

The greatest resistance came from several long-time MAHC board members who expressed surprise and angst over the changes from the

traditional format of a candidate’s meeting. These individuals were very comfortable with the traditional format and expressed concern about the productivity of this session which allowed for direct citizen participation. This resonates with initial interview findings that ***rather than finding significant differences along ethnic lines the greatest differences in attitudes toward public deliberation and citizen involvement are seen between community leaders and the average citizenry.***

**GROUP: THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC
PROJECT: MESA CANDIDATE FORUM SERIES**

CCP staff entered into a collaborative project with the *Arizona Republic*, Arizona’s largest newspaper, to sponsor a series of candidate forums in January 2008. The City of Mesa was undergoing the largest change in council since the 1960s with five of seven council seats, including the mayor’s seat, up for election, and no incumbents running for office. The *Arizona Republic* had traditionally held candidate debates prior to municipal elections in a very traditional format—candidates seated at a dais answering predetermined questions from the editorial staff. These were videotaped and played on the local municipal cable channel post-event. No



citizen participation was included in these events. *Republic* staff members were very open, however, to changes in format in order to include citizen participation.

After several planning meetings the final agenda for the candidate forums included several deliberation strategies. Candidates were seated to the side of the citizens and were not on a raised platform or dais. The first half hour of the forum was devoted to citizen participation with participants asked to respond to the question, “What do you see as the vision for our community; what would you like to see for Mesa in another 5, 10, 20 years?” Candidates were asked to remain silent during this portion of the evening. After resident discussion had concluded, each candidate was provided seven minutes to present his or her vision for Mesa in the context of what they had heard that evening. The event then concluded with a Q&A portion, based entirely on questions collected that evening from citizen participants.

Participants in the candidate forum series held in January were representative of the general population with a mix of ethnicities and socioeconomic ranges represented. This was a significant departure from the typical candidate forums that have taken place in Mesa. As the general manager for the *Arizona Republic* described, “This approach seemed to engage citizens more readily than the usual candidate-talks-then-answers-questions format. The audience members seemed more intent on what candidates had to say after seeing their fellow citizens had some of the same ideas and observations that they did.” This comment did resonate with feedback from forum participants including those who had been involved politically (a former council member) and those who did not describe themselves as politically active. As one participant stated, these forums “actually gave residents a chance to speak and for candidates to hear us.” There was also an awareness among forum sponsors, as well as participants, that having resident dialogue prior to hearing from candidates provided an opportunity for the public to frame the

conversation, rather than allowing the candidates to dominate with a predetermined speech. As expressed by one *Republic* editorial writer, “It also was refreshing to not let the candidates dominate the time with their ideas. Residents tended to say constructive things that helped frame the talking points for candidates.” ***The fact that the event sponsors are now able to use language that reflects the strategies and goals of public deliberation is a significant and positive departure from business-as-usual in the Mesa community.***

Participant dialogue and feedback on the event, however, showed *no significant differences among ethnic groups.*

Even though the candidate forums did not follow a strict NIF format, the NIF strategies implemented had a significant impact upon the quantity and quality of participation. This was noted and seen in a positive manner by both forum sponsors and participants. “By far they seemed more engaged than usual, and productively so. Audience members clearly arrived with some very well-developed thoughts on Mesa’s future and their own neighborhood’s conditions. The moderators’ efforts to be inclusive and to coax members to elaborate on their observations enriched the overall experience at the forums,” [*Arizona Republic* general manager].

Mesa, as a municipality, has experienced dramatic changes in demographics coupled with geographic disparities. Some neighborhoods in Mesa have a Latino population of more than 90 percent while newer developments in the community included considerably fewer Latino residents. Participant dialogue and feedback on the event, however, showed ***no significant differences among ethnic groups.*** As one editorial writer pointed out, “Based

on the feedback I heard, people were glad we asked them for their input on the issues. And I think that was productive. If nothing else, it showed that citizens' priorities and concerns for this city were generally the same, no matter where in Mesa they lived."

**GROUP: GOLDWATER INSTITUTE, ACLU,
ARIZONA HUMANITIES COUNCIL
PROJECT: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION
COMMUNITY FORUM**

In the Summer of 2007, backers of a political campaign to eliminate affirmative action programs in government agencies began organizing efforts to place a ballot measure to that effect before voters in the November 2008 state election. In anticipation of this election issue, two ideologically opposed organizations, the Goldwater Institute, a conservative think tank, and the Arizona Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, approached the Arizona Humanities Council and the CCP with the goal of cosponsoring a community forum on the issue. The shared goals of both organizations were to raise awareness about the affirmative action programs that would be affected, arguments for and against the proposed ballot measure, and what the likely outcomes would be if affirmative action programs were eliminated in government and educational institutions. The main goal of the Arizona Humanities Council was to demonstrate the benefits and effectiveness of using civil discourse to bring such oppositional parties together to deliberate on a controversial topic.

To accommodate these several objectives, a two-part forum format was developed. The first half of the event will feature an NIF-style deliberation on the broad issue of affirmative action. The 1996 NIF issue framing of this issue was adapted to include contemporary and localized issues surrounding affirmative action in Arizona.

After the hour-and-a-half deliberation on affirmative action, the participants will be reconvened to hear brief presentations from panelists advocating for and against the

elimination of affirmative action programs in Arizona, including elaboration on what specific programs in education, procurement, and hiring practices would be impacted. Audience members will then have the floor to pose questions and comments to the panelists.

It is hoped that by beginning with a moderated deliberation on the general issue, participants will have gained a better appreciation for viewpoints that differ from their own and will be more disposed to engage in civil discourse on the specific policy issues raised in the ballot measure.

The sponsoring organizations are excited about the prospect of holding a style of policy deliberation very different from the norm and hope to eliminate the negativity and personal attacks that typically result from deliberation of such controversial issues. The event is scheduled to take place in September 2008.

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**GROUP: ARIZONA ATTORNEY
GENERAL'S OFFICE
PROJECT: HOUSING DISCRIMINATION
COMMUNITY FORUM**

In the Spring of 2007, the newly appointed president of a local community college was denied a lease for rental housing. It was discovered that the denial was based on the racial bias of the

property owner. The resulting lawsuit awarded not only monetary damages to her in recompense for the unlawful discrimination, but also mandated that the parties at fault collaborate with the state Attorney General's Office to conduct a community forum on housing discrimination. At the behest of the plaintiff, the Attorney General's Office requested the assistance of the CCP to develop a format that would educate the community about housing discrimination issues, as well as engage community members in active deliberation about the causes of, and solutions to, dealing with housing discrimination.

The Center for Civic Participation collaborated with the plaintiff, the real estate agency that was found to be at fault, and the Attorney General's Office to organize this event. The format that was developed sought to engage real estate professionals alongside community members in discussing and developing solutions to housing discrimination, as opposed to having community members passively listen to presentations on fair housing laws and guidelines.

The proposed format begins with some introductory remarks by the Attorney General to set the stage for the event, and video testimonials from victims of housing discrimination to provide some "personal stake" perspectives to the issue. Audience members will then observe some live reenactment vignettes of recent cases of housing discrimination and be asked to analyze each scenario and discuss how to deal with the situation. Expert panelists will be on hand to respond to audience suggestions and provide guidance about what real estate professionals and community members could and should do to both prevent and respond to perceived and real incidences of discrimination. By including real estate professionals alongside non-expert community members, it is expected that solutions will not be limited to the legalistic constraints of fair housing laws, but get to the deeper issues that determine how and why discrimination persists in our society.

The event is scheduled for late April 2008 and is expected to "sell out" at the maximum capacity of 280 persons. Video footage will be taken of the event for use in subsequent real estate courses and community forums in smaller settings.

The primary goal of this portion of the research was to determine whether deliberative practices can help engage people, particularly underserved and underrepresented populations, in community politics. Specifically, how can NIF values and techniques be applied by public institutions and ethnic/minority-based organizations outside of the traditional NIF forums? Can these values and techniques be translated to other public meetings and public interactions?

Results of infusing NIF strategies and techniques into a variety of public events has yielded positive results. Generally speaking, these changes in the traditional ways of convening the public have been well received by both public leaders and general community members.

Similar to initial interview findings, there are no significant differences in the reactions to these changes across racial or ethnic lines. However, there are differences between community leaders and the general public, with community leaders being much more resistant to changes in traditional convening methods, regardless of ethnicity.

We believe that by demonstrating the success of nontraditional convening methods to our partners, we also ensure the sustainability of these initiatives. In the long-term, our goal is to create enough change within our partner organizations to bring about support of the principles of public deliberation.

UPDATE

Given the disappointing results of this study, the MCCD Center for Civic Participation has sought to address the relationship between community leaders and members of the public by trying to recast what it means to be a citizen through educational and outreach efforts and by working with current and emerging leaders to instill skills and awareness of more effective public engagement practices. Some of those efforts include:

- Public Engagement and Civil Discourse training for leadership development programs
- Community leadership institutes (Valley Leadership, Project CENTRL, etc.)
- College and high school student leadership programs
- Technical assistance for public meetings and forums to embed more deliberative and engaging processes and outcomes
- Deliberative candidate forums and ballot measure workshops
- Deliberative panel discussions preceding public meetings
- Public relations and outreach efforts to engage the community in discussion about strategies and practices of real civic participation and civic engagement
- Project Civil Discourse coalition
- O'Connor House Project—Civic Education Committee

While the scale of these efforts is not yet what it needs to be to really impact change statewide, the focus of our early efforts has been to begin a process of redefining the set of skills and expectations for community leaders to include effective and legitimate public engagement as the driver and initiator of public policy development, rather than as the means to convince voters to agree with conclusions arrived at beforehand by experts and elected officials.

Early response to these efforts has been very encouraging, and we hope that as more community leaders and emerging leaders are exposed to, and have experience with, these strategies, they will help proliferate these practices as a matter of course throughout the state.

We believe that by demonstrating the success of nontraditional convening methods to our partners, we also ensure the sustainability of these initiatives. In the long-term, our goal is to create enough change within our partner organizations to bring about support of the principles of public deliberation.

ABOUT THE KETTERING FOUNDATION

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.

Developing Deliberative Practice: The role of deliberation with underrepresented populations in community politics reflects the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the foundation, its directors, or its officers.

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