

Developing Deliberative Practice:

Understanding
community politics
through public
deliberation

A KETTERING FOUNDATION REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the summer of 2003, our local National Issues Forums (NIF) project teams have completed four deliberative projects on the following topics: health information privacy, nonprofit financial stability, Internet filters in public libraries, and the sustainability of local agriculture. Each of these projects included a full range of roles in NIF methods. In reflection on these projects, we recognized that we had introduced a very diverse group of citizens and leaders to a deliberative practice through the application of NIF methodology. Then we recognized that these individuals and groups were basically unaware that others had done a similar NIF-based project. Our plan for this project emerged to actively seek these unique individuals as partners in debriefing their specific project within the context of all four Solano County efforts and then to invite their input in determining our next steps as community partners.

Our vision throughout this research project focused on the basic questions posed about the interconnected and organic nature of community politics. The four projects we chose to study a bit more were all done within a specific political context—Solano County, California. Because public decisions were actually made in three of the four situations and are still pending in the fourth, a connection between deliberative practice and local politics was present.

We didn't really know whether any of these project partners would be interested in looking back at their experiences or whether any of them had an interest in looking at a different project. We started our research, wondering and hoping: wondering whether our previous partners had really been affected by the NIF-based way of talking about crucial issues and hoping we'd have enough people who were willing to talk to us.

As we debriefed our projects, participants were surprised by the sum of the actions, results, and consequences being reported.

FULL REPORT

WHERE WE STARTED

During the past few years, we have been engaged in deliberative projects that support public policy decisions in our communities and in Solano County. The National Issues Forums (NIF) deliberation practices have gained appreciation and trust by members of the public, of city councils, and of the Board of Supervisors. In one instance, the Board of Supervisors mandated an NIF-style research project for a county department.

Since the summer of 2003, our local NIF project teams have completed four deliberative projects on the following topics: health information privacy, nonprofit financial stability, Internet filters in public libraries, and the sustainability of local agriculture. Each of these projects included a full range of roles in NIF methods. In reflecting on these projects, we recognized that we had introduced a very diverse group of citizens and leaders to a deliberative practice through the application of NIF methodology. Then we recognized that these individuals and groups were basically unaware that others had done a similar NIF-based project. Our plan for this project emerged to actively seek these individuals as partners in debriefing their specific project within the context of all four Solano County efforts and then to invite their input in determining our next steps as community partners.

At the outset of this research effort, we believed our participation in the project would give us a chance to “unpack” some of our experiences, to reflect on what was working and what needed to be upgraded, to share our learning with other professionals in deliberative work, and then to plot our next steps in developing new partnerships and projects. We believed, also, that our unpacking could best be done in group processes with those who participated in one of our projects, offering them the opportunity to join us in reflection and in planning future partnerships and projects.

Most of the research questions outlined in the research project's guide appeared to be applicable in our conversations with individuals and in group settings. Because public decisions were actually made in three of the four situations and are still pending in the fourth, a connection between deliberative practice and local politics would be observable—if it, in fact, existed in these situations. We proposed a combination of settings for research:

1. Small-group and individual conversations with key citizens and leaders in each of the four projects
2. Large-group gathering with citizens and leaders of all four projects
 - a. Increase awareness of deliberative practice in diverse projects affecting the county, identifying the key “roles” in deliberative practice, and linking people across the projects.
 - b. Identify the next critical issues for deliberative practice in Solano County in small-group and large-group processes, utilizing the diverse perspectives of those who already have experience in NIF-assisted projects.
 - c. Create new project partnerships and enlist new NIF practitioners to address the most urgent and important issues of the county.

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. (See Appendix for these support documents.)

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. (See Appendix for decision-support documents.)

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, NIF or our 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.

A detailed meeting plan was created to include small-group and large-group conversations with clear timing, content, objective, and logistical notes. By alternating these conversation methods, we were able to make some of our participants more comfortable in a setting with others with very different backgrounds and interests. As people arrived, we specifically asked them not to sit with more than one person they already knew in order to mix their table groups. We asked someone at each table to be a recorder for their group, so reporting out to the large group worked smoothly. We had very little presentation or lecture time; most of our time was spent in small-group or large-group conversation. When we got to the part of our agenda where we wanted to identify new projects for NIF-based work, everyone seemed to be very comfortable as active participants. (See the Appendix for our meeting plan.)

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We collected a lot of data from our small-group and large-group conversations. While we'd worried a bit that conversations might not flow comfortably, our worries were unfounded; we had a room full of good talkers. We compiled table talk notes and large-group conversation notes by project; these notes could be helpful to the constituencies involved and other projects could see where their interests might overlap. Each project was discussed for the same length of time, just like we commit equal time in forums to each of the approaches. Our conversations could have easily taken double the time we had committed. Our conversation notes are included in the next several pages.

We also had a research interest in the creation of new cooperative and interdisciplinary efforts. Since 2003, we have worked closely and individually with four different special-interest groups. We were also interested in the creation of a deliberative culture, one project at a time. Now that four projects were mostly completed, we hoped to gather these individual experiences to see whether a cooperative group could be formed to identify where NIF-based work could be applied next in Solano County. We asked our table groups to brainstorm what they felt "we need to talk about next, 'in this way,' in Solano County." After each table reported their list, we opened the floor for additional items. A couple items on the list were consolidated, because they were similar enough to be blended. Then we asked the group to prioritize their brainstormed list. We counted the total number of items (18) and determined that each person could vote for 6 items that they felt were most urgent and important for our cooperative next steps. Item by item, we counted by a show of hands how the list should be prioritized for future actions. One item received a consensus top priority, and the rest were rated in the order you see in the pages that follow.

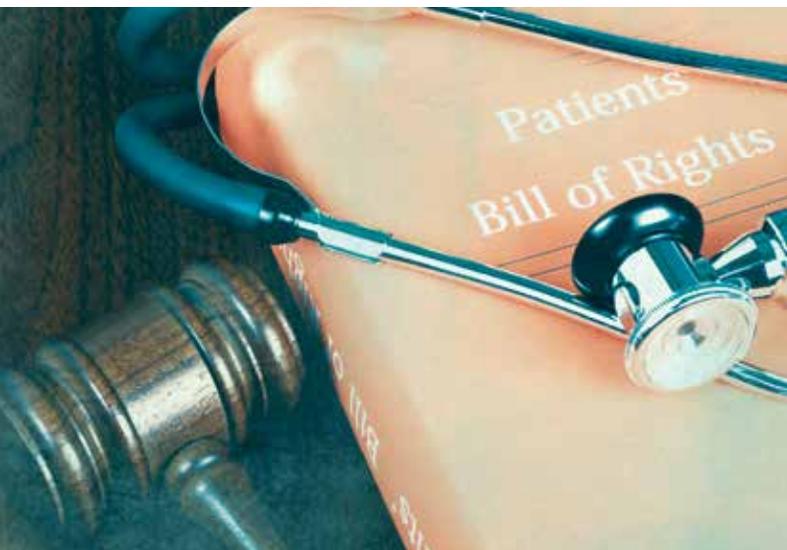
HEALTH PRIVACY PROJECT

- A newspaper editor and staff initiated the project; six months after the event, they stepped back to look at what happened.
- The newspaper felt blocked in their reporting; decisions were made without a policy in place. It was obvious at that point that more clarity was needed in the relationship between privacy rights and access in reporting health information the public wants to know.
- It was hard for the public to trust the media. Skepticism was powerful in trying to do the right thing in starting a conversation about the issue.
- At first, discussion invited learning from across the spectrum of roles; a variety of views on "protecting children" emerged.
- Obviously, a means to gather a wide diversity of views was needed. NIF was a familiar means for public discussion, so contact was made with the NIF network.
- A lot of fear surrounds contagious diseases, even though some diseases are less contagious than others.
- A totally unbiased group of people worked together to help frame the issue for public discussion, providing the language and concepts that could bridge the gap between the public agencies and the media.
- The public got to hear the perspective on their specific role in the event, and got to voice their disappointment that public agencies and the media were not coordinated in their efforts.
- Citizens got to meet heads of county departments and to communicate with all sectors in the event.
- Through the forum prep and forum event, participants got a greater understanding of other agencies and their unique missions, including HIPAA, which was new at the time.

- Health privacy is misunderstood; it's really in everyone's self-interest to have privacy protected in health issues. It's not important until it's you!
- The public forum was totally unscripted; real people got to speak without being dominated by one group or another.
- Public agencies had the opportunity to be heard without being filtered by the media—a refreshing opportunity to address the public directly.
- The newsroom gained a greater sensitivity about the limits various agencies have in doing their jobs; there was a recognition of legal limits.
- Participants had a greater awareness of the public's view of the media.
- Participants gained a new view of public connections and interagency communications and limits.
- Health privacy became an important issue for further discussion; few people realized that HIPAA was going to have such a great impact on everyday life.
- School district officials became aware that they needed a policy that was clear and understood; they felt they were prepared and discovered they weren't.
- The Health Department wrote policies for Solano County that were used by the State of California in defining new health privacy policies.

NONPROFIT FUNDING PROJECT

- The nonprofit coalition wanted a united voice. It is now under the umbrella of the Solano County Community Foundation and has 45-46 members.
- The coalition is now at a turning point regarding how to proceed and the issue is how much attention to give to any specific agency.
- Two significant interest groups have emerged: agencies that vie for and receive county funding and those that do not.
- They are talking about some common issues, such as back office operations, how to share services, and so on.
- The coalition has a listserv for sharing of information. They want to work together, focus on the overall mission, and not compete.
- Another model, Solano Coalition for Better Health, has one big goal, which helps people rally around one urgent topic; the nonprofit community is more diverse. They look at issues affecting everyone. A model in Napa County is a good example of a “seasoned” coalition.
- They are communicating better, and looking at the coalition in Napa as a good example for further cooperation.
- Stephanie Wolf, director of the Solano Community Foundation, has become the reluctant spokesperson for the group.
- Nonprofit groups came together to discuss their concerns regarding the scarcity of available funding, communication of information, issues with the county, and areas of responsibility.
- The first meeting was well attended (100 or so attending) and was covered by the media.
- From that initial gathering, a group of five or six became the current board.
- As a result, the Solano Nonprofit Coalition was formed; it encompasses 45-plus member organizations or individuals, a website, and dues.



- They set a goal of one to two events per year.
 - Funder’s Faire: 100 attended; the event was considered a success with a lot of enthusiasm and sharing of information.
 - Resource Faire: Considered a failure due to disorganization.
- The coalition is polarized between county-supported groups and those who are not.
- The board sees value in grouping together for insurance and buying power, but they are struggling for consensus.
- Politics plays a major role; the group is still young and scared to fight with or to anger the county.
- Moving forward:
 - Improve relationships with the county.
 - Be heard as a coalition instead of as individuals.
 - Do not compete for dwindling funds.
 - Reexamine forward growth.
 - Talk to Napa, who does it “right” and model what they do.
- Observation from former supervisor Duane Kromm: “Coalition for Better Health is more effective because they focus on a single united goal. As a group they are united and focused, which is different than the Nonprofit Coalition, which makes them a stronger presence.”

The forums gave the person who initiated this issue (and others) a civil way to discuss differing viewpoints. It didn’t change her mind, but she understood better why the final decision was made.

LIBRARY INTERNET PROJECT

- There was a lot of politics, because this was a highly charged issue. The Board (of Supervisors) policy was being challenged. It was a hard issue for the library staff, who felt a new policy was cutting off the public’s access to information. But filtering software these days is more sophisticated, so the public still has a lot of access.
- The board voted for filters with the option for adults that the filters can be turned off; but the vote was not unanimous (three to two), even with this compromise.
- The forums gave the person who initiated this issue (and others) a civil way to discuss differing viewpoints. It didn’t change her mind, but she understood better why the final decision was made.
- Those involved with this project, including library staff, appreciated the process.
- Some people were very opposed, some were in favor; it could have been a very contentious issue with many hard feelings.
- Library staff presented a plan that mitigated a lot of concerns. The forum gave opportunity for a lot of open dialogue. Having strong support for just one view could have kept people opposing it from coming. The library and all library staff had to remain completely neutral, but this was also a way to show the library’s commitment to free speech.
- The forums on this incredibly charged issue were balanced. If not for NIF, the board would have had to make a decision anyway, but NIF provided a foundation for public conversation on which to base their decision.
- NIF training has influenced how Kromm (a member of the Board of Supervisors at the time) worked and deliberated in his everyday work as a board member.
- It was a no-win situation for the Board of Supervisors; they stepped through the issue, whereas the forums gave the public the opportunity to voice strongly held opinions without violent public disagreements.

- An issue arose from the concerns of one Vacaville resident.
- It was a highly charged, emotional issue, with communities polarized: Vacaville pro, Fairfield mixed, Vallejo opposed.
- It was felt that democracy itself was being challenged regarding censorship and the right to information.
- Politics played a major role, involving the board, citizens, church groups, and the news media.
- The board policy itself was challenged. A potentially explosive issue needed some special attention and participants looked to NIF methods to provide a buffer.
- Supervisor John Vasquez was pro-filtering and had a strong constituency who was visible and vocal, yet he advocated strongly for the forum process.
- The NIF forums “provided civil conversation on differing viewpoints.” The process allowed those involved to understand and appreciate opposing viewpoints even if they did not agree.
- The library staff remained publicly neutral, and implemented the filtering system as ordered by the board.
- The filtering proved to be less restrictive than anticipated, and though not optimum for anyone, has proven to be livable for everyone.

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AGRICULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT

- This topic is really interesting to many people; they really want to know how local agriculture can be sustained.
- Connections between rural and urban factions were greatly needed, and awareness increased in both.
- The discussion on food, agriculture, and land use is just getting started. Solano County is growing and agriculture is changing. A lot of assumptions shape how we talk about agriculture in Solano County.
- The topic needs more conversation, and there needs to be a mechanism to bring people together to understand and support each other. The process should be ongoing outside of the Board of Supervisors’ Chambers.
- Both the community and producers need to be educated.
- “We didn’t know what we’d be when we grew up”—neither growers nor city folk have a vision of agriculture in an increasingly urban county.

- There was a pervasive lack of awareness about agricultural issues, threats, and opportunities.
- Disagreements arise when communication is lacking.
- City/agriculture connections should be sought.
- Solano County lacks a long-term decision on policies that affect agricultural sustainability; a new General Plan can change that.
- This issue ties into the health of the nonprofit sector: wealth in Solano County looks different, because much of it is agricultural wealth. Agriculture helps to make Solano County a nice place to live.
- The agriculture report, which focused on practical language and understandable concepts, was a real asset.
- It was eye-opening for growers to hear that they have support and encouragement from many in the urban community.
- In the philanthropic world, Solano County is in the “rural philanthropy” category; when asked about whether Solano County is truly rural, the response was, “Well, when I drive to work, I see cows, so I guess so.”
- Without dialogue with producers, a lot of people in Solano County don’t understand this culture (agriculture and small towns).
- Solano County needs to develop a vision for agriculture; the community needs to help develop the vision, and needs to understand the complexities of agriculture; the process is almost more important than the final product.
- The rural and agricultural “landscape” has become important to developers in several counties, such as San Luis Obispo.
- Other counties have a well-developed plan and process; these counties can provide an example and model of what’s possible in bridging the gap between agriculture and urban populations.

- People don’t understand the issue; most people assume agriculture is sustainable without doing anything.
- No long-term vision for the county or for agriculture in the county exists.
- A joint vision is needed for urban and Ag communities.
- There is a need to educate both the community and the Ag producers.
- Developers understand the value of our agricultural landscape to their land values; build on that premise.
- Nonprofits have interest in developing rural philanthropy.



OBSERVATIONS FROM THE DATA

- Overwhelming consensus from all groups that more forums need to be held on the Agricultural Sustainability topic . . . cross-project interest and urgency evident.
- Nonprofit coalition decided in table and large-group conversations that they needed to revisit their forum experience to decide their next steps.

**SOLANO COUNTY NIF WORKGROUP
PROPOSED PROJECT TOPICS FOR 2008
WORKGROUP DINNER–JANUARY 30, 2008, FAIRFIELD, CA**

VOTES	TOPIC
Consensus	Continue Ag Sustainability forums (community supported)
13	Affordable low-income and entry-level housing, including the development of affordable housing land trusts
12	Criminal justice system, prisons, and prisoner releases
10	Leadership evolving into collaborative approach; community expectations; diverse leadership in a highly diverse county
10	Violence in the community, especially in Vallejo
10	Water in California, including water rights, storage, power production, limits
9	Community-supported agriculture (CSA)—develop local food production, sales, and distribution model in Solano County
8	Cost of sports/extra-curricular programs in schools for youth 11-18 years of age; activities that are cost effective, including band
8	Obesity and related health issues
8	Veterans . . . helping them . . . especially young people and Boomers
6	Immigration
5	How to “harness: the Boomer population”
5	Nonprofit funding . . . revisited
3	Bilingual support for Hispanic families
2	Youth transitioning from foster care into adulthood
1	Family Resource Centers . . . need in each community
1	Use of prisons and schools to solve society's ills
0	Outsourcing (exit) of senior population to other countries on retirement



■ As we debriefed our projects, participants were surprised by some of the actions, results, and consequences being reported.

■ Participants in two projects expressed that they were surprised that their own opinions changed as they listened to the conversations in forums when they thought they were pretty clear on how they felt and why.

■ Testimony of a former member of the Board of Supervisors made it clear that he felt NIF-based community forums did and can play an important role in changing the way politics is both perceived and practiced; big supporter of community forums on local issues.

■ Topics that appeared to be very different on the surface were discovered to have connections no one had previously identified. New opportunities for cross-project education and advocacy were noted, and participants decided to get together on their own to follow up.

■ NIF-based work gives the public a voice in important local issues, even if the outcome of the public decision isn't changed by that voice. Politicians can make decisions that include compromise easier when public deliberation succeeds in reducing polarization.

■ Forums have an educational nature, but the education they provide isn't limited to information about an issue . . . forums educate the public about the range of choices available if solutions are truly desired and sought.

■ Several individuals and groups expressed an interest in moderator's training and development of more networking to convene forums across the county.

■ Forums uncover foundational and sometimes hidden tensions within a complex issue . . . once the underlying values and principles in play are discovered, the real issues at stake emerge.

■ Most of the group asked specifically to be invited to our follow-up events as we take the next steps they helped to identify as new topics for NIF-based community work.

■ One of our gathering participants is an executive in the California State Library. Through small-group conversations around the tables and large-group sharing, she decided to enter into partnership conversations with our NIF California Network for a yearlong deliberative project on California water issues. Subsequently, we have established a relationship with the California State Library, the California Public Broadcasting System affiliates, and the California Center for the Book in developing a research plan, issue framing, moderator training, and forum convening for a project that will culminate in spring 2009.

■ Gathering participants have shared their appreciation and enthusiasm after the event. One person said, "That was the best meeting I've ever attended . . . and I've attended a lot of meetings. No one at our table wanted to leave."

A FEW REFLECTIONS

■ Local issues have top priority for framing, conversation, and action; issue forums that give voice to the urgent, relevant, and important topics of conversations in everyday life are capable of generating deliberative projects in communities. People are talking about the issues that are most important to them, and they want to talk in a more productive and respectful way to achieve long-term solutions.

■ Local issues that are then connected to each other find new synergy and partnerships; some seemingly unrelated topics are discovered to have some similar values and goals when partners are connected for conversation.

■ If we in the NIF community were really serious about our heritage in the "town hall meeting" movement, we'd commit ourselves to our genuine roots: town hall meetings focused on "town" issues, and these issues were mostly local, sometimes state, and rarely national. Cutting-edge research in deliberative politics today would return to these roots.

■ A combination of local, state, and national issues in public deliberation is needed to bring the variety of voices that are present in a community into the crucial conversations that lead to long-term, win-win solutions for our most troublesome and complicated problems.

■ “Politics happens!” But local politics is less polarized and more accessible. National politics is severely disabled by partisanship and the polarized framing of politicians and the media. Politics makes public decisions possible; it’s only a “four-letter word” when it’s applied to a state or national issue—local people mostly just want their politics to solve everyday, on-the-ground problems.

■ Local leaders want to be good neighbors; they want to provide the tools for local solutions AND they want solutions that everyone can live with.

Local issues that are then connected to each other find new synergy and partnerships; some seemingly unrelated topics are discovered to have some similar values and goals when partners are connected for conversation.

■ Some of our conversations about trends in politics drew a distinction between partisan, gridlocked politics and issue-based, accountable politics. It was the feeling of some that local politics tends to be more issue-based and accountable, then at the state and national levels partisanship and gridlock increases to the point that it chokes the life out of any hope for long-term solutions that everyone can live with.

■ “NIF forums are totally unscripted.” This remark drew some laughter and agreement. Then others remarked that most of our public discourse on crucial issues is highly scripted for media sound bites and marketing effectiveness. NIF forums were seen as “authentic” and “spontaneous” while news coverage of issue was seen as “scripted” and “predictable.”

■ Politics in general is perceived to have many no-win situations, because of polarization and partisanship; but NIF forums are seen as having the capacity to introduce some respectful and issue-based conversation into everyday conversations about important issues.

■ Several people mentioned how they took the approaches of the forum into conversations days and weeks after the forum. They found it helpful to practice talking about a volatile issue with a set of forum agreements that made it necessary to listen first and then talk. Forum participation made it possible to experience the issue in a different way—a personal way.

INNOVATION/CREATIVITY/LEADERSHIP

Our UC Davis Institute was one of the first in the NIF network and many regarded it (as they should!) as a model for other states. True, it had all the components for an academic institution to meet its public-service commitment through a comprehensive training, which would be replicated in local communities throughout California. And, as long as the interest of the dean of University Extension saw it as important, money to sustain it was available. But with the retirement of a dedicated advocate and the loss of a slick and high-priced marketing department (which, it must be said, registered only 28 participants as a result of its 10,000 mailings in its last year of use in 2000), the reach into new audiences was curtailed. This resulted in a flurry of new outreach schemes that bore small returns for the effort. It became necessary to ask the cost/benefit ratio questions and, consequently, the large Public Policy Institute (PPI) of the 1990s hosted on the UC Davis campus

came to a close in 2003. The UC Davis PPI was a powerful personal experience, but, for some, it was an academic exercise—transferring the learning from that setting to local situations was, in a reflective assessment, an action rarely attempted. To have sustained the UC Davis PPI the dedicated dean would still be at the helm, holding positional power and therefore access to the dollars needed for sustainability.

To sustain an institute in a real-world political environment is to live with and be involved in that political environment. Since 2003, a small group of UC Davis PPI “graduates,” located not far from the UC Davis campus in Solano County, has recognized a growing citizen interest in participating in local forums. This has happened through a slow process of building an understanding of community civic engagement as a means to deliberation and to explore options to solve local problems. Consistent offerings of NIF forums have resulted in an expanding interest in tackling local problems as a method to work together to understand and move to action to address them. The desire to learn how to conduct local forums is growing. A rising interest in expanding this method of addressing local issues has caused a discussion among organizers to consider offering a summer 2008 moderator and recorder workshop.

Solano County Cooperative Extension and the county library system have forged a creative partnership that is yielding a dedicated following. Both institutions are regarded as unbiased sources of accurate information and are both public domains for citizens. Working together they have been able to pool limited resources to expand services to interested forum participants. Our local California team has been able to frame a number of local issues, positioning it to be a reliable venue for addressing “hot button” or polarizing topics utilizing a fair and systematic method.

LEGITIMACY

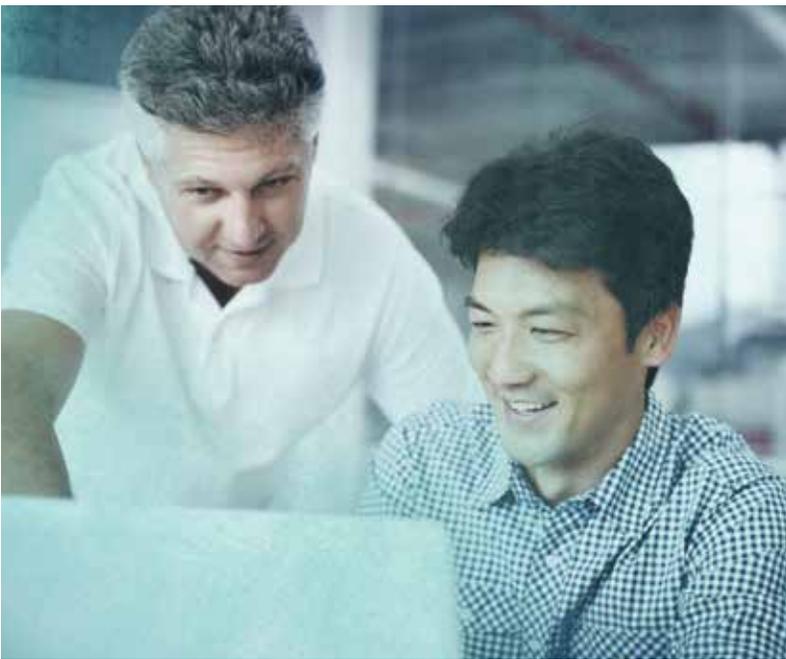
These two primary players in regular forum offerings in Solano County—UC Cooperative Extension and the Solano County Library—are regarded as trusted and unbiased sources of information. The process of framing local issues and convening forums is slowly building legitimacy among local citizens and decision makers, as well as policymakers. Local newspapers are requesting that forums be held on timely national and local issues, and organizational leaders are seeking assistance with their concerns. Legitimacy is growing because a track record has been established that indicates we are determined to provide a consistent setting for effective public deliberations in which nothing is offered but an experience that allows citizens to come together and listen to each other and talk with each other about their deeply held values and beliefs. We offer nothing more; asking only that we might alert participants to future forums. We are gaining legitimacy because we are going slowly, building our network slowly, and using word-of-mouth as our strongest marketing tool.

Recognition of our legitimacy is simply based on a growing list of organizations, institutions, and individuals who have sought out the Solano Network of NIF in issue-framing assistance have requested moderator and recorder training in their organization or community. The interest has grown to be a truly statewide interest. We have been sought out by organizations across California for moderator and recorder training to assist their staff and volunteers in their civic-engagement efforts.

The process of framing local issues and convening forums is slowly building legitimacy among local citizens and decision makers, as well as policymakers.

NETWORKING

The idea of a viable network has been touched upon earlier, but this aspect of our sustainability cannot be emphasized enough. Networking is the key factor in sustainability, as well as our legitimacy. Our consortium of practitioners and supporters is strengthening the network and growing in its capacity. As we have engaged more citizens in our shared work, they have become increasingly active, both through their participation in issue framing as well as their training to become moderators or recorders. There is growing interest in “stepping up” their knowledge base so that they may also grow the network. At the conclusion of our group event, about a dozen individuals requested a formal workshop to increase their understanding and skill in forum moderation. Training local participants will offer the opportunity for mentoring and continued affiliation for assessing efforts and increasing the skills of interested participants. Government policymakers, the media, and others within our seven communities have begun to recognize our “organization” as a piece of the social framework of county decision making for citizens.



LEARNING

Seeing the impact participation in a forum had on citizens’ efforts to address local problems was an affirmation of our work, and consequently a delight! Testimony of the strength of local forums to impact a community issue was mentioned multiple times. The passion of our local participants in expressing their appreciation for the NIF experience in community development was significant and helped our team of researchers understand the synergistic effect we were having on local politics. We have accepted the challenge of creating a 21st-century moderator/recorder training in 2008. This workshop will draw from our past experiences, but will embrace current technology and methodology for the curriculum’s foundation.

We have also identified some unfinished business in our learning. During our group event, we recognized again, with the help of our participants, that we need to learn new methods in building an inclusive and diverse community of NIF practitioners. While we have succeeded in doing specific projects with a variety of ethnic and cultural groups, the integration of practitioners into a diverse cadre of moderators, convenors, and recorders has not been achieved.

UPDATE

During the past three years, it’s been a mix of good news and bad news for the California NIF Network. Our primary goal to transition from large-scale, annual training sessions to specific deliberative projects was a success . . . that’s the good news. But . . . this ended up being bad news for the network as a whole, because the specialized nature of these deliberative projects reduced the opportunities for participation by many of the members of the network. This update to our original report of 2008 will list some features of the “good news” . . . but our further reflections in the weeks and months to come need to also lay a foundation for more network development.

Deliberative Projects: We wanted to focus on deliberative projects, rather than generic training workshops. During the past 3 years, we've engaged in 19 different projects . . . ranging from a national focus to the specific issues or a single organization as they interact with their constituents.

- Two projects in conjunction with the research effort of the Kettering Foundation
- Five projects with nonprofit organizations across California in support of their mission in dealing with public policy issues
- Two projects with University of California Cooperative Extension in support of their community-development efforts
- Three projects at the specific request of local community groups as they seek to generate public conversations on the issues that affect their constituents most
- Seven projects generated by the network in response to local interest, as training workshops and as interactive, planning opportunities

During the past 3 years, we've engaged in 19 different projects . . . ranging from a national focus to the specific issues or a single organization as they interact with their constituents.

Framing and Issue Guide Addendum Projects: When an issue framing is needed for public conversations, we have been able to provide the necessary support for eight different issue guides. In addition, we've created two addendum pages for use with issue guides on topics that would benefit from updated and localized information to make them more relevant and timely.

- Immigrant Neighbors
- American Financial Crisis
- Energy Dependence
- Tax Cuts
- San Francisco Schools' Achievement Gap
- California Water Policy
- Nanotechnology
- Health-Care Reform
- Childhood Obesity (addendum)
- Cost of Food (addendum)

Deliberative Partners: We've been able to link our deliberative efforts with 30 different organizations, agencies, nonprofits, and public libraries as we respond to national, state, county, and neighborhood interests.

- Kettering Foundation
- Southern California Lutheran Synod
- California Center for the Book
- California State Library
- San Francisco Education Foundation
- University of California Cooperative Extension
- San Francisco Exploratorium
- Vacaville Education Foundation
- *America Speaks*
- Temecula Deliberative Community
- Vacaville Boys and Girls Club
- Solano County Ad Hoc Citizens' Group
- And 18 public libraries across the state of California

Online Projects: In early 2009, Craig Paterson began writing a blog on deliberative methods and potential topics for deliberative projects, in addition, to sending weekly (well, most of the time) e-mail notes to a variety of friends, colleagues, and interested friends-of-friends with comments on our ongoing challenges and opportunities in deliberative work. As a result, Paterson was asked to be a contributing blog writer for the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) website.

In mid-2009, a project in the virtual world of Second Life (SL) began with the hopes that our deliberative efforts here in California could encourage deliberative work in distant communities, across the United States, and even around the world. Deliberative IDEAS is a group in SL with a growing number of members and friends. In 2010, we coordinated an *America Speaks* session in Second Life, which included participants from across the country and two US citizens currently living abroad. In 2011, we will use SL as a gathering venue for deliberative conversations and some basic issue-framing support activities.

We've been able to link our deliberative efforts with 30 different organizations, agencies, nonprofits, and public libraries as we respond to national, state, county, and neighborhood interests.



APPENDIX

- A HEALTH PRIVACY AND THE PUBLIC’S RIGHT TO KNOW : A Guide for Public Deliberation
Nov 4, 2003 17
- B THE NONPROFIT FUNDING CRISIS : How Do We Provide a Safety Net for the “Safety Net”?
Apr 18, 2005 19
- C INTERNET CHOICES IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES : How Do We Manage the Internet ...
So We Can All Live with It? Aug 31, 2005 24
- D AGRICULTURE AT THE CROSSROADS : How Do We Sustain Agriculture in Solano County?
Oct 18, 2006..... 28
- E DECISION MATRIX in Community Life Jan 2008..... 33

APPENDIX A

HEALTH PRIVACY AND THE PUBLIC'S RIGHT TO KNOW: A Guide for Public Deliberation

Compiled and written by Craig S. Paterson

Revised November 4, 2003

Understanding the Problem: **Health information is powerful**—it can save lives, but it can also be abused to cause great harm to people and communities.

Approaches for Forum Deliberation: **OPEN “ESSENTIAL” HEALTH INFORMATION FOR EFFECTIVE PREVENTIVE MEDICINE**

- Health information can save lives—trust the scientific method that is the basis for all modern medical breakthroughs!
- Responsible use of “essential” health information can save lives and prevent suffering through carefully focused testing and research—essential data must be gathered quickly and processed effectively by appropriate medical personnel without interference or public panic.
- Who: health-care professionals, Centers for Disease Control, World Health Organization, medical research labs, health-care entrepreneurs, and so on.
- But . . . this information must be used responsibly, relevant to preventive medical intervention, coordinated by health-care professionals, and protected carefully by all parties.

- Questions:
 - What kinds of information are essential to save lives in preventing the spread of a contagious disease?
 - Who are the professionals we depend on to collect, process, and protect this essential information?
 - How can this essential information be handled without public panic?
 - How do we make sure this system of essential information isn't abused, making the public more vulnerable to disease or discrimination?

PROTECT HEALTH INFORMATION FROM INAPPROPRIATE USES IN ECONOMIC OR SOCIAL INJUSTICES

- Health information can be abused—safeguard the public from well-intended, but unfairly damaging, public disclosure of personal information.
- Open access to even the most basic personal health information can unfairly threaten the lives and livelihoods of individuals and families, because health information has no “shelf-life” and the opportunities for abuse are vast.
- Who: insurance companies, employers, government agencies, school officials, health vigilantes, landlords, and so on.
- Because . . . health information can make people vulnerable to insurance abuses, job elimination, isolation, quarantine, prejudice, violence, and housing discrimination, safeguards like HIPPA must be strengthened and universally applied to protect people from inappropriate uses. But . . . these safeguards may make essential information more difficult to gather for timely and effective intervention in a potential crisis.



COORDINATE THE USES OF HEALTH INFORMATION FOR EFFECTIVE DIAGNOSIS AND CONTROL OF DISEASE

- Health information must be coordinated among agencies and professional groups—prepare for crises by sharing information policies and limits before they're needed.
 - Timely use of accurate health information can control epidemics and limit the spread of all contagious diseases by alerting health-care professionals, government agencies, and the public in local communities and around the world.
 - Who: public health agencies, local governments, the news media, school officials, Centers for Disease Control, World Health Organization, non-governmental organizations, and so on.
 - But . . . this information must be accurate, relevant to a risk situation, coordinated by health professionals, and proportional to the level of threat to the public.
 - Questions:
 - What kinds of coordination would be most helpful in preparing the community for a health crisis?
 - What agencies or groups would need to be included to inspire confidence in the community?
 - How can different agencies and groups coordinate their efforts without jeopardizing their uniquely objective view of the crisis?
 - How do we make sure that coordination doesn't lead to coercion or control by government agencies?
- Questions:
 - What kinds of abuses have inspired laws like HIPAA to protect innocent people from discrimination, exclusion from health benefits, and potential violence in the event of health information disclosure?
 - What are the most likely groups and agencies to unfairly use the health information that might be disclosed at the time of a crisis?
 - How can sensitive medical information be handled to protect people from future discrimination?
 - How can we make sure “protection” isn't used to hide dangerous medical conditions that could threaten public health?

APPENDIX B THE NONPROFIT FUNDING CRISIS: How Do We Provide a Safety Net for the “Safety Net”?

Prepared by Craig S. Paterson

April 18, 2005

INTRODUCTION

Our local “safety net” is in crisis. While the unmet needs of children, the unemployed and under-employed, older adults, the homeless, and so on are steadily increasing, the resources available, and the delivery systems for helping people in need are shrinking. Donations and grants are not increasing as fast as the needs of our neighbors, so the stability of local safety net efforts continues to deteriorate. The schedule and conditions of contract payments to nonprofits from government agencies pushes nonprofits into dangerous cash-flow practices just to keep a positive balance sheet—reimbursements are slow while nonprofits are required to provide services upfront. The sustainability of many Solano County nonprofit organizations is currently threatened, and this threat affects all areas and populations of our county.

The informal network of nonprofit organizations provides a critical component of community life. It’s generally accepted that there are three uniquely different yet equally important elements in thriving communities—effective government agencies, prosperous local businesses, and stable nonprofit organizations to serve individuals and families with special unmet needs. If any of these elements is weakened, the health of the wider community is diminished. When businesses are failing, elected officials and government agencies step in to assist them with revised regulations and policies, but when nonprofits are in crisis, little help is available. If any person or group wants to strengthen the capacity of Solano County to provide a high quality of life for its citizens, they will eventually recognize the urgent need to stabilize the nonprofit community in the process.

Nonprofit organizations are generally designed to focus on the needs of the most vulnerable and neglected people in the community. They are important conduits of education for clients about the services of other agencies and groups—they are the most important delivery agencies in teaching accountability and financial planning in low-income communities. Nonprofits provide intake and referral (I&R) services for many people so they can enter a helping system for effective problem solving. As nonprofits work with clients through case management, they decrease occurrences of fraud and duplication of services. Nonprofits are generally good stewards of limited resources—they check out claims of need and coordinate their efforts with others as much as possible. In the delivery of services, nonprofits remind people of their worth. In a real sense, nonprofits provide a social conscience—they are focused on what a community should be.

People are talking about the current and growing crisis in our local safety net. Managers and staff in government agencies are talking about tight budgets and the trend toward fewer nonprofits to accept valid referrals. Corporate leaders are talking about the quality of life in Solano County as they decide whether to locate a new production facility in the county. Clients of nonprofits are talking about a dangerously thin safety net with fewer government services, fewer jobs, and fewer nonprofit resources and staff persons. In light of these pressures, how do we provide a safety net for the safety net?

APPROACH ONE: “SHOW ME THE MONEY!”

Nonprofits are delivering essential services to a wide cross-section of our communities—they just need enough money to provide direct services and to sustain their infrastructure. Solano County doesn’t have a comprehensive means to encourage local donors to focus their charitable giving on local needs—as a matter of fact, a lot of charitable resources are leaving the county. We need to focus attention on the needs of local nonprofits and be concerned about their financial problems.

Solano County is excluded from mandates of many Northern California foundations, banks, and corporations—Sacramento-based foundations don't extend west to include Solano County; and many Bay Area foundations don't extend north and east to include Solano County. In addition, our community foundation seems to be unprepared to meet the increasing needs of the county. Nonprofits in human services have to compete with schools for funding—this funding is supposed to be separate, but schools are in crisis and are seeking funding from all possible sources. The small businesses in Solano County have less time and resources to devote to the development of events that support local nonprofits—one event per year is the limit for many businesses, and businesses need someone to coordinate these events.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- Appropriate more public funding when necessary to keep the safety net safe.
- Strengthen the Solano Community Foundation to seek donations and coordinate fundraising events for nonprofit safety net organizations to develop new partnerships with public, private, and corporate donors.
- Create a mini “Season of Sharing” as a comprehensive fundraising effort to support Solano County nonprofits.
- Educate the public through the creation of a coordinating council for nonprofit safety net funding—develop a need-oriented criteria for resource allocations and then actively seek the funding that is required to meet those documented needs.
- Publish client-based stories that make the benefits of nonprofit efforts clear and accessible through online and newsletter formats.

PEOPLE WHO AGREE WITH THIS APPROACH SAY . . .

- Stable funding is essential to nonprofits as they provide a critical component of the county safety net—from whatever source is necessary, money keeps nonprofits open with caring staff to deliver services.
- Public funding needs to be appropriated to sustain nonprofit safety net efforts when private and business donations fall short.
- There is a lack of infrastructure at the Solano Community Foundation—it's already doing all its limited resources will support, so it needs more support.
- While many donors want their resources to go into direct services only, overhead costs and indirect services are significantly underfunded, so long-term donor relationships need to be developed to provide for infrastructure funding .

PEOPLE WHO DISAGREE WITH THIS APPROACH SAY . . .

- If we provide unlimited money to nonprofits, there won't be any incentive to coordinate efforts or to provide accountability.
- The public chooses with its donations—if the public doesn't support local nonprofits with adequate donations, it's because the public has a different set of priorities.
- Public money should only be appropriated where elected officials have direct oversight, supervision and accountability of the services provided.

A POSSIBLE TRADE-OFF IS...

■ If nonprofits can extend the reach of an effective and comprehensive safety net, I'd be willing to have public money appropriated to their efforts.

APPROACH TWO: "IT TAKES A VILLAGE"

Nonprofits need to be integrated into a fully coordinated safety net community where all agencies and groups are focused on the quality of life for all citizens. Unfortunately, government and business leaders seldom view nonprofits as partners in solving community problems. Nonprofits have the unique capacity to customize services to the individual—nonprofits can create more flexible eligibility criteria than large government agencies because they are more sensitive to local and specialized needs.

Coordination, however, is difficult and complex. The requirement to have strict privacy protocols makes it difficult for nonprofits to work together to solve client problems—this is even more complex when government agencies are involved. Competition among cities and groups in Solano County for basic funding has decreased efficiency and increased isolation. In addition, there is a general lack of communication among nonprofits—this is caused by and leads to a lack of trust. Solano County is still suffering from a lack of "institutional wisdom"—the demise in 1992 of the Solano County Economic Opportunities Council (SCEOC), as a countywide community action council, set us back significantly. Unfortunately, there is also a lot of competition among nonprofits for good partnerships with local businesses.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- Create a safety net coalition of nonprofit organizations in Solano County.
- Create a standardized intake protocol and form for use by all safety net agencies and nonprofits—integrate efforts for coordinated system with "multiple points of entry."
- Create and mandate the use of state-of-the-art, secure communication networks, like the HUD "virtual provider network," "2-1-1" system for social service providers, and the new Community Action Council (CAC) software for the social safety net agencies.
- Integrate "smart growth" methods into long-term planning at all levels to reduce transportation barriers so low-income persons can have access to community services.
- Revise county policies in reimbursements to nonprofits to reduce the need for nonprofits to subsidize the county by accepting and paying the debt of late payments.

PEOPLE WHO AGREE WITH THIS APPROACH SAY...

- Government agencies, businesses, and nonprofits all have different and unique roles in a coordinated community of safety net efforts—when all participants accept the others as partners, program effectiveness and financial efficiency are both increased.
- Donors have increased confidence in nonprofits when they are effectively integrated into a comprehensive safety net community—total revenue to nonprofits will increase.
- Long-term safety net planning will be more likely when a safety net community is created with shared responsibility in maximizing the quality of life in the county.

■ Partnerships between businesses and nonprofits need long-term nurture—mutually beneficial and effective partnerships can be only created in a noncompetitive community of agencies and nonprofits.

PEOPLE WHO DISAGREE WITH THIS APPROACH SAY...

■ Coordination requires staff training, equipment, and time—additional funding will be required to make this approach work, but it'll be spent on infrastructure and not direct aid.

■ Limited funding will continue to create a competitive spirit among nonprofits as they vie for funding and advocate for their special clients—coordination will suffer.

■ Super-agencies like SCEOC will fail again and again without proper accountability.

A POSSIBLE TRADE-OFF IS...

■ If a coordinated safety net community can reduce duplication and increase the range of services to clients, I'd be willing to donate more money to nonprofits that cooperate.

People are no longer willing to publicly fund or personally donate to nonprofits that will not provide program accountability and financial transparency.

APPROACH THREE: "WAKE UP AND SMELL THE COFFEE"

People are no longer willing to publicly fund or personally donate to nonprofits that will not provide program accountability and financial transparency. Nonprofits need to inspire trust by embracing good business practices, and publishing accurate and timely reports with sound evaluation methods. The creation of new nonprofit efforts almost never includes the development of project proposals with clearly described goals, outcomes, and evaluation methods. While the need for accountability is critical to businesses as they decide how they will donate to nonprofits, few nonprofits actively seek to inspire the trust of businesses by using the methods businesses understand and require.

The mismanagement of SCEOC points out the fragile nature of many nonprofits when the focus is on delivery of services and not necessarily on good management or fiscal accountability. The evaluation of services takes a great deal of skill and staff time—many nonprofits are unskilled in evaluation techniques and resist the commitment of time and money to learning new administrative methods. The fiscal calendars of many foundations and government agencies don't coincide—this makes reporting much more complicated and costly. Finally, self-sufficiency is increasingly important in nonprofit services—the basic perception in the business community is that the need for social services is only temporary and situational, so projects are seldom funded for chronic or long-term needs.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

■ Create a clearinghouse of strategic planning and evaluation for nonprofits in Solano County to maximize research and development in financial and program accountability.

■ Publish reports of program outcomes in measurable and tangible terms that fulfill the goals and strategies of nonprofit organizations in Solano County.

- Publish examples of nonprofit strategic plans and financial reports that exemplify full accountability and financial transparency—good examples teach good practices.

- Standardize evaluation and reporting schedules through the coordinated efforts of government agencies, businesses, and foundations to minimize prohibitive requirements.

- Research and discuss the variety of needs that are the responsibility of the safety net community—identify legitimate temporary needs and legitimate chronic needs, so appropriate evaluation methods can be developed for each type of need.

PEOPLE WHO AGREE WITH THIS APPROACH SAY...

- Financial abuses have raised the public's awareness in accountability—elected officials are expected to provide appropriate oversight when public funds are used by nonprofits.

- Compassionate and caring nonprofits can be fully accountable too—it's not necessary to choose one or the other.

- There is a plethora of nonprofits—there are too many to know or to coordinate, so those nonprofits that provide sound accountability will receive more donations.

- Business funding of services requires assurances that their money is being well spent AND that the business will receive positive public relations in return.

PEOPLE WHO DISAGREE WITH THIS APPROACH SAY...

- Faced with strict reporting requirements, nonprofit organizations decide that they aren't ready to do the work AND provide the complex paper trail—services will be reduced.

- Existing nonprofits resist expanding their services to meet additional needs—additional efforts aren't developed while existing nonprofits balance benefits and requirements.

- Accountability and efficiency are important, but only personal, customized service by a caring case manager will effectively deliver safety net resources.

A POSSIBLE TRADE-OFF IS ...

- If nonprofits would follow proper accountability methods, I'd be willing to actively advocate with businesses and civic groups to support them with donations.

What can be done? Research and discuss the variety of needs that are the responsibility of the safety net community—identify legitimate temporary needs and legitimate chronic needs, so appropriate evaluation methods can be developed for each type of need.

APPENDIX C INTERNET CHOICES IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES: How do we manage the Internet . . . so we can all live with it?

Prepared by Craig S. Paterson
Revised copy – August 31, 2005

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has literally changed our world in a very short time . . . and the speed of further innovations is increasing. While it has added much to our lives with its almost limitless information, it is also raising the anxiety level of parents, educators, and community leaders as pornography, hate speech, and terrorist's how-to guides become more available and invasive online.

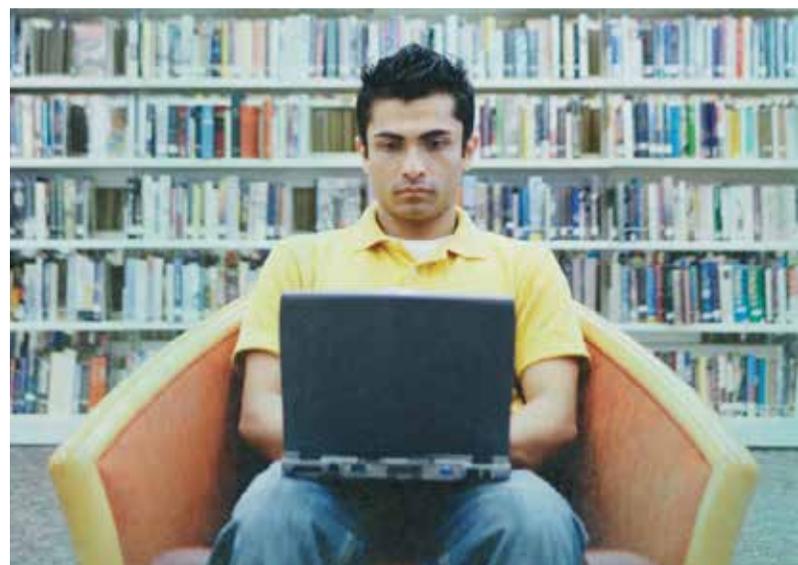
People are talking about the Internet in Solano County, and one important topic focuses on content filtering for Internet access in the public libraries. Some people express concerns about inadvertent or accidental exposure to offensive sites by children in the library and want filters installed on public access computers. Others express their confidence in current policies and hope open access to the Internet will not be limited. Still others express the desire for a variety of options in Internet access in the libraries, so everyone can have what they need and want. Most agree that the public needs an acceptable sense of security in Internet materials . . . but how?

The Internet is making it easy and inexpensive for computer users around the world to swap, share, and sell information. Information consumers are paying for the creation of an entirely new communications system, combining the Internet with television, radio, print, mail, and telephone. But the Internet is a frontier without clear rules or even cultural norms. Sex, violence, privacy, and free speech are among the nation's most difficult social issues, and now Americans must consider them again in their new, high-powered Internet forms.

The benefits of the Internet are profound. *Time* magazine included the Internet as one of the top five innovations of the 20th century for just this reason. Internet news brings world events into our computers at light speed. Medical information that saves lives is available to low-income and isolated persons. E-mail can follow people anywhere around the world, keeping families and friends connected. Massive numbers of websites are prioritized to make research more effective with a simple "google." In the next few years, almost one million books will be available for online searches and downloading.

At the same time, the Internet is becoming a more disturbing and intrusive experience. Unsolicited e-mails from pornographic websites can take a person into an inescapable maze of offensive images. Chat rooms can lead unsuspecting persons into face-to-face meetings with criminals and sexual predators. In addition, the Internet has become an effective recruiting tool for hate groups and terrorists. Concerns arise because it's still unclear what the long-term affects are, particularly on children, of exposure to pornography, violence, and hate-inspired propaganda.

The Solano County Board of Supervisors has unanimously mandated the convening of a series of public forums to gather additional thoughts, feelings, and ideas on the topic of content filtering for Internet access at Solano County public libraries. How do we manage the Internet . . . so we can all live with it?



APPROACH ONE: PROTECTION WITH CONTENT FILTERS

“A picture is worth one thousand words.” – Chinese Proverb

Pornography, hate literature, and terrorist propaganda are not included in print media on the shelves at the library, and they shouldn't be available anywhere in the library on the Internet. Protection from offensive images and hate-inspired writings is essential, and Internet content filters can add a significant level of protection to the computers in the library. Images with pornography or graphic violence are disturbing to many people, especially when they appear suddenly in a place that is supposed to be safe. Like the Chinese proverb indicates, these images produce some upsetting feelings and many times become embedded in the memories of the person. In addition, history has proven that hate literature is powerful, and public welfare is threatened when it is allowed to spread freely. The public deserves a consistent and appropriate standard in library information selections, including information on the World Wide Web. Internet content filters provide technology-based protection to counter a technology-based threat.

SOME POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Install content filters on all computers to protect the public from offensive materials, just as virus filters protect computers from hackers.
- Choose content filters that are consistent with print material standards, so no one needs to be fearful when entering the library.
- Educate library patrons through written material, classes, and tutoring about what information is available and what is not, so everyone understands the reasons for filtering choices and knows what to do when access is limited by the filter.

- Choose filters with an easy and quick override feature, so library staff can assist persons doing legitimate research with minimum inconvenience.
- Install a central monitoring system so a volunteer or staff member can observe the on-screen websites of all Internet computers simultaneously.

SUPPORTERS OF THIS APPROACH MIGHT SAY:

- Library staff can spend more time being librarians with less distractions or embarrassments—librarians should not have to be “Internet-content cops.”
- Parents will find the library to be supportive and respectful of the values they are teaching their children when a consistent standard is applied for all materials.
- Citizens will have more confidence that their tax dollars are being used appropriately in the library.

CRITICS OF THIS APPROACH MIGHT SAY:

- Filters can be ineffective—this could give a false sense of security and could make patrons feel it's their fault when the filter fails to work properly.
- Content filter purchase, technical support, and the added attention by library staff to allow overrides can cost taxpayers significant money.
- A few people would end up making choices for everyone—librarians shouldn't have to make “parental choices” for the general public.

A LIKELY TRADE-OFF:

- I'd be willing to accept content filtering if I was confident that I'll always get help quickly to override the filters when they limit my search too much.

APPROACH TWO: ACCESS TO CRITICAL INFORMATION

“Information is the currency of democracy.” – Thomas Jefferson

Internet filters allow a few people to limit information for everyone. Free and unrestricted access to information is essential in any democracy and is supposed to be guaranteed in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. The information that is needed for critical life decisions is sometimes highly personal. It's gathered from many sources, and then it's linked together to provide the foundation for an important decision. Without free access to information, critical decisions are compromised with serious consequences in personal, community, and global well-being. Internet filters can act as invisible censors, limiting the responses to information searches with secret criteria of what is acceptable and what isn't. In some cases, a person can be unaware that the filter has eliminated some websites from their list of options. The mission of public libraries should focus first on providing free and open access to information without any technology-based interference.

SOME POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Don't filter any Internet content on any computer—the current policy that prohibits viewing of pornography and other offensive materials is still working, and those who ignore this policy have their Internet access privileges suspended.
- Strengthen user accountability as needed—require a user agreement for Internet access so a person must have a library card, must agree to the library's policy, and is clear about the consequences of policy abuse before using the Internet.

- Library or volunteer staff need to increase their attention and time in making the current policy clear to patrons, and then monitoring Internet use for accountability.

- Make the reporting of Internet policy abuses to library staff easy and anonymous.

- Provide classes and printed material to help adults use the Internet responsibly and to help parents as they guide their children in Internet access.

SUPPORTERS OF THIS APPROACH MIGHT SAY:

- Censorship can damage our democracy . . . and Internet filtering is censorship, so it should not be used.

- Filters should not be installed, because people could be too embarrassed to get the library staff to override the system to give them access to sensitive and personal information—they would simply not get the information they need.

- Recent upgrades in library policy and practices have responded quickly to public requests for additional safeguards—filters won't solve the problem, people working together will solve the problem.

CRITICS OF THIS APPROACH MIGHT SAY:

- Without some filtering, everyone continues to be vulnerable to offensive material.

- Monitoring the images on computers is difficult enough, but limiting access to hate or terrorist websites is almost impossible—library staff can't be everywhere.

- Tax money should never be used for access to pornography, hate literature, or terrorist propaganda—filters give taxpayers more confidence.

A LIKELY TRADE-OFF:

■ I'd be willing to accept no content filtering if I had more confidence that policy upgrades would effectively protect innocent people from offensive material.

APPROACH THREE: LIFELONG LEARNING OPTIONS

“Never stop learning; knowledge doubles every fourteen months.”

**– Anthony J. D'Angelo,
*The College Blue Book***

Libraries can customize Internet access with very strict content filters on some computers and no filters on others—lifelong learning requires more choices and more respect. In the 21st century, learning for all ages and interests is essential. The fast pace of change in a global marketplace is challenging our traditional educational system. Public libraries can choose a lifelong learning strategy to assist citizens of all ages as they adjust to changes in the workplace and to create a dynamic process of policy updates and revisions. The library can be the first point of access for the new learner, and it can provide a safe and comfortable learning environment which is socially inclusive for all ages and interests from basic skills to higher education. A variety of age- and interest-appropriate options can be offered that change through time to keep pace with the values and needs of the public.

SOME POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

■ Install content filters on most computers using a variety of interpretations of “offensive material,” leave some computers completely unfiltered, and continue staff monitoring of all computer use for accountability within library policies.

■ Develop more “white pages” with recommended websites to include a wider range of learning and research topics for all ages and interests.

■ Create a dynamic and interactive process of frequent and regular updates in filtering options that respond quickly to new technology-based threats to effective lifelong learning and community well-being.

■ Adjust the physical layout of each library to serve diverse needs—create open learning environments where strictly filtered computers are used, and install privacy screens on all unfiltered computers.

■ Install workstations in a protected environment to develop special access for children with their parents, allowing parents to decide what level of filtering they want and encouraging responsible inquiry that becomes lifelong learning.

SUPPORTERS OF THIS APPROACH MIGHT SAY:

■ A wide range of filtering choices could increase public confidence in the library as a place for lifelong learning, fitting the learning environment to the learning need.

■ Adults want to be treated like adults—this approach increases parental and personal responsibility, while affording increased safety from offensive material.

■ It would be clear that the library is not just for kids or just for adults.

CRITICS OF THIS APPROACH MIGHT SAY:

■ How many variations is enough? This starts a costly and time-consuming process where everyone can claim yet another special need.

■ Library staff would still have to spend significant time in guiding patrons to the appropriate computers and then in monitoring Internet use within all venues.

■ A standardized rule for viewing material in the public library is needed, so everyone is clear and the public can have confidence.

A LIKELY TRADE-OFF:

■ I'd be willing to accept a variety of content filter options if I was confident that guidance would always be available to help people find the right option for them.

APPENDIX D AGRICULTURE AT THE CROSSROADS: How Do We Sustain Agriculture in Solano County?

Prepared by Craig S. Paterson

INTRODUCTION

Our topic is the sustainability of agriculture in Solano County. It is a topic with great complexity, because of the nature of agriculture, and the nature of sustainability, and the nature of Solano County. It is also a highly emotional issue for many, particularly the farmers of the county. This discussion guide proposes three approaches for in-depth and comprehensive conversation on the topic of the sustainability of agriculture. While each approach is presented to be an unbiased option for public decisions, there is a foundational bias in the discussion—that agriculture **should be** sustained in Solano County. From this clearly biased position, we can explore an urgent and important issue together—how do we sustain agriculture in Solano County?

Sustainability is a topic for the 21st century. The frontiers have been absorbed, and now decisions must be made more and more often about how our spaces will be “filled-in.” *Sustainable development* . . . *sustainable community* . . . *sustainable industry* . . . *sustainable agriculture*. You may have heard these words used in many different ways, but what does sustainability really mean and how can we tell whether our current practices are sustainable?

Because we need to start talking at some point, for this conversation we will propose that sustainability is related to the quality of life in a community—whether the economic, social, and environmental systems that make up the community are providing a healthy, productive, meaningful life for all community residents, present and future.

When discussing sustainability, several terms seem to be used no matter who is framing the way we talk about the issue. This discussion guide includes a simple list of definitions to help create an effective foundation for formal and informal conversations. These terms are not presented as the only definitions, but they are relatively unbiased in their approach to the topic and are included in most online and professional guides on sustainability. We'll use terms like—*sustain, develop, community, economy, community capital, carrying capacity, and equity*. While other definitions for these terms may influence the way we talk about sustainability, the terms themselves are standard in understanding the complexities of sustainability.

One further note must be made concerning the definition of terms. *Sustainable agriculture* as a term has been developed in recent years to signify some specific farming practices for food production that are organic, nonpolluting, energy-efficient, and community friendly. While these practices may become the standards for all agricultural production in the future, the thrust of this discussion guide is to propose the need to sustain all agriculture, regardless of the cultural practices used.

Agricultural sustainability in general seeks to sustain farmers, resources, and communities by promoting farming practices and methods that are profitable, environmentally sound, and good for communities. It works on farms and ranches, large and small, harnessing new technologies and renewing the best practices of the past. It is a system of farm production that can indefinitely sustain itself without degrading the land, the wider environment, or the people. It reflects our concern with long-term viability and security of our communities, our resources, and our nation.

APPROACH ONE: STABILITY FOR THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Agriculture continues to be the most important single factor in a diversified, local economy investment portfolio. Diversification is a risk-management technique that mixes a wide variety of investments within a portfolio. The rationale behind this practice contends that a portfolio of different kinds of investments will, on average, yield higher returns and pose a lower risk than any individual investment found within the portfolio. This principle applies to any local economy as decisions are made about how to best invest the various types of community capital—natural, human, social, information, and infrastructure. Agricultural production and all of the supportive layers involved in agricultural processing play a critical role in diversification of our local economy, contributing significantly in each of the five types of community capital. Plus, the wide diversity of agricultural products in the county increases returns and decreases risks.

Agriculture has also provided a consistently effective means for community capital transfers from one generation to another. In the context of sustainability, equity introduces fairness into short- and long-term public decisions. This concept is most often referred to as intragenerational equity, meaning justice among the various members of the present population. In addition, intergenerational equity has to do with fairness between current and future members of a community. It doesn't mean that we neglect our current needs, but that we try to achieve a reasonable balance between satisfying our needs now and setting aside enough to provide for needs in the future. Aiming for intergenerational equity means we want to give equal consideration to our own immediate needs, our own future needs, and our children's and grandchildren's future needs.

SOME POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Incorporate agricultural business strategies in the economic development plans of local counties and cities.

- Give subsidized access to agricultural, economic, and environmental consultants so all agricultural producers and agricultural infrastructure industries can create business plans for current and sustainable viability.

- Promote countywide agricultural diversification through planting new crops or shifting to a different mix of crops and livestock, through developing new products or targeting new markets, through crop rotation or value-added goods.

- Provide tax incentives to farmers and ranchers who change their agricultural practices to defer current benefits and invest in intergenerational equity.

- Organize and publicize agricultural tourism efforts that bring in new customers and promote farm products.

SUPPORTERS OF THIS APPROACH MIGHT SAY:

- The best way to protect farmland is to ensure that farming is profitable.

- Communities with a diverse economic profile, including a thriving and diverse agricultural component, are more stable in the short-term and long-term.

- Communities that plan for intergenerational equity provide entrepreneurs and young people with the incentives they need to invest in the future in commercial farming or agriculture-based industry.

It doesn't mean that we neglect our current needs, but that we try to achieve a reasonable balance between satisfying our needs now and setting aside enough to provide for needs in the future.

CRITICS OF THIS APPROACH MIGHT SAY:

- Changes in agricultural markets requires economic agility, making accurate, long-term planning almost impossible.
- If farmers and ranchers participate in the “diversification” plan and fail to make a profit, the county could potentially be held liable for damages.

A LIKELY TRADE-OFF:

- I would be willing to use more sustainable practices, if I had confidence that consumers would pay for the additional costs I may have.

APPROACH TWO: EFFECTIVE OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT

Agriculture has a long and successful history in open space management. Farmers and ranchers have been de facto managers of our most scenic landscapes across the country without recognition or thanks. They are surprised and delighted when they are recognized as good stewards of the land by their peers and by the public-at-large. Well-managed agricultural land supplies important non-market goods and services. Farm and ranch lands provide food and cover for wildlife, help control flooding, protect wetlands and watersheds, and maintain air quality. They can absorb and filter wastewater and provide groundwater recharge. Some agricultural lands also can provide sites for alternative energy production, like wind farms and methane digesters. Farmers and ranchers have the knowledge and commitment needed to effectively manage the majority of our open spaces for the enrichment of all citizens.

In addition, agriculture provides these benefits at a very low cost. New housing developments require services, such as schools, roads, and fire and police protection, whereas privately owned and managed agricultural land requires few services. The Cost of Community Services (COCS) studies of American Farmland Trust (AFT) show that, on a nationwide basis, farm, forest, and open lands more than pay for the municipal services they require, while taxes on residential uses, on average, fail to cover costs. When agriculture is recognized properly in its open space management role in local communities and across the country, new partnerships can be created to enhance the quality of life in increasingly sustainable ways. Then communities can decide on the balance between housing and open space that is right for them.

SOME POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Promote the establishment of purchase of agricultural conservation easements (PACE) and purchase of development rights (PDR) to permanently protect farmland through proactive investment.
- Provide direct subsidies or tax incentives to farmers and ranchers who enter into an open space management agreement with the county, enhancing the rural experience of all citizens in the process.
- Create a land stewardship award program, decided by peers in the agricultural community, to reward farmers and ranchers who excel in caring for the land.
- Provide tax incentives to farmers and ranchers who reclaim abandoned land and return the land to agricultural production.
- Give subsidized access for farmers and ranchers to open space management and alternative energy production consultants to encourage innovative land management practices.

SUPPORTERS OF THIS APPROACH MIGHT SAY:

- Controlling sprawl around growing cities is not a simple task, and it's everyone's business for current and future generations.
- Communities can determine the fate of their neighboring land in partnership with farmers and ranchers who are willing to manage the land on behalf of the public.
- Communities can limit the development of agricultural land, using reliable cost-analysis methods to counter the claims of developers.

CRITICS OF THIS APPROACH MIGHT SAY:

- Protecting land from development won't make agriculture profitable—as farmers go out of business, the land will just lie fallow indefinitely.
- Creating an open space management process will just add to the bureaucracy.

A LIKELY TRADE-OFF:

- I would be willing to invest more in open space management, if I had confidence that my efforts would be appreciated.

APPROACH THREE: FOOD SECURITY... LOCAL AND NATIONAL

Agriculture produces a basic human and societal need—food. The United States continues to be a strong food exporter in some commodities, while it is rapidly becoming a food importer in other commodities. Our food exports give us a consistently positive global image as hungry people around the world benefit from our production, but increasing fuel costs and decreasing farmland acreages due to development, erosion, and economic losses threaten to reduce our export capacity. Our food imports, on the other hand, may eventually create a dangerous foreign dependency in which food, not just oil, is either not available or available only at a very high price. United States national security is at stake as our export capacity decreases and our import dependency increases.

According to a study published by the Carrying Capacity Network, “population growth and the loss of farmland reduces self-sufficiency in food, availability of vital natural resources, standard of living, and ultimately US national security. The United States is in a privileged situation compared to many other nations in the world because its per capita endowment of natural resources is relatively high, based on its current population density. However, the United States is at serious risk of losing this privilege if attention is not given to the control of total population growth, the sustainable management of natural resources, and the development of alternative energy sources. Food security depends on ample fertile land, fresh water, energy, and protecting biodiversity of plant and animal species.” As global tensions increase, our capacity to provide for our own basic human needs—like food—becomes more and more important, making our nation's farmers and ranchers key protectors of our national security.

SOME POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Incorporate both export and local consumer agricultural production into the General Plan for Solano County.
- Educate the public on food issues, including America's role in feeding the world and the balance of trade in food commodities.
- Provide tax incentives to Solano County producers to grow for local farmers' markets, identifying county products with an easily identifiable logo.
- Plan for decreased fuel and fertilizer dependence in agricultural production.
- Create an emergency food production plan for Solano County in the event of major food distribution disruptions.

SUPPORTERS OF THIS APPROACH MIGHT SAY:

- National security increases as foreign dependency decreases . . . in energy, in industry, in food.
- The protection of our national carrying capacity is a primary national security focus, worthy of local attention and action.
- America's fertile land is one of our greatest assets as a free nation . . . and one of our greatest assets in spreading freedom with other nations.

Critics of this approach might say:

- Free-trade food imports have reduced food prices and increased the selection of foods available to consumers—protectionism will reverse this positive trend.
- Our local economy can't take responsibility for protecting our national security—it's not our job.

A LIKELY TRADE-OFF:

- I would be willing to pay more for local products, IF I had confidence that the actual farm producer was going to receive full and fair compensation.

America's fertile land is one of our greatest assets as a free nation . . . and one of our greatest assets in spreading freedom with other nations.



APPENDIX E: DECISION MATRIX in Community Life

Prepared by Craig Paterson, January 2008

Every community is unique, but some shared sectors, decisions, and factors in community life can be seen across in most (if not all) populations, large and small. This is by no means a definitive list of decisions in public life. It is simply a display of some ideas that contribute to the decisions that shape our lives.

Community projects can focus public awareness on the urgent and important decisions that need to be made in one or more sector of public life. When issues are framed for public deliberation, everyone is invited to participate in effective and critical thinking, identifying the values, hopes, and needs that must be included in decisions that are fulfilling for each person and that everyone can live with.

SECTOR	DECISION	FACTORS
Government	Legislation	Public Needs & Public Resources
Justice System	Judgment	Laws
Business, Finance, Environment	Investment	Cost-Benefit Analysis
Organizations & Agencies	Coalitions, Collaborations, Cooperatives	Shared or Compatible Mission & Vision
Organizations & Agencies	Agreements, Policies, Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)	Coordination of Operations
Professional Associations	Practice	Learning & Application... Past, Present, Future
Citizens	Lifestyle	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

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: Understanding community politics through public deliberation reflects the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the foundation, its directors, or its officers.

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