Focus on: Citizens and Public Choice

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The Habit of Public Deliberation

David Mathews

Every Connections begins six months before its publication when the staff and associates of the Kettering Foundation (assisted by several outside authorities) sit down to review one area of research in-depth. That review ends in a board discussion of options for future research. The Connections for each period then explains these options and illustrates the pros and cons of each through a series of articles.

In this issue, we will report on “Citizens and Public Choice” research. One of the first and most obvious conclusions in studying how democracy might work as it should is that democracy cannot function at its best unless citizens are able to make responsible decisions about their collective fate. So the foundation has been studying the process of public decision making (deliberation) for nearly 20 years. The objective of this research isn’t only to understand how the public talks and reasons but also to find out how such a fundamental practice as deliberation can become a more widespread habit. That deliberation has been a habit in the past is evident. The word is found in many early political cultures with a rather consistent meaning: collective decision making. And students of politics today have made compelling arguments that a democracy necessarily implies deliberation because there is no monarch or other authority to make decisions. (For more on scholars and the roles they might play in deliberative democracy, see the 2002 issue of Kettering’s Higher Education Exchange.)

If democracy is to mean self-rule, deliberation has to be public. John Adams understood that in 1776. Adams not only recognized that the “whole People” had to deliberate but also was grateful that deliberation had been going on long enough to “ripen” public judgment:

Time has been given for the whole People, maturely to consider the great Question of Independence and to ripen their Judgments, dissipate their Fears, and allure their Hopes, by discussing it in News Papers and Pamphlets, by debating it, in Assemblies, Conventions, Committees of Safety and Inspection, in Town and County Meetings, as well as in private Conversations, so that the whole People in every Colony of the thirteen, have now adopted it, as their own Act.—This will cement the Union, and avoid those Heats and perhaps Convulsions which might have been occasioned, by such a Declaration Six Months ago.

The need for public deliberation is most evident when the nation faces a crisis — as in the recent terrorist attacks. Emotions run high, knee-jerk reactions can set in, and innocent people may be harmed. In order to avoid hasty decisions, public deliberation has to be ingrained in the political culture. That is most likely to be the case when people understand that deliberation is a different kind of public talk, unlike airing grievances or conveying information. In order to know what deliberation is and can do, citizens have to experience it; they can’t just read about it. However, repeating the definition the foundation uses may be helpful here. Deliberation is weighing carefully (with others who may have different views) the costs and consequences of the major options for responding to a common problem. Each alternative touches on a number of things that people hold valuable and creates conflicts that, to use a phrase of Daniel Yankelovich, have to be “worked through.” For instance, options that increase our freedom may also compromise our security. Certainly that was the case when Americans
considered declaring their independence from England.

Furthermore, in order for deliberation to be around when we need it, the practice must have found its way into all the places where collective decisions are made and must be available to all parts of society. Fortunately, deliberation seems to occur naturally (as during six crucial months in 1776), so the challenge is to reinforce deliberative instincts, not introduce something that is totally foreign. Yet, that said, public deliberation is far less prevalent today than it needs to be, and there are not always organizations willing to provide opportunities for people to reason together.

How then might deliberation become more

firmly established? Kettering staff and associates came up with four options. They didn't assume that one approach would be better than the other three but rather that weighing all four might result in a better understanding of barriers to, and opportunities for, strengthening the habit of deliberation.

The first option for future research is based on the assumption that large national organizations have an untapped capacity to give people across the country more opportunities to deliberate. But for them to play that role, these organizations would have to see public deliberation as consistent with their missions and self-interests. Research might tell us if that is likely to happen.

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Fortunately, several of these organizations are already writing discussion guides to promote public deliberation or have chapters organizing deliberative forums. They include the American Bar Association, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the League of Women Voters of California, the Farm Foundation, and a group of academic honor societies including Phi Beta Kappa. These projects might present an opportunity for shared learning about ways in which public deliberation furthers the objectives of our national civic organizations.

Option two says that the most critical problem facing deliberative democracy isn't the already civically engaged Americans but rather the “unorganized citizen” who doesn't belong to a national organization. The organizations with the greatest capacity to break down whatever isolates these people are community-based institutions such as churches and tenant associations. There is reason to believe that more of these institutions would be interested in providing opportunities for deliberations on issues of concern to their constituencies. For instance, one of the best deliberative programs in the country has been going on for years in a neighborhood association of Topeka, Kansas. We have also learned of ministers who have brought forums to the inner cities of towns like Cincinnati, Ohio. In addition, literacy organizations have taken deliberation into prisons, as is happening in Rockview, Pennsylvania. And deliberation may be going on among the supposedly unorganized citizens in rooms that don't have a sign saying “forum” over the door.

Option three grows out of the assumption that deliberation cannot become a habit when issues are routinely framed in a highly polarized or overly technical fashion. How can there be true deliberation if there are never more than two alternatives to consider on any issue and citizens can’t understand what is at stake because the terms in which problems are described are off-putting? This option says to focus the research on organizations that have a self-interest in framing issues in ways that promote deliberation and problem solving. For instance, some news organizations have done that in Hammond, Indiana, and Owensboro, Kentucky.

The fourth option reflects Thomas Jefferson's conviction that deliberation (or any other democratic practice) will not become a habit unless people practice it in their communities. That argues for more research focused on what is happening in framing local issues and finding out what types of community organizations are most likely to provide space for public deliberation. Studies that have been done with civic associations in Grand Rapids, Michigan; Akron, Ohio; Owensboro, Kentucky; and Kanawha, West Virginia suggest a great deal is happening that is going unreported. This line of research could also draw on community forums in other countries, such as Russia, Colombia, and New Zealand to name just a few.

As these options are being discussed at Kettering, the foundation tries to keep in mind the argument that deliberative democracy is neither desirable nor possible — particularly the view that most citizens do not have the ability or the desire to deliberate. Even if the critics are right, however, people continue to go to the polls and vote their convictions in what has been called “lawmaking by ballots.” Timothy Egan of The New York Times has written a recent article (reprinted in this issue of Connections) with a long list of what he considers mixed messages and muddled thinking that have resulted when people have voted without the benefit of deliberation. (Also, we have noted that some of the issues put on ballots were framed so that deliberation was virtually impossible.) Some will read Egan’s article as confirmation of their worst fears about their fellow citizens. I have read it and recall that often-quoted line from Thomas Jefferson about the inescapable necessity of “informed discretion” in a democracy.

David Mathews is president of the Kettering Foundation.
Grassroots organizations are natural places for people to come together to talk about community problems. Whether these groups see themselves as representatives of underserved parts of the community or advocates for the interests of a particular constituency, they are often the ones who serve as a bridge between the problems of individual segments of the community and those of the community at large.

The Kettering Foundation (KF) understands the importance of such groups to the building of a democracy. A number of these groups have been involved in NIF forums, Public Policy Institutes, and elsewhere in KF's work. Participants have learned moderating skills, developed programs within their own constituent groups, and otherwise adapted what they have learned about deliberation to meet the needs of their particular communities. There have been benefits and drawbacks to the way these groups have interacted with the foundation's work but, on the whole, both KF and the many groups have recognized the importance of our common work.

Last November, for example, a group of people gathered at the foundation to talk about leadership but, more important, about what they saw as the way they give back to their communities. These were folks from communities across the country who did not necessarily see themselves as leaders but who felt called to do specific work. They were almost evangelical in their zeal, talking passionately about being connected to "real people," unencumbered by organizational structures, chairmen, associations, or rules and by-laws.

One participant began her story by telling how she had become involved in a group that was formed to commemorate the lives of two young black couples who were lynching victims. She told about the "massacre" in 1946 of the two couples, who were killed by a white mob. "This was done in broad daylight, in front of eyewitnesses, and no one was ever brought to justice," she said. Subsequently, the community divided itself into two groups, one called the Circle of Fear, the other, the Code of Silence. Race relations have been strained ever since. "Our group was formed to facilitate racial healing and reconciliation," she said.

Another woman talked about her work with young people through her organization, Turning on Youth with Gospel Music. One of the projects her organization sponsored was a live recording with young people throughout the state who had never recorded before but who are multitalented. And why are we doing it? Because we believe ... we can stop the negative behavior that we see in our schools, in our communities, in our neighborhoods and turn them around utilizing gospel music. Now, you might utilize something else, but my specialty is gospel music. I've been a radio announcer for some 23 years, and I've seen the effect music has on children."
When people from grassroots organizations participate in deliberative forums... they confirm what they have already realized through their grassroots efforts: that they are responsible for solving their communities' problems.

Others told stories about moving from welfare to work or mobilizing low-income nursing-home workers as well as voters. But they all had one thing in common. They were grassroots folks who cared about their communities, saw problems that needed attention, and simply didn’t want to wait for governmental and organized groups to form committees and hold meetings in order to address them. They just joined with their friends and neighbors and did what they thought needed to be done.

This is the kind of grassroots energy that all communities need, for it helps shape individuals into a democratic public. It involves them in making choices about what kind of communities they want. People from these organizations bring to the table voices that might otherwise go unheard. When people from grassroots organizations participate in deliberative forums, the learning that takes place is more authentic than that produced by outside experts or officeholders. They learn with others to speak...
in a genuine public voice. They confirm what they have already realized through their grassroots efforts: that they are responsible for solving their communities’ problems.

Because of the nature of grassroots groups and their work, they offer an opportunity for the foundation to learn new approaches to public-building, to understand special barriers to deliberation in forums, and to refine the way we share and understand our work. Their participation in forums also may help shed new light on the issues that concern them and perhaps even reveal a new way of approaching their work.

Grassroots organizations are complicated. They create their own ad hoc structures and are not bound by the way others see things. Even deciding who leads and who speaks for the groups is complicated.

But if a democracy is to work as it should, all voices should be included in the deliberative conversations held in communities. While there are certainly some people who are predisposed to joining deliberative conversations, the voices of those who are not so predisposed, those like the people the foundation connected with that day last November, must also be included.

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More than 1,000 people marched in support of a living wage during The Poor People’s March last January in Miami, Florida. The march was sponsored by South Florida Jobs with Justice, a coalition of unions.
The Diamond Spotter

A young woman who attended the meeting on leadership last November at the Kettering Foundation told this story about her entry into the world of grassroots organizing:

We lived in a community that our city had decided was a lost cause, that they would just let it die on its own. [Then] someone came to me that I refer to as my bulldozer. At that time, I was a mother who did absolutely nothing. [She] said, “The neighborhood is dying; we need people to save it; we see you as one of those people.” [I thought], “My life is dying. You’re asking me to save a neighborhood? I don’t get it.”

I may have seen this person as a bulldozer, but she was actually a diamond spotter. And that’s what I try to encourage in other people. And become one myself. There are so many diamonds-in-the-rough out there, we have to be able to spot those diamonds and just rub off that top so that their brilliance can shine through.

We saw vacant lots just continually crop up in our community. And of course, vacant lots become dumping sites. Don’t want the washing machine anymore; put it on that vacant lot. Don’t want these car tires anymore; put them on that vacant lot. Don’t want this bag that I just finished potato chips from; toss it on that vacant lot. And pretty soon, those are eyesores in our neighborhood.

But I thought, “Well, if we’re going to change the neighborhood, at least we could do something about how it looks.” And so I organized my neighbors into clean-up committees on Saturdays. And that’s what we did. We took on those vacant lots. We got rid of all that stuff. Got introduced to government in that way by saying, “We need help.” If you’re going to keep these lots clean, we need you to provide the trucks and whatever other materials we can utilize that the city has. And we started to receive those things.

Then we started to take on more. We saw crime in our community — organized a neighborhood watch group to monitor that. Folks started to talk about unemployment being a problem in our community. As folks would say, there’s only one person on our block who actually gets up to go to work. So that certainly told us that unemployment was one of those issues in our community.

So we started to get persons in a position to gain work. Now, I’ll tell you, in our neighborhood we didn’t have people who had a lot of skills so we started to be creative and started to create our own jobs. We had someone who owned a building. And most of us were pretty poor. [But] we all thought it would be nice to go out to eat, so we created our own community restaurant. And the folks in the community actually ran the restaurant. Lots of women who wanted to display their culinary skills would take a day and prepare the meal. And then that kind of created a little competition between them. Who could put on the best meal that day?

Then that took away a lot of the time from our cleaning up the vacant lots. So we turned our vacant lots into community gardens. And now our community gardens provide the vegetables for the meals in the restaurant.

— Maxine S. Thomas
Partnering with Large National Organizations: A Win-Win Proposition

By Estus Smith

Should immigration be restricted? What should we do about health care? What should go on the Internet? National Issues Forums (NIF) have been posing questions like these to the public for nearly 20 years. The Kettering Foundation (KF) relies on NIF forums to provide grist for its research mill. But the foundation’s interest extends beyond simply finding answers to the specific questions citizens explore through NIF. While the answers are important, the foundation is more interested in the way people arrive at them.

What interests the foundation is how citizens deal with these and other issues that critically affect all Americans. The primary question on Kettering’s research agenda is to discover what it takes to make democracy work as it should. The foundation concentrates on the most important, if least understood, element of a democracy — the powerful, but unpredictable, public.

So it is to the public that we have turned to seek answers. What we have found — not surprisingly — is that citizens who accept their responsibilities and are able to make sound decisions about what is in the public’s best interest are the lifeblood of a democracy. We study the way a deliberative public makes decisions on the major issues facing the country and, through studies of networking and deliberation, we seek to find better ways of providing space for public deliberation.

This past year, the foundation and its trustees took time to reassess and look ahead. We know that deliberation — as distinct from general discussion or debate — belongs everywhere people make collective decisions. Furthermore, our research suggests that opportunities for citizens to engage in deliberative discussions have to be available to every sector of a democratic society.

And so, we asked ourselves: What course of action should we pursue to help bring about these conditions?
Four options were outlined and discussed. One involved introducing deliberation to large national organizations whose objectives may be different from ours but whose approach to achieving those objectives includes public input and citizen action, areas of great interest to the foundation.

Large national organizations care deeply and know a great deal about certain issues. They are dedicated, for the most part, to educating the public and promoting action. As a nonpartisan research foundation, KF is interested not so much in the issues themselves, but in how issues are framed, how people talk about the issues, and what moves people to do something about them.

Consistent with its history, the Kettering Foundation continues to shape its agenda around problems that are too big for a single organization to solve alone. The advantages of working with large partner organizations are many. For example, by joining with existing organizations, we are able to get a broader array of participants involved in deliberative work. Also, these organizations have structures and histories that can ensure longevity for the work. This is not always easy to achieve by working directly with local NIF organizations.

While NIF's effectiveness as a tool for building a deliberative public is virtually undisputed, long experience has revealed a number of obstacles that impede the growth and sustainability of the NIF Network. Among these pitfalls is the reliance on single individuals. All too often, a local NIF organization's commitment to the work depends on a single enthusiastic individual. When that person burns out, leaves the organization, or changes positions, the NIF contact dies and so does that connection in the network. There is far less likelihood that this will happen when collaborating with a large organization whose modus operandi — education, public input, and citizen action — complements Kettering's approach.

Another good reason to work with large organizations is that they are likely to continue the project because the selected NIF issue is at the core of their agenda and because they typically develop strategies to address the identified problems. This is particularly true of special interest organizations. Some years ago, the foundation began to teach national organizations how to frame issues in public terms. Organizations that
wrote and distributed issue books include the Farm Foundation, the American Bar Association, and the Southern Growth Policies Board.

We have long had a successful partnership with the Federation of State Humanities Councils, the membership association for humanities councils in all 50 states and 5 U.S. territories. Humanities councils promote interaction and dialogue between humanities scholars and the general public and encourage programs that engage people in discussion.

In 1999, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) contacted the foundation after learning that KF planned to release an issue book entitled *Alcohol: Controlling the Toxic Spill*. NIAAA is one of the institutes within the National Institutes of Health and is the primary federal entity responsible for research on the causes, consequences, treatment, and prevention of alcohol-related problems.

One of the goals of this organization is to "energize the public to address this issue within their families, schools, and communities in a sustained way, and to work for change." The agency has come to understand that there are things about alcohol abuse and alcoholism that cannot be treated medically. Their research clearly shows that efforts by the individual, the family, and the community are needed to address these issues.
NIAAA was interested in not only using the issue books, but also in collaborating on a two-year project. The advantages to the foundation were obvious. NIAAA has liaisons with more than 200 organizations dedicated to long-term issues related to alcohol. The agency has amassed considerable research findings on topics related to alcohol and alcoholism. And it has commitments from 33 governors’ spouses prepared to foster meaningful discussions in their respective states about alcohol.

Under the terms of the agreement, KF posed the research questions, prepared the issue books at two reading levels, and agreed to underwrite reports on the outcomes. The National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) identified NIF moderators and convenors for each state and alerted the NIF Network of the two-year program on alcohol and alcoholism. NIAAA unleashed the resources of its network in endorsing the issue book.

Altogether, the collaboration offered an opportunity for many interested local organizations to expand the number of citizens who took part in their forums, raised national consciousness of the issue, and promoted citizen involvement in setting an agenda for action. It exemplified the unique capabilities of each organization to achieve both common and unique goals. The Kettering Foundation has been asked to join 24,000 adults and youths in the PRIDE 25th Annual Conference on Drugs and Alcohol, to be held this summer in Cincinnati, Ohio. This is yet another opportunity to sustain interest in and further promulgate the work of the foundation.

In summary, this option — collaborating with large national organizations — holds considerable promise for the foundation. We can get more participants involved in the work. We can count on these organizations to continue their projects. And, not the least of the advantages, partnering with others can help reduce the foundation’s costs.

Still, as we have learned well in our work, no approach is without drawbacks and tradeoffs. Some organizations are looking for quick fixes for difficult issues. Issues may be framed in political, rather than public, terms, and they may become polarized as a result of positions held by long-time advocates. In these cases, the foundation’s interest in fostering the deliberative process could well be compromised.

We cannot, of course, expect that a large national organization will adopt KF’s agenda lock, stock, and barrel. The question we will have to define for ourselves is what tradeoffs we are willing to make in this area.

In charting a path for the future, it is important for the Kettering Foundation to stay true to its own history. For more than 20 years, we have developed expertise in framing public issues and studied the ways people come to grips with them. Collaborating with large national organizations will help us greatly enlarge the scope of our work, and the foundation actively seeks to include such collaborations in its work.

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Local Issue Framing and Deliberation: Making a Difference in Community Life

By Grace Severyn

When people from a community come together to deliberate about and work on a problem they care about — a problem that affects them, their neighbors, or a family across town — good things can happen.

Over the past few years, teams of people from several communities have been working to bring the process of deliberation to their communities. Through the foundation’s Community Politics Workshop series, these teams have learned about deliberative public politics. They have framed and delved into their own local issues and moderated deliberative forums. Most teams have viewed their work as far more than issue framing and holding forums; they see it as a way to create a new, effective, deliberative culture. Despite obstacles, the community teams have made progress toward the goal of embedding the practices of issue framing and deliberation in their community life.

The experiences of the community team from Helena, Arkansas, which is participating in the current series of Community Politics Workshops, illustrates how deliberation can begin to take root in a community and how it can make a difference. Helena is a small, rural, poor, predominantly African American Mississippi-River town. While Helena boasts of an annual blues festival, historic homes and churches, and good fishing and recreational opportunities, the community also suffers from racial tensions, a teen pregnancy rate that is among the highest in the nation, and public schools in “academic distress.”

Several years ago, two local women, Mary Olson and Naomi Cottoms, saw the potential for deliberation in their beloved, but troubled, hometown. Mary and Naomi noticed that talk about local issues tended to be divisive and argumentative. They heard people say that they were “talked out” and wanted action. These two friends, one black and one white, were so united in their conviction that deliberation could lead to positive changes that they created a new organization, Walnut Street Works. One of the goals of the organization is to empower citizens to make decisions for themselves and the community using the process of “democratic deliberation.”

As Walnut Street Works was getting started, Naomi drew together a team of six to participate in the Community Politics Workshops. This new Community Politics team began by sponsoring six discussions on violence by young people. The forums were based on an NIF issue book, but because Helena is predominantly an “oral culture,” moderators did not use the issue book. Forums were held at a school, juvenile detention facility, senior center, housing authority, barber shop, and city hall. Ollie White, a team member, observed that the forums gave people a sense that they have some control over their lives and the issues that affect them.

Because of the notoriously high teen-pregnancy rates in the county, the Community Politics team members chose teen pregnancy as their first issue to frame. They produced a one-page
"We know no one solution is enough, so we hope people will end up working on the issue in a lot of different ways."

Framing entitled “Teenage Pregnancy: What Can We Do?” Using this framework, the team organized five forums in the spring of 2001, at various community sites. Most participants in these small forums were African American, and quite a few were teens. After this set of forums, Naomi wrote:

"The greatest public action was that people who participated in the forums actually left feeling like they could do something, they could make a difference in this issue. This process is very empowering for a people who have been oppressed and live in a land where hopelessness abounds. This empowerment is exciting... It is a wonderful beginning for action."

Responding to interest expressed by teens in learning to moderate forums, the
Fifteen
team held a training session for 15 teens. These teens have formed a leadership team. "We hope we will be able to actually make a difference in our community," said C. Ryan Ford, a member of the leadership team. "We know no one solution is enough, so we hope people will end up working on the issue in a lot of different ways." Working in teams, the teens moderated nine forums for teens under the supervision of the Community Politics team and seven more without supervision. After moderating a few forums, one of the teen leaders, Ndidiama Oyetunbi, concluded that "this process is a good way to get youth to become more responsible by allowing them to decide how they can be more responsible."

At the close of each of the forums, participants are asked to think about what action could be taken as a community, as a group, or as an individual. To encourage action, the moderators make a sign-up sheet available. The Community Politics team is learning that people want to do something, but that they often "need a little support and nurturing." As Naomi explains, this follow-up could be as simple as contacting the people involved to see if they have been able to come together.

With this gentle nurturing by the Community Politics team, both adults and teens are beginning to act. One parent is developing a second youth leadership team. The teens in this group have moderated forums on teen pregnancy in a neighboring county and plan to use the deliberative process to work on drug and alcohol abuse. Another parent who is a nurse and medical technologist wants to join with Walnut Street Works to offer training for hospital laboratory careers to teen mothers. A group has also formed of parents interested in moderating forums. Another outcome of the teen-moderated forums was a teen summit. In November, the teen leadership team, assisted by the Community Politics team and some parents, held a Teen Summit. More than 300 teens participated in the day's activities, beginning with a forum on teen pregnancy moderated by teens. At the close of the forum, many teens committed to changing their personal behavior or to learning how to moderate forums.

The deliberative process has also been a bridge between people and officeholders. Debates within and among the major political bodies — the West Helena City Council, the Helena City Council, and the County Quorum Court — often are contentious. Because of the safe and neutral environment of the forum, members of these three political bodies felt comfortable enough to attend a forum together on teenage pregnancy, an accomplishment in itself. A day after the forum, several officeholders who did not attend the forum apologized and expressed their desire to be included in future forums. The mayor has indicated he would like to use the deliberative process in decision making.

Finally, the process plays a role in improving race relations in the area. All current members of the Community Politics team are African Americans. A majority of participants in the forum for officeholders were white. As Naomi says, the team "moves as an African American team in a community where African American teams are often discounted." The fact that an African American team is introducing the process of deliberation to the community as a whole could ultimately become a unifying element.

Through the forums in Helena, people from all walks of life are talking to one another. Teens and adults have begun to take action. The Community Politics team hopes that issue framing, deliberation, and public acting become habits in the community. Then, as Naomi envisioned, the deliberative process can be the hub of a wheel of much-needed change.

For more information about Community Politics, contact Jim Wilder, director of external affairs for the Kettering Foundation. He can be reached at wilder@kettering.org or 202/393-4478. Grace Severn, an associate of the foundation, can be reached at severn@kettering.org.

A Local Issue Framing: Teenage Pregnancy

The Community Politics team in Helena, Arkansas, chose teen pregnancy as its first issue to frame. The result was a one-page framing entitled "Teenage Pregnancy: What Can We Do?" It encompassed three choices:

- Educate. The community as a whole should become more educated about the perils of pregnancy and the impacts it has in our community, both potential and factual, in order to reduce teenage pregnancy.
- End Poverty. We must create job opportunities, raise income levels, improve educational opportunities, housing, physical health opportunities, social venues, and the general wellness of the community in order to reduce teenage pregnancy.
- Everyone needs to set good examples. Adults and youth should begin to set better examples for each other in order to reduce teenage pregnancy in our community.
News Organizations as Partners in Deliberation:
Tapping Democratic Potential

By Cole C. Campbell

"Imagine Cincinnati as a model city for solving racial problems. You can help make it a reality. Find out how."

With that simple statement, The Cincinnati Enquirer and 110 cosponsors invited the citizens of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky to come together "Neighbor to Neighbor" in a series of dialogues entitled "Community Conversations on Race: What Should We Do?"

"We've created an initiative, called Neighbor to Neighbor, with an audacious goal: holding a solutions-oriented conversation in nearly every neighborhood, village, township, and city in the region," Enquirer Managing Editor Rosemary Goudreau wrote in a column published October 8, 2001.

The newspaper decided to sponsor the forums following the riots in Cincinnati in the spring of 2001. The initiative included facilitator training by Dave Patton of The Ohio State University's Civic Life Institute and Chip Harrod of the National Conference for Community and Justice in Cincinnati. With help from the Kettering Foundation and the National Issues Forums, the initiative created a framework for talking about race.

From mid-November 2001 through mid-March 2002, Neighbor to Neighbor had held or planned 163 conversations in 108 communities — and nearly half the groups planned to meet again to keep the conversation going.

After each conversation, facilitators posted summaries on the initiative's Web site (http://cincinnati.com/neighbors) so that every citizen in the region with access to the Internet could keep abreast of how the conversations were progressing.

"We find answers when we talk," reads the Web site's homepage. "When it comes to improving race relations," it reports, "this is what your neighbors are saying:

- "Greater Cincinnati would be a lot better off if everyone just treated everyone else the same — as Americans, not as whites or blacks.
- "No, things would be better if everyone honored each other's differences — primarily their race."

Beyond sharing these divergent frames, the Neighbor to Neighbor Web site also reports:

- "People from Forest Park and Springfield and Colerain townships are investigating ways their churches can bring diverse people together.
- "Neighbors in Kenton County want public schools to enlist excellent students as role models to pair with poor-performing students.
- "People from around Hyde Park want to meet more often with police officers to develop better relations.
- "People in Pleasant Ridge may start a book club to discuss topics of racism."

The Cincinnati initiative is perhaps the most sweeping example of a newspaper engaging in community deliberation in consultation with the Kettering Foundation (KF) and the National Issues Forums. But it is not the only example. The Charleston Gazette has published issue frameworks developed by the West Virginia Center for Civic Life, and the Messenger-Inquirer has been a lead sponsor of community deliberations in
boro, Kentucky. The Poughkeepsie Journal in New York has partnered with Dutchess Community College to sponsor a series of National Issues Forums, most recently on how the community should respond to terrorism. In addition, the Times of Northwest Indiana in Hammond is working with a half-dozen area colleges and universities to develop deliberative forums, starting with a forum on terrorism cosponsored with Valparaiso University in November 2001.

Some of these initiatives have grown out of the Kettering Foundation’s Community-Media Workshops. Others have been initiated by a newspaper or a community group that then turns to KF or NIF for information about the effective use of deliberation in a community setting.

It makes sense for the foundation to work with news organizations in its study of what helps democracy work as it should — particularly with regard to deliberation. Deliberation occurs in the open — within and among political, governmental, economic, and civic associations and institutions. These bodies are linked to the larger citizenry largely through the news media that pay attention to their work. Citizens' sense of the vitality of deliberative democracy and public life can be significantly influenced by the way news media frame and depict these aspects of community life. And citizens' sense of the efficacy of their own engagement with each other and with community organizations also can be significantly influenced by how the news media frame and depict issues for public deliberation.

Through the Project on Public Life and the Press, KF has learned that journalists who learn to appreciate the public's capacity to deliberate change the way they frame and depict public life in their reporting. Among these journalists, coverage of some traditional topics, such as elections, has taken on a more deliberative character as they frame candidates' positions as alternative approaches to public issues rather than as merely appeals to different constituencies. This suggests that news organizations are worth further study and collaborative research.
A column (January 13, 2002) by Bob Ashley, editor of the *Messenger-Inquirer* in Owensboro, Kentucky, is an example of that paper's efforts to foster public deliberation on important community issues.

Public dialogue important to weigh pros, cons of casino gambling

When John Froehlich and Dan Edelschick of Downtown Owensboro first pitched the idea of a forum on casino gambling to me, I was darkly skeptical.

Whatever its merits, I observed, the idea has no traction. Nearly two years of sporadic discussion seemed not to have fired up people on either side of the issue...

We conducted a roundtable discussion with the editorial board and a dozen folks with interest in this issue a few months ago and received little reaction to the report of that discussion...

Because any good community newspaper's role is to churn up some real dialogue on civic issues — and because John and Dan were resolute — I figured, what the heck, let's give it a try. The *Messenger-Inquirer* would be glad to co-sponsor the discussion, and I'd lend some time to moderate it.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

After Tuesday evening, I'm about to add my initial skepticism to the ever-longer list of examples that I'm lousy at foreseeing the future. That's why I don't go to the track.

On a chilly weeknight in drizzly, post-holiday January, about 200 people came out to listen — really listen — to three representatives of towns with casino gambling.

You read a good summation in Keith Lawrence's story on Wednesday of what was said. The panelists were articulate, engaged and sometimes witty. The audience was polite, attentive and occasionally feisty.

All of those are good things.

I'm not here to argue for or against casino gambling. The paper has yet to take a position on it and I, like my colleagues, am weighing pros and cons.

Tuesday night's session indicated that so are many, perhaps most, of you.

I'd like to think that Tuesday's discussion demonstrated that this community is interested, ready and even eager for a dialogue on the question.

That is what we need.

This is not an easy issue. The arguments for economic growth are strong. On the other hand, the concerns that many people have on the practical downsides are valid. What will happen to crime, to traffic, to civic cohesiveness? Is the casino boom that many towns see a flash in the pan, doomed to go away later or, worse, sooner? This community has bet its future on whiskey-distilling, wagon-making, vacuum-tube manufacture. They've been short-term booms that faded into nothing.

Full, honest and robust discussion will hammer out how best to weigh those pros and cons.

The harder part of the issue — on which middle ground may be especially elusive — also was apparent Tuesday night.

For many good people, this is not a question of economics. It's not a debate over whether infrastructure improvements would be outweighed by congestion, about whether jobs created in one sector would outweigh jobs wiped out, or businesses harmed, in another.

For many, this is a question of morality. Is gambling simply wrong, a violation of community standards and basic moral precepts?

Others might argue that it most certainly is not — that there is no moral imperative against something that already is sanctioned in this state at the horse track, the convenience store lottery-ticket counter, the church bingo hall.

And still others might argue that it's a personal choice.

But that doesn't change the fact that many people think it's very wrong.

An incredibly difficult — and important — community debate should lie ahead.

Maybe it's moot, at least in the near term. The legislature probably isn't going to open this door.

But lots of things can happen in the frenzy of Frankfort — especially in a year when revenue shortfalls and escalating expectations for expenditures put a tremendous squeeze on the treasury.

Even if there's no action this year, the tide may move in that direction.

And it's important to know where we as a community stand on this.

I think healthy dialogue took a big step forward Tuesday. We, and others, will be looking for ways to keep it going.

Whether it does, is largely up to you.

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Because news organizations reflect and contribute to public discourse, they can be a platform for infusing public discourse with a more deliberative quality. They serve as gatekeepers to information and, in a sense, to public participation. The gates to civic participation open and close in accordance with the degree to which citizens see public life framed as a life of possibility or the realm of knavery and tomfoolery. News media that frame public life as a realm in which citizen participation matters encourage such participation. They can help increase public acting in their communities.

As one of the few boundary-spanning institutions in any community, news organizations have incredible reach, both geographic and demographic. They can reach the widest array of citizens and organizations with examples of deliberative democracy at work and with portrayals of public life that encourage participation.

News organizations also are committed to public service and sense that they need to strengthen their connection to citizens and communities. Several are experimenting with ways to act more publicly and to relate more effectively to the public sphere. Within the world of journalism and journalism education, there are many leaders and innovators who can be strong partners in improving how public life is framed.

But there are also some drawbacks to working with news organizations. Given their professional cultures, news organizations are internally focused and often are not open to learning new practices and theories from people outside of journalism. They can be, paradoxically, addicted to the novel and stuck in the past. Their attention constantly shifts to the new, even as their professional dialogue rehashes many of the same issues in the same ways as it has for the past decade.

News organizations are also business organizations, and they are preoccupied with the challenges of economic success. Journalists may fall victim to the temptation to recruit citizens to their cause as a counterweight to corporate interests they perceive to be inimical to journalistic interests. If so, journalistic interests, rather than civic interests, would remain the focus of their endeavors. News organizations are so implicated in the way public life is functioning now that they may have a particularly hard time reaching escape velocity for a new, more civic orbit. Meanwhile, public trust in news organizations continues to rise and fall, which may be a barrier to citizens engaging with each other through news organizations’ work.

But The Cincinnati Enquirer’s collaborative effort to foster conversations about race suggests the scale and sweep that news organizations can bring to community deliberation. And that is a process worth learning more about.

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A Question for the Public to Decide: What to Do about Money and Politics

By Patty Dineen

Last November, I was happy to be part of a team that presented some findings from the forums held around the country using the NIF Money and Politics issue book to a number of groups in Washington, D.C. Doble Research Associates had put together an insightful report about what people in the forums had said and how they had said it, and our meetings in Washington were to be based on the report, as has been done in years past with other issues.

As the time to meet in Washington approached, we anticipated, mostly via E-mail, that the people who would be hearing our report might question how much interest the public could possibly still have in money and politics since the events of September 11. We certainly had that question ourselves, and were right that those hearing our report would ask it.

I think it's an interesting and important question for us to consider. A great deal of time, effort, and energy goes into the preparation of issue guides, convening of forums, and reporting about what was said. The attempt to report on "Money and Politics" right after September 11 threw into vivid relief the idea that the public's attention and priorities might be so unpredictable as to make all this deliberative democracy work something that we are trying to do in a solid way while standing on shifting sands.

There must be an interesting study in all this about how completely the public's attention can shift from one issue to another and whether the public can manage to "walk and chew gum" at the same time, in spite of all the distractions. It would be an interesting question for those of us in the National Issues Forums Network at any time, but even more so in light of events in recent months.
On December 1, I sent an article I had written for *Civic Life* (formerly the *Deliberator*) to Sarah Rickman. I had been asked to write something about the “Money and Politics” issue. I titled it “Money and Politics: A Year in the Life of an Issue” because I thought it had been an interesting year to look at the ebb and flow of the prominence of a particular issue on the national scene and how convenors and moderators had dealt with that. But now — how much more complex things have become!

The question a few months ago was, “How interested is the public in money and politics now that September 11 has happened?” Now, we could just as well ask, “How interested is the public in terrorism now that Enron has happened?” Of course, the answer is that they are interested, even intensely interested, and concerned about both, but with one crucial difference with respect to money and politics (especially for the NIF Network): While public deliberation about how officeholders should proceed in dealing with the threat of terrorism will be difficult and very important, there is no reason to believe that they are in any way conflicted about where their loyalties lie. But when it comes to making or changing policy about money and its impact on politics, we see officeholders as both the source of and solution to the problem. It looks like an impossible dilemma if left to the officeholders alone. The public must get involved in the discussion of what to do about money and politics, or there is a good chance that nothing will change. In fact, there’s a good chance that things will get worse.

Enron’s money and influence extended to both political parties, and some have questioned whether it is possible for Congress or its appointees to conduct an honest investigation. What is possible is an honest conversation about money and politics and what we can do to curb abuses. If ever there were a need for a national conversation (that could happen in a nonpartisan, nonbiased way) about a national problem, this is the time. And if ever there were a time, and a need, for citizens to take responsibility for working on an issue, this is it.

Some national columnists have pointed out that while Washington seems to be holding its breath to see if the Enron scandal becomes a political scandal (meaning whether people in high offices will be proven to have done something illegal), those who are waiting anxiously for the answer to that question are missing the most important point. It’s not whether the system has been involved in something that’s illegal (well, yes, that’s important, too); it’s whether the system has been involved in something that is simply a bad idea, and bad for the country and its citizens.

That is exactly what the public had to say about “Money and Politics” in the Noble report. This is what the report said about whether the public connects to this issue in the way conventional wisdom suggests it does:
What can be done about the impact of money on politics?

Here are some of the major themes that emerged in the NIF Report on the Issues — Money and Politics: Who Owns Democracy?

- Participants in National Issues Forums on “Money and Politics” saw the influence of money on the political system as damaging and harmful in three ways: 1) money warps political decision making, subordinating the public interest to special interests; 2) it skews the election process, giving well-financed candidates a great and unfair advantage; 3) it alienates ordinary Americans, who often feel their voices don’t count.

- Forum participants defined the issue of money and politics in terms of the public’s right to hear. Money, they said, corrupts the public dialogue, limiting the voices that people hear and amplifying some at the expense of others. As a result, many people do not hear leaders who speak to their concerns or articulate their deepest values.

- Participants identified five ways that the news media exacerbate the problems caused by money: 1) they further limit the voices the public hears by filtering information so people do not hear directly from public leaders; 2) they do not present issues fairly; 3) they do not help people sort through manipulative, deceptive ads; 4) they focus too much on overly personal information; 5) they intensify cynicism.

- Participants felt we should reduce the influence of money by “leveling the playing field” in terms of elections. They felt all candidates should have roughly an equal chance of being heard and considered by the public and that voters should have an opportunity to consider all candidates and all points of view.

- Participants in most forums talked about the need for access to the media and how that relates to the problems caused by the influence of money on politics. The need for so much money, many said, is driven by the high cost of advertising, especially on television. A large majority of the participants said that the way to “level the playing field” is to give all major candidates for public office free or low-cost airtime on television and radio.

- Most participants said that the best way to ensure that all candidates have a roughly equal chance of being heard is through a system of public financing of political campaigns.

- Participants felt that lobbyists and special interests have too much political influence, and they wanted to curb their power. At the same time, as people deliberated, their antipathy toward lobbyists and special interests declined as they learned more about the role of both groups, and realized that they themselves might well be represented by one or both.

- Almost without exception, participants favored full, immediate disclosure of all campaign contributions, including disclosure in the media and on the Internet. Participants, however, felt that such disclosure would not really curb the influence of money or remedy the problems they had identified.

- Most forum participants favored the idea of giving the public a more direct say in running public affairs, but many saw problems with the idea as well, giving it only qualified support.

- Participants saw “money and politics” not as one single issue but as several interconnected issues, among them campaign finance, media accessibility, an alienated and cynical public, and the lack of qualified leaders willing to serve the public interest.
Participants in this year's National Issues Forums were troubled, not so much about the narrow issue of "campaign finance reform" but about the broader issue of "money and politics" as an underlying cause of the public's alienation, cynicism, and feeling of disconnection from the political system. "There's a cancer in American politics. And that cancer is money," said a man at a forum in Poughkeepsie, New York.

Participants defined the issue as encompassing not only campaign contributions but also the day-to-day influence of money on governmental decision making, usually at the federal level, and the impact of money on what we will call "the public dialogue."

I can't imagine anything being much more on target in terms of the light it sheds on the significance to the public of the Enron collapse and Enron's dealings with the political system. While many of the people who heard the report in Washington last fall were listening for only the parts pertaining to campaign finance reform, I hope that some of the other things they heard or read in the report are now echoing in their heads and suddenly sounding like they make a whole lot of sense.

I think all of this points out the tremendously important niche that NIF fills — or, at the very least, has the potential to fill — by giving people a way to talk about, and take responsibility for, the problems that probably aren't going to get fixed in any other way.

Patty Dineen, a Pennsylvania-based NIF activist, worked on the report of the "Money and Politics" issue. She can be reached at dineenp@msn.com.
They Give, but They Also Take: Voters Muddle States’ Finances

By Timothy Egan

The voters of Arizona have spoken. They want lower taxes. They also want higher taxes — but only if they go to the state’s beleaguered public schools, consistently ranked among the worst in the nation.

The people of Colorado have spoken as well. They passed a constitutional amendment that limits how much state government can spend or take in, even in flush times. But then a few years later they passed another amendment, calling for guaranteed annual increases in education spending. Pay for it however possible, the voters seemed to be saying, but do not raise our taxes.

In Washington State, the voters have sent a similar mixed message. By a sizable majority, people voted in 1999 to cut taxes. But the next year an even bigger majority voted to spend $800 million to give teachers annual raises and reduce class size, without also offering any new money to pay for the initiatives.

Call them unfinanced mandates from the people. Now all three states are facing crushing deficits and may have to close parks, delay road construction, close hospitals and reduce police officers in rural areas. Standard & Poor’s warned Colorado that its credit rating may be downgraded. Still, the voter message seems to be, Deal with it.

As state legislators struggle to find ways to adhere to the popular will, some are now wondering whether it was a good idea to let people shape big chunks of the budget by voter initiatives, leaving the messy details to lawmakers.

Where voters have put budgetary strictures on their elected officials has practically doubled, to 13.

At the same time, in 24 states where lawmaking by ballot is permitted, voters went on a spending spree of their own, mandating money for drug treatment, schools, parks and roads. Voter initiatives have never been particularly popular with state lawmakers, who see their job as taxing and spending. But most of what voters did was largely inconsequential in the prosperous 1990s. Now, in the midst of a lingering recession and increased costs for domestic security, the bill is coming due, and in a growing number of states, expenses and revenues do not add up.

More than 40 states have a budget shortage. And unlike the federal government, these budgets are required by law to be balanced. “This makes my job very difficult,” said Nancy McCallin, the budget director for Colorado. “But the voters pay the taxes, and if they are telling us this is how they want us to run things, we have to do it.”

Voter moods can vary. Colorado is now trying to find a way to make up a two-year budget shortage of about $700 million, in part because of new voter-mandated spending programs. But the state is also scrounging for a way to give about $1 billion back to taxpayers in voter-mandated refunds, which was deferred.

In the West, where taxing and spending by initiative has a strong tradition, the balancing act is particularly difficult. “I wouldn’t say voters are stupid,” said Phil Talmadge, a former Washington Supreme Court judge and legislator. “But the same voter who wants unlimited services also does not want to pay for it. There’s a disconnect.”

Voter initiatives, Mr. Talmadge said, were created nearly a hundred years ago because people did not trust their legislators to act for the public good. But in recent years, such initiatives have grown in popularity and importance. “What happened in the 1990s is that special interests decided it was a lot cheaper to buy initiatives than buy legislators,” Mr. Talmadge said.

The result, he said, is that Democrats used the initiative process for new spending
programs on education, health care and the environment, and Republicans used it to cut taxes or limit states’ ability to raise taxes. Many voters punched yes for both sides. “This puts us in somewhat of a civic death spiral,” said Richard Davis, president of the Washington Research Council, a nonpartisan public policy research group in Seattle. “You give the voters an up or down without any nuance. They are reacting to a line item, and they never have to deliberate, as legislators do.”

The message in the states where voters can basically do the job that elected officials were once primarily charged with doing, Mr. Davis said, “is not liberal or conservative — it’s reactive.”

Others who have studied the initiative patterns agree. “Where direct democracy becomes a more dominant force than representative government the result is a whipsaw, without any long-term coherence,” said Brian Weberg, an official with the National Conference of State Legislatures.

People on both sides of the political spectrum say the system has gotten out of control. Lawmakers in some states have called for hearings on the initiative process. Still, these states with strong initiative powers have populist traditions, and lawmakers are loath to mess with the majority sentiment, however contradictory that can seem. “Legislators don’t want to do anything because it may be viewed as tinkering with the will of the people,” said Daniel A. Smith, a professor of political science at the University of Denver.

Washington State legislators, for instance, now seem cowed by the initiative. Mr. Davis said. When people voted to cut the annual car-registration fee to a flat fee of $30 from $500 or more, depending on the year and model of the car, officials argued that the measure would increase the state’s deficit. But when the State Supreme Court threw out the measure, legislators, with the aid of Gov. Gary Locke, a Democrat, resurrected the issue, made the $30 car-registration fee the law and said it was the will of the people. Now Washington is struggling to finance road construction to ease Seattle’s chronic traffic congestion. But legislative leaders from both parties say they are afraid to raise gasoline taxes to pay for new roads without first putting it to a vote of the people.

Here in Arizona, voters passed a 1992 constitutional amendment making it almost impossible for the Legislature to raise taxes. But in the late 1990s, during boom times, voters started mandating by initiative more money for health care and education. To make sure state politicians got the message, voters passed another measure that said the lawmakers could not undo what the voters had just decided to do. In the 2000 election, Arizona voters decided to raise the amount of money spent on schools every year. They also said lawmakers could not use school money for other purposes. But, several legislators say, the fund created for the schools does not have enough money to satisfy the law that says schools must be given a certain amount every year.

In part because of the dual mandates from voters, Arizona is now facing a deficit of up to $2 billion over this year and next. Washington’s shortage is about $1.6 billion, and Colorado has a $700 million hill to climb. “It’s a mess,” said Panfilo Contreras, executive director of the Arizona School Boards Association. “What’s happening now is we’re getting our comeuppance for what we’ve been doing over the last 10 years.” Mr. Contreras says voters realized that voting to restrict taxes and revenue 10 years ago was a mistake, because schools and health facilities in the state fell apart. Now the voters are more educated, he said, and are trying to undo piecemeal what they did earlier.

Others have a different interpretation, saying voters are inconsistent.

So Arizona legislators continue meeting here, now in their third special session over the last year, trying to figure out exactly what the voters intended while having to make large, unpopular cuts. Nearly 60 percent of the budget cannot be touched, under orders from the people. “We have become somewhat of a Bypass Legislature state,” said Francie Noyes, a spokeswoman for Gov. Jane Dee Hull, a Republican. “We have very little flexibility, particularly in hard times, to make budget decisions because of all the demands from voter initiatives.”

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Books Worth Reading

The Kettering Foundation’s researchers, associates, and program staff seek to keep abreast of current literature on public life and democratic culture. Following are a few recently published books that we have found to be relevant to the foundation’s work.

All of these books are available at bookstores, libraries, or directly from the publishers.

The Truth of Power: Intellectual Affairs in the Clinton White House

By Benjamin R. Barber
New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001

Benjamin Barber, now Gershon and Carol Kekst Professor of Civil Society at the University of Maryland, offers a compelling personal testimony about his interactions with President Bill Clinton and the White House during Clinton’s two terms.

As a memoir, Barber’s story about life as a public intellectual among politicians is similar to Jay Rosen’s tale of his time as a public intellectual among journalists in What Are Journalists For? (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). Both accounts detail the struggles of engaging practitioners with larger ideas that can inform, and transform, their practice. Both Barber and Rosen reflect on how the experience has changed them as thinkers who, most of the time, stand apart from power and practice.

The theme of Barber’s book is that however much intellectuals, as advisers or informal consultants to high officeholders, may want to leap at the chance to tell truth to power, they must heed the impact power — itself inevitably constrained — can have on the pursuit and articulation of truth. The book also discusses the “fundamental change in the nature, ideology, and constituency of the Democratic Party over the last several decades” and the matter of Clinton’s remarkable, charismatic personality and unresolved legacy.

Three chapters in particular speak to issues of relevance to people interested in democracy and civil society. In Chapter 4, “The Art of Speechwriting,” Barber moves beyond memoir into reflections on the role of rhetoric in making lasting impressions and in bringing coherence to a body of political thought and practice (a shortcoming on both counts in Clinton’s speech-making). In Chapter 6, “The Community Service President,” Barber explores the great difference between community service as a means to prepare and engage citizens in self-rule and volunteerism as a substitute for governmental action. And in Chapter 7, “Chairman of the NEH — Not!” Barber uses his being considered as a candidate for the leadership of the National Endowment for the Humanities as a chance to argue that arts and culture are essential elements in preserving democracy and self-rule.

The Truth of Power is a brisk literary jaunt, filled with fascinating details about the Clinton White House, memorable insights into Barber as an indomitable political theorist and frail human being, and keenly articulated notions about how democratic theory comes to life in the concrete actions taken by politicians, intellectuals, citizens, and public institutions.

—Cole C. Campbell
Civic Innovation in America: Community Empowerment, Public Policy, and the Movement for Civic Renewal

By Carmen Sirianni, and Lewis Friedland
Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001

Civic Innovation is a must for both academics and practitioners interested in the work of revitalizing democracy. Academics will appreciate the book for its rich case studies, attention to detail (there are 66 pages of endnotes and a variety of research methods used to construct the cases), and connections to relevant literature. Practitioners will appreciate the book as a guide to action and, for its review of success stories in the area of civic and democratic renewal, as a morale boost.

The single thing that defines the importance of Civic Innovation is that it is both descriptive as well as prescriptive. It is descriptive in outlining the development of civic innovation and social learning over the past several decades. It is prescriptive in providing a "master narrative" of how a civic renewal movement has emerged and how it can be nurtured into the twenty-first century.

To the authors, civic innovation entails the mobilization of social capital in new ways. Further, it looks to new institutional forms coupled with "out-of-the-box" policy designs to enhance the democratic process. But it does not stop there. In addition, civic innovation requires the active involvement of citizens and civic associations in offering critical and reflexive revisions of the movement as it progresses. Illustrating this concept are the stories throughout the book of successful individuals, associations, and movements that have undertaken the critical process of reflection, assessment, and change — hence, innovation.

The corpus of the book involves four cases that are spread across four chapters. The authors detail how civic innovation has taken place over the past several decades in the areas of community organization, the environment, community health, and public journalism. A final chapter is devoted to the careful construction of a "master narrative" that outlines what the civic renewal movement should do in order to stem the tide of cynicism and disengagement that has defined American society for the past 30 years. This narrative argues that for civic renewal to be successful, it needs a vibrant and healthy civil society that is stretched horizontally across a wide array of institutions, markets, organizations, associations, and individuals. The creation of this civil society is a necessary component for civic renewal.

Several themes in this study stand out for particular mention:
- The importance of learning and learning communities. Individuals and organizations that succeed tend to have adapted a style that will allow feedback loops to enhance learning.
- Overlapping networks that are defined by their density or thickness. These are organizations or communities that are connected both horizontally and vertically, which enhances adaptation and innovation.
- The importance of trust to enhance social cooperation. Diverse groups are able to work together because they have learned, over an extended period of time (iteration), to trust one another.
- The importance of social and policy entrepreneurs that serve as leaders. Whether it is an individual (Harry Boyte) or an organization (the Kettering Foundation), one or many individuals and/or associations serve as an important resource to successful innovation.
- Nonpartisanship and deliberation. Because civic renewal depends on large groups of people and organizations working together, the emphasis is on avoiding policy, actions, or language that will marginalize or stigmatize various sectors of the community.

The authors use a quote from Proverbs 29:18 to conclude this study: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." They have given us a much-needed instructional manual to reverse the decline in civic-mindedness that has moved like a shadow over the United States for the better part of 30 years. Civic Innovation gives us some necessary direction to begin the important work of community-building and democratic renewal in the new century.

—Chris Kelley
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