Exploring the Relationship between THE PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENT
The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering’s primary research question is, what does it take to make democracy work as it should? Kettering’s research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through interrelated program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. The foundation collaborates with an extensive network of community groups, professional associations, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation’s website at www.kettering.org.

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

© Copyright 2019 by the Kettering Foundation
ISSN 2470-8003
2 Governing *With the People*  
David Mathews

16 City Managers: Creating a Collaborative Culture of Engagement  
Ron Carlee

22 Democratic Practices That Inspire Collective Action: Engaging the Full Community through Citizen-Centric Strategies  
Cheryl Hilvert, Michael Huggins, and Doug Linkhart

28 Imagining the Deliberative City Manager: The Case for Local Systems Leadership  
Martín Carcasson

35 A Public Voice: A Look at National and Local Efforts  
Tony Wharton

41 Connecting to Congress  
Michael Neblo

48 Felt Democracy: Multinational Research Exchange Week, 2019  
Wendy Willis

55 Costa Rica’s Ottón Solís: A Politician Who Puts Citizens First  
Maura Casey

61 Decades of Dialogue: Reflecting on US-China Exchanges  
Maxine S. Thomas

68 When Communities Embrace Shared Responsibility  
Richard C. Harwood
This year’s review of Kettering research is on the relationship between the public and the government and other governing institutions. These relationships have become deeply troubled as people have lost confidence in these institutions. While the discontent seems particularly sharp now, it isn’t new. In fact, it has been growing for decades, so the problem isn’t likely to go away soon. People’s concerns have even led to questioning whether democracy is the best form of government.

Americans living in all parts of the country have different reasons for being concerned. Some fear that the country is in decline because of an erosion of our core values and failures in the way our political system works—or doesn’t work. Others are troubled by issues like the growing economic divide, along with racial and other forms of injustice. People tend to see many of our problems as the result of self-inflicted wounds, and they usually blame politicians. On the other hand, elected and appointed officials in our governing institutions may blame what they see on an irresponsible citizenry. (Some citizens also have doubts about their fellow citizens.) If this situation were to morph into a rejection of institutional legitimacy, it would be fatal to our democracy.

Governing institutions have mounted numerous efforts, such as public participation and accountability initiatives, to counter the loss of confidence. But these haven’t stopped the erosion, and some studies suggest they have been counterproductive. Something more has to be done to counter the destructive forces at work, but that is going to be especially difficult at a time when divisiveness is rampant.

There may be other strategies for dealing with the public’s alienation that need to be tested. One is cap-

By David Mathews

A *with* strategy isn’t a set of best practices to emulate. It is simply a different way of thinking about the relationship citizens could have with their governing institutions. A different way of thinking could open doors to imagining new ways for governments to gain from citizens and citizens to gain from governments. This book describes situations in which a *with* strategy could have been useful and also conditions that made collaboration impossible. However, there is no one perfect example of this strategy. So debating what cases are or aren’t exemplary isn’t likely to be productive. *With* is just an idea intended to spark imagination.

**WITH AS DEMOCRACY**

A *with* strategy is a democratic strategy. Saying that, of course, demands an explanation of what is meant by *democracy* because the word has many meanings. Today, the most common is that democracy is a system of contested elections resulting in a representative government. Or it is a system of institutions, both governmental and nongovernmental, that serve the public. Those are certainly valid definitions. However, there is reason to believe that a democracy is much more.

*A with* strategy isn’t a set of best practices to emulate. It is simply a different way of thinking about the relationship citizens could have with their governing institutions.
I think what we now call democracy began long before the word was coined. It grew out of lessons taken from the collective actions needed for human survival when our ancestors were hunter-gatherers living in tribal enclaves and, later, villages. This was before there were kingdoms and nation-states. As humans spread out across the globe, they carried with them a “political DNA” developed in the struggle to survive. A principal lesson of survival was that cooperation was key because we needed collective efforts to stay alive. We had to work with one another, even those from different tribes.

Much, much later, the Greeks captured some of this survival legacy in their language with new terms like democracy. As explained in other editions of Connections, this word has two roots: demos, “the people collectively,” as in a village or deme; and kratos, “sovereign power,” the capacity to act in a way that makes a real difference. Modern representative government rests on this earlier foundation of collective decision-making leading to collective actions for collective well-being.

From this perspective, democracy began and continues as a political system in which, at the most fundamental or organic level, citizens must work with other citizens to create things—“public goods”—that make life better for everyone. Our ancestors went on to form governments and other governing institutions to create more and different goods. These two political systems, one governmental or institutional and the other organic or civic, are interdependent in the ecosystem of democracy, which is the subject of an earlier book, The Ecology of Democracy, from the Kettering Foundation Press. Unfortunately, this essential, symbiotic relationship becomes weaker if citizens don’t join forces to produce public goods, if they delegate much of what they must do to institutions and govern-

“Democracy began and continues as a political system in which, at the most fundamental or organic level, citizens must work with other citizens to create things—“public goods”—that make life better for everyone.
ment agencies, or if all forms of governmental institutions are influenced wholly by professional expertise and bureaucratic routines. All of these relegate citizens to the sidelines.

A *with* strategy is idealistic, yet it isn’t a pie-in-the-sky fantasy. The United States recognized the need for what citizens provide by enacting laws allowing tax exemptions for nongovernmental institutions serving public purposes. Public-government collaboration is, in fact, very common in some situations. Think about communities hit by natural disasters—fires, floods, and tornadoes. Before the government relief arrives, people rush to help others—even those who may be strangers—possibly putting themselves in harm’s way. A *with* strategy fosters collective work, not only among people who are alike or who like one another, but among those who recognize they need one another to survive and live the lives they want to live. While collaboration between citizens working together and government agencies does occur in extreme circumstances, it isn’t a well-established policy with broad applications.

**WHAT ISN’T BEING PROPOSED**

I have cautioned against debating what is or isn’t a true *with* strategy. Yet there are some already well-known and useful practices that aren’t what I mean by *with*. A *with* strategy, for instance, isn’t just another form of public participation. It goes beyond conferring with citizens who are beneficiaries of government programs. It isn’t just consultative democracy. At the federal level, *with* doesn’t
mean just partnering with state and local governments. And it isn’t the same as transferring government responsibilities to nongovernmental organizations; it isn’t devolution. With isn’t about volunteers serving government agencies, valuable as that is. And it is not the same as the partnerships that governments have with businesses and other institutions. I am not critical of any of these efforts, yet I believe there is more to be done.

**RECIPROCITY AND COMPLEMENTARY PRODUCTION**

“Working with” is a reciprocal relationship. The best metaphor I have for this may be too dated to mean much today. Where I am from, pine trees grow so rapidly that they are treated as a crop, like corn. Seedlings are planted in neat rows so the trees can be harvested easily by machines. Before this equipment was available, however, the trees were cut using long crosscut saws, with two workers pulling the saw back and forth. Their reciprocal efforts produced a result that neither laborer could have achieved by working alone. They worked with each other.

A with strategy fosters reciprocity between what citizens do on their end of the saw and what governments do on the other end. The strategy is based on evidence that institutions can’t do their jobs effectively without
the complementary efforts of people working with people. That is because there are some things that can be done only by citizens or that are best done by them. Democratic governing needs working citizens. (I realize that saying there are some things only citizens working with one another can do invites pushback, and I will say more about that later.)

The case for the complementary efforts I am writing about now was made persuasively in Elinor Ostrom’s Nobel Prize-winning research on what she termed “coproduction.” Citizens can’t be left on the sidelines, she said, because their work is needed to reinforce and complete the work of governments, schools, and other institutions. In 1993, Ostrom presented her argument in the Committee on the Political Economy of the Good Society’s newsletter:

> If one presumes that teachers produce education, police produce safety, doctors and nurses produce health, and social workers produce effective households, the focus of attention is on how to professionalize the public service. Obviously, skilled teachers, police officers, medical personnel, and social workers are essential to the development of better public services. Ignoring the important role of children, families, support groups, neighborhood organizations, and churches in the production of these services means, however, that only a portion of the inputs to these processes are taken into account in the way that policy makers think about these problems. The term “client” is used more and more frequently to refer to those who should be viewed as essential co-producers of their own education, safety, health, and communities. A client is the name for a passive role. Being a co-producer makes one an active partner.

Products from the work of citizens can complete what institutions do because civic work is different from the work of institutions. I have in mind supplementary projects that

“A with strategy fosters collective work, not only among people who are alike or who like one another, but among those who recognize they need one another to survive and live the lives they want to live.”
That is exactly how a *with* strategy sees citizens—as actors themselves rather than just objects of the actions of others.

make use of people doing the things professionals don’t—and can’t—do. That’s why I prefer the term *complementary production* rather than *coproduction*.

A good example of complementary production is captured in a story a colleague told me about an exchange between a group of citizens in her community and their local government. The citizens had started a cultural project, but when they met with municipal officials, they didn’t ask them to take over the project. They simply said, “Here is what we have done; now what can you do?” People had taken the initiative, which was an important characteristic of what was happening. Town officials then offered assistance from a crew that brought in some equipment that the citizens didn’t have. That type of reciprocity is at the heart of a *with* strategy. Citizens take initiative; they work together to make things (public goods). Then, the government adds the resources it has. Collaborating *with* one another is mutually beneficial.

Governments already work *with* citizens when there is a problem that is beyond their capacity to solve alone. I have mentioned what happens when natural disasters strike. Citizens on the scene do immediate rescue work before municipal and federal emergency crews can arrive. Yet, as I have noted, working *with* people and communities isn’t typically an intentional strategy used on a regular basis. This may be because citizens aren’t usually thought of as being capable of contributing to what governing institutions do. And, on the institutions’ side of the divide, there can be complications with coordination and confusion about authority that make officials reluctant to go beyond consulting with people.

**CITIZENS AS AGENTS**

The greatest challenges to a *with* strategy, however, are not in the coordination. They have to do with the way citizens see themselves, act, and are seen by others. For a *with* strategy to be effective, people have to do their share of the work. If they are to be coproducers, they have to make things, both tangible and intangible. This concept of citizens...
as producers is novel because, even in participatory projects, citizens are more often seen as constituents or consumers of government services. They don’t necessarily make anything by working with others. However, I was intrigued when the World Economic Forum, an organization of business leaders, issued a report in 2017 that recognized the value of citizens being treated as creators and producers rather than consumers or clients. That is exactly how a with strategy sees citizens—as actors themselves rather than just objects of the actions of others.

Part of the Sovereignty of My Country?

Working together to produce public goods can give people a sense of themselves as agents who make a difference. In 1780, Samuel Cooper, a Boston minister who was a leader in the resistance to the British during the American Revolution, gave a sermon in a ceremony recognizing the creation, after lengthy public debate, of a constitution for Massachusetts. The new constitution, he said, was “an established frame of laws; of which a man may say, ‘we are here united in society for our common security and happiness.’” He compared the laws that had been passed to the fruits that farmers produced by their own labor on their own land. He reasoned, “The regulations under which I live are my own; I am not only a proprietor in the soil, but *I am part of the sovereignty of my country*” (emphasis added). Cooper had a right to that sense of agency because he had, in fact, been instrumental in creating not just a state constitution but a new nation.

What I take away from this sermon is that, ultimately, the key to stemming the loss of confidence in institutions may be more in what citizens do than in what the government does. That is because human beings usually have more confidence in what they’ve made, or helped make, than in what has been made for them. When people have worked with an institution to solve a problem, they tend to have positive feelings about that institution, provided it has been receptive and the work hasn’t just been menial. When people have positive feelings about schools, for example, they often speak as agents, saying, “*Ours* is a good school.” Then, they add, “And we are involved in it.” Seeing this connection helped me recognize the possibility of restoring confidence in government by using a with strategy. This strategy can generate a sense of public responsibility because people tend to feel responsible for what they have made. A with strategy could help restore a sense of democratic sovereignty.
STARTING IN COMMUNITIES
Much of the work citizens do begins locally. And more attention is now being given to the importance of communities and what citizens can do there. Writers James and Deborah Fallows toured communities across the United States from 2013 to 2016. In their 2018 book, Our Towns, they wrote that while many news stories gave the impression that the country is “going to hell,” the view locally is usually positive. “The closer [people] are to the action at home, the better they like what they see.” Perhaps this is a result of frustration with Washington, but, whatever the reasons, constructive change at the community level appears more likely.

Greater appreciation for what can happen locally has implications for a with strategy because citizens are able to see more clearly what can be accomplished when they join together. Municipal governments and local institutions can be their first allies. That said, community politics is not immune to the partisan polarization that infects national politics. And, although there may be greater opportunities locally for a with strategy, that doesn’t mean such a strategy doesn’t have potential at the federal level.

THINGS ONLY CITIZENS CAN DO
As mentioned earlier, a with strategy is especially important because there are distinctive things to be done that only citizens can do. For example, institutions like hospitals can care for people, but family and friends can care about them. (We now have evidence of how powerful a medicine that caring can be.) And citizens can supply the local knowledge that comes from living in a place 365 days a year. Using this knowledge, people understand how to do things that are different from what professionals do.

Here is a simple case of the importance of local knowledge taken from a large city in the Midwest: In one neighborhood, a dimly lit pedestrian bridge was both unsafe for residents and a place where drug dealers congregated because it was a quick “in-and-out” area for people buying drugs. For the police, this was a minor concern given other, more flagrant violations in the neighborhood. They agreed to provide only temporary patrols. It was citizens

“Citizens can supply the local knowledge that comes from living in a place 365 days a year.”
who came up with a solution to the problem. Knowing exactly where the drug dealers sat (local knowledge), and with officials’ endorsement, people glued inexpensive plastic eggs to the bridge railings (not something governments normally do), making them uncomfortable for sitting. Then, the government did the things it does best: installed better lighting and improved the landscaping. Together, all of these efforts helped ensure that the dealers wouldn’t return. That was complementary production.

Another thing people uniquely contribute is their ability to form associations at the grassroots level. This was evident in Patrick Sharkey’s 2018 study of what has allowed some cities to lower their crime rates when others couldn’t. The New York Times wrote about the study, noting that researchers found that “every 10 additional [civic] organizations in a city with 100,000 residents . . . led to a 9 percent drop in the murder rate and a 6 percent drop in violent crime.” Such organizations didn’t necessarily regard their work as preventing violence, but “in creating playgrounds, they enabled parents to better monitor their children. In connecting neighbors, they improved the capacity of residents to control their streets. In forming after-school programs, they offered alternatives to crime.” Even if not directly related to crime, these efforts helped turn negative emotions into positive energy.
WHAT ABOUT THE OBSTACLES?

Up to this point, my objective has been to explain a *with* strategy and why it is needed, given the problems facing democracy now. However, as is always the case, there are challenges a new strategy has to overcome. I am afraid what I have said so far won’t be credible unless these barriers are acknowledged.

**Citizens’ Perceptions of Their Fellow Citizens**

One obstacle has to do with the way citizens see their role and their fellow citizens. The unpleasant truth is that people don’t always have confidence in one another. Surveys report that Americans believe selfishness is growing. And some people may be more comfortable with being consumers and clients than taking on the responsibilities of active producers. If involving citizens in carrying out a *with* strategy were easy to do, it would be commonplace.

**Differences in Ways of Working**

Other obstacles are differences between the ways citizens do their work and the ways governments and large institutions do theirs. Why are there differences? After all, the tasks that make up any kind of work are similar. Most all work involves identifying problems, making decisions about what needs to be done, finding the necessary resources, organizing the efforts, and evaluating what happens; nothing exceptional about that.

However, the way citizens go about these tasks democratically can be quite distinctive. The differences begin in things as basic as who describes or names problems and the terms they use. People don’t identify problems using the expert language common to professionals in governmental institutions. Citizens tell stories about the things that they hold most dear: security, freedom, and being treated fairly. These are the ends and means for life itself, which are universal. The options for actions to solve problems grow out of what people hold dear and go beyond the things that can be done by institutions, such as actions by families and the civic associations people form. Citizens also don’t usually make decisions about which options are best by the methods favored by institutions, like cost-benefit analysis. In the best cases, people make decisions using the kind of deliberations that exercise the human faculty for judgment. The resources citizens draw on to implement their decisions, like personal talents and the ability to magnify those talents through forming civic associations, are different from institutional resources. Citizens organize their work less bureaucratically than institutions. And they evaluate results
Kettering research suggests that governments and the citizenry can work effectively together by realigning their efforts so that they are mutually reinforcing.

differently, using the things they hold valuable as standards rather than just using quantitative measures.

Public and institutional ways of working may not just fail to mesh, but the way governing institutions work may have adverse effects on what citizens do. For example, citizens typically work through small, informal, grassroots associations. These groups are quite unlike highly structured governing institutions. When large institutions try to work with these citizens’ groups because they are good at what they do, the institutions may unintentionally remake them in their own image or “colonize” them. The result is that the citizens’ groups lose their identity as authentic agents of the people, which is what makes them effective.

Engaging the Government

To propose any kind of change in what the government does, like working more with the citizenry, it’s useful to have some grounding in how the government actually functions. At the federal level, the agencies in the executive branch are in the best position to collaborate with civic organizations and citizens. They are staffed by able public servants who work in large bureaucracies, which are necessary given the scope and complexity of the programs they direct. Bureaucratization, however, brings with it certain mind-sets and values that can be problematic for a democratic strategy. While inevitable, these obstacles are not insurmountable.

As James C. Scott noted in Seeing Like a State, bureaucracies may not be as aware of local conditions and human concerns as citizens are. He holds that while bureaucrats can appear to lack common sense, it is because they “see like a state.” They are charged with enforcing rules uniformly and, in doing that, may not take into consideration extenuating circumstances. Even before enforcement, creating the rules without sufficient opportunities for the general public to weigh in, may alienate people. Adding to the
alienation, rules are legalistic, and that can create a climate not conducive to collaboration between citizens and the government.

A BETTER ALIGNMENT
Kettering research suggests that governments and the citizenry can work effectively together by realigning their efforts so that they are mutually reinforcing. The way citizens go about their work has to be recognized in the way that governments do theirs. The challenge, as I have said, is that these two ways of working aren’t the same and can be seriously misaligned. As noted, citizens and governments alike give names to problems, but the terms aren’t identical. Yet it shouldn’t be too difficult for officials to recognize the names people use in their descriptions of issues. Officials also have to respect the way people see problems. When they do, alignment is possible. Of course, people’s experiences and the names that grow out of what people experience can be misleading. Still, officials benefit from starting where people start. A better alignment between citizens and government actors doesn’t necessarily require government officials to do a great deal more but rather to do what they are already doing a bit differently.

Ideally, government institutions and associations of citizens will collaborate for their mutual benefit. Here’s an example of what can happen: There have been exchanges between people deliberating on policy questions and government officials who then should deliberate to enact laws and make regulations. As officials deliberate among themselves, they have to weigh various policy options against their costs and consequences. They have to consider tensions among the things they consider valuable as they weigh pros and cons. This is their “choice work.” Citizens do the same thing, albeit in their own terms, when they deliberate. When government officials sit down with deliberative citizens
to compare the outcomes of their respective efforts at choice work, they are collaborating with one another. And that has actually happened at both the state and federal levels.

Officeholders can benefit from hearing a deliberative public because it is a voice different from those that government officials are attuned to hearing. It isn’t the voice of polls or focus groups, of constituents, or even of interest groups. A deliberative voice can tell them how citizens go about making up their minds when there are costs and other trade-offs to consider. Legislators and public administrators can’t create this citizens’ voice, yet they can help create a climate in which such a voice is likely to develop. When citizens have deliberated in forums on an issue that is also before the government, the outcomes of the public deliberations have been helpful to elected representatives by showing them routes they can take that are less likely to lead to polarization. Exchanges between legislative branches and a deliberative citizenry are excellent examples of a with strategy at work.

THEN AND NOW
Now, as always, the most hotly contested issue is whether Americans are able to meet the responsibilities of citizenship. As you have read, I think that there are ways for citizens to make some of the differences in the political system that they would like to make. But I don’t have any doubt-eradicating proof. That acknowledged, and also recognizing that people collectively have acted foolishly and worse at times, democracies have endured because of a faith in The People. I am reminded of one of the first tests of that democratic faith, which occurred at the onset of the American Revolution. Would the people in the Colonies support a war against one of the world’s superpowers, Great Britain? Daniel Webster recalled that Founders like John Adams had responded to the doubters unequivocally by insisting that citizens were not fickle but would stay the course in the resistance to British aggression. Perhaps influenced by his own era’s democratic spirit in 1826, Webster imagined Adams rising to rhetorical heights to capture the spirit of 1776: “But we shall not fail. The cause will raise up armies; the cause will create navies. The people, the people, if we are true to them, will carry us, and will carry themselves, gloriously, through this struggle.” This was the same citizenry that Abraham Lincoln placed his faith in at Gettysburg.

David Mathews is the president of the Kettering Foundation. He can be reached at dmathews@kettering.org.
City Managers: Creating a Collaborative Culture of Engagement

By Ron Carlee

A frequent discussion among city managers is to what extent they, as managers, should lead civic engagement. Given divided councils and ambiguous and conflicting guidance from them, city managers can find themselves in a difficult spot. However, they do not have to be in the engagement spotlight. They can help create an internal culture of engagement and empower staff at all levels—from the person fixing the pothole or repairing the water leak to the senior executives engaging as subject matter experts sincerely seeking public involvement—to engage meaningfully with the public. Young, fresh voices can be empowered to try new forms of
engagement. Third-party community organizations and civic initiatives can lead the engagement with the city manager and city council, stepping back and letting the community express itself.

In my experience as a city manager, the most inspiring engagement has not been that which I led, but that which I experienced as an observer, watching people of good will respect each other and sincerely work toward understanding if not agreement. Each encounter left me with a deeper understanding and commitment to the ideal of government of, for, and by the people.

My belief in civic engagement is based on 30 years of observing it in Arlington County, Virginia, where it had been deeply embedded in the DNA long before I began working there in 1980. Engagement came to be known as “the Arlington Way.”

In its most positive framing, the Arlington Way means engaging with the public on issues in an effort to reach community consensus or, in the absence of consensus, a shared understanding and an opportunity for everyone to be heard. In its negative framing, the Arlington Way means talking issues to death so that people are so worn down by the end that they do not care what happens just as long as it is over. The laborious process of the Arlington Way of civic engagement is what converted Arlington from a dying inner suburb in the 1960s to the thriving model of sustainable urbanism it is today—chosen in 2018 by Amazon as the location for the company’s second headquarters.

**TRANSFORMING A DYING SUBURB INTO THRIVING URBAN VILLAGES**

The most likely origin of the term “the Arlington Way” is from the development process dating to the 1960s. Arlington had been largely rural before World War II, but with the expansion of the federal

In my experience as a city manager, the most inspiring engagement has not been that which I led, but that which I experienced as an observer, watching people of good will respect each other and sincerely work toward understanding if not agreement.
government and the construction of the Pentagon there, the community boomed, becoming the inner-ring residential community for the nation’s federal workforce. By the 1960s, however, highways, suburban shopping malls, and extensive greenfield development west and south of Arlington had taken their toll.

The people of Arlington became engaged and united with visionary county leaders to decide how a new light rail system would be built in the Washington region, what is known today as Metro. Arlingtonians opposed a commuter rail strategy in their community and insisted on a subway, as was being designed for Washington, DC. Through an extensive public process, they also developed a new land-use plan that fundamentally changed the low-density, suburban nature of the county’s main corridor, Wilson Boulevard—now known as the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor. From this early, intense engagement evolved an expectation on the part of the public for high levels of engagement on all subsequent land-use and development proposals. The result is the transformed Arlington of today: mixed-use, high-density, fiscally successful corridors of pedestrian- and bike-friendly urban villages complemented by the preservation of single-family neighborhoods and many of the historic garden apartments.

Three examples of engagement, related to affordable housing, environmental restoration, and neighborhood conservation, are especially memorable. Each initiative was successful because of extensive civic involvement and ownership.
AFFORDABLE HOUSING: COLLABORATION SNATCHES VICTORY OUT OF THE JAWS OF GOVERNMENT OVERREACH

Affordable housing was the number one priority of the county board and the community in the early 2000s. Economic success resulted in the loss of market-rate, affordable rental units. Arlington was at risk of becoming exclusively upper middle class with little ethnic or economic diversity. To expand housing opportunities, the county had an aggressive housing program that sought to achieve voluntary inclusionary zoning through the development process. Developers were pressured to provide onsite, committed affordable housing in their residential projects, and commercial developers were pressured to provide cash contributions into an affordable housing fund.

The problem was that Arlington had no authority to require affordable housing; it could only negotiate voluntary actions by developers. In 2004, developers said, “enough.” They sued the county, claiming that the housing policies were not voluntary. The court agreed, ruling that Arlington’s inclusionary policies were “invalid and illegal, as they are beyond the scope of the county’s lawful authority.” As a result of the court victory, the affordable housing program was effectively dead, and the county board was not likely to approve development projects without affordable housing. We embarked on months of intense negotiation between the developers and the housing advocates. They were far apart initially but began to realize that the current situation was lose-lose and could be changed only by a win-win compromise. Eventually, all parties agreed to a compromise, joined hands, and presented a unified front to the conservative Virginia General Assembly. The legislature approved authorization for a mandatory affordable housing program in March 2006. Without the collaborative process involving activists and developers, the legislation would have never had a chance.

DONALDSON RUN STREAM RESTORATION: STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS WHO AREN’T

While affordable housing was the most pressing public issue in Arlington during the first decade of the 21st century, environmental stewardship came in a close second. In 2006, Arlington began construction of its first major urban stream restoration. Donaldson Run ran through a park and a relatively high-income neighborhood. The restoration required extensive work to reclaim the flood plain and transform an urban drainage ditch back into a sustainable...
Because of the work of professional staff to sincerely and honestly engage with the neighborhood throughout the project, the restoration was not just something that the county was doing to the neighborhood, it was a community project that everyone owned.

stream. The work involved removing numerous trees and replanting native and appropriate vegetation. The project managers, Jason Papacosma and Aileen Winquist, reached out to the neighborhood and involved residents from day one on all aspects of the project.

Unrelated to the stream project, I attended a Donaldson Neighborhood Association meeting for a general update on county government. After a short presentation, the floor was open, and one of the first questions came from a resident who had not been involved in the restoration project. He ripped into me about how incompetent the county was and how the county was destroying the park. As I began to answer the question, another resident arose, interrupted me, and said, “Let me answer the question.” This resident explained how the community had been involved, why it was necessary to remove and replace the trees, and then offered to take his neighbor on a tour of the project and explain it in detail. Because of the work of professional staff to sincerely and honestly engage with the neighborhood throughout the project, the restoration was not just something that the county was doing to the neighborhood, it was a community project that everyone owned—owned enough to stand up and appropriately confront criticism from a neighbor who had not been involved.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION PROGRAM: PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING FOR NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENTS

An area receiving increasing recent attention in the engagement literature is participatory budgeting. An example of budget empowerment is the Arlington Neighborhood Conservation (NC) program. The program preceded my term as county manager by over three decades. It empowers
residents to create plans for their own neighborhoods, set priorities for neighborhood improvements based on criteria they establish, and receive funding from the county based on recommendations to the governing body from a peer citizen committee called the Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee (NCAC). The NCAC is a 48-member, volunteer citizen committee that typically meets monthly.

The Donaldson Run stream restoration project, referenced earlier, had its origins in the NC program, beginning with the civic association initiating a request for a study in 2001.

Public-led processes similar to but less intensive than the Neighborhood Conservation program were used to prioritize projects for traffic calming, park improvements, and public art. The various commissions, civic associations, and individuals were also highly active in the annual budget process.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS, LESSONS LEARNED
The work of engagement is not easy, and the role of the city manager is especially complex. City managers walk a tightrope. Some city councils do not want their managers to engage with the public. Even in Arlington, elected officials were sensitive about the manager getting ahead of the elected officials. Returning to the point where this essay started, the manager does not have to lead the engagement but can play the critical role in creating a culture of engagement.

Civic engagement cannot hope to successfully achieve lasting and positive change on the hard issues of society if it is not practiced successfully on the small issues. Can we develop a consciousness about engagement such that we process all local decisions through an engagement lens? Can we develop efficient engagement strategies that make public dialogue and participation a common way of working and hearing all voices? Can we use the relationships built over time on the small issues to develop a level of community trust that enables meaningful discussions about our greatest challenges?

Idealism and optimism combined with 40 years of experience lead me to answer “yes.”

Ron Carlee, a Richard S. Childs Fellow, is visiting assistant professor of public service and director of the Center for Regional Excellence at Old Dominion University. He is a former city manager of Charlotte, North Carolina, and a former chief operating officer of the International City/County Management Association. He served as Arlington County manager from 2001 until 2009. He can be reached at rcarlee@mac.com.
Democratic Practices That Inspire Collective Action: Engaging the Full Community through Citizen-Centric Strategies

By Cheryl Hilvert, Michael Huggins, and Doug Linkhart

There is a sense in many communities today that something is off-kilter in how residents and local governments approach community engagement and public problem solving. Many government officials are skeptical about the knowledge, rationality, good faith, and capacity of ordinary citizens to think about and take responsible action on complex community issues. Citizens, in turn, are often skeptical about local governments’ public participation processes, question whether they will experience genuine opportunities to make a difference in how public problems are decided, and are similarly skeptical about their own abilities to work productively with others to overcome differences and take meaningful action. In the meantime, important, persistent problems that require collective action are not getting better.

COMPLEX ISSUES REQUIRE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACHES

“Civic disconnect” is often present when local governments offer only limited opportunities for civic engagement. In these cases, community members may simply be “informed,” via vehicles such as newsletters and public hearings. While this simplified approach to engagement works in some cases, complicated issues and projects require a more comprehensive approach to ensure the community is part of a deliberative process that creates workable and sustainable action strategies. Collaboration with community members is even more important when a community is faced with a wicked problem—
a messy, real-life situation lacking a clear and agreed-upon problem definition. In these cases, there is a deeper need to involve community members in describing the problem and exploring policy solutions.

Interwoven with complex sub-issues, a wicked problem centers on the challenges of resolving the conflicting values and perspectives of multiple stakeholders. Think homelessness, criminal justice, and educational disparities.

Wicked problems are not solved in the conventional sense, only made better or worse by a decision or action. How to fix a broken water line is usually a straightforward proposition for most local government managers. Where and how to provide affordable housing that addresses the needs of homeless and marginalized populations is something else again.

Wicked problems are rarely addressed successfully through sole reliance on professional expertise or adversarial politics. Community efforts are more likely to succeed with relational problem-solving strategies centered on active citizen engagement, collaboration, and deliberative processes.

The challenge to local government leaders is how to do this in ways that not only make visible progress on the most persistent problems, but also strengthen citizens’ confidence in public processes and in their own abilities to accomplish meaningful public work.

**CORE DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES**

One approach to addressing complex community issues may lie in systematically incorporating core democratic practices into community engagement and problem-solving processes. Drawing on decades of research with local communities, the Kettering Foundation has identified six core democratic practices critical for rebuilding citizens’ abilities to work with each other and with local governments to generate effective

---

One approach to addressing complex community issues may lie in systematically incorporating core democratic practices into community engagement and problem-solving processes.
and responsive decision-making. These practices have been paired with examples from communities throughout the United States.

1. **Identify or name the issues** facing citizens in their own terms; that is, in terms of what is meaningful and valuable to them.

   In an example of being open to community members naming an issue in their own terms, Charlotte, North Carolina, undertook several approaches to listening to community voices, following a report on economic inequity in the city and a fatal officer-involved shooting in late 2016. These included Can We Talk? dialogues, in which residents engaged in open conversation with police, and Take10CLT, in which city employees surveyed people passing by, asking open-ended questions about their views on the city.

2. **Frame issues** so that a range of actions are considered and the potential trade-offs are evident.

   An example of framing is a process in which community stakeholders in El Paso, Texas, broadly defined resiliency to include economic prosperity, affordable housing, and other goals not traditionally included under this heading. The resulting resiliency strategy is aimed at deploying innovative initiatives that directly address the diverse needs of the El Paso community.

3. **Make decisions deliberatively** and weigh the trade-offs among choices to minimize hasty reactions and move toward sound public judgment.

   Done well, participatory budgeting can represent a deliberative process for decision-making. One of the pioneers of this practice in the United States is former Alderman Joe Moore, who used a year-long community process in Chicago’s 49th Ward to determine the priorities and projects that he submitted to the city and its related agencies. Since 2010, the residents of Ward 49 worked to suggest projects, set priorities, and determine the allocation of $8.3 million in capital expenditures.

4. **Identify available community resources**, including intangible ones, such as enthusiasm and commitment.

   Stockton, California, is focusing attention on trauma issues in an effort called “Healing South,” which includes an asset-mapping strategy that outlines a variety of partners, programs, and physical resources providing trauma and social support. The group coordinated with community-based organizations, schools, and faith-based groups to engage residents in focus groups about what they think contributes to trauma in Stockton and what kind of support is needed beyond existing
services. This information helps focus policy advocacy and systems change and increases access to appropriate services.

5. **Organize community actions**
to address a public problem in a complementary and coordinated fashion.

As part of its implementation of a communitywide visioning process, San Antonio, Texas, has formed a Teen Pregnancy Prevention Collaborative. The collaborative includes an impressive list of cross-sector organizations, including public entities and community organizations, as well as faith-based and secular institutions. Specific goals for reducing teen pregnancy have been established, with particular attention paid to Latino and African-American populations, and these goals were exceeded during the first seven years of collective work.

6. **Encourage constant collective learning**
to maintain momentum.

A project in southeastern San Diego, California, to reduce heart disease taught organizers about trust and how to motivate action.
The area has a high concentration of African Americans and the county’s highest incidence of heart attacks and strokes. In working with local congregations, the organizers found that previous efforts that overpromised and underdelivered had left many people mistrustful of such partnerships. By engaging in candid dialogues about race, exploitation, and neglect and by forming a data stewardship agreement that ensured transparency and local ownership, the project gained the participation of the congregations and other residents in the area, ultimately reducing the number of heart attacks by 22 percent since 2010.

Kettering research has found that citizens’ consistent application of these practices in their public relationships with others, with community institutions, and with local governments is essential for building joint public leadership, solving public problems, and developing the broad civic base necessary to govern effectively in a democracy.

MANAGERS’ SURVEY SHOWS ACCEPTANCE OF PRACTICES

In 2018, the authors surveyed local managers to examine how important they believed each democratic practice was to their public engagement efforts and how comfortable they were in using each practice.

The managers had either participated in learning exchanges at the Kettering Foundation or were finalists for the National Civic League’s All-America Cities Award program. For the past several years, the Kettering learning exchanges have brought city managers together for biannual wide-ranging conversations about public engagement, wicked problems, democratic governance, and the leadership practices of local public managers. Since 1949, the National Civic League has recognized 10 communities yearly with the prestigious All-America City Award, which celebrates the work of communities in using inclusive civic engagement to address critical issues and create stronger connections among residents, businesses, and nonprofit and government leaders.

The survey found that managers, who were familiar with the six democratic practices and believed they were important to undertake, rated these practices to be either “extremely important” or “very important” as follows:

- Naming issues (87.5 percent)
- Framing issues (75 percent)
- Deliberating with citizens (75 percent)
- Identifying community resources (66.7 percent)
• Organizing complementary community actions (79.2 percent)
• Encouraging constant collective learning (62.5 percent)

Of managers surveyed, at least 54 percent felt either “extremely” or “very confident” in implementing these practices and were most likely to implement the following practices:
• Naming issues (54.2 percent)
• Framing issues (70.8 percent)
• Deliberating with citizens (66.7 percent)

Those practices least likely to be undertaken by managers were organizing complementary community actions (28.3 percent) and constant collective learning (38.1 percent).

ENGAGING THE FULL COMMUNITY

Local government managers routinely name issues and frame options for their elected officials. They are accustomed to using deliberative processes to negotiate the tensions among stakeholders’ underlying values, assess policy option trade-offs, and find appropriate solutions to community issues and problems.

These process strategies inform local decision-making and are leadership competencies with which managers are generally comfortable. Familiarity and confidence with these foundational leadership processes may be why managers in our survey were more likely to feel comfortable in undertaking naming, framing, and deliberating. Confidence with these practices may serve as a bridge to expanding the use of these approaches to broader application in engaging the full community in public problem-solving work.

The use of deliberative processes for community engagement can be an effective way to address local challenges. Community members can be a source of innovative and context-specific solutions for addressing difficult and perplexing wicked problems. Effective use of relational and citizen-centric strategies can do much to enhance local efforts to solve public problems and provide effective democratic governance. We encourage managers to incorporate these practices in both their organizational and community leadership work in finding creative and deliberative solutions to the issues, activities, and problems that confront them today. ■

A version of this article was previously published in the May 2019 issue of PM Magazine.

Cheryl Hilvert is the Midwest regional director at the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) in Montgomery, Ohio. She can be reached at chilvert@icma.org.

Michael Huggins is principal of Civic Praxis in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He can be reached at huggins-mw@gmail.com.

Doug Linkhart is president of the National Civic League in Denver, Colorado. He can be reached at dougl@ncl.org.
Scholars and practitioners continue to inform our collective understanding of both wicked problems and the corrosive hyperpartisanship that undermines the ability of citizens and government officials to work together to address these shared community problems. They also emphasize the critical importance of high-quality communication and engagement and the need to proactively build capacity to support such communication. Fortunately, a growing community of practice has been applying insights from the fields of conflict management, collaboration, public participation, deliberative democracy, and systems thinking in order to rethink our public processes. This reduces our propensity for bringing out the worst in human nature (such as the need for certainty and the preference for simple good-versus-evil narratives) and increases our ability to tap into the best of human nature (our sense of purpose, empathy, creativity, and our need for community). This essay argues for the need for cities to build their deliberative capacity, with a particular focus on the role city managers could play to tap into these developing insights and elevate the quality of communication in their communities.

For several decades, practitioners have been successfully running...
deliberative forums, many relying on National Issues Forums issue guides, designed to bring people together in productive ways to address shared problems. Only over the last several years, however, have theorists and practitioners such as the Kettering Foundation’s president David Mathews (The Ecology of Democracy) and John Parkinson and Jane Mansbridge (Deliberative Systems) begun to think more broadly about how communities overall function as deliberative systems. For such systems to function well, there must be broad engagement and collaboration across public, private, and civic lines, especially participation from “bridging” or “mediating” institutions such as libraries, schools, colleges and universities, local media, community foundations, and civic organizations such as the United Way, Lions Clubs, and Rotary. Healthy deliberative systems boost what Robert Putnam called “bridging social capital,” which develops as people connect and build trust across perspectives. Those connections are critical to warding off the polarization that can so easily develop, as well as to supporting the difficult but rewarding collaborative efforts that we know are our best shot at addressing wicked problems well.

Critical to a high-functioning deliberative system is the capacity and skills to support the long-term conversations and engagement that are the hallmark of such systems.

A broad range of players need to be in the room, including practitioners who know how to tap into that potential. The kinds of conversations to sustain this work often require convenors, issue framers, process designers, facilitators, and reporters, and these capacities can come from many places. Many cities, counties, and school districts are working to build their capacity to support deliberative efforts, creating facilitation teams across departments, and hiring public engagement specialists who are trained not only in public relations, but also in public participation.
and deliberative processes. Similarly, the community impact literature highlights the role of “backbone organizations” as key behind-the-scenes factors in the success of broad community projects. The realization of the value of collaboration is finally being met with the recognition of the necessity of strongly supporting collaborative efforts as essential aspects of a local system.

**THE EMERGING DELIBERATIVE ROLE OF THE CITY MANAGER**

Within this growing understanding of the importance of deliberative systems, for the past few years, the Kettering Foundation, led by director of exploratory research and former city manager Valerie Lemmie, has worked with the International City/County Managers Association (ICMA), the National Civic League, and the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) to convene groups of innovative city managers from across the country to explore their potential role in realigning their professional routines to better connect with how citizens work as actors, problem solvers, and cocreators in their communities. As I have worked with these city managers, participated in their conferences, and engaged the public administration literature, it has become very clear that city managers can play a transformative role in their communities if they come to see the importance of viewing their community as a deliberative system and focus on their role in enhancing that system.

For several reasons, I believe city managers could be game changers in their communities from a deliberative perspective. To set the stage, however, a very brief description and history of the position is necessary. The council-manager form of government is the most popular form of local government, operating in more than half of the cities in the United States. An elected city council sets the policy direction of the city and votes on broad decisions, but a professional city manager is hired by the council to carry out the day-to-day operations. City managers in most cases have professional accredited degrees in public administration, thus there is a robust training structure already in place, as well as key professional development organizations such as ICMA.

City managers originally developed because of the demonstrated need for professional knowledge as cities became more complex and, in some places, captured by political machines. In *The New Public Service*, Janet Denhardt and Robert Denhardt argue that historically there have been three approaches to the role of public administration in cities.
Initially, when the field developed in the early 1900s, the focus was on apolitical expertise. The city manager’s role was to run the city by avoiding politics and applying knowledge. A second approach, which began to dominate toward the end of the 20th century, reimagined the city manager more as a CEO, running the city as a business, focused on effectiveness and efficiency and providing services to taxpayers. Most city managers today are still trained and operate within some combination of these two approaches. Denhardt and Denhardt argue for an emerging third approach, which goes beyond the focus on efficiency and effectiveness and recognizes the broader range of public values that must be addressed in local public life. They highlight the limitations of the earlier models, especially in terms of public engagement.

The new public service model, or what some call public value governance, has clear connections to deliberative engagement. There is great potential in city managers seeing their cities as deliberative systems and focusing on their role in developing and managing those systems. In many ways, city managers are well situated to adopt this role. The mindsets and skill sets critical to deliberative engagement could be instilled in the professional training at the master of public administration (MPA) level. As professionals rather than elected officials, city managers are more insulated from politics and generally have a longer tenure with their communities, which allows them to build a culture of deliberative engagement within both city hall and the broader community. Most important, by the actual wording of their position, city managers are called upon to “manage” the city. As we learn about wicked problems and how communities must work together to address their shared problems, city managers must extend beyond managing internal city staff to consider how to increase the capacity of the community overall to address problems effectively. This perspective is not new to public administration; scholars such as Tina Nabatchi, Matt Leighninger, Lisa Bingham, and Kirk Emerson have examined the importance of democratic or collaborative governance and the limits of focusing solely on government actions to address wicked problems.

**DELIBERATIVE SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP**

Systems guru Peter Senge recently argued for the importance of “systems leadership” in a *Stanford Social...*
**Innovation Review** article with Hal Hamilton and John Kania. They argue that in order to make progress on our society’s most intractable problems (i.e., wicked problems), we need systems leaders who cultivate a different set of skills and positionality than that of traditional leaders. Systems leaders must work to foster collective leadership and build the capacity in their communities so people can learn collectively and constantly cocreate innovative actions.

Marrying their thoughts on the role of systems leaders with the idea of communities functioning as deliberative systems is particularly fruitful.

Three aspects of deliberative systems leadership are especially relevant to city managers. These may call for significant shifts in the mindsets and skill sets of some city managers, but for many with whom we have worked, the transition would be much less dramatic. First of all, deliberative systems leadership is about humility and managing uncertainty. Facilitators know that if a group is going to truly deliberate and do the hard work of cocreating actions to address complex issues, then the opinion of its leader must not be revealed. The traditional leadership model of having charisma and a strong opinion and mobilizing the masses to take on a challenge is unfortunately often counterproductive when addressing wicked problems, especially in a polarized, adversarial environment. In order to contribute to an overall environment that supports deeper conversations about difficult issues, city managers—and other key community leaders—will often need to avoid the natural impulse toward certainty and clarity and model the difficult work of allowing and managing uncertainty.

In order to contribute to an overall environment that supports deeper conversations about difficult issues, city managers—and other key community leaders—will often need to avoid the natural impulse toward certainty and clarity and model the difficult work of allowing and managing uncertainty.
this as labeling an issue as wicked inherently expresses that the speaker does not have the solution. Admitting the wickedness of a problem, in other words, is an act of humility, which can be difficult for some city managers, particularly if they were trained in the more traditional sense of their role being the expert who solves problems for the people. Such humility from leaders, however, helps create a learning environment that welcomes nuance and creativity.

A second key aspect, clearly building on the first, is that a big part of deliberative systems leadership is about managing tensions. Much of my work as a deliberative practitioner involves identifying the inherent underlying tensions and trade-offs to difficult issues, framing them in a productive way, and putting them on the table for people to work through and ultimately cocreate community responses. Too often, we avoid those tensions, or partisans frame issues as if no true tensions exist, thereby fueling poor communication and polarization. The more our leaders take it upon themselves to seek out tensions and bring them forward, the better our communities
will be able to address those tensions. John Nalbandian’s work in the public administration literature is valuable here as he has argued for city managers to see themselves as facilitators negotiating the inherent tensions in managing a city. Concepts such as Barry Johnson’s polarity management, Ronald Heifetz’s adaptive work, Robert Quinn’s competing values framework, Deborah Stone’s policy paradox, and even Aristotle’s notion of virtue should all be staples in MPA programs in order to equip city managers to be adept at helping their communities navigate the inherent tensions they all must face.

The third key aspect is that deliberative systems managers must constantly survey the system and work toward having the various necessary capacities developed and roles fulfilled for the deliberative system to thrive. This is crucial to a deliberative system, and a city manager is likely in the best position to oversee this work. Deliberative communities need the capacity to support ongoing conversations and collaborative efforts, which means people or bridging organizations that serve the roles highlighted earlier (convenors, issue framers, process designers, facilitators, and reporters). In some cases, city managers may play those roles themselves; often, they will simply make sure they are adequately provided either through city staff or, ideally, from the community. Long term, a key task of all city managers must be to proactively work to expand the overall deliberative capacity of their communities. The Kettering Foundation and others often refer to this responsibility of city managers as creating spaces for civic learning.

A key function of community leadership in the face of wicked problems and growing partisanship is taking more responsibility for the quality of communication and engagement in communities. That involves not simply leaders communicating well themselves—though that is certainly part of it—but also working to develop stronger norms and expectations and working to build the necessary capacity across the community to support the kind of engagement our communities need to thrive. Cities that develop this capacity will be stronger, more connected, and more resilient. Robust deliberative systems, however, do not develop naturally. In the end, local deliberative systems are in desperate need of leadership, and the history of public administration is a history of city managers constantly evolving to meet the essential needs of the day.

---

Martín Carcasson is a professor of communication studies at Colorado State University and the founder and director of the CSU Center for Public Deliberation. He can be reached at mcarcas@colostate.edu
A Public Voice: A Look at National and Local Efforts

By Tony Wharton

For more than 30 years, the Kettering Foundation, in collaboration with the National Issues Forums Institute, has organized A Public Voice (APV). This annual program brings together representatives from forum groups around the country and from national dialogue and deliberation organizations, as well as elected officials and staff, to explore the contributions that a deliberative public makes to addressing some of the most challenging issues facing our communities and elected officeholders.

The two-hour discussion brought together legislators, local elected officials, congressional staffs, and citizens from the National Issues Forums (NIF) network.

APV 2019 focused in part on the deliberations held in recent months using the NIF issue guide on political divisiveness, A House Divided: What Would We Have to Give Up to Get the Political System We Want?

Heading into the 2020 elections, Americans urgently need to talk more constructively with one another and with legislators and candidates if the nation is going to make progress on the problems we face, panelists at A Public Voice 2019 said.
“We don’t talk like this in Congress. Members of Congress yell at each other, and then constituents yell at the members of Congress,” said Stacy Palmer Barton, chief of staff to US Representative Steve Chabot (R-Ohio). “I think that given the current times, the appetite for respectful dialogue will only increase.”

Glenn Nye, a former congressman and current president of the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress, said, “I’m sure that all of you agree from talking to your neighbors that there’s a sense that we need a better way in this country to talk to each other. We know that we’re incentivized to disagree sometimes; we know that the media wants to cover the drama. So, it’s on us to make sure that we continue to provide opportunities for citizens to engage in the way that I think they really want to.”

The program also looked ahead at what issues should be topics for issue guides and deliberative forums in the coming year.

As host and National Issues Forums Institute board member Charles Moses put it, “What happens when typical Americans get together to deliberate seriously about tough, divisive issues, when they weigh choices and listen to different perspectives? . . . What issues most need this kind of deliberation?”

Panelists suggested several topics they thought were ripe for delibera-
tion, including health care, immigration, and the future of work in the US.

Gregg Kaufman, a retired pastor and NIF veteran now on the faculty of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of North Florida, described Floridians’ concerns about sea level rise as a result of climate change.

“People are concerned about the oceans’ health and preservation, and people want to talk about preserving their communities and their way of life,” Kaufman said. “They recognize how tourism and the fishing industry and recreation will be impacted, resulting in economic decline. In fact, jobs will be lost.”

JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA: Convenors from Palms Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville Beach, Florida, gathered people for eight A House Divided forums. Three local mayors, Charlie Latham, Jacksonville Beach; Ellen Glasser, Atlantic Beach; and Elaine Brown, Neptune Beach; as well as city council members, were also invited. The three mayors, as well as several people who are responsible for city projects, attended and participated in the forums. Soliciting the mayors’ interest is an effort that is intended to move well beyond a single forum. The forum-convening groups, like Palms Presbyterian Church, are trying to create an infrastructure for civil discourse that involves faith communities, nonprofits, city agencies, and citizens.

—Gregg Kaufman
Simultaneously with APV 2019, NIF affiliates held Common Ground for Action online forums about the issue of political divisiveness, with participants both deliberating among themselves and commenting on the discussion taking place in Washington.

One participant, a retired state legislator from North Carolina, said, “I have watched with dismay as the constructive ways for citizens and officials to engage with others with whom they disagree have disappeared. . . . I believe in the importance of having a government that acts for the common good, and I am worried that that is slipping away.”

SEDONA, ARIZONA: City council members regularly attend forums and enjoy the opportunity to connect with the community informally. Forums are a way for policymakers to get more information about what citizens are thinking. One city council member said, “I don’t think of the citizens at forums as decision-making groups because they aren’t. What they are is perspective-expanding groups.” Deliberative forums create an opportunity for engagement that is not adversarial or competitive. Overall, deliberative forums build a feeling of community connection and goodwill in Sedona. They are spaces where people can express their views, hear the views of others, and consider competing options fairly. “When is the next one?” is the question convenors always hear at the end of a forum.

—Andrea Christelle
Panelists agreed that the need for constructive, deliberative dialogue is more urgent than ever. “The most encouraging thing that I’ve heard is the idea that folks have sat across the table from somebody that has a different opinion,” said Nick Bush, deputy chief of staff and legislative director for US Representative Steve Stivers (R-Ohio), a founder of the Congressional Civility and Respect Caucus. “Even acknowledging that our political opponents do the same things, they go home with their families, they have their community centers. ... We don’t have to get to a solution, but just having the conversation, I think that’s the most encouraging thing I see from this.”

Sedona, Arizona, city council member Bill Chisholm said citizen deliberation “allows me a nuanced look at what people are saying. All

**MOUND BAYOU, MISSISSIPPI:** The forum on *A House Divided* was the first time the forum-convening team intentionally brought ordinary citizens, practitioners, and officeholders together at the same time. As in their previous forums, they found that participants were eager to talk across boundaries, listen to different points of view, and learn more about the issues. Attendees did discuss in detail some options, and given more time, may have come up with shared directions and policy implications. Still, participants appreciated the opportunity to discuss issues in a way they usually hadn’t experienced in other community public meetings and forums. As they continue to hold these forums, learn from these public gatherings, and focus on what happens after the forums and gatherings, they are likely to experience more shared direction.

—James (Ike) Adams Jr.
too often I hear the soundbites that come from a particular person’s bubble, wherever they’re getting their information from. But when I’m in the room and I see how people are reacting to comments that are made, it gives me a better feel for where the common ground is.”

In his concluding remarks, Kettering Foundation president David Mathews said he was struck by the level of interaction between citizens and legislators. “The legitimacy of democracy is endangered, and it’s endangered by the loss of confidence; it’s endangered by the divisiveness. That gives special meaning to this particular gathering,” Mathews said. “The breakthrough this time, I think, was clearly in getting an interaction between sitting members of legislative bodies and a deliberative citizenry. Before, when we tried it, we would show videos of people deliberating. Whatever the subject was, it just keyed a member of Congress to go into whatever his or her set speech was about the issue at hand. We didn’t get any interaction. We did this time. People began to talk about what they took away from deliberation.”

—Heidi Dobish

Tony Wharton is a writer in Richmond, Virginia, with 20 years of experience producing National Issues Forums issue guides. He can be reached at tkwharton@comcast.net.
Connecting to Congress

By Michael Neblo

The broad network of organizations interested in supporting and encouraging deliberative democracy has made huge advances in the relatively short time since its inception. In fact, the Kettering Foundation and the National Issues Forums Institute have a history of research on almost 40 years of in-person deliberative forums, from the issue guides used in such forums to a network of moderators to the development of Common Ground for Action (an online platform for convening deliberative forums), among other efforts. However, this network has struggled hardest to prove the value of a deliberative citizenry to formal governmental institutions. This inability to connect the vibrant deliberative ecosystem with the institutional demands of Congress has been to the detriment of both. Still, it is only because of this foundational support that we may, perhaps, be on the brink of bridging our network and the beleaguered citadel that is Congress.

Many members of Congress and their staff make enormous efforts to represent their constituents authentically. But even the most idealistic public servants face immense and increasing challenges to doing so: a hyperpolarized political climate, an ever-rising flood of communication-demanding partisan agenda items, and, perhaps most worrying, a citizenry that feels disconnected, with historically low levels of trust in Congress. Much of this discontent stems from the absence of avenues for citizens to participate in meaningful dialogue with their members of Congress.
Many members of Congress and their staff make enormous efforts to represent their constituents authentically. But even the most idealistic public servants face immense and increasing challenges to doing so.

Even members who are deeply committed to hearing from their constituents face the difficulties of geography, time, and limited staff resources. Over time, this disconnect can have dire consequences not only for the member, but also for democracy. That’s the problem our research team, which consists of staff at the Institute for Democratic Engagement and Accountability at The Ohio State University, as well as other collaborating scholars at the University of Houston, Stockton University, and the University of California-Riverside, has been working on for more than a decade.

EARLY EFFORTS
In 2006, our research team launched a plan to integrate deliberative principles and design features into a format elected officials know very well, the town hall. The five key deliberative innovations will no doubt be very familiar to those familiar with National Issues Forums (NIF):

- a representative group of constituents;
- a single issue to ensure focus, depth, and substance;
- nonpartisan background information on the issue in advance;
- neutral, third-party moderator; and
- real-time candid participation by an elected official.

It is important to note that in our experiment, which was conducted via a grant from the National Science Foundation and intended to produce academic research, the first criterion goes a bit beyond the broadly inclusive efforts made by most NIF convenors. For these town halls, we recruited a scientifically random sample of constituents from each congressional district with whom we are working and split them into treatment and control groups (in order to be able to establish causality in our later analysis). This was important for two reasons of concern even for nonacademic deliberative
practitioners: one conceptual and one practical. It removed the conceptual objection that many elected officials have about relying on self-selecting groups, but the broad ideological and experiential diversity that such recruitment created also contributed to the deliberative quality of the events.

The last criterion is obviously determined by the format we chose for the event, the town hall, which almost necessarily involves participation by an elected official. Because of this, our first round of experiments can prove their effects on only vertical deliberations like this in which constituents are elevated to direct conversation with their lawmaker. But we don’t see a compelling reason they could not be extended to more horizontal (citizen-to-citizen) deliberations like NIF forums if the same expectations of attention, candor, and accountability can be in other ways assured.

In 2006-2007, we conducted 21 hour-long deliberative online town halls for 13 sitting members of Congress, a balanced mix of Republicans and Democrats, with significant diversity in geography, tenure in office, and committee assignments. Back in 2006, before the explosion of business and consumer webinar software available now, options were...
much more limited, but our team was able to allow citizen participants to submit their questions via typing and then listen to the answers from their member of Congress over audio. (Live transcription was also included for hearing-impaired participants.) The questions were relayed to the member by the research team acting as moderators; the questions were filtered to remove only those that had already been answered, that were incoherent, or that were deemed vulgar, abusive, or inciting.

Winston Churchill is credited with saying that “the best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.” Perhaps surprisingly, we agree with Churchill’s observation. But we also believe, one of the best arguments for democracy is a 50-minute conversation among average voters. The deliberative context makes all the difference, as our results below show:

- These deliberative sessions attracted every kind of citizen—the citizens who voluntarily participated in these deliberations were more representative of the country than the electorate.
- The deliberative events offered lawmakers a chance to reach beyond “the usual suspects”; in fact, they particularly attracted citizens who thus far had tended not to follow politics or who had become disenchanted with the system. Furthermore, after participating, these citizens became more likely to vote and take part in political discussions.
- The nonpartisan materials and impartial facilitators helped participants move past talking points and simplistic arguments. The questions and the resulting conversations could be tough but remained productive and positive. In fact, of more than 1,400 questions submitted in all the town halls—remember, online town halls, with anonymous participants—there were exactly zero comments that had to be removed for being vulgar, inciting, or abusive.
- Participating in these deliberative sessions significantly increased citizens’ trust in their member and in their sense of agency within the political system.

“One of the best arguments for democracy is a 50-minute conversation among average voters. The deliberative context makes all the difference.”
• Participants surveyed four months after the deliberative event were 10 percent more likely to vote for the representative who engaged with them in this way.

As we documented in our 2018 book, *Politics with the People: Building a Directly Representative Democracy*, our data supported a radically different reading of the citizenry from what the conventional wisdom derived from looking at contradictory poll results or tests of voter knowledge. We learned that constituents are not so much angry or apathetic as they are frustrated. Frustration can lead to disengagement, but under the right circumstances, it can also provide energy for change. Many more—and different kinds—of people wanted to participate in our sessions than anyone expected. We found that people seem ill-informed not because they don’t care, but because they believe it is not worth it to stay informed; no one will listen anyway. But when they think that their member will really listen, we found that they are willing and able to become informed. Meanwhile, members were similarly positive about the town halls.

We began to see the outlines of one final problem even as we were conducting the research, and we now believe it to be the biggest obstacle to the adoption of deliberative engagement by elected officials and other policymakers: capacity. All congressional offices have cut total staffing positions since the 1990s, while at the same time the number of constituent communications—emails, both individual and advocacy group-organized, phone calls, letters—have increased tenfold. Among all the offices we talked with, the answer, in response to our question about whether they would be holding town halls on their own using these deliberative practices, was a regretful, “No. We just don’t have the resources.”

**SO, WHAT NOW?**

That lack of capacity to engage deliberatively with the public is the
starting point for our current research initiative, Connecting to Congress. Our aim is to bring the resources of our institutions, our civil society partners, and our networks to finally build that bridge from the deliberative democracy network into institutional decision-making, thus helping to forge public policy that has truly broad and deep support and improving public faith in Congress and our democratic institutions.

Connecting to Congress has three main objectives:

- identifying the most effective technologies and practices to enable a network of deliberative practitioners to conduct deliberative events for any member of Congress who wants to;
- learning which kinds of information gleaned from various forms of deliberative engagement are most useful to congressional offices; and finally, crucially,
- tracking how the information from these deliberative events is integrated into the office’s decision-making and representational activity.

Practically, this means that our team is focusing on a number of things. We are recruiting a cohort of congressional offices who would like to try this kind of engagement. We will convene and facilitate one or more deliberative engagement events (deliberative town halls, Common Ground for Action forum series, or other experimental adaptations). We will also provide analysis of the events back to staff (both on constituents’ perception of the member and the event as well as their judgment on the issue). Finally, we will track and document how the experience and the information is integrated into the office’s relational and representational activities.

Our early efforts have met with more success than we had even hoped. Certainly, none of these “quick” successes would be happening without the previous decade of painstaking academic research and publishing, but there also seems to be less skepticism that this could help to shift the broader political environment toward sounder decision-making, and higher than anticipated willingness to experiment. In our meetings with congressional offices (more than 30 in the first 6 months since our launch), we’ve heard several different motivations for this willingness: desire for civility and “better disagreements,” as a staff member for Congressman Steve Stivers, co-founder of the Civility and Respect caucus, put it; desire to find more useful, convenient ways of staying in touch with constituents while in DC; and the desire to modernize, to communicate and engage with constituents more authentically and with current
technology. In fact, improving constituent engagement is one of the major charges of the Select Committee for the Modernization of Congress, before which I was honored to be invited to testify in June about our research. The Select Committee has also requested a recommendations report from the American Political Science Association Modernization Task Force, of which two of our team members are a part, and which we hope will contain some guidance for all members of Congress interested in engaging more usefully with their constituents.

As of July 2019, our Connecting to Congress team has confirmed three House offices as participants in our deliberative engagement experiments: Representative Mark Takano (D-CA), Representative Steve Stivers (R-OH), and Representative Mary Gay Scanlon (D-PA). Several more House and Senate offices have expressed sustained interest in potentially joining as well. We hope to have at least 7 offices participating by the end of 2019, and we think with 12-15 more on top of that, we should be in a good position to begin analyzing what we’ve learned and figuring out what comes next.

Michael Neblo is a professor of political science and director of the Institute for Democratic Engagement and Accountability at The Ohio State University. He can be reached at neblo.1@polisci.osu.edu.
Felt Democracy: Multinational Research Exchange Week, 2019

By Wendy Willis

It has become axiomatic that citizens’ trust in government is at an all-time low. The 2018 Democracy Perception Index found that “a majority of people around the world feel like they have no voice in politics and that their governments are not acting in their interest (51% and 58% respectively).” As it turns out, citizens of nations deemed “democratic” by Freedom House have even less trust in government than those living in “nondemocratic” countries. More than half the respondents from democratic countries said their voices “rarely” or “never” matter in politics, and nearly two-thirds said they believe their governments “rarely” or “never” act in the interest of the public.

It was against that backdrop that 54 participants from 21 countries gathered with Kettering Foundation staff and associates at the foundation’s campus in April 2019 for
Multinational Research Exchange Week. Through a series of plenaries and breakout sessions, the group considered:

- How can both government institutions and communities approach public challenges in ways that make them better able to solve problems?
- What gets in the way of such approaches? How might alignment between the two be further developed?
- How might that change the current relationship between the citizenry and government institutions?

The focus of the gathering was 1) to consider how citizens work with governments and other institutions to improve their communities and accomplish public goals and 2) to explore instances of citizens and governments—both local and national—engaging in “complementary production” to create public goods. As the foundation’s longtime director of international affairs, Hal Saunders, once put it, “There are some things that only governments can do and some things that only citizens can do.”

Over three and a half days, those 70 people shared examples of citizens engaging in complementary production alongside governments and other institutions, sometimes under very challenging circumstances. Several themes emerged over the course of the week:

- In a democracy, citizens are the source of power, and they need places and opportunities to recognize and develop that power;
- It is much more common for citizens to engage in complementary production with governments at the subnational level;

The focus of the gathering was 1) to consider how citizens work with governments and other institutions to improve their communities and accomplish public goals and 2) to explore instances of citizens and governments—both local and national—engaging in “complementary production” to create public goods.
• Complementary production is often most robust when citizens identify and begin work on an issue and then later partner with government (rather than the other way around);
• Mediating institutions play an important role in bridging the gap between citizens and government; and
• There are a number of preconditions necessary for complementary production to thrive.

CITIZENS AS THE SOURCE OF POWER
Ottón Solís, member of the board of the Central American Bank of Economic Integration and former candidate for president of Costa Rica, kicked off the exchange by reminding participants that citizens—rather than government officials—hold the power in a democracy. As he put it, “Citizens do not need to surrender power to officials. . . . In democracies, citizens are the owners of power. If you are an owner of something, you must exercise responsibility.”

While there was wide agreement about the source of power, a few participants warned that most citizens are disconnected from their own power and that significant complementary production often requires widespread culture change.

Martin Ocholi, a media and communication consultant at the University of Namibia, and Chaacha Mwita, a consultant from Internews, both said that Kenyan citizens don’t often see themselves as empowered actors vis à vis the government. Rather, they see themselves as “helpless,” waiting for the government to come to the rescue.

Several participants suggested that social media can ignite citizens’ sense of their own collective power. Using social media channels, citizens are able to organize quickly and in large numbers, allowing grassroots movements to spring up in communities all over the world. Germán Ruiz, professor of social communication from the University of Cartegena in Colombia, told the story of a group
of activists who used social media to organize large street protests in response to the ongoing marginalization of indigenous people. Eventually, an indigenous senator started working with the activists, and together they applied a traditional deliberation tool—minga—to start a conversation among themselves and with government officials. Ruiz suggested that the citizens first had to get a sense of their own power through protest before they could begin to work with government and elected officials in other, more deliberative ways.

**BIGGER IS NOT USUALLY BETTER**

In discussing citizen mistrust of government, a majority of the participants’ stories involved national governments. Some participants believed that even when citizens are “invited” to participate, the invitation is often tokenistic and is issued to serve government’s—rather than the people’s—interests. Or worse, sometimes national governments invite citizen participation only once something has gone seriously wrong. As Tendai Murisa, the executive director of the SIVIO Institute in Zimbabwe, put it, “Why are we being invited to clean up the mess that they made? Citizens don’t have ownership over the mess. Why should they have to clean it up now?”

As the unit of government—or the size of the national government—got smaller, there were more meaningful examples of citizens working with government to address community issues. Antonella Valmorbida, secretary general for the European Association for Local Democracy, argued that any unit of government representing 16 million people or more is too large to meaningfully engage with citizens.

The participants shared many more examples of complementary production—or at least positive engagement—between citizens and governments at the state (or provincial) and local levels. As Idit Manosevitch, senior lecturer at Netanya Academic College in Israel, contended, it is important for citizens to “feel democracy,” and that feeling is much more palpable at the local level.

Nonetheless, participants identified barriers to meaningful complementary production, even at the smallest scale. Robust local initiatives often require devolution of authority from national governments to local ones, creating more opportunities for citizens to work on issues in their own communities. Many times, however, the devolution of authority does not include additional resources, and local governments and
communities then struggle to sufficiently fund locally led initiatives. Because local governments are burdened by unfunded or underfunded federal mandates, they are often set up to fail, which increases the spiral of mistrust between citizens and government. Svetlana Gorokhova, director of international and educational activities for the All-Russia State Library for Foreign Literature, also reminded the group that in some places—such as Russia—citizens may actually see local governments as more corrupt and more susceptible to political pressure and bribery than the national government, creating a dynamic by which citizens go around local officials to seek help from the federal government.

**COMPLEMENTARY PRODUCTION GROWS FROM THE GROUND UP**

Participants offered several significant examples of citizen-generated complementary production. In most of those cases, the citizens themselves identified the problem and then acted together to address it before inviting government into a supporting role later in the process.

Nadia Aissaoui, a sociologist with the Mediterranean Women's Fund, told the story of a remote village in eastern Algeria that was without a hospital or any other medical facilities. The women of the village began a campaign to build a health-care unit in their town. They successfully raised the resources to build a clinic for women and children, and the village started getting positive press coverage both in Algeria and abroad. As a result, the government reached out to local leaders to join the new initiative. Eventually, government officials both helped supply medical equipment and also spearheaded other infrastructure improvements in the community. Aissaoui summarized, “[W]hen citizens organize themselves, they can challenge the local government, and they become real partners because they show that they are creative and they can appear as able to solve their problems.
without waiting for the solution from the government.”

Tendai Murisa also shared two instances in which citizens led, followed by government. One involved women in a local cake-baking association who organized themselves to clear out street drains so that children wouldn’t play in standing water and potentially be exposed to cholera. After the women began their work, the government stepped in to support them.

Murisa’s other story, however, displayed a more complex dynamic between citizens and government. After Zimbabwe was hit by Cyclone Idai, many communities were unreachable for days and, in some instances, weeks. Citizens began to work on disaster relief and recovery themselves. Once the government could reach most communities, officials tried to centralize the recovery effort. But the citizens pushed back, arguing in favor of the informal systems they had developed. Eventually, after some struggle, government relief agencies agreed to work alongside the systems established in the communities rather than impose a top-down framework driven by government.

As Antonella Valmorbida colorfully put it, it is up to governments to “monitor the sparkle,” to determine where citizens are putting their energy and then support those efforts.

**MEDIATING ORGANIZATIONS**

As demonstrated in several of the stories above, democratic complementary production is deeply rooted in relationships, and often those relationships are nurtured by institutions outside of government. Participants identified a range of organizations—from private consultancies to large nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—that play that nurturing and mediating role. Abdullah Rehman, director of community engagement at the Sultan Bahu Trust in the United Kingdom, offered a very instructive case featuring a low-income neighborhood in Birmingham, England. After decades of neglect from the police, there were several murders of young people in the neighborhood. A few residents began to protest; then more and more joined them. Eventually—working with the police—neighbors founded a street watch program. And then, they founded the Balsall Heath Forum, a community-based organization that organizes the neighborhood around a wide variety of issues. They focus on everything from on-the-ground neighborhood safety to lobbying on behalf of citizen priorities. Balsall Health Forum even garnered the attention of former Prime Minister David Cameron, who advocated for a similar nationwide model, which he called “the big society.”
None of this comes without risk, however. Several people cautioned that NGOs and other mediating institutions can be co-opted by government and—if they are not careful—turn their attention toward the needs of government at the expense of the needs of the people. As Rehman said to the group, “It [takes] years to build trust. It takes seconds to lose it.”

**PRECONDITIONS**
Participants identified several important preconditions that support citizens’ ability to engage in meaningful complementary production. One of those preconditions is gathering spaces—both physical and digital. Time and again, we heard that citizens gathering together is often the beginning of complementary public work. Sometimes, that work began as protest and later evolved into other activities to benefit the broader community.

Another of those preconditions is a “learning culture.” We heard many stories about citizens learning together about the needs of the community before they began to work together to address those needs.

Finally, one of the most important preconditions is basic trust among citizens. Even if citizens don’t trust government, they can find a way to work together if there is a baseline sense of trust among themselves. If citizens cannot disagree and still trust one another to do the things that “only citizens can do,” a significant power vacuum will develop that antidemocratic forces can and will fill. The question of trust was one expressed by Kettering president, David Mathews, and echoed by Idit Manosevitch: “What does it take to move to that point that citizens join together not because they like each other and not because they want to really spend time together socially but because they realize that they need each other?”

**CONCLUSION**
Nearly every day there is a new report about the deconsolidation of democratic values, yet the almost 70 people who gathered in Dayton last spring found reasons for hope, particularly at the local level. They shared stories of citizens who are working together to identify problems and solutions, seeking help from intermediary organizations and government officials when necessary. In many places around the world, citizens are working with government to address issues important to communities and community members and, in the process, building a stronger democratic culture. ■

---

Wendy Willis is a writer, a lawyer, the executive director of the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, and the founder and director of Oregon’s Kitchen Table. She can be reached at wendywddc@gmail.com.
Costa Rica’s Ottón Solís: A Politician Who Puts Citizens First

By Maura Casey

Ottón Solís can be described in many ways: He is one of nine children and the son of a cattle rancher. He is an economist and political thinker who grew up never intending to enter politics. He is an idealist, despite losing the 2006 presidential race in Costa Rica by only a few votes. Most of all, he is a man who believes in the power of ordinary people to make change.

Solís participated in the first two days of the Kettering Foundation’s Multinational Research Exchange Week in April, which focused on the relationship between government institutions and communities in approaching public challenges. He shared perspectives from Costa Rica, where he represents his country as a director of the Central American Bank for Economic Integration.

During meetings and meals, Solís spoke at length about his vision of democracy, the role of citizens, and the role that the Kettering Foundation ideas have played in his thinking.

He introduced himself and his thinking during the plenary session of the first day, when he addressed those attending the multicultural workshop week. Here is an edited version of those remarks:

“I’m privileged to be here. Let me start with a conceptual view of
democracy. Democracy is a system of responsibility, and in it, people don’t surrender power to those elected. They’re the owners of power. In monarchies, the owners of power are kings, queens, and sheiks. In dictatorships, the generals are owners of power. In a communist regime, the means of production is ostensibly owned by everyone, but power is owned by a few.

“In democracy, the people are the only owners of power, and when you are the owner of something, you exercise responsibility over it. If you are an owner of a farm, your relationship to the farm is very different from if you are a worker on the farm. So, people in a democracy need to behave as owners of power. . . . In fact, the least powerful person in a democracy is the elected official. Everyone else is freer to change opinion than the elected official because the elected official is enslaved to whatever he or she promised during the campaign.

“What we did in Costa Rica was to tell the people, look, power belongs to you, so act as such. Do not act thinking I have more responsibility than you. If I’m elected president of Costa Rica, you will continue to be the owners of power. So do not work because we pay you money to go to meetings; work because you are the owners of the thing. Do not work because we promise you a post or a government position. Work for the correct use of power.

“When the citizens work only for self-interest and feel that the leaders have the responsibility, the leaders feel some entitlement. And that’s where corruption develops because the system allows them to feel special. Instead, when the system has politicians as employees of the people, then you end up with a more ethical system.”

A CHANGE OF PLANS
Ethics are at the core of Solís’ political philosophy. He explained how he began to develop his philosophy while studying overseas.
In democracy, the people are the only owners of power, and when you are the owner of something, you exercise responsibility over it.
about why we needed a tax bill. They attended meetings and were educated politically.

“The people learned that power belonged to them,” Solís said. “And the scheme was very successful; the people felt for the first time the owners of the budget because they could choose whether to do this public works project or another one. What the people decided was respected to the last penny,” he said.

Solís said his methods didn’t make him particularly popular with his fellow members of the assembly, who were used to deep, centralized, condescending, and clientelist practices. Some didn’t even speak to him. But he could see how effective it was to empower citizens by involving them in the budget process. And he began to think about forming a new political party, one that would be for citizens.

KETTERING FOUNDATION’S INFLUENCE

Around this time, Solís began to read Kettering Foundation publications. “I read the magazines the foundation published and Politics for People by David Mathews,” Solís said. “It encouraged me to understand that I was not lost. When you are creating new things, you are often in doubt. But when I read it, I felt sure I was on the right path.”

Solís cofounded the Citizens’ Action Party in 2001. In 2002, after just one year, the party gained 26 percent of the vote. Soon after, he decided to run for president—and was determined to use the same truthful, direct approach he had used when he was a member of the national assembly.

“The only way to have true authority within a democracy is to be ethical,” Solís said.

Solís’s view of what is and is not acceptable in politics is shaped by his sense of ethics. He believes a lack of ethics leads to corruption, of which there are at least four types, Solís said.

One is classical corruption—stealing from the state, which he said is rare in Costa Rica.

The second is lying during the campaign, which is unacceptable, he believes. “You cannot lie to the people. You have to tell them the truth.”

Solís cofounded the Citizens’ Action Party in 2001. In 2002, after just one year, the party gained 26 percent of the vote. Soon after, he decided to run for president.
The third is a form of lying—using words that hide your real intent. “This is easy, especially in Spanish,” he said. “Like using a term such as ‘modernization’ to hide the fact that you intend to privatize government services, which is very controversial in Costa Rica.”

The fourth form of corruption is appointing people to government positions not because they are the best people, but because they are members of your party. “This results in the politicizing of decisions. It also contributes to polarization. . . . I believe the announcement of solutions to problems is not polarizing. If politicians explained their answers to problems such as immigration in a very serious way, not a simplistic way, and answered questions, this would fight polarization. But they have too much of a one-track mind, focused on their own campaigns, their own reelection, and they give over-simplified answers, usually focused on the negative. That just makes things worse.”

**UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS**

Putting ethics at the heart of his presidential campaign meant that Solís had to give the voters the unvarnished truth. But it wasn’t always comfortable.

“I told people all the nasty things I intended to do. I told voters I would increase the tax burden, which is very low in Costa Rica. I said I would reduce the size of the state, give agricultural subsidies only to farmers who worked at least eight hours per day and give scholarships only to students who made an effort to get good grades. I told people that the results of many actions would not be seen for a long time,” Solís said.

He advocated for gender equality, talked about human rights, and refused to accept campaign contributions of more than $10 a month from anyone, not even relatives.

Solís also said he wouldn’t pretend to know answers when he did not, which he made clear at town hall gatherings.

He didn’t like to make a speech when he attended such meetings. Rather, he said, he wanted to have a dialogue with citizens.

“Very often, people would ask questions I didn’t know how to
answer. I would say, ‘I don’t know.’ My staff kept statistics and told me that 42 percent of my answers to people were either ‘I don’t know’ or ‘I disagree with you,’” Solís said. “Politicians don’t know everything, but they always have an answer. Yet if you want the authority to make changes, there is only one way. That is to tell people the truth.”

The election of 2006 was a cliff-hanger. In the end, Solís lost by less than a percentage point.

Despite that heartbreaking loss, Solís remains an idealist. He doesn’t believe that there is a lack of honest people in politics. Most are honest, he insisted: “What is rare is courage—courage to denounce the corruption of colleagues, to constantly remind the people that besides rights they also have responsibilities, and courage to prompt citizens’ awareness of their own power.”

Citizens must ask more questions during campaigns, Solís said. Journalists, too, because the media can still, through reporting, help the people to take the true measure of a politician.

So, at the end, Solís addressed a simple question. Is he an optimist?

“Yes, absolutely,” he said immediately.

Why?

“Humanity has sorted out so many tough problems—some of them, just in time. Look at the Soviet tyranny in Eastern Europe, the population explosion, the resolution of the Cuban missile crisis, even global problems like slavery. And for many of these things, people marched and brought about solutions. They have done many wonderful things. So, there is evidence in history that supports being an optimist.

“People are longing for officeholders to tell them the truth. When they do, it adds to the conversation of how to make democracy stronger and what must continue to be done to make democracy work.”

Maura Casey is a senior associate of the Kettering Foundation and a former editorial writer for the New York Times. She can be reached at caseynyt@gmail.com.
Decades of Dialogue: Reflecting on US-China Exchanges

By Maxine S. Thomas

To mark the 40th anniversary of the normalization of relations between the United States and China, a small Kettering Foundation delegation traveled to the Carter Center in Atlanta in January 2019 to participate in a symposium commemorating the event. The Kettering delegation joined more than 150 scholars, foreign policy professionals, diplomats, and others in attendance. Maxine Thomas, vice president, secretary, and general counsel at the Kettering Foundation, was invited to speak, and the article that follows is based on her remarks.

The Kettering Foundation has had a long and deep relationship with several entities in China, but particularly with our collaborator in this celebration, the

US-China Delegation, Beijing, China, November 2000
Institute of American Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The Kettering Foundation’s interest in international issues started almost immediately after its founding in 1927. It entered the field in earnest in 1972, just months after President Richard Nixon’s official visit to China. Kettering’s then-president, Robert Chollar, started a program for scientific and cultural exchange with the Peoples’ Republic of China. And in 1985, a small team led by Kettering’s new president, David Mathews, visited Beijing to explore with several Chinese nongovernmental organizations their interest in establishing a dialogue. Preparations for the 1985 trip to China were facilitated by former US President Gerald Ford, in whose cabinet Mathews had served. Ford put Mathews in touch with an officer in the Chinese embassy who had helped Ford organize a visit to China.

The meeting grew into an ongoing set of dialogues about our two countries. Ultimately, a dialogue between two organizations would complement the work of the two national governments by systematically broadening and deepening the interactions between the two societies. For the US, the organization was the Kettering Foundation, and for the Chinese, the organization was the Institute of American Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Mathews described the work this way: “International relations have changed. It is no longer just government-to-government but society-to-society.” This dialogue was to be society-to-society and has continued for more than 30 years.

The ongoing dialogues were, of course, impacted by what was happening in the world. A pivot point happened early in the dialogues, with the 1989 Tiananmen Square event. After Tiananmen Square, many US organizations cancelled plans to visit China that year, but Kettering did not. Kettering’s philosophy of dialogue has always been that it is even more important to talk when times are bad than when they are good.

Harold Saunders and David Mathews, Beijing, China, October 1989
The US-China dialogues were held as planned in October 1989. The first decade of the dialogues ended in formal, off-the-record summaries drafted by the late Kettering Foundation director of international affairs, Harold Saunders, who had served as assistant secretary of state in the Carter administration. The dialogues were extremely formal and often took the form of an exchange of prepared speeches or lectures. The only real conversation occurred during tea breaks.

In 1998, the dialogues took a turn. The meeting that year began with our Chinese colleagues lamenting the pressure they felt the US was exerting on China to behave like the US, particularly as it related to human rights. The problem was that Americans, they said, were reading bad stories about China in the press. US dialogue participants were appreciative of the differences in the two countries. Chinese colleagues were convinced that if the US participants would get the US press to stop printing negative stories about China, it would persuade the US government to stop pressuring China to follow a US-dictated agenda.

The American participants protested. “Americans do not believe what the press tells us to believe,” we said. “People expect the press to print what it prints, but we do not take it as fact because it is in print. We are independent thinkers.”

Out of that meeting came an agreement to look at the differences in public opinion within our two countries as the research basis for the next meeting.

A task force, led by Zhao Mei for China and myself for the US, was created to carry out the research. The results of this work formed the basis for an interim research meeting and provided the discussion point for the October 2000 meeting of the dialogue group. This meeting was

The meeting grew into an ongoing set of dialogues about our two countries. Ultimately, a dialogue between two organizations would complement the work of the two national governments by systematically broadening and deepening the interactions between the two societies.

The meeting grew into an ongoing set of dialogues about our two countries. Ultimately, a dialogue between two organizations would complement the work of the two national governments by systematically broadening and deepening the interactions between the two societies.
The research in the US was done through dozens of deliberative forums. Kettering brought a group together to frame an issue guide on the US-China relationship, and forums were held across the country. In 2000, American participants in forums didn't think about China much, but events in the news and what they had learned in school formed their initial perceptions of the Chinese people. As those participants talked together about their perceptions, several themes emerged.

In 2018, in general, Americans still didn't think much about China. Some people, however, were engaged and following the China story. Americans viewed China with wariness and sometimes with suspicion. Some were favorably disposed to China, but few would call China a close friend or US ally.

In 2000, equality, fairness, and the notion that there should be a “level playing field” motivated participants to look at China through the same lens they used to look at the US. Viewed in this light, many were able to see China as a large nation like the US, addressing its internal matters in the best way it could for its own citizens and with as many shortcomings as any other nation, even the US.
There emerged the sense, sometimes reluctantly, that China had every right to do what it did regarding human rights.

That same year, concerns over female children and child labor were also flash points. But this was juxtaposed against Americans’ love of a bargain. These Americans acknowledged that they liked the opportunity to buy low-priced goods. Even if inexpensive goods from China might displace American workers or violate child labor principles, it did not deter many forum participants from wanting access to them. Mention of a scandal concerning Chinese prisons or child labor used to produce these goods, however, caused many to say they would not buy tainted goods, even at bargain prices.

In 2000, forum participants were clear and consistent in their willingness to engage China and to take China seriously. They were prescient in their thinking that China would play a much more significant role in the 21st century and that China deserved Americans’ attention.

In 2018, American forum participants were most likely to talk about the economic dimensions of the US relationship with China. China was seen as a manufacturing powerhouse. The “Made in China” label is everywhere, and Americans know China for producing inexpensive goods. They bemoaned the loss of American jobs and industry and worried that this made the US vulnerable.

In 2000, forum participants were clear and consistent in their willingness to engage China and to take China seriously. They were prescient in their thinking that China would play a much more significant role in the 21st century and that China deserved Americans’ attention.
By 2016, Americans’ views about China had become less favorable than they were in the earlier deliberative forums. There were concerns about US debt to China and potential loss of US jobs. Their analysis revolved around low wages paid in China to produce low-cost goods. Theft of intellectual property was also implicated in what they saw as unfair competition. Most saw China as an economic threat. What Americans perceived as China’s effort to control its population was also mentioned as troubling. They thought, or perhaps hoped, that these differences in political systems would result in the US retaining its world leadership in the future, even as they expressed concern that China was trying to take over the world. But Americans also saw themselves as part of the problem. As one participant stated:

We’ve become an outright lazy country. The drive’s not there for anybody. And it just seems like other countries just have that drive. We have cars that practically drive themselves, you have an app to order fast food, you have people bringing you food to your house. People want a good job right out of the gate. And if you grow up with that culture, then you think you shouldn’t have to work hard to get the job or salary you want.

In 2018, Americans continued to be self-critical, believing that the US had lost its edge because of a weakening work ethic and a perva-
sive sense of entitlement. In contrast, they saw the Chinese as hard working, reliable, and thorough.

What does all of this say about how Americans think about China? While China is not at the top of their consciousness on a regular basis, history, experience, and world events shape their views slowly over time. They see China as important. They lament that they do not know more about China. But they want unfiltered information.

When asked how he formed his opinion of China, a forum participant said that he recalled “being told as a child, if you keep digging a hole deep enough, you will end up in China.” Others recalled reading Pearl S. Buck’s *The Good Earth* or seeing films like *The Soong Sisters* or *The Manchurian Candidate*. Still others remarked about liking Chinese food or knowing an exchange student from China. These experiences added to their views of the Chinese. But such limited knowledge is even more reason that supplemental diplomacy is needed.

Governments have their roles to play, but what governments do will not be the only determinant of what Americans think about China. Americans see opportunity in a US-China relationship. Connections with people through work, exchanges, and dialogues like the ones the Kettering Foundation has held over the last 33 years with the Institute of American Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences help to shape their opinions. As a Chinese colleague stated after our 2016 meeting in Beijing:

Indeed, it is my own observation that the greatest contribution Kettering has made to the China-US relationship is to bring together social elites from the two societies, making friends between us, letting us share the same purposes in life—happiness, love, family, harmony, and unity. To be sure, political and cultural differences, as well as geographical spans, divide the two peoples, but these differences are secondary if compared to our shared purposes of life as human beings. ■

Maxine S. Thomas is vice president, secretary, and general counsel at the Kettering Foundation. She can be reached at mthomas@kettering.org.
If there were any doubt about the condition of the community, the high school students in Winchester, Kentucky, left little room for ambiguity. They felt abandoned. They feared being unprepared for their futures—despite attending an award-winning school. Many were being raised by absent parents, some of whom were paying more attention to their drug addictions than to their children. Kids lacked activities, and, out of boredom, some were turning their pent-up energies to drug and alcohol abuse themselves.

When asked for a town motto, their answers came swiftly. “Get Out!” and “Run While You Can!” These youth felt the community had lost faith in them and had no place for them. The youth had lost faith in their community.

This is, in part, what I found in Winchester, where Eastern Appalachia meets the Bluegrass region. The some 38,000 people who live in the local area face many challenges. The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation has partnered with The Greater Clark Foundation, which is working to build a more vibrant and resilient Clark County, where Winchester is located. We'll work with the community over a number of years to help develop leaders, organizations, networks, and a can-do spirit that can spark tangible improvements for the people who live there. Our work began with a report called *Waving the Community's Flag: Winchester and Clark County's Moment*, based on conversations with residents and leaders.

Every community has its challenges. Community members may fear that young people will move away to find opportunities elsewhere or that their community is beset by gun violence or teen pregnancy or inadequate public schools. Maybe their challenges have to do with racial inequities, racism, barriers to inclusiveness, or the loneliness of shut-in seniors. In most communities, many of these issues often overlap.

By Richard C. Harwood
What are we to do? How can we come together to take action as a community? How can we do this in a way that we productively and positively shape our shared lives? We must make room for the people we’ll need to do this. Every person in the community can help. We must bring people together in more effective ways that take advantage of all the resources and talents and gifts a community has.

WE NEED EACH OTHER
I see opportunity before us, but we must purposefully claim it if we are to effectively address the kinds of issues Winchester and other communities face. There are two intertwined parts to this opportunity:

1. A deep yearning among people to be part of something larger than themselves.

   Amid all the noise and confusion, people want to be seen and heard. They seek to restore a sense of dignity and decency in their lives and communities. We long to build things together and want to be more connected and engaged. In many respects, people feel they have been robbed of control over their lives, and they want it back.

2. Solutions to many of our current challenges require marshaling our shared resources.

   Children feeling abandoned, the opioid crisis, inadequate public schools, and the like beg for a collective response. No single organization, no one leader, nor group of citizens can tackle these problems on their own. We need each other.

Here, then, is the opportunity that I see. Acting on one of these factors on its own is not enough. Rather, our task is to actively combine these two elements in an approach of “shared responsibility.” I believe we can—we must—bring together the resources of our communities in ways that enable us to solve
At the heart of this idea is a critical experience I’ve had over and over again when working with communities. Too often, we take action on our concerns in ways that are delegated to and driven by just a handful of institutions and groups. Even when we enlist the help of others, we still tap only just a fraction of the potential of communities. If I had to make a guess, I’d say we’re leaving on the table 85 percent or more of our available resources. What’s more, so many of those resources involve the time and energy and innate capabilities of individuals and small groups in communities. We are forfeiting the golden opportunity for a community to work together, create together, and achieve together.

I believe we need to take a shared-responsibility approach. By this, I mean we need to bring together both big and small actions, in mutually reinforcing ways, to tackle our common problems. Everyone must play a part, and we must make sure that every person and every group feels they are invited to join in.

Shared responsibility can get us on a more hopeful path that leverages our collective energies. On this path, we can grow our civic confidence and belief in ourselves.

**ACTING IN COMPLEMENTARY WAYS**

In the years ahead, Winchester will need to marshal its resources, from all directions and from people and groups of all sorts, to help children and the community thrive. In doing so, they will need to work together to generate answers and actions to such questions as:

- Who can mentor, support, and love the children of this community when their parents and families are often absent or unable to do so? And who can support the parents and families to help them step forward?
- What social networks—meaning family, church, and neighbors, among others—can provide the necessary support to help people
move and stay off drugs and then to get on their feet and be self-sufficient? Drug treatment alone will not be enough to give people a real chance.

- What assets do different organizations and groups within the community have to help educate children beyond what the schools themselves can do?

- How might residents and organizations come together—in ways they could not achieve on their own—to get young mothers and families off to a good, healthy start?

- How can the community tackle issues such as obesity and unhealthy eating habits—and actually reach people where they live, in ways that matter to them, through messengers they trust?

Not all these steps can or even should be taken all at once. It takes time to build trust and forge relationships and for new actions to emerge. New people will come to the work when they are ready—not simply when a new project is announced. Strategically, we must start our efforts focused on those things that are actionable, doable, and achievable.

The key is to get early wins in order to build a new, promising trajectory, with growing momentum and ever-expanding civic confidence.

**MAKING OUR WAY FORWARD**

My hope is that the idea of shared responsibility becomes a way to seize the opportunity before us, to tap into people’s yearning to be part of something larger than themselves, and to marshal a community’s resources to address shared challenges.

Shared responsibility is not some new model that must be implemented with rigid fidelity. We already have such models that too often strait-jacket communities, siphoning off our attention to implement the model rather than focusing on the community itself. The approach of shared responsibility can be incorporated into many existing efforts.

“People in communities want to be builders, shapers, contributors, and partners. We must be cocreators of our own lives and communities. This means how the work gets done is as important as what gets done.”
The starting point must always be what’s best for the members of the community and not the professional processes we get so entangled in. Being focused on what is best for the community may sound obvious. But we all know that we get lost in our professional approaches.

People in communities want to be builders, shapers, contributors, and partners. We must be cocreators of our own lives and communities. This means how the work gets done is as important as what gets done. We must imagine and construct actions that pull unlikely people and groups together, often across dividing lines, often in ways not thought of before, and often with results that not only solve problems but also help communities thrive. Shared responsibility is about a whole host of groups and people having a genuine place in the community. There is a place for everyone—from large institutions to small ones, from citizens to clergy, from nonprofits to business. Everyone means everyone.

To effectively marshal a community’s resources requires leaders and organizations to recognize and value these abundant resources and how they fit in relationship to them. As such, we must see ourselves and others as part of a larger alchemy called community. We must not simply ask, “What is our role?” The better question is, “Where do we fit in the larger community, given who else is here?”

Shared responsibility, as I see it, will take different forms. Sometimes it might be led by an organization reaching out to the larger community. Other times it might start with an ad hoc group and grow into the larger community. It can launch with a government agency and then fan out to include others. It might take place just in a small neighborhood and never spread beyond.

Shared responsibility isn’t about seeking to “fix” everything all at once, as if that were possible. Instead, it is about how we tap into our innate capabilities and forge new ways to work together to take shared ownership of our lives and communities.
The truth is that all of these things—in their own ways, at the right times, in the right combinations—are called for if people are to reclaim a sense of belief and can-do spirit and if communities are to solve pressing problems.

Here I ask you to consider Abraham’s tent in the Bible. He insisted that all four sides of his tent remain open at all times. All four sides! Anyone who wished to come in could do so, from any direction, when they were good and ready. They could contribute what they could. The stranger, especially, was welcomed, even those who were thought not to have much to offer—at least at first.

In our communities, to advance shared responsibility, we need to become tent-pitchers. We need to envision in our minds—and make real through our actions—how we can pitch a tent into which anyone can come. How can we honor the gifts and talents and resources of all groups, organizations, and individuals? How can we enable people to come when they are ready? How can we create a signal to those who might be resisting change that we will be here waiting for them and will welcome them when the time is right? We become creators when we pitch a new tent and leave all the sides open.

This is happening in Clark County. Since our work began there, different ad hoc groups of citizens, government agencies, nonprofits, and faith groups, among others, are coming together to forge new shared-responsibility approaches to combat what had been seemingly intractable challenges of family breakdown, drug addiction, divisions sowed by race, religious denominations and where people live, and kids who felt left behind. Real progress is being made.

There is something basic—radical—at the core of shared responsibility: It is relational. Shared responsibility is rooted in a covenant of sorts—an agreement between and among people that reflects a common purpose, infused by shared obligations, undertaken entirely by one’s own will. Like all covenants, it calls us to be part of something larger than ourselves, in service to something that includes, yet transcends, ourselves.

This article is adapted from Stepping Forward: A Positive, Practical Path to Transform Our Communities and Our Lives (Greenleaf Book Group, 2019) by Richard C. Harwood. He is the president and founder of The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization located in Bethesda, Maryland. He can be reached at rharwood@theharwoodinstitute.org.