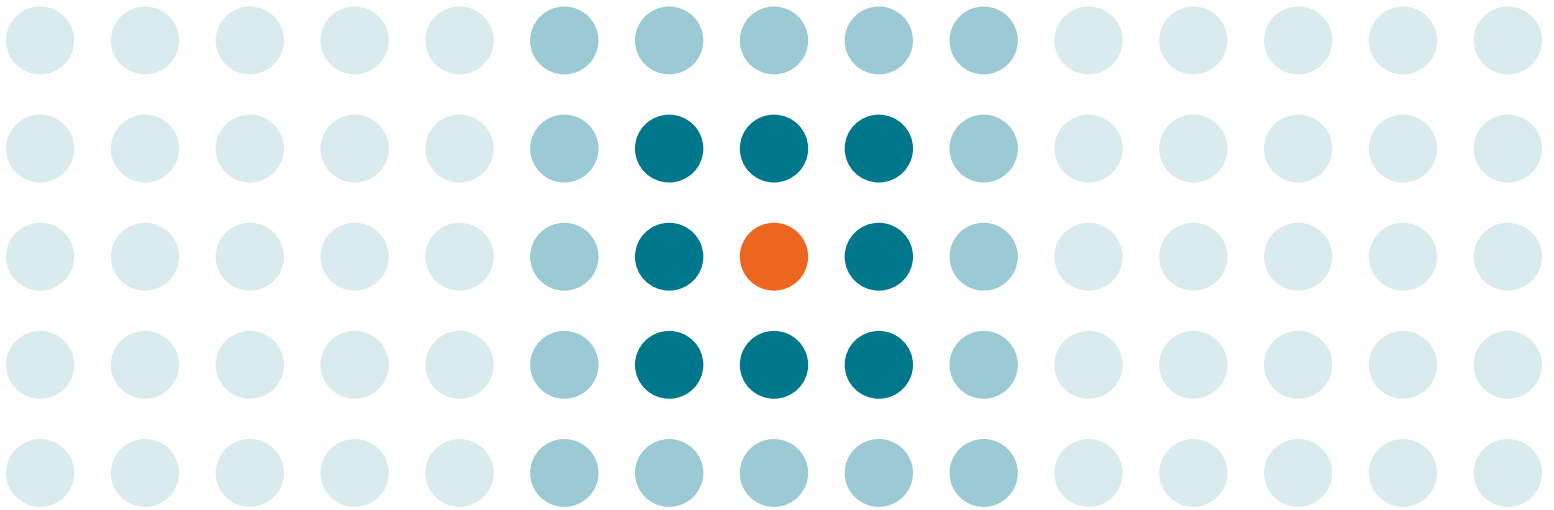




CENTER *for* ADVANCES
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Beginning with the End in Mind:

A Call for Goal-Driven Deliberative Practice

by Martín Carcasson, Ph.D.

Public Agenda's Center for Advances in Public Engagement (CAPE) researches, develops and disseminates new insights and practices that help improve the quality of American public life by building the field of public engagement and citizen-centered politics.

CAPE is dedicated to creating new and better ways for citizens to confront pressing public problems. CAPE is housed within Public Agenda, a nonpartisan, nonprofit opinion research and public engagement organization founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance.

For nearly three decades, Public Agenda has been working in communities to help citizens understand complex problems and create momentum for change by building common ground, managing differences and creating new partnerships. The Center serves the field by advancing three distinct but interrelated strands of work:

- The Public Engagement **Research Project** conducts and disseminates studies that clarify the dynamics and impacts of specific public engagement practices. Among the questions it explores are: What are the short-and-long term impacts of public deliberation on citizens, communities, leadership and public policies? What are the impacts of framing public issues for deliberation in contrast to framing them for purposes of persuasion—and what are the democratic implications of those differences for the media, political and civic leadership and civic participation? Why do deliberative democratic habits and practices take root in some communities more than others? And how can deliberation practices best go to scale, and be applied beyond the level of individual communities?
- The **Digital Engagement Project** experiments with and explores new internet-based tools and their application to engaging citizens in public deliberation and problem-solving. Guiding questions include: Can the internet only be used to link together like-minded people, or are there effective ways to produce greater “boundary-crossing” online, bringing diverse citizens together to better understand their differences? Can blogging contribute to deliberative public engagement, or only to partisan electoral or interest group politics? Is deliberation feasible within online communities?
- The **Theory-Building Project** promotes greater interplay between researchers and practitioners to improve the field's understanding of how public deliberation works and how it can work better. Principal areas and inquiry are: How does the public come to judgment? How does public deliberation relate to political and social change?

Major support for the Center is provided by the **W.K. Kellogg Foundation**, the **Rockefeller Brothers Fund** and the **Kettering Foundation**.

For more information on CAPE and Public Agenda's public engagement work, contact **Alison Kadlec**, Vice President, Public Engagement and Director, CAPE, at 212.686.6610 x 40 or akadlec@publicagenda.org. Also, visit the public engagement section of our website at http://publicagenda.org/pubengage/pe_home.cfm.

Beginning with the End in Mind: A Call for Goal-Driven Deliberative Practice

by Martín Carcasson, Ph.D.

Foreword

by Alison Kadlec, Center for Advances in Public Engagement

Why do we work to give “ordinary” citizens a greater voice in public life? What do we hope it will accomplish? And how should our goals inform our strategies? These are among the most pressing questions that public engagement practitioners must answer in order to ensure that our individual efforts are meaningful, and to guarantee that the burgeoning movement for deliberative democracy continues to thrive and spawn innovations that enrich public life.

These can be answered in abstract and general terms: We work to give citizens a voice because we believe in democracy, because sustainable solutions to knotty problems are best developed by tapping the knowledge of a wide variety of stakeholders and gaining their informed support, and so on. But such questions must also be answered in concrete terms with respect to particular situations and initiatives if we are to be truly effective in the real world. A time-limited public participation period prior to the passing of a local land-use regulation is one situation, turning around a failing school is another, developing a workable community-policing program or deciding what foreign policy we ought to pursue as a nation are yet other and different scenarios. What are our deliberative democratic purposes and goals in each of these instances and how should they affect the way in which we conduct the work?

At CAPE, through publications like our “Public Engagement: A Primer from Public Agenda,” we seek to reflect on and articulate the principles that drive our practices. In this same spirit, we are delighted to team up with Martín Carcasson from the Center for Public Deliberation at Colorado State University to disseminate his latest thinking about the goals and consequences of public deliberation.

While we believe Carcasson’s essay will be of great interest to researchers and scholars, we think it will be particularly useful for public engagement practitioners who are constantly dealing with the challenges of designing effective avenues for public participation. Carcasson provides a conceptual framework to help practitioners systematically consider both their short-term and long-term goals and the strategies that will set us up for success. In doing so, Carcasson invites us to be more intentional in every aspect of our work.

We find this extremely valuable and hope you will, also. Please feel free to join the conversation and share your thoughts about the goals and consequences of your work in communities at <http://www.publicagenda.org/publicengagement>.

Finally, we extend a special thank you to the Kettering Foundation, whose support and partnership made Carcasson’s original research for this piece possible.



Introduction

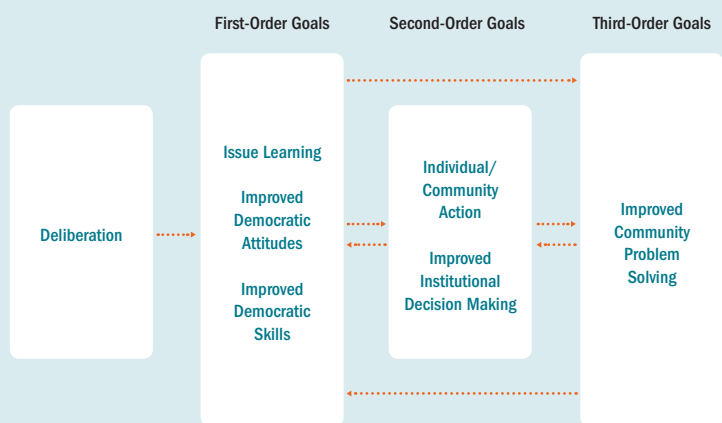
As the deliberative democracy movement continues to grow and mature, more and more practitioners, many of them new to the field, are hoping to increase the tangible impact their events have on the communities in which they work. This essay presents a conceptual framework to help practitioners more systematically consider both the short-term and long-term strategies that inform and guide their efforts. The framework outlines six distinct but interrelated goals for deliberative practitioners to target, organized in three groups (Figure 1).¹ The first-order goals are *issue learning*, *improved democratic attitudes*, and *improved democratic skills*. These primarily educational goals essentially involve the (re)building of critical social capital that can then be utilized to support the second- and third-order goals. The second-order goals more directly connect to action and include *improved community action* and *improved institutional decision making*. Lastly, the third-order goal is *improved community problem solving*. The word “community” is purposely ambiguous.

The framework was particularly developed with local deliberative practitioners in mind—whose “community” would be a city or a region of a state—but the principles could certainly be “scaled up” to consider larger communities.

The framework presented here builds on three key preliminary arguments. First, I contend that *improving a community’s capacity to solve problems serves well as the ultimate goal of deliberative practice*. As depicted in Figure 1, all the other goals flow toward that goal. I argue that, as deliberative practitioners and organizations develop, they should be encouraged to shift from a perspective focused on individual events and projects and toward one that more broadly considers the long-term problem-solving capacity of their communities and their critical role as community resources for that end. The broader field and its national organizations should then, in part, focus on helping develop and support such locally situated nonpartisan mediating institutions to serve as critical “hubs of democracy.”² As the number of communities with such organizations increase (and collaborate), the impact of the deliberative democracy movement will surely grow exponentially.

With community problem solving situated as the primary long-term goal, individual deliberative projects or forums become means to that broader end and should in some sense be selected based both on the need to engage that specific issue as well as on the project’s potential to ultimately impact the community’s capacity. This overarching focus on community problem solving is also a benefit in terms of helping deliberative practitioners define their identity while solidifying a reputation for impartiality and nonpartisanship. Rather than being identified in terms of individual issues or specific processes—and the squabbles between them—deliberative practitioners would be known for their passionate focus on democratic problem solving and all

Figure 1: The Goals of Deliberation



¹ This report was developed from an extended report authored by Martín Carcasson and Elinor Christopher entitled, “The Goals & Consequences of Deliberation: Key Findings and Challenges for Deliberative Practitioners.” That report was the result of collaboration with The Kettering Foundation and the Center for Public Deliberation at Colorado State University. Any interpretations and conclusions are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, its staff, directors or officers. It was developed out of questions shared during a year-long exchange among Kettering, the CPD, and others in the National Issues Forums network who engage in field practice in deliberative politics. The original report is available from the author at mcarcas@colostate.edu, or at: <http://communicationstudies.colostate.edu/cpd/kettering%20goals%20and%20consequences%20final>.

² Currently, at least two networks of local organizations are operating in this manner, the National Issues Forum network (www.nifi.org) and the University Network for Collaborative Governance (www.policyconsensus.org). For more information on this notion, see Carcasson, “Democracy’s Hubs: College and University Centers as Platforms for Deliberative Practice,” which was also based on research sponsored by the Kettering Foundation and is available from the author at mcarcas@colostate.edu.

that entails. “Impartiality,” in other words, need not mean neutral or dispassionate. Deliberative practitioners are nonpartisan concerning issues and the process, but are nonetheless quite biased in favor of participatory democracy and its ideals.

My second preliminary point is that, although improved community problem solving should be considered the ultimate goal of all deliberative practice, I nonetheless argue that *individual deliberative events or projects should generally focus on specific and appropriate lower-order goals in order to maximize impact*. Whereas deliberation inherently leads to many of the goals, different goals nonetheless likely require different strategies—the processes that particularly spark issue learning are distinct from those that positively impact democratic attitudes and so on³—as well as present different challenges and call for different skill sets for practitioners. I contend, therefore, that organizers should identify and plan events based on specific and appropriate goals from start to finish and clearly communicate those goals to participants throughout. By “appropriate,” I mean goals that fit the situation and that they have the capacity to deliver.

Certainly, the goals in Figure 1 are not mutually exclusive and are self-reinforcing in important ways (hence the arrows flowing both ways),⁴ but attempts to do too much—to target later-order goals when first-order goals are more realistic—or simply to deliberate for the sake of deliberation, will likely result in disappointing results and perhaps even make future deliberative efforts more difficult to support in the community.⁵ The second-order goals, in particular, require significant investment and involve considerable challenges and are difficult to achieve in a community without the social

capital that develops as the result of the first-order goals. The goals are thus not linear in the sense that the first-order goals must be accomplished before the second-order goals, but there is nonetheless a natural progression moving from right to left that must be considered.

Whereas the recent increased focus on tying deliberation to action and institutional decision making are vital steps forward in this movement, we should not discount the importance of the initial goals of improving democratic skills/attitudes and fostering understanding of issues. In other words, first-order goals should not be considered mere side effects on the way to action, but are critical in their own right and are clearly appropriate targets for newly developing practitioners. As Peter Levine, Archon Fung, and John Gastil have argued, “The goal of a meeting may be to build networks of citizens, to develop new ideas, to teach people skills and knowledge, to change attitudes, but not to influence government.”⁶

Together, these first two points identify a critical tension with which deliberative practitioners must struggle. Simultaneously, practitioners must “begin with the end in mind” in two important senses: the long-term end of improving community problem solving and the short-term specific ends of particular projects.⁷ The framework, therefore, is particularly focused on helping practitioners conceptualize goals for their work so that they are more likely to be accomplished while also helping them consider the interconnections between the goals and how they all can flow toward the ultimate end. Thus, the goals in Figure 1 should be considered *individually* as well as *systematically*.

³ See Table 1 for examples of how the different sorts of deliberative practices would cater to the various goals.

⁴ See Stephanie Burkhalter, John Gastil, and Todd Kelshaw, “A Conceptual Definition and Theoretical Model of Public Deliberation in Small Face-to-Face Groups,” *Communication Theory* 4 (2002): 398-422, for a model that similarly emphasizes the self-reinforcing aspect of deliberative practice and was influential to the development of this framework.

⁵ This is one of the difficult lessons I have learned personally in part through mistakes made as I have run the Colorado State University Center for Public Deliberation (CPD) the past three years. Broad, ambitious projects are very tempting, but such projects take significant time and resources, and taking on projects the CPD could not handle well, or in a timely manner, can certainly be counterproductive to the long-term goal of building community capacity for problem solving through deliberative practice.

⁶ Peter Levine, Archon Fung, and John Gastil, “Future Directions for Public Deliberation,” in *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the 21st Century*, ed. John Gastil and Peter Levine (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 278. Also see Burkhalter, Gastil, and Kelshaw, “A Conceptual Definition and Theoretical Model of Public Deliberation in Small Face-to-Face Groups,” for additional discussion of the many important habit-forming impacts of deliberation that are critical for supporting future deliberation.

⁷ This distinction is similar to the distinction between “capacity-building” and “event-oriented” approaches to public engagement discussed in “Public Engagement: A Primer from Public Agenda.” (Public Agenda, 2006). Available at http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/public_engagement_primer_0.pdf



My third preliminary point is that *goal-driven deliberation highlights the importance of what occurs before and after individual deliberative events*. While the heart of deliberation is certainly the face-to-face interaction between engaged citizens, the work that deliberative practitioners complete before those interactions to ensure high-quality deliberation and the work they must complete afterwards to take full advantage of those interactions and achieve their goals are critical to those events succeeding. Too often, practitioners focus primarily on a deliberative technique and discount what comes before and after utilizing that technique. The discussion of the six goals, therefore, will offer key practices for deliberative practitioners to consider at these various stages for each of the goals (see Table 1). One key implication of this point is that deliberative organizations must have the capacity for much more than moderating or facilitating meetings but also be able to serve as, or otherwise have access to, policy analysts, conveners and reporters, among others.⁸

If deliberative practice is to go beyond hosting good conversations and truly impact communities, developing these broader skill sets is necessary. An additional purpose of this framework, therefore, is to help deliberative practitioners and organizations step back from the day-to-day work of running events, consider the long-term potential impact of their work, and thus be more intentional about the sorts of events they choose and the necessary capacity-building activities and trainings they require.⁹ Alternatively, deliberative practitioners with fewer resources could also find their particular niche in terms of goals to focus on and make an impact on their community by doing that work well. As the discussion of the first-order goals will show, plenty of good work is required at that level. Goals should thus be ambitious but achievable, and the more deliberative practitioners deliver on promises, the more this movement will expand.

The Six Goals of Deliberation

I turn now to a discussion of the six goals. Each discussion will be framed somewhat as a response to the current state of politics and community problem solving. In important ways, the deliberative perspective is a reaction to the negative consequences of our primarily adversarial system, and its impact can often be considered as “antidotes” to some of its more damaging effects. Each discussion will thus consider the current situation and then review the potential impacts of well-planned, high-quality deliberation related to each goal in order to lay out a potential path for practitioners. Table 1 provides a list of suggestions for deliberative practitioners to consider when focusing on particular goals, organized in terms of actions to take before, during, after, and even beyond specific deliberative events.

Issue Learning

One of the age-old questions about democracy concerns whether citizens have the capacity for understanding the complexity of the issues that confront them or if only experts or politicians—whose jobs in some sense are to acquire, develop, and/or utilize that knowledge—could be expected to do so. Strong advocates of democracy, deliberative or otherwise, generally fall under the category of those that believe that people can develop enough understanding of issues to be a significant part of the decisions that impact them. Advocates of democracy believe that having “ordinary citizens” involved in community decision making is critical to democratic legitimacy. Deliberative democrats take the “legitimacy thesis” a step further and argue that involving a broad range of the public is pragmatically important to the ability of communities to address the problems they face.

Many commentators have discussed the current state of public knowledge concerning issues in the United States. Some of the key problems include:

- An overarching focus on or deference to experts and expert knowledge to solve problems.
- The poor quality of political communication that rewards strategy and image over substance, which feeds misunderstandings and causes polarization.

⁸ This point supports the notion that developing positive reciprocal relationships between local and national organizations will be an important part in the further development of the movement.

⁹ Table 1, for example, provides a list of the different literatures that are relevant to each particular goal.

- The politicization of research and the media that has led to a crisis of legitimacy. Citizens do not know where to turn for high-quality information.
- A basic proliferation of information, particularly online, that often causes information overload and “paralysis by analysis.”

These factors contribute to a political culture that undermines citizens’ opportunities and abilities to talk to each other much less work collaboratively to solve common problems. Due to this situation, improving the public understanding of issues becomes a critical goal for deliberative practice. Indeed, despite the fact that “issue learning” is situated here as the initial goal, it could very well be one of the most important goals and deliberative organizations could easily focus solely on this goal and make significant positive impacts on their communities.

In order to increase the potential of achieving this goal, deliberative practitioners should seek to achieve three key consequences of deliberation related to issue learning. It is important to note from the beginning, however, that the focus here is not on providing endless amounts of information, research and facts about an issue—citizens need not become experts to contribute—but rather on the development of what Noelle McAfee and others have called “public knowledge” which includes information about the “constraints, consequences, trade-offs, competing values, aims, and necessary sacrifices” related to community issues.¹⁰ Information is, thus, only one part of issue learning and while some amount of information is vital, too often leaders and experts overestimate the importance of information to the development of thoughtful public judgment about an issue.¹¹

The most basic and vital positive impact deliberation can have on issue learning is simply *increased awareness of the range of perspectives around public issues*. Many of the various basic aspects of deliberative practice work toward that end. Deliberative forums typically rely on background information that was purposely developed to fairly provide multiple perspectives on the issue and get participants away from typical, polarized tracks.¹² Deliberative processes—as well as the reporting of the results—essentially focus on helping individuals get beyond their biases and truly develop understanding of issues across multiple perspectives. These impacts are particularly important in comparison to the dominant forms of political communication which often aim at narrowing conceptions and misrepresenting opposing views.

Deliberation also leads to a particular form of issue learning that is often not nurtured otherwise. At its best, *deliberation helps participants work through the tough choices and tradeoffs inherent in public decisions as well as helps participants identify the shared interests or common ground that exists across diverse perspectives*. Many of the deliberative tactics work to help participants identify the underlying values to their perspectives and how those values interact with those of others. This critical work takes many forms and labels, such as “choice work;” a focus on “tough choices,” “tensions,” or “tradeoffs;” “working through;” or dealing with the “inescapability of choice.”¹³ This process, I argue, is one of the most valuable consequences of deliberation. It is both critical to later goals and stands in stark contrast to what is typically offered to citizens in our media and public discourse.

A third key potential consequence of deliberation to issue learning is *generating new information and inspiring innovative responses to problems*. Not only can participants in

¹⁰ McAfee, “Public Knowledge,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 30 (2004): 148. Also see Daniel Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

¹¹ In *Coming to Public Judgment*, Yankelovich compares the role of information in public opinion formation to the role that memory plays for a great pianist. While memory is certainly indispensable for the pianist, it is obviously not sufficient. He goes on to say that, “I am not denigrating information anymore than I would be denigrating memory by pointing to the qualities for creativity, technique, and feeling that make for greatness in a pianist.” 45. The point here is the quality of information is vital for the public’s ability to work through an issue and come to sound judgment but it is neither sufficient, nor is it necessarily the most important factor. To view knowledge as the sole domain of information makes sense for experts, but it is not the best way to understand how non-experts think and generate knowledge. To expect the public to have expert-level knowledge in order to make thoughtful decisions is to always find the public deficient and to overlook the unique kinds of knowledge the public brings to the table in the form of values and experience.

¹² See Will Friedman, “Reframing Framing” for a discussion of the difference between framing for deliberation and framing for persuasion. (CAPE Occasional Paper #1, Public Agenda, 2007). Available at http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/Reframing%20Framing_0.pdf

¹³ Choice-work is a favorite of NIF. “Working through” is part of Yankelovich’s process of moving from individual opinion to public judgment. The “inescapability of choice” is Michael Briand’s terminology in *Practical Politics*.



deliberative processes improve their opinions, they may actually produce new knowledge and a more nuanced understanding of an issue that has been previously treated as the domain of experts and leaders alone. Citizens working together can perceive possibilities that experts and politicians may not consider because, as John Dewey said, “the man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches, even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied.” The new knowledge that citizens may generate in the course of deliberation may be particularly valuable when derived from the examination of tough choices. The process of “harvesting the wisdom in disagreement”¹⁴ is an important concept in conflict resolution, and because there are simply so few places that opposing perspectives can come together in a respectful manner, deliberative forums represent key opportunities for communities to reap that harvest that can be critical to a highly functioning democracy.

Deliberative practices targeting improved issue learning would thus focus in particular on accomplishing these impacts, utilizing some of the tactics identified in Table 1. Overall, when focused on this goal, deliberative practitioners would seek to become critical sources of high-quality, well-framed impartial information about a range of approaches to complex public problems—through the development and utilization of nonpartisan discussion guides, well-designed forums, and carefully prepared reports of forums¹⁵—filling a role that is vital to the health of a democratic society but paradoxically uncommon in our “Information Age.”

Improving Democratic Attitudes

The second key goal of deliberative practice is improving democratic attitudes. Similar to the topic of issue knowledge, many have written, often quite pessimistically, about the current state of democracy and the attitudes toward it in the 21st century. Key problems include:

- A general disengagement from both the civic and political realms.
- A sense of powerlessness and lack of efficacy that affects many and leads to significant distrust in government institutions.
- Rampant individualism that supports narrow conceptions of citizenship focused primarily on citizens as consumers, taxpayers, or spectators.
- Polarization and misunderstandings across perspectives that decrease confidence in fellow citizens and justify adversarial tactics that further harm democratic sensibilities.
- Current efforts at “public engagement” are often designed poorly, cater to extreme voices, and are rarely deliberative. As a result, both the public and elected officials often have negative views of public involvement and are wary of any calls for more of the same.

Once again, deliberative practitioners have been given quite a task to address the current deficiencies in the public’s democratic mindset. Fortunately, research and experience have shown that carefully designed and properly facilitated deliberative events can work as powerful counters to the negative attitudes toward democracy that are instilled as a byproduct of “politics-as-usual.”

Here I offer three primary consequences of deliberation that practitioners can focus on to improve democratic attitudes. I should note that these impacts can also be conceptualized

¹⁴ Stephen W. Littlejohn & Kathy Domenici, *Engaging Communication in Conflict: Systemic Practice* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001), 48.

¹⁵ These tasks represent another critical role for the national organizations to play in support of local organizations. A tension, however, has developed between the framing of “national” issues and their relevance to local communities. NIF books, for example, may be particularly useful for local deliberative organizations to utilize to address first-order goals but, depending on the issue, may not be situated well for second-order goals. Indeed, local deliberations on national issues such as Social Security or foreign policy may actually have a negative effect when framed in terms of second-order goals of making an impact. I thus emphasize again the importance of appropriate selection and communication of goals.

individually or in terms of a community. In other words, as more and more individuals develop positive democratic attitudes, a community may develop the habit of relying on deliberation when faced with difficult issues.¹⁶ Considering different subsets of the public may be important here as well. Democracy can certainly be positively impacted by improved democratic attitudes across many levels of engagement. So while perhaps the primary target audience may be “ordinary citizens,”—particularly those that are disengaged and apathetic—improving the attitudes of politically engaged community leaders, active civil society members, elected officials, policy experts, and bureaucrats may be just as critical and would likely require different strategies. Thus, deliberative practitioners “beginning with the end in mind” should have a clear sense of their target audiences and plan their events accordingly.

Perhaps the most important attitudinal effect of deliberation to foster is *increasing participants’ sense of efficacy or empowerment*. This effect is critical to both individuals and communities and is a direct counter to the feelings of powerlessness that many commentators find as a root cause of apathy and cynicism. Deliberation can provide a new sense of possibility and engagement as people realize that others around them are concerned with similar issues and are willing to act. Rather than fostering the blame game as other political events tend to do, deliberative activities are often specifically designed to create different forms of interaction that avoid simply pointing fingers and spouting cynical frustrations. As a result, citizens are more likely to take ownership of the issue and decide to act.¹⁷ It should be cautioned, however, that if organizers of deliberative events overreach and promise significant change or institutional action as a result of deliberation that cannot be delivered, then any sense of empowerment generated could be jeopardized. Therefore, as noted earlier, appropriately selected goals are vital for making sure that civic agency is bolstered and not undermined.

A second key impact of deliberation on attitudes involves the *creation and improvement of community relationships, particularly between individuals with opposing perspectives*. This process can be critical to productive decision making in a democracy, especially in diverse communities because of the importance of mutual respect and understanding (and the current lack of them). Whereas many of the specific techniques utilized within conflict management are particularly useful for deliberative practitioners—such as ground rules, impartial facilitators, and establishing a respectful environment—deliberation also tends to improve relationships inherently by bringing together, in the same room, people who think differently. Simply put, people who think differently rarely have the chance to have serious conversations in our society, or when they do they often degenerate quickly because people are not furnished with proper conditions for productive boundary-crossing dialogue. Deliberative processes can work to counter the isolation that breeds hostility toward “others” by broadening an individual’s conversation network and by allowing people from a wide range of backgrounds and starting points to discuss complex issues in an environment that fosters listening, true understanding, and an expanded awareness of previously unrecognized shared interests. The importance of this cannot be overstated. As Daniel Yankelovich has argued, self-governance is “utterly dependent” on the “ability of people of good will to communicate with each other across barriers.”¹⁸

Deliberation can also result in *helping individuals adjust their preferences and develop a better balance between their own self-interest and the interests of the community*. Indeed, a critical potential impact of well-designed deliberation is the discovery, development, and nurturing of notions of the “common good.” Often termed as “preference formation,” it is a feature of deliberation that is particularly important to its theoretical advocates.¹⁹ Unlike other forms of public decision making such as voting, bargaining, or interest-group politics,

¹⁶ See, for example, Will Friedman, Alison Kadlec, & Lara Birnack, “Transforming Public Life: A Decade Of Citizen Engagement In Bridgeport, Ct.,” Center for Advances in Public Engagement Public Case Studies in Public Management 1 (2007), available online at http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/cape_bridgeport.pdf.

¹⁷ For excellent accounts of how individuals and communities can develop a strong sense of responsibility through working together in productive ways, see David Mathews, *Politics for the People Finding a Responsible Public Voice*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1999), and Harry Boyte, *Everyday Politics: Reconnecting Citizens and Public Life* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Yankelovich, *Coming the Public Judgment*, 224.

¹⁹ Simone Chambers, for example, has argued that the notion that deliberation “can change minds and transform opinions” is a central tenant of deliberative theory. See Simone Chambers, “Deliberative Democratic Theory,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6 (2003): 318.



deliberation allows for participants to adjust their views and, proponents argue, often those views are changed in ways that increase their open-mindedness and empathy for others.²⁰ The point here is not that participants abandon their individual interests, but rather that they are given the opportunity to consider the interests of others and the community as a whole in conjunction with their own, which is yet another critical aspect to a functioning diverse democracy.²¹

In summary, deliberation can work to counteract many of the negative aspects of current democratic attitudes. Once again, these impacts can be felt with a broad range of citizens. When elected officials or experts observe high-quality deliberation—which can be very unlike the typical public hearing—they can improve their attitude about public engagement and thus, perhaps, support it more in the future. Once again, specific suggestions for practitioners to focus on in this area are presented in Table 1. To connect to some of my preliminary arguments, deliberative projects make a significant impact on democratic attitudes in a community and provide participants with a glimpse of how deliberative practice can be impactful, regardless if that project made an impact on the issue that was discussed. Once again, I'll emphasize that deliberative organizations that simply do a good job on this particular goal are critical to our movement.

Improving Democratic Skills

This goal is obviously a key counterpart to the goal of improving democratic attitudes. Individuals must have both positive democratic attitudes and skills in order to function fully as democratic citizens. Whereas democratic attitudes provide the “want to,” democratic skills can provide the “how to.” I kept them separated in this framework because the tactics to improve each are distinct and, by separating them, each is inherently provided more focus. Nonetheless,

they are intertwined in important ways. As John Gastil has written, “Fortunately, it is likely that deliberation is a self-reinforcing process. The more often we deliberate together, the better we become at it, the more we come to expect it, the more often we expect it to work, and the more motivated we are to try it.”²²

Once again, the current state is problematic. Overall, several key democratic skills are lacking and several skills that are generally detrimental to democracy are prevalent. As many have argued, including Thomas Jefferson himself, democratic skills are not necessarily innate, but must be learned. In addition, many innate human impulses such as egoism must be overcome. One key justification for public schooling in the United States was to insure that the population had the requisite skills for democracy but, unfortunately, the overall quality of civic education is considerably lacking in the 21st century despite noble efforts by many for its revival.²³ Today's schools seem much more focused on providing skills for the workplace or perhaps academia rather than democracy. A review of the current state of democratic skills could certainly be a report in itself but, for our purposes, I simply highlight three key points:

- Individuals, particularly in the United States, tend to have much stronger skills for adversarial democracy rather than deliberative democracy. The political, legal and consumer realms, for example, all focus primarily on either adversarial or consumerist communication. Winning an argument and persuading relevant audiences are paramount skills in our culture, whereas collaboration and cooperation are generally discounted.
- Listening is not considered a critical aspect of education or individual success in our society, which has contributed to a dangerous inability to communicate effectively with one another.²⁴

²¹ Following Dewey and others, deliberative democrats have an optimistic view of the potential for human nature to go beyond self-interest, while also realizing that that potential requires nurturing and is often not realized in our current political culture. Central to this optimism is the rather pragmatic notion that when people are furnished with the proper conditions for boundary-crossing deliberation, they are far more likely to develop a more nuanced understanding of how their own self-interest is implicated in the interests of others. Tocqueville famously called this “enlightened self-interest,” and he too understood that multiple channels of communication in the context of a vibrant civil society are vital for the cultivation of this democratic habit of mind.

²² Gastil, “Communication as Deliberation,” in *Communication as . . . : Stances on Theory* ed. G.J. Shepherd, T. St. John, J., & T. Striplhas (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2005), 171. See also Burkhalter, Gastil, and Kelshaw, “A Conceptual Definition and Theoretical Model of Public Deliberation in Small Face-to-Face Groups.”

²³ See, for example, the Civic Mission of Schools campaign: <http://www.civicmissionofschools.org/>

²⁴ As Gerald Goff has written, “A dangerous inability to talk to one another is the price we pay for a culture that makes it easy for us to avoid to respect and deal with the people who strongly disagree with us.” Gerald Graff, *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), viii.

- A third key deficiency involves a lack of judgment, decision-making or critical-thinking skills. This inherent deficiency is exacerbated by an education system that focuses primarily on the acquisition of information rather than the development of practical wisdom and problem-solving skills.²⁵

As a result of these various factors, citizenship skills in this country are practically in a state of crisis, with the democratic skill level matching the limited conception of citizenship that reduces citizens to consumers or spectators of public life. Citizens are rarely viewed or treated as collaborative problem solvers which, to deliberative practitioners, is a cornerstone of meaningful democracy. The people often have the skills to consume, criticize, complain, and advocate, but do not have the skills to work with their neighbors on a common problem.

High quality deliberative events can yield three key areas of skill development that can be targeted by practitioners. The first is the *improvement of communication skills to address differences*. Perhaps the most important relevant skill to develop is for people to actually listen to each other. As Mahatma Gandhi is often quoted as saying, “Three-fourths of the miseries and misunderstandings in the world will disappear if we step into the shoes of our adversaries and understand their standpoint.” When individuals truly listen to each other, those misunderstandings can lose much of their power and other, more positive, relationships can develop. Whether conceptualized as deep listening, reflective listening, or active listening, the combined impact of the deliberative event—with its ground rules, trained facilitators, properly framed materials, and carefully designed process—should be at least somewhat focused on fostering true listening, seeking to provide individuals with a new experience where they are truly listened to and are strongly expected to listen to others.

Other related communication skills include asking good questions and expressing one’s interests and values in a manner that facilitates understanding and welcomes discus-

sion.²⁶ Once again, people naturally know how to defend themselves or express their views but knowing how to do so in a manner that is productive with a diverse group must generally be learned. These skills become one of the key issues facilitators of public deliberation must help participants develop. Facilitators model these skills, hoping that the participants themselves will pick them up on their own.

A second key skill that can develop as the result of deliberation is tied to *the improvement of skills related to judgment, wisdom, and group decision making*. Deliberative events are often framed with a particular focus on the tough choices and tradeoffs inherent to the issues. Facilitators then work to have the participants not only recognize these tough issues and points of common ground—which has considerable value in itself—but also attempt to find ways to build upon the common ground and work through the tensions as a group. The importance of the ability of individuals to understand issues through these lenses cannot be overstated.

One final point to make here shifts the focus from the participants of forums to the conveners, facilitators, and institutional decision makers. Another critical result of deliberative events is that the individuals organizing or hosting the event have the opportunity to sharpen their skills, as well. Each event is a learning opportunity. We learn lessons about attracting audiences, explaining deliberation, facilitating discussions, capturing and reporting the information, etc. Deliberative practitioners must be self-reflective about their work and continuously hone their craft. The need to develop and expand these impartial mediating skills further supports the relevance of events focused on first-order goals.

In some ways, this goal of improving democratic skills is distinct from the others. Often viewed as a side effect rather than a primary goal, the impact of deliberation on democratic skills is nonetheless critical. This goal is also one that can easily be pursued outside of specific issue-focused projects by connecting to civic education initiatives. One particular goal of our field must be to incorporate deliberation into curricula at various levels so that students develop

²⁵ See, for example, Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment*, and Michael Briand, “Knowledge, Judgment, and Deliberative Politics,” *Higher Education Exchange* (2006): 5-11.

²⁶ As communication scholars Littlejohn and Domenici put it, “helping people talk so others will listen.” Littlejohn and Domenici, *Engaging Communication*, 76



these skills as early as possible and learn to consider community problems through a deliberative lens and not just through the typical adversarial perspectives. This goal can also be pursued through hosting community workshops and seminars. Overall, deliberative practitioners serving as “hubs of democracy” in their communities should be valuable resources to help citizens develop the skills and habits so critical to democracy.

Improving Community Action

I move now to the fourth primary goal of deliberation, improved community action. With this goal, I move away from primarily educational consequences of the first-order goals, and into the realm of action and more tangible, issue-focused consequences of second-order goals. The differences between this goal and the next are important—and the processes can be rather distinct²⁷—but the two can also certainly work in tandem. Here, I focus on sparking individuals, groups and organizations to action, whereas the next goal will examine how deliberation can impact government policy and institutional decision-making processes. The difference is similar to the distinction NIF makes between community and electoral politics, as well as the distinction between “public engagement” and “public consultation” in the forthcoming work of Public Agenda.²⁸ Similar to the split between improving democratic attitudes and skills, I believe the split here is necessary conceptually but also caution from reading too much into the split. In some ways, as this movement grows, this split will become less and less relevant and the two sides more intertwined. More on that later.

This goal connects the world of deliberation with the world of community organizing and social movements. As Tocqueville explained during his travels in the 19th century, Americans have always been “joiners,” establishing and populating numerous community organizations. The faith institutions, service clubs, and single-issue organizations that make up the non-profit sector are strong in the United States and are critical for helping communities deal with a vast array of issues. Margaret Mead’s famous quote, “A small

group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has,” is hanging on walls in community organizations across the country.

In some ways, therefore, the current situation with community action is not as dire as the situations described in these initial sections for the first three goals. That being said, the situation is far from ideal. Some of the key problems particularly relevant to deliberative practitioners are:

- Many community organizations are focused primarily on addressing symptoms of problems, such as feeding the hungry, rather than developing responses that can foster long-term systematic change, such as developing a broad response to poverty.
- There is a general lack of coordination and collaboration between organizations working on similar issues. Individual “silos” develop that have an impact, but not nearly the impact they could have.
- Community organizations often are not places where people with diverse views come together, but rather represent another site for the likeminded to gather and work together.
- The impact of polarized adversarial politics is felt here as well. Too often the tactics used by many of the organizations hoping to spark community action are representative of “us v. them” techniques that push people apart rather than bring them together. Tough choices are avoided or simplified, thus the public is not given the opportunity to work through conflicting values.

The bottom line is that, although many communities are already very active and engaged, our most important problems often require broader coalitions and higher-quality communication than are currently supported by the traditional models.

Deliberative practices can have a number of positive impacts on the quality of community action that practitioners can nurture. Perhaps the most important is that *deliberation can*

²⁷ For example, Everyday Democracy—formerly known as Study Circles—seems to primarily focus on sparking community action, whereas AmericaSpeaks focuses more on injecting citizen voices into institutional decision making.

²⁸ *Dialogue, Deliberation, and Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World*, forthcoming 2009 Vanderbilt University Press.



not only lead to more individual and community action on common problem, but also to a more collaborative and inclusive kind of individual and community action. Such action is critical to the health of a diverse democracy. Many community efforts are led by activists that focus on a particular perspective and are thus inherently limited in scope and audience. Deliberative practices that are supported by impartial mediators with a commitment to equality and inclusivity can often take a community farther.

Deliberative practice can also *help communities develop a sense of empowerment and possibility particularly distinct from the actions of government.* In 2006, David Mathews wrote that, “There are some things that only governments can and must do, but there are other things that only citizens outside government can do—change political culture, modify human behavior, transform conflicts.” He labeled this idea the “great eye-opener” of the past two decades of research on democracy completed by the Kettering Foundation.²⁹ The realization that community problems require more than a governmental response is a critical step in the development of a community’s problem-solving capability.

Deliberative practice can also *spark more traditional involvement beyond the usual suspects, helping support the development of citizens as engaged problem solvers.* Although large community-wide collaborative projects are certainly the best examples of deliberation sparking real change, even specific forums can spark positive action. Individuals that participate in forums may decide to get involved in any number of ways. As the number of individuals embracing this broader notion of citizen as problem solver, particularly citizen as collaborative problem solver, increases, the capacity of that community to address its problems also increases.

As detailed somewhat on Table 1, deliberative practitioners that choose to focus on improving community action must rely on a distinct set of skills and tactics. Practitioners

focused on this goal also will constantly need to deal with the heightened tension between serving as an impartial resource and as a catalyst for action. This tension is a productive one for our field, but one that certainly warrants more attention and critical thought. The line between deliberative practitioners and community organizers has blurred somewhat and, while that is not inherently problematic, practitioners should also realize that if they choose to focus above all on sparking action, they may find achieving the first- and third-order goals more difficult. I would therefore argue that we need deliberative practitioners that keep deliberation at the center of their work, and focus utmost on serving as impartial resources to support collaborative action across broad perspectives, not just on sparking specific community action.³⁰ This point reemphasizes the importance of viewing the first- and second-order goals through the lens of the third. Action is not the ultimate goal of deliberative practice; the ultimate goal is increasing the community’s capacity to solve problems. Individual projects and issues are means to that end. Deliberative practitioners may very well be community organizers in many ways, but they are community organizers with a particular long-term focus and a value set that prioritizes inclusion and equality.

Improving Institutional Decision Making

I now focus on how deliberative practice can improve institutional decision making and public participation efforts. The exciting news here is that more and more institutional decision makers, particularly at local levels, are coming to realize the importance of utilizing more truly deliberative processes in their work. Although it certainly still represents a minority opinion within public administration programs and city halls, and while often what is called public engagement by leaders amounts to empty gestures, the idea that citizens can serve as important resources for problem solving is certainly gaining currency.³¹ Institutional action

²⁹ David Mathews, “Community Politics: A Lens for Seeing the Whole Story of Kettering Research,” *Connections* (Winter 2006): 4.

³⁰ Perhaps one way to consider the difference between deliberative practitioners and community organizers is the coalition they hope to build. Community organizers seek to build coalitions primarily of the like-minded that are strong enough to pursue the specific change they seek. Deliberative practitioners, on the other hand, seek to achieve a coalition of the whole as much as possible and typically start much more upstream in the policy process. The public, therefore, is engaged in the process of defining the solution and developing alternatives rather than advocating for a particular pre-determined solution.

³¹ The work of public administration scholars such as Matt Leighninger, Archon Fung, James Creighton, John Nalbandian, and Lisa Bingham, as well as organizations such as the International Association of Public Participation, the Institute for Local Government, and the National League of Cities, clearly reveals that there is a movement within institutional structures that is realizing the poor quality of much public participation and are seeking new and more productive ways of interacting with the public. See also the recently released “Core Principles for Public Engagement” available at www.thataway.org/files/Core_Principles_of_Public_Engagement.pdf.



can be considered from a variety of scopes, both in terms of the level of government (city, county, school board, state, national, international) as well as the degree of institutionalization of deliberation (ranging from public participation processes controlled by government, deliberation sponsored by government but run by independent mediating institutions, or deliberation completed by outside organizations with a particular focus on informing institutional decision makers). A myriad of terms are also used here, including public participation, public consultation, civic engagement, collaborative governance, collaborative public management, etc. Overall, I focus generally on improving and expanding the use of deliberative practice connected in some degree to institutional decision-making processes.

Clearly, many books have already been written detailing—and deriding—the current situation with institutional decision making in the United States. Once again, I limit my critique to a set of bullets:

- The most common criticism expressed concerning institutional politics involves the dominance of either money or power in decision-making processes, often at the expense of the public good.
- We essentially now exist under a “perpetual campaign” dominated by media coverage that tends to focus on the strategy and game of politics rather than the collaborative problem-solving that is critical to a healthy democratic society.
- From a communication perspective, the two-party system has clear negative impacts on the quality of public discussion, essentially supporting a zero-sum “blame” game. The common goal of solving problems too often takes a back seat to short-term political victories.
- Campaign communication is often dominated by manipulative consumer marketing tactics that sell candidates and ideas like boxes of cereal and reinforce the reduction of citizens to consumers or spectators of the process.
- These various factors have contributed to historic lows in the public trust of government institutions at all levels.

- The quality of local public discussion is significantly constrained by the lack of public spaces for productive, diverse conversations. Most public discussion takes place either on Internet message boards, local newspapers, or meetings that are dominated by extreme voices.
- Most official forms of “public engagement” such as public hearings or public input sessions during official meetings are ill-designed to spark productive conversation, much less deliberation. The communication is often one-way and rarely do citizens work together with other citizens.
- When the public is involved in institutional decision making, it is often too late in the process. The public is invited to respond to decisions that have already been made or perhaps to express their opinion right before the decision is made. At that point, the role of the public is reduced to either complaining about or blessing the decision, an extremely limited scope of potential action.
- These frustrations go both ways, as public leaders, due to all the factors listed above, tend to have negative experiences with the “public.”

This list makes clear that deliberative practitioners are faced with a sobering task of reconstituting public engagement in the 21st century.

Despite the daunting list of problems, there is reason for optimism. As institutional practices become more deliberative, a number of positive impacts can occur that practitioners can cultivate. First, *institutional decisions made in concert with high-quality deliberative processes are likely to be more legitimate and sustainable*. When the public is more deeply involved in problem solving, they are more likely to take ownership of the solution and thus support, rather than work against, implementation. In addition, such decisions can rely on a broader base of support rather than a political coalition playing a zero-sum game focused primarily on garnering enough of a plurality to insure passage. This particular consequence of deliberation should be a primary selling point to offer institutional decision makers faced with serious problems but also significant opposition to any potential solutions. Deliberative processes can also *help institutional*



decision makers consider the potential of the public and thus better consider their role as convener and catalyst rather than primary problem solver. Just as events focused on community action can help communities realize the power they have outside of government, deliberative events focused on institutional decision making can help legislators and governments realize the power that exists beyond themselves and the important role they can play as conveners rather than advocates.³² Too often, problem-solving discussions focus too intensively on one particular policy solution—more often than not a government solution—and its pros and cons. In our poisonous political culture, criticism is always much easier than advocacy so often the individual solutions are torn down and the problem remains untreated. The deliberative perspective is particularly well suited to forcing consideration of a wide variety of solutions that include, but also range beyond, government actions, as well as the realization that all solutions have inherent tradeoffs and flaws but, in the end, some action is warranted. Exploration of these sorts of solutions is often necessary to address modern problems in a diverse democracy.

Finally, *deliberative efforts can also increase the ability for office holders to take on difficult issues.* The current political climate can be so poisonous that key controversial issues are often avoided. With the prevalence of NIMBY perspectives and the threat of legal action, governments are often reticent on tough local issues and, once again, the problems go untreated. With deliberative processes, however, institutional decision makers may be more apt to address issues that otherwise they would not. Serving as conveners, elected officials can choose issues based on their importance rather than their political potential.

As the deliberative democracy movement continues to expand, working with institutional decision makers to help

them better incorporate collaborative problem-solving techniques will certainly be a key aspect of the work of deliberative practitioners. Whereas the thought of impacting institutional decisions and making them more collaborative and deliberative likely represents the goal of many budding deliberative practitioners, deliberative work that officially connects to institutional actions bears a heavy burden and should not be attempted without clear understandings of the difficulties involved and the resources and experiences necessary to overcome significant hurdles.³³ Just as focusing on community action increases the challenge of impartiality, focusing on institutional action significantly increases the challenges of inclusion and diversity. Practitioners hosting officially sanctioned deliberative events, for example, must be cognizant of issues of power and the critiques that arise from radical democratic theorists.³⁴ Practitioners will also face the growing tension between embedding their practices and potentially losing some control or remaining on the outside but perhaps lacking in status or impact. In a related issue, the question of whether governments can serve as impartial mediating institutions or if they are inherently partisan is another issue our field must grapple with, particularly in light of the recent establishment of the White House Office of Public Engagement.

Improving Community Problem Solving

I now arrive at the point where I focus on what I contend should be the ultimate goal of deliberative practice: *improved community problem solving*.³⁵ In our political culture, few are actually focused on this goal. There are many activists that focus on individual issues, the workings of government, or educating and equipping citizens, but for democracies to be efficient, the need for passionate advocates of deliberative practice is clear. This is the void our field can and must fill.

³² For more on this point, see *Legislators at a Crossroads*, a joint publication by Kettering and the Policy Consensus Initiative, available at <http://www.policyconsensus.org/publications/reports/docs/Crossroads.pdf>

³³ Much more commentary on the challenges to embedding deliberative action in institutional politics is provided in the expanded version of this report, available online at <http://communicationstudies.colostate.edu/cpd/kettering%20goals%20and%20consequences%20final.pdf>

³⁴ For a review of and response to these criticisms, see Alison Kadlec and Will Friedman, “Deliberative Democracy and the Problem of Power,” *Journal of Public Deliberation* 3(2007): 1-26.

³⁵ Identifying the ideal term here is difficult. On one hand, the focus on “problem solving” can be seen as too reactive and negative and less amenable to processes that focus more on vision planning and appreciative inquiry. That being said, I have found the term “community problem solving” to work well in describing my work to people outside our field. It simply makes more inherent sense to them than other terms I have tried. It is more tangible and less theoretical than others such as calling for “deliberative democracy,” “democratic governance,” or “public making.” Following Dewey, I settled on the notion of community problem solving as the best option.



This section is based on the premise that, at its best and most effective, community problem solving is a democratic activity that involves the community on multiple levels, ranging from individual action to institutional action at the extremes, but also includes all points in between that involve groups, organizations, non-profits, businesses, etc. It is also deeply linked to the work of John Dewey and his focus on democracy as “a way of life” that requires particularly well-developed skills and habits connected to problem solving and communicating across differences.³⁶ The developing concepts of “democratic” or “collaborative” governance are also relevant here. Harry Boyte described the move from “government” to “governance” as a useful way to reframe democracy:

Governance intimates a paradigm shift in the meaning of democracy and civic agency—that is, who is to address public problems and promote the general welfare? The shift involves a move from citizens as simply voters, volunteers, and consumers to citizens as problem solvers and cocreators of public goods; from public leaders, such as public affairs professionals and politicians, as providers of services and solutions to partners, educators, and organizers of citizen action; and from democracy as elections to democratic society. Such a shift has the potential to address public problems that cannot be solved without governments, but that governments alone cannot solve, and to cultivate an appreciation for the commonwealth.³⁷

Deliberation must be considered a key tool along multiple points to help communities strive for the vision of deliberative democracy. From this perspective, institutional decision making is not the ultimate result of democratic practice.

Rather, the institution of government is simply one tool among many that communities may use to address the problems they face. Certainly it is a critical tool, perhaps even the most important, but nonetheless one of many in the community’s toolbox.

In many ways, the distinctions between both second-order goals and the third-order goal represent currently contested ground for our field. One tangible way to consider the difference is that the second-order goals are particularly issue-focused, whereas the third-order goal is focused more broadly on capacity building and overall community processes. Pushing further, however, in important ways, improving community problem solving, as well as the concepts of democratic or collaborative governance, transcend the distinction between community action and institutional decision making, making them less relevant. Once again, deliberative practitioners must have a dual focus. In our current political culture, the two second-order goals remain separated and relevant but part of the long-term goal for our field is to bring them together and erase the distinction. At one and the same time, therefore, practitioners must keep one foot in the current political world and work to improve both community action and institutional decision making by better incorporating deliberative principles, while at the same time placing their other foot into the newly developing world of the “next form of democracy.”³⁸ We must, in other words, be both pragmatic and visionary.

³⁶ Many of Dewey’s books could be cited here, but his *The Public and its Problems* (Athens: Swallow Press, 1927) has been particularly influential to my work. For an extended examination of Dewey’s connection to the field of deliberative democracy, see Alison Kadlec, *Dewey’s Critical Pragmatism* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

³⁷ Boyte, “Reframing Democracy: Governance, Civic Agency, and Politics.” *Public Administration Review* 65 (2005): 536. Related concepts include collaborative governance, used by the Weil Program on Collaborative Governance at Harvard University, as well as collaborative public management, used by Lisa Bingham and Rosemary O’Leary in their recent Big Ideas in *Collaborative Public Management* (M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2008).

³⁸ Matt Leighninger, *The Next Form of Democracy: How Expert Rule is Giving Way to Shared Governance and Why Politics Will Never Be the Same* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006).



Conclusion

To conclude this report, I would like to step back and once again consider the interactions between the various goals. Returning to my preliminary arguments, I emphasize the need for deliberative practitioners to somehow keep one eye on the long-term importance of developing community capacity while at the same time designing and performing individual projects of high quality.³⁹ These goals are joined together by the simple fact that, if our individual events are not of high quality, then they will not serve the broader ends. Projects should be chosen based on their potential impact on the longer-term goal, but, once chosen, practitioners should zero in on particular goals for the immediate project. Practitioners must ask themselves, “What do we hope to accomplish with this project?” and then keep those goals centered through the planning and execution of the project. Deliberation for the sake of deliberation, while likely enjoyable and perhaps moderately impactful, will not be enough to carry this movement forward.

Perhaps this report is best summarized by considering two fears I have for our field. One fear is that, in the rush to make an impact, we will skip over the crucial initial goals that form the foundation for later goals or we will focus too intently on action and solving problems and forget that we need to pay particular attention to the manner in which we spark action and solve problems. We cannot just become community organizers and social movement activists that also like to talk about impartiality and process. In addition, the nature of deliberative work is that it requires an incredibly diverse set of skills and competencies and trying to do too much too early will be counterproductive. We must avoid taking on projects to spark community action or impact institutional decision making when neither the practitioners nor the community have the capacity to support such projects (due perhaps to the paucity of

democratic skills and attitudes and broad misconceptions about the issue). Events that focus in on particular goals and accomplish them well, even if they are less ambitious, will be much more impactful on our communities than events that try to do it all and fall short, or attempt to do nothing in particular other than host a conversation.

My second fear, however, is that we get so caught up in the daily grind of running individual events we do not make the broader impact we need to make to build civic capacity and facilitate change in our political culture. The old adage of giving someone a fish versus teaching him or her how to fish seems apt.⁴⁰ Seeking the perfect balance between these short-term and long-term goals, and working within the current culture while at the same time working to change it, will be critical to the further development of our field. Tied to these tensions will be working through our relationships with governments, and the question of whether governments can be the primary drivers of this work, or if impartial mediating institutions will need to develop and remain generally independent of governments.⁴¹

In closing, I return to the excitement that should be felt by those that have been involved in this work. Scholars in a variety of fields are now focused on understanding and furthering the scope and impact of public deliberation efforts and new books are seemingly published daily. Depending on the primary field of study, the terms or labels may change but, nonetheless, the underlying focus is similar. And while the academic work will be important in furthering the movement, much of the true work of deliberative democracy is completed by practitioners on the ground, designing, convening, facilitating, and reporting on deliberative projects. The better we do our work, and the more we achieve the goals we target, the stronger our democracy will be and the closer we will come to crafting a more perfect union.

³⁹ David Mathews discusses this dual function as working both on the problems in democracy as well as the problems of democracy. Similarly, Kadlec and Friedman discuss “two interrelated dimensions of democratic change”: the “ongoing maturation of civic capacity through the development of particular habits of inquiry and communication” (which, following Dewey, they term “social intelligence”) and “the more episodic but equally important realm of concrete public problem solving.” See Mathews “Afterwards: Ships Passing in the Night?” in *A Different Kind of Politics: Readings on the Role of Higher Education in Democracy*, ed. Derek W.M. Barker and David W. Brown (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2009), 101; and Kadlec and Friedman, “Deliberative Democracy and the Problem of Power,” 15.

⁴⁰ It is also apt when considering the roles of the national and local organizations. When national organizations sponsor local deliberative projects, the degree to which they develop the capacity for that community to support its own future projects will be important to consider.

⁴¹ Whether centers and institutes at public universities would be considered part of the government or independent is perhaps another important question to explore.



Table 1: Suggestions for Deliberative Practitioners

	Before Forums	During Forums	Reporting Forums	Beyond Specific Forums	Relevant Literature
Issue Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberative research and analysis of issues • Include diverse public in naming and framing • Develop diverse audiences • Choose appropriate topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well framed issue book • Diverse audience • Good moderating to allow for different perspectives and the identification of key tensions, misconceptions, and areas of common ground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expose book and results of discussion to broader audiences • Host follow-up forums on key aspects • Track down answers to key fact questions • Get responses from key stakeholders • Focus on common ground, tensions, and misconceptions in report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commentary on public issues, focusing on key tensions and common ground • Host issue-framing workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberative policy analysis • Public policy theory • Learning theory • Argumentation • Framing and agenda setting
Improved Democratic Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve the public as early as possible • Focus on audiences that typically are not heard (beyond usual suspects) • Build trust between participants as necessary (dialogue before deliberation) • Be clear on expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain/promote deliberation in introduction and background information • Ground rules • React well to conflict and imbalances • Identify common ground and key tensions • Reflections focused on views of others • Highlight positives from forum in report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expose alternatives to a broader audience • Follow up to ensure impact and avoid chilling effect • Live up to expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Editorials • Annual reports • Promote positive deliberative attitudes • Critique negative political tactics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict resolution • Dialogue theory • Intercultural communication • Intergroup dynamics
Improved Democratic Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve moderating, notetaking, and reporting skills • Facilitator workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground rules, clear explanation of process • Modeling by moderators • Praise proper use of skills • Take advantage of teaching moments • Reflections focused on process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative concerning the process • Highlight quotes from participants concerning the process/skills • Self-reflection and improvement of convener/moderating/reporting skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host workshops • Connect to civic education (partnerships with school districts and college campuses) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic education • Communication • Listening • Intercultural communication • Critical thinking • Facilitation
Improved Community Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve key community actors and organizations • Meet with emotionally attached groups in particular • Include groups in development of local information as well as planning • Highlight local action in prepared material • Choose appropriate topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate connection to action throughout • Inform participants of local connections to issue • Reflections focused on action steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report on action steps in particular • Expose results to key community actors • Potentially help initiate and sustain action • Follow-up reporting (a year later) • Follow-up events focused on action steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop strong community network • Serve as boundary spanner • Identify and train individuals working within key organizations and institutions to serve as deliberative leaders • Promote examples of deliberative action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community networking and development • Social movement theory • Social change • Sociology • Stakeholder negotiation processes
Improved Institutional Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start upstream to allow public in • Topic choice is critical (ripeness) • Connect to local decision makers in design of event • Plan multiple forums • Utilize decision makers as conveners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate design elements to provide good information to decision makers (such as dot voting of comments) • Ask focused questions in reflection for reporting to decision makers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure decision makers are exposed to and consider information • Follow-up report (one year later) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster the concept of legislators as conveners • Consult with institutions on public participation efforts • Cultivate relationships with decision makers and community liaisons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public administration • Democratic governance • Public participation • Political science
Improved Community Problem Solving	All of the above	All of the above	All of the above	All of the above	All of the above

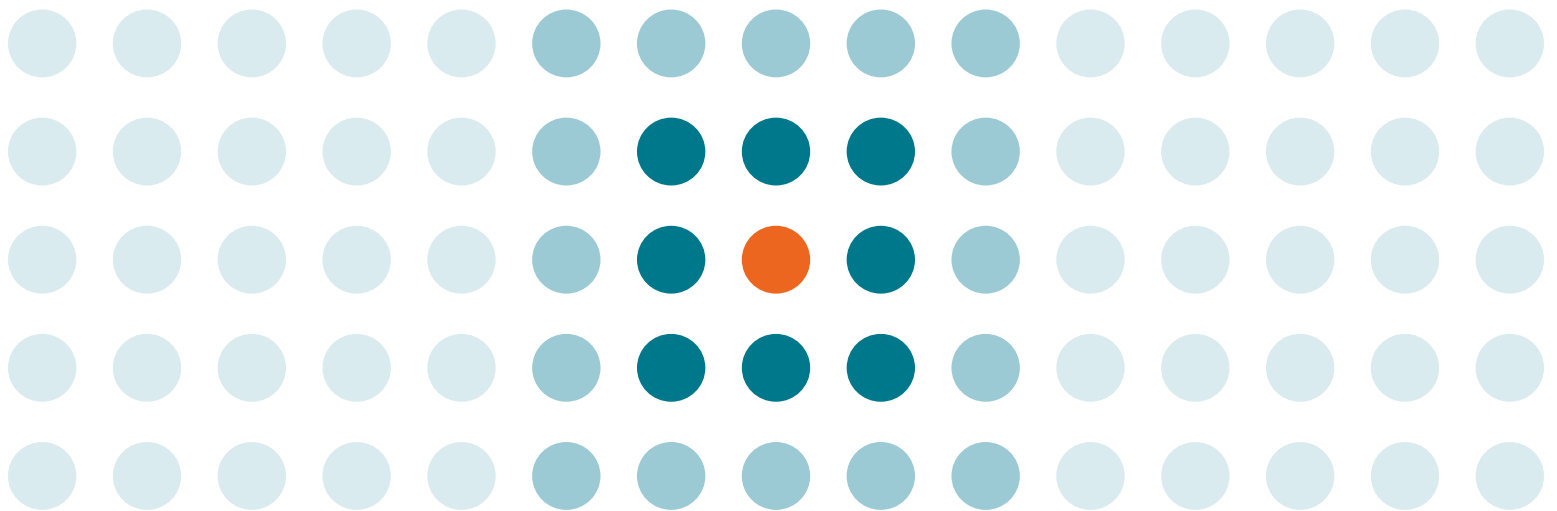


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