

The Goals & Consequences of Deliberation:
Key Findings and Challenges for Deliberative Practitioners

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by

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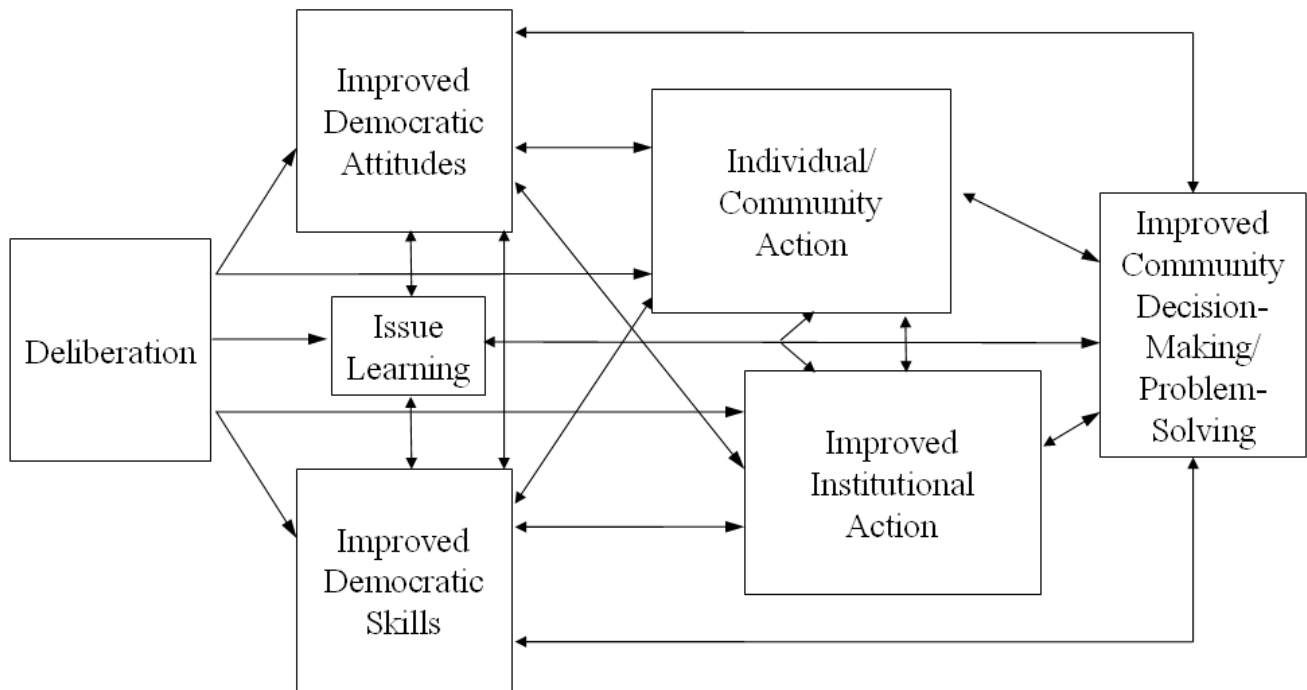
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In the spring of 2006, Martín Carcasson attended a National Issues Forums (NIF) Public Policy Workshop in Missouri as part of the process he was completing to establish the Center for Public Deliberation (CPD) at Colorado State University, which would open that fall.¹ During the three-day workshop taught by NIF veterans Sandy Hodge and Patty Dineen, Martín started to ask himself a question. He imagined running a forum in his community and having one of the participants ask, “Why are we doing this?” As academics tend to do, Martín was asking himself the “so what?” question. He was asking not because he couldn’t see the value of the forums, but rather because he saw many different values. Throughout the rest of the workshop, Martín wrote different answers to this question on the margins of the workshop handouts. The good news for those of us that do this work is that there are several good answers to that question. This report expands on the notes originally jotted down during that workshop and presents an overall framework for deliberative practitioners to not only answer that question, but to better plan, execute, and follow up on their efforts with specific goals in mind and thus hopefully make it more likely that our somewhat idealistic answers to such questions are realized.

The research presented in this report is also a response to a question that was posed by the Kettering Foundation to a gathering of scholars and practitioners in April 2007: “What is the nature of the relationship between deliberative forums and community politics?” Building on Martín’s initial answers, we explore the research on deliberation focused on potential positive impacts of deliberation, as well as the challenges to achieving those consequences. That research was supplemented by the personal experiences, reflections, and, above all, lessons learned during the first two years of projects completed by CPD.²

As a result of the literature review, a flowchart comprised of six primary positive consequences of deliberation was developed: *issue learning, the improvement of democratic attitudes, the improvement of democratic skills, individual/community action, improved institutional action, and improved community decision making/problem solving* (see Figure 1). Connecting to the initial research question posed by Kettering—what is the nature of the relationship between deliberative forums and community politics?—we utilize the term *community decision making/problem solving* as a substitute for *community politics*. We believe *politics* is simply a term with a predominately negative, or at least narrow, connotation for many that is focused on institutional politics, campaigns, and parties. “Community decision making/problem solving,” on the other hand, provides for a broader conception that will more easily connect with developing notions of democratic governance that will be discussed within this report. As shown on Figure 1, the five initial consequences of deliberation essentially lead to community decision making/problem solving, which, we argue, serves as the ultimate ends of this work.

Figure 1: The Goals and Consequences of Deliberative Activities



One key purpose of this research project is to help deliberative practitioners, who serve as our primary audience, to better conceptualize their overall mission and achieve these positive various consequences. In other words, the six primary positive *consequences* of deliberation can also be conceptualized as the six primary *goals* of deliberative action for practitioners. A key argument of this report is that goals are much more likely to be met if targeted early and planning and follow-up is focused on particular goals. In this report we walk through each of the six goals in some detail, examining: (a) the current situation related to each goal, (b) the impact deliberation can make on it, (c) the key challenges to achieving those positive impacts, and (d) some practical suggestions for deliberative practitioners concerning each. In the conclusion, we highlight four primary key overall points for deliberative practitioners based on the analysis.

Before we move on to our analysis, three preliminary points are necessary. First, a sneak peek at some of our primary conclusions is necessary in order to provide the overall view of the analysis and the value of the goals and consequences flowchart. One of the conclusions we will discuss in detail in the conclusion examines the notion that improved community decision making/problem solving serves well as the ultimate goal of deliberative practice. At CPD, the catch phrase printed on the front of our pamphlet reads, “Dedicated to enhanced public communication and improved community problem solving.” That is our overriding mission. That being said, we realize that many of our various activities and special events

likely do not *directly* impact that mission. Our hope is, of course, that they all indirectly connect to that mission in a number of ways, which is essentially what the flowchart depicts. Inside our pamphlet, the three primary goals of CPD are listed: improve civic culture, expand collaborative decision making, and improve civic pedagogy. The three goals can be seen as three interconnected pathways to the broader end of improved community problem solving. To connect these goals to Figure 1, improving civic culture and civic pedagogy would be tied to issue learning and developing democratic attitudes and skills, while expanding collaborative decision making, would include individual, community, and institutional action. The ultimate goal is to improve community decision making/problem solving, but the other five goals are nonetheless valuable on their own. The six goals, in other words, should be considered both *systematically* and *individually*. One of the overall key points of this report is that deliberative practitioners need to focus on specific goals for their projects from start to finish, and different goals likely require different strategies in important ways. Deliberation has multiple impacts, but attempts to do too much—to target all six goals at once—will likely result in disappointing results. The final three goals also require significant investment, involve considerable challenges, and are difficult to achieve in a community without the social capital that develops as the result of the first three goals. Therefore, while the recent increased focus on tying deliberation to action and connecting deliberation to institutional decision making are vital steps forward in this movement, we should not forget the importance of the initial steps of the flowchart, and that not every event or project completed by deliberative practitioners needs to be justified in terms of “action” and “embeddedness.” As Peter Levine, Archon Fung, and John Gastil—three heavyweights in this field—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.”³ At CPD, as potential projects arise, our first task is to step back and ask the “so what?” question. Considering all the various aspects of the project, we decide what the overall goals for that project will be, and those goals are considered throughout the stages of development and follow-up.

A second preliminary point simply gives credit to some of the major precursors to the ideas laid out in this report. This field is well known for its ideas having been developed through extensive sharing of thoughts, and the ideas here are certainly no exception. Martín’s initial thoughts from his training workshop were first sharpened by several exchanges with Michael Briand, whose book *Practical Politics* has been influential in his thinking. John Gastil’s work has also been very important.⁴ We were also intrigued by the “Dialogue and Deliberation Streams” document produced by the National Coalition of Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD).⁵ That document works to organize deliberative work into four broad categories: exploration, conflict transformation, decision making, and collaboration. One of the main tenants of NCDD is that there exists a wide variety of tools for deliberative practice, and a key to success is understanding what tool would work best in particular situations (or to achieve particular goals). One

mistake deliberative practitioners surely can make is to have one tool, and assume it would fit all situations. As has been often said, “if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” While the streams of engagement helped us expand our thinking, we felt it was too focused on specific individual situations. It is a useful tool to think through how to plan a specific deliberative project, but we hoped to develop something broader. We wanted to develop a tool that helped deliberative practitioners or organizations conceptualize a long-term strategy concerning their place and impact on their community. In a sense, while individual projects are critical, they are merely means to the broader end (improved community decision making/problem solving). Our purpose also connects more clearly with Kettering’s goal of identifying what it takes to make democracy work as it should, not just address individual community issues.

Another key influence on these ideas was the rationales for deliberation identified in “Deliberative Democracy: A Survey of the Field,” authored by Lars Torres for *AmericaSpeaks*. He identified six rationales: instrumental, substantive, civics, empowerment, social capital, and normative.⁶ These rationales also work very well to help deliberative practitioners answer the “so what?” question—and the six rationales are all incorporated into the six goals in various ways—but we hoped to connect the various goals together and consider them within an interrelated system rather than as separate rationales.

Two final key influences were workshops Martín attended with the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) in September 2007 and the Institute for Participatory Management and Planning (IPMP) in April 2008.⁷ Both trainings were primarily focused on providing public participation skills to institutional actors, essentially helping them improve the manner in which they work with the public. As a result, Martín learned important lessons about connecting deliberative work to community action or institutional decision making. Insights from both trainings will be examined throughout this report. One of the key conclusions Martín drew from his week with IAP2 trainer Doug Sarno, for example, was that practitioners must focus on what goes on before and after deliberative events as much or even more than the event itself. This insight corresponded with the clearest lesson we have learned in our two years with CPD and has had a significant impact on the training we provide and the manner in which we plan and execute our projects. As a result, this report will continually consider the “before” and “after” actions, as well as the “during,” when discussing the impact of deliberative forums.

Our third preliminary point involves the concept of community. Most of our CPD events are focused on Fort Collins, and that is primarily what we consider to be our community. We consider ourselves the local advocate for deliberative democracy, and we are open to any and all actions that work toward our mission of improving our local democracy. The focus on this local community is also a critical part of our philosophy. We feel that “politics” is too often imagined nationally, particularly by students. When politics is primarily envisioned as the work of the U.S. presidents and Congress, the connection of

individual citizens and politics is understandably weak. Critical concepts to active citizenship like efficacy—the belief you can make a difference—are too often absent when politics are national. Therefore, at CPD we work to shift the focus on politics, as least in part, from national to local. When politics are local, individuals are more likely to make an impact, and thus their role is transformed from merely spectators or critics, to actors in multiple contexts. An additional advantage of the local focus is that the institutional decision makers are often much more amendable to deliberative practice. Local leaders are often, at least in our experience, more likely to be interested in working with the public in innovative ways than national or even state politicians may not. This all being said, certainly the hope of the deliberative democracy movement is that our scope ranges beyond individual communities. The notion of “community” should in other words be considered flexible. For CPD, as least currently, our primary community is Fort Collins, thus we focus on improving Fort Collins’ decision making and problem solving. At times, however, we imagine our community more broadly, to include northern Colorado or the state as a whole. We hope as the national and international network of deliberative organizations continue to expand (and collaborate), the notion of community will also expand.

Examining the Goals and Consequences of Deliberative Practice

In this first part of the report, the bulk of our analysis, we introduce and examine the six goals and consequences of deliberative forums. For each of the six goals and consequences, we discuss the current situation related to each goal, the impact deliberation can make on it, the key challenges to achieving those positive impacts, and some practical suggestions for deliberative practitioners concerning each. By the “current situation” we mean the current state of affairs with that aspect of the flowchart. What, for example, is the current quality of public knowledge about issues, or the current condition of democratic attitudes and skills? In important ways, the deliberative perspective is a reaction to the current state of politics and can essentially be considered an “antidote” to some of the more damaging effects of politics. This is critical, because *the value of deliberation must be weighed not just in terms of the positive habits it may create, but also in terms of the negative habits it is able to counteract*. The third subsection for each goal will review what we see as the key challenges to deliberative practitioners realizing the impacts identified in the second section. Here the excitement of the potential positive goals of deliberation meets the realities of the barriers and required hard work to make them happen in our communities. In the final subsection for each goal, we highlight some of the specific suggested actions for deliberative practitioners, building on the information from the first three subsections. All these suggestions are compiled in Tables 1 and 2, organized by actions to consider before, during, and after specific events, as well as actions suggested beyond the framework of a specific project.

Table 1: Summary of Goals and Consequences Analysis

	Current Situation	Potential Positive Impacts of Deliberation	Challenges
Issue Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert focused • Educational focus on knowledge over wisdom • Poor quality of political communication (strategy > substance) • Politicization of research • Negative media impact • Impact of cynical academics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved policy information from broad sources • Diffusion of polarization • Creation of new “public knowledge” and innovative responses • Increased focus on tough choices and common ground • Improvement of opinion quality and development of public judgment • Added local learning • Increased ownership of problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty of overcoming poor quality of information (time requirement for deliberative practitioners) • Difficulty of developing “fair” information • Difficulty of drawing a broad, diverse audience
Democratic attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apathy (disengaged and distracted) • Cynicism • Distrust of government • Blaming of “them” • Powerlessness/lack of efficacy • Anger and polarization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowerment/ownership/increased efficacy • Decreased self-interest/increased public-spiritedness • Better opinion of opposing views • Better opinion of government • Increased social capital/trust • Broader notion of citizenship and democratic virtue • Work on a common goal increases liking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple layers to address • Most active are typically not deliberative • Deliberation may lead to information overload • Potential for chilling effect and backfire • Whether deliberative attitudes are ideologically partisan • Difficulty of drawing a broad, diverse audience
Democratic skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor listening skills • Educational focus on specialized knowledge and research rather than practical wisdom • Partisan skills favored • Inability to speak to those that differ • Limited citizenship skills (spectator, consumer, and protester skills) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased listening skills • Ability to speak dialogically • Improved ability to analyze issues • Increased sense of judgment/ability to navigate pluralism and conflict • Increased knowledge of local decision-making processes • Increase in skills within deliberative organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of public places • Human nature • The protest mentality • The advantages of partisan skills • The difficulty of teaching and testing judgment and wisdom
Individual/community action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apathetic or disengaged majority • Dominance by elite and partisan voices • Disconnected community efforts • Protest mentality • Exaggerated conflict between opposing sides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More inclusive (sees everyone as a resource) • Breaks down fiefdoms; sparks collaboration and interconnectedness • Broaden notion of action (beyond individual vs. government dichotomy) • Greater ownership of problems • Developing additional practitioners • Success breeds success (working on common goals brings people together, creates social capital, and increases efficacy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can lead to partisan action • Threat of strategic cooptation/hijacking of forums • Difficulty of transition from impartial process facilitation to action facilitation • Can take responsibility away from decision makers • General focus on policy as only legitimate action • Difficulty of drawing a broad, diverse audience • Requires increased capacity • Favors the vocal and articulate
Institutional action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominance of money • Dominance of party • Dominance of strategy/game over policy • Distrust by public • Zero-sum nature • Institutional decision makers dislike of public participation • Public dislike of government meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring public and government together • Can provide useful information decision makers cannot receive otherwise • Allows decision makers to take on difficult issues • Increased legitimacy • Less obstacles to implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chilling effect when public voice is not impactful • Potential for venue shopping • Difficulty of drawing a broad, diverse audience • Would require multiple forums per issue
Community decision making/problem solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limits of aggregation/majority rule • Limits of partisan/interest group politics • Limits of consumerist politics • Limits of administrative decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses difficult issues • Deals with tough choices • Involves a broader range of people • Sparks innovation, accountability, and collaboration • Leads to other positive impacts for the health of democracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cultural challenge • The institutional challenge • The diversity challenge • The impartiality challenge

Table 2: Suggestions for Deliberative Practitioners

	Before Forums	During Forums	Reporting/Follow-Up	Beyond Specific Forums	Relevant Literature
Issue Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perhaps most critical stage to issue learning • Deliberative analysis of issue • Including public in naming and framing • Develop diverse audience 	<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 • Report on common ground, tensions, and exposed misconceptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commentary on public issues, focusing on key tensions and common ground • Issue-framing workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberative policy analysis • Public policy theory • Learning theory
Democratic attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving public as early as possible can help • Focus on audiences that typically are not heard • Build trust between participants as necessary (dialogue before deliberation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeals in intro/ background information • Ground rules • React well to conflict (tap into conflict management literature) and imbalances • Find common ground • Identify key tensions • Reflections focused on view of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight positives from forum • Expose alternative 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 deliberative attitudes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict resolution literature • Dialogue theory • Intercultural communication • Intergroup dynamics
Democratic skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve moderating, note taking, and reporting skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground rules, explanation of process • Modeling by moderators • Praise use of skills • Take advantage of teaching moments • Reflections on process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative on the process • Participants' quotes on the process/skills • Self-reflection and improvement of convenor/moderating/ reporting skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Connections to civic education (partnerships with school districts and college campuses) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic education • Communication • Active listening
Individual/ community action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve key community actors/orgs • Meet with emotionally attached groups in particular • Include groups in development of local information as well as planning • Highlight local action in prepared material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate connection to action • Inform participants of local connections to issue • Reflections focused on action steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report on action steps • Expose results to key community actors • Potentially help initiate and sustain action • Follow-up reporting (one year later) • Follow-up events focused on action steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop strong community network • Be a boundary spanner • Encourage collaborative orgs • Identify and train individuals in key orgs 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 • Public campaigns • Stakeholder negotiation processes
Institutional action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start upstream to allow public in • Topic choice is critical • Consult decision makers in designing event • Plan multiple forums • Utilizing decision makers as convenors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate design elements with the end in mind 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"> • Research democratic governance literature • Foster the concept of legislators as convenors • 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
Community decision making/ problem solving	All of the above	All of the above	All of the above	All of the above	All of the above

1.0 Issue Learning

One of the age-old questions about democracy has always been whether citizens have the capacity to understand the complexity of the issues that confront them or whether only experts or politicians—whose jobs in some sense are to acquire, develop, and utilize that knowledge—could be expected to do so. Strong advocates of democracy, deliberative or otherwise, generally fall under the category of those that optimistically believe people can develop enough understanding of issues to be a significant part of the decisions that impact them. Additionally, these advocates believe that having “ordinary citizens” involved in community decision making is critical to democratic legitimacy in general. In sum, a critical aspect of any high-quality community decision-making/problem-solving process must involve a broad range of community members with adequate understanding of the issues.

1.1 The Current Situation Concerning Issue Learning

Many commentators have discussed the current state of public knowledge concerning issues in the United States. This brief review will simply touch on some of the, well, “lowlights.” The situation can be explored from many different directions. One of the most often discussed is the overarching focus on experts and expert knowledge to solve problems. This focus can be seen in policymaking, in K-12 systems, and in higher education. For too many people, there is an assumption that our problems could be solved with more research and more information. Surely, good information is critical, and experts are needed to help address problems, but many of the problems that most trouble us range far beyond the capabilities of expert study. The most difficult issues that communities face involve making tough choices among competing values that experts can perhaps clarify, but cannot provide conclusions. As Michael Briand has written:

Because the things human beings consider good are various and qualitatively distinct; because conflicts between such good things have no absolute, predetermined solution; and because to know what is best requires considering the views of others, we need to engage each other in the sort of exchange that will enable us to form sound personal and public judgments. This process of coming to a public judgment and choosing—together, as a public—is the essence of democratic politics.⁸

Daniel Yankelovich’s excellent insights on the limits of expert knowledge and the need for public judgment should be considered here as well. In his classic *Coming to Public Judgment*, for example, Yankelovich argued that the importance of information in shaping responsible public opinion was vastly exaggerated and that the general public’s responsibility for governance was being usurped by “creeping expertism.”⁹ This expertism not only tends to focus attention away from the tough choices and create a

chasm between the public and the elite, it also systemically removes many of the brightest citizens from the democratic pool by placing all their focus on researching specialized niches. As J. Michael Halloran has argued, “the drive of modern science toward specialization and exactness has tended to remove the scientist from the arena of practical decisions on contingent human affairs, first because such matters are outside his [or her] specialty, and second because they are by definition inexact.”¹⁰ As higher education has splintered into silos each with their own jargon and publishing outlets, the capacity of our public institutions to serve their communities has suffered (though there has been an encouraging “interdisciplinary” push back on this issue lately).¹¹

This focus on expert knowledge also directly—and negatively, we would argue—impacts our education systems. As a whole, the system, including both K-12 and higher education, is too focused on increasing the knowledge level of students, and gives short shrift to their decision-making or judgment capabilities. This point will be reexamined when we discuss the current situation with democratic skills (section 3.1), but is also worth mentioning here. Scholars, such as Nicolas Maxwell and Sharon Crowley, have spoken eloquently about the distinction between knowledge and wisdom, and the increasing tendency for Western culture to focus on the former at the expense of the latter.¹² So in some ways, the public is more “educated” and “knowledgeable” than ever, but may be less capable of self-governance. Paulo Freire has made similar claims, arguing that the current “banking” model of education, in which knowledgeable teachers pass on knowledge to passive students—which, incidentally, is much easier to evaluate—must be replaced with a “problem-posing” model of education. Overall, the point is that the level of knowledge concerning public issues derived from our education system is often theoretical and/or fact based, not pragmatic and applied.

A second major area of concern with the current state of understanding of public issues involves the impact of our political system. Barnett Pearce and Stephen Littlejohn have argued that “political argument in the United States often models the worst rhetoric. What seems to secure votes and what enlightens the citizenry appear to be two different things.”¹³ Briand adds that “Political discourse at the national level too often amounts to little more than impugning the motives of unbelievers, on the one hand, and preaching to the converted, on the other.”¹⁴ Many other commentators would echo these same sentiments. For a variety of reasons—ranging from the zero-sum nature of a two-party system, the reliance on sound bites and other consumer-marketing techniques during campaigns, and simply the fact that image has proven more important than substance in American politics—our political system tends to lead to, perhaps even rely on, low-quality issue learning. To make matters worse, public opinion polling, which at its best captures this low quality of opinion, has now become a primary tool for legislators to gauge “the public voice.”¹⁵

These first two areas of concern have combined in some ways due to the increasing impact of “think tanks” and the subsequent politicization of research. Whereas many scientists and policy analysts still at least strive for objectivity—a notion which has its own problems—many now work for progressive or conservative think tanks in which any claim toward objectivity is questionable.¹⁶ The methods may remain neutral, but the purpose of the research is essentially to find evidence for preconceived claims. The most difficult issues are so complicated that data can often be found, particularly if framed well, to support many different claims. Policymakers and the public are then fed this “expert” information—often without clear understanding of the ideological position of its source. The legitimacy of expert information, in other words, has in some ways been compromised. In this context, information becomes ammunition, and all sides have their own ammunition in the fray, and in the end, those people focused on moving forward and solving problems, rather than fighting for a particular perspective, simply throw up their hands.

A third major area of concern involves the media, which often also works in conjunction with the expert and political cultures to cause a poor quality of issue understanding. Once again, the arguments are well known.¹⁷ The media focuses on conflict rather than compromise; on the game, strategy, and image of politics rather than solving problems; on popular culture, sensationalism, and “infotainment” rather than community, and so on. The Internet and the “post-broadcast” state of the media makes it easier for individuals to receive information from sources that are predisposed to their perspective, thus increasing the likelihood of polarization and the related false caricatures of opposing perspectives. Many also receive their political news primarily from national sources—the broadcast channels, CNN, FOX News, MSNBC, the *Daily Show*—furthering the disconnect to their local communities. In sum, the media has little incentive to provide high-quality policy information, and a myriad of incentives to provide content that tends to harm the quality of public opinion.

A fourth issue, somewhat a result of the second and third, involves the current power of interest and protest groups, and in particular, the tactics they rely upon. Such institutions rely on professional persuaders who only have one goal—to win people over to their perspective in order to influence policy. Some may be focused on solving problems, but many are seemingly intent on marketing particular solutions. The tactics they rely on often lead to misinformation and polarization as well. As John Gastil has argued, “The higher the stakes, the more companies invest in your mis-education. Sure, some advertising might really provide useful input into your deliberative process, but more often, the goal is to shift your preferences and build your appetite through guile.”¹⁸ In addition, protestors may gain important aspects of their identity from being uncompromising warriors for their cause, and thus utilize tactics that demonize their opponents and strongly misrepresent their views. Much like the natural incentives of our partisan political system, the inherent incentives of interest group and protest politics lead to

communication tactics that are directly opposite of the type of communication that would help communities come together to solve problems.

A final problem in some ways works from the opposite perspective of the first, and particularly impacts higher education. For many academics, a focus on postmodernism and the questioning of science and the rationality it entails also has a particular impact on the quality of public learning on issues. Similar to what happens with scientists, far too many of our brightest minds have seemingly checked out of democracy due to their research programs. But rather than checking out due to a specific disciplinary focus, many academics, particularly on the political left, have simply become too focused on a rather cynical, and too often highly theoretical or dense, critique of modern society. At its extreme, cynical postmodernism rejects the notion of the common values as well as the “great narratives” that can bring people together. It supports an overall focus on individualism and freedom above all other values. In many instances these critiques may very well be useful—the “*deconstruction*” of “hegemony” certainly has its merits¹⁹—but they generally offer too little in terms of *reconstruction*. The learning that results from this perspective can contribute to the one-sided nature of the public’s views on most key issues, and likely leads to more cynicism and apathy. As a result, students of these academics are often not given the tools they need to face the tough choices inherent to democracy. The combination of the scientific focus on objective data and avoidance of values, and the cynical postmodernist dismissal of common values and rationality is that too few academics or experts remain in the critical middle ground, struggling with the actual choices democracy requires.

The combined result of all these factors—the expert culture, the state of politics, the impact of the media, the tactics of interest group and protest politics, and academia’s focus on postmodern critique—is that the citizens are not prepared to discuss the issues that face their communities. As Kevin Mattson has written, “Much of the ‘information’ citizens have to prepare them for deliberation is close to useless.”²⁰ All these factors also contribute to a polarization that leads to an inability for citizens to work together. Indeed, many of these factors tend to exacerbate the natural human impulse to see things simply. Humans like to avoid tough questions, and we are wired to be selective listeners and readers, seeking out information that confirms our perspectives and avoiding or quickly dismissing perspectives that challenge us.²¹ Unfortunately, the tactics used by the media, politicians, interest groups, protestors, and many academics feeds rather than counters this impulse. As a result, differences of opinion become greatly exaggerated and poisonous. Once opposing perspectives are polarized, that polarization is self-reinforcing and creates a cycle of conflict. Opponents interpret any action by their adversaries through the lens of negative motives, pushing them farther apart. In the end, the current state of public awareness and true understanding of public issues is too often woefully inadequate.

1.2 The Potential Positive Impact of Deliberation on Issue Learning

Certainly the arguments provided in the previous section establish quite a task for those of us that believe in the viability of democracy and the importance of citizen involvement in public issues. Deliberative practitioners, however, are eager to take on the challenge. Just as the poor current state of the public's understanding of issues is the result of multiple interrelated factors, the impact of high-quality deliberation works at multiple levels as well.

The most basic potential positive impact of deliberation is simply *increased awareness and information concerning key public issues from multiple perspectives*. The various basic aspects of a deliberative forums—and this report assumes readers are familiar with the National Issues Forums style of deliberation²²—all tend to work to provide participants with an improved opinion concerning the issue at hand. Perhaps most important, deliberative forums typically rely on background information that was purposely developed to fairly provide multiple perspectives on the issue. The naming and framing of issues are deliberately chosen to improve the conversation and get participants away from typical, polarized tracks. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized considering the current state of political communication. *Where can citizens go now to get impartial perspectives on key issues?* Political information from politicians, interest groups, and protestors has always been suspect, but now more and more political information from academics and the media is similarly suspect. The authors of deliberative issue books, backgrounders, and discussion guides are able to avoid the negative incentives that exist within the other institutions. As deliberative practitioners, we hope to develop reputations in our communities that we provide high-quality, unbiased information. In order to build that reputation, we need to do the hard work that results in information that people feel is fair.

Beyond the basics of deliberation helping to improve the quality of people's opinion simply by exposing them to information that is framed to improve public discourse rather than for persuasive effect, several other aspects of the processes used during deliberative forums lead to issue learning. These include, but are not limited to, the ground rules (which, in particular, focus on the need to listen to opposing perspectives), dedicated time to examine the appreciations and concerns of each approach (which require engagement of different views), and moderation by impartial facilitators (who focus on helping people understand each other and consider the consequences of their opinions). As a result of these processes, participants are exposed to several different levels of tactics designed to improve their understanding on the issue. In particular, many of these tactics work against the polarization that was highlighted in the previous section. Again, whereas the impact of political communication from most other sources tends to exacerbate the problems of egoism and polarization, deliberative forums work to defuse it. The impact on polarization is particularly powerful when opposing views are confronted face to face. The polarization that was fed by false assumptions and bias can often quickly be exposed.

Differences still may certainly remain, but one of the key positive impacts of deliberation is its ability to help focus conflict. *Deliberation can help groups get past the layers of bad assumptions built up by poor communication and focus in on the actual differences between them.* Both steps—narrowing the conflict and then providing the tools to address the conflict—are critical. As Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson wrote in their *Democracy and Disagreement*: “We believe that a deliberative perspective can help resolve some moral disagreements in democratic politics, but we suspect that its greater contribution can be to help citizens treat one another with mutual respect as they deal with the disagreements that invariably remain.”²³ As has been mentioned and observed often by deliberative practitioners, deliberation may not change people’s own opinions that often, but it does often change people’s opinions about opposing points of view. This sort of learning is critical to the development of improved democratic attitudes (section 2).

Deliberation also leads to a particular form of issue learning that is often not nurtured otherwise.

At its best, *deliberation helps participants focus on the tough choices and trade-offs inherent to public decisions*, as well as the common ground that exists across diverse perspectives. Many of the facilitation tactics in deliberation work to help participants identify the underlying values to their perspectives, and how those values interact with those of others.

This is another example of deliberation working in an opposite manner than most political communication. Campaign politics often work to hide the tough choices.

Politicians identify themselves as for “good education,” “lower taxes,” and the “working Americans,” as if their opponents favor poor education, higher taxes, and idle foreigners. Protesters and interest groups also often frame controversies as if only one side is legitimate

(“Are you for peace or for tyranny? Do you support the war or hate America?”). Deliberative practitioners, on the other hand, focus on surfacing competing values and helping participants deal with the tensions. This critical work takes many forms and labels, such as “choice work,” a focus on “tough choices,” “tensions,” or “trade-offs;” “working through;” or dealing with the “inescapability of choice.”²⁴

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At Colorado State University, CPD has been involved in a project to significantly adjust the manner in which Communication Studies majors are taught argumentation. There are four required core courses for all majors, and one of them, “Rhetoric and Argumentation,” has recently been transformed into “Public Argumentation.” The class used to focus on reasoning, evidence, and competitive debate. It will continue to focus on the first two components, but the final component will now expand to include debate, dialogue, and deliberation. The overall idea is to provide the students with a broad range of necessary democratic skills. Students will pick an issue, and first do extensive research on the issue, leading to a traditional pro-con academic debate. The students will then use the information from the debate to develop a community discussion guide on the issue, similar to an NIF issue book. In particular, the students will be asked to identify key points of common ground on the issue, as well as key tensions and tough choices that must be considered. The students, in other words, will be asked to serve as impartial policy analysts focused on improving the conversation, rather than simply picking a side and making their best case.

This process, we argue, is perhaps one of the most valuable consequences of deliberation. When participants realize and deal with the tough choices, often their opinions improve, their attitudes toward democracy improve, and their potential impact on policy increases. When we work with decision makers, we often begin with the argument that our events are designed to have community members recognize and work through tough choices, so the information we provide decision makers is more nuanced. One of the most often heard complaints from legislators is that when they hear from the public, they only hear isolated opinions. They have some constituents complaining about the quality of roads, and other constituents complaining about the high rate of taxes. Deliberative practitioners work to get those two groups together and struggle with the tensions between their choices. As a result, the public voice coming out of such interactions is more useful to the decision makers (more on this in section 4).

A third key potential consequence of the deliberation to issue learning is *developing new innovative information*. As David Mathews has written, citizens can create a “distinctive kind of knowledge in the forums, a knowledge of the public produced *by* the public.”²⁵ Deliberation, therefore, can have an epistemic function. Not only do participants in deliberative processes improve their opinions, they may actually produce new knowledge that could improve the quality of overall opinion on the issue. The new knowledge may be particularly valuable when derived from the examination of tough choices. The process of “harvesting the wisdom in disagreement”²⁶ 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.

Deliberation can also result in *transforming people’s perspectives altogether*. This is a key theoretical aspect in the defense of deliberation in comparison to other forms of political decision making such as aggregation. Unlike proponents of rational choice theory—a theory of politics currently held in high regard in many departments of economics and political science that assumes individual preferences do not change—deliberative democrats believe preferences certainly can, and often do, change when individuals are exposed to a broader view. Deliberative democrats also believe that individual preferences can, and often do, range beyond individual self-interest. Indeed, another positive potential impact of deliberation is the discovery, development, and nurturing of notions of the “common good.” Said differently, diverse individuals from a community who come together to talk about a common problem often discover the importance of issues beyond their own individual, separate self-interest. *We would argue that democracy requires individuals to continuously seek the right balance between their own individual self-interest and the common good, and deliberation is perhaps the best tool to help them do so.*

Another positive consequence from deliberative forums related to issue learning is specific learning about the issue from a local perspective. Because the public often focuses on politics at the

national level, at least in terms of media, a local deliberative forum can do the important work of bringing issues down to scale, a critical aspect of increasing an individual sense of efficacy. Through local deliberative forums, citizens learn about local decision-making processes and organizations they may not otherwise be exposed to.

A final point to be made here comes as a response to the academic dichotomy discussed in section 1.1 between the expertism of modern science and the cynicism of extreme postmodernism. In many ways, knowledge developed from high-quality deliberative processes represents perhaps the best balance between these two extremes. Done well, therefore, deliberation can better negotiate the modern epistemological tensions of what should count as “knowledge.” Deliberation values good information, but also privileges diverse perspectives. It respects the contribution science and technical information can provide to public debate, but also realizes that science can only take us so far. It realizes the importance of including or at least representing a broad range of voices and that some citizens will have more inherent difficulties in participating in public forums than others, but also understands that abstaining from public discussion because it cannot overcome inequality does nothing to confront that inequality.

1.3 The Challenges to Deliberation Positively Impacting Issue Learning

Despite the many potential positive impacts from deliberation on the quality of public understanding of issues, a number of challenges exist that deliberative practitioners must consider. Three in particular will be reviewed here. The first is simply the difficulty of overcoming the current poor quality of information. There is great value in deliberative practitioners serving as “honest brokers of information”²⁷ for their communities, but one of the reasons for that great value is because it requires significant time and effort. Producing high-quality background material for deliberation takes a strong understanding of the issue from multiple perspectives, and, ideally, time to have representatives from various perspectives vet the material. Many framing processes also incorporate the views and concerns of the public during the development of the material, which takes additional time, effort, and resources. Due to the poor quality of political information in general, deliberative practitioners must wade through a significant amount of material in order to arrive at a point that the material is workable. At CPD, we can rely on nationally developed material from NIF or other sources for some of our meetings, but often we must develop our own material or at least provide some information that connects the national issue to our local community. Each project, therefore, requires extensive effort prior to events to overcome the problems of bad information. Indeed, we would argue that one of the tough choices deliberative organizations face is the question of how many issues they will engage. Focusing on a limited number of issues—in particular issues that personnel in an organization already have some experience with—can help address this challenge, but would also limit the long-term impact of an organization on the

community, as they may not be able to get involved with issues that are ripe for deliberation in a timely manner. But if an organization seeks to be open to all issues, they could get either bogged down or spread too thin. Simply put, it is the classic dilemma between depth and breadth.

The second key challenge—one that will become familiar in this report—is the importance of drawing a diverse audience to the actual events in order to truly capture the positive consequences of deliberation for issue learning. A quick note of clarification, however, is necessary. By diversity, we mean all sorts of diversity, including racial, ethnic, gender, income, age, geography, occupation, political perspective, and so on. To attain all the

benefits of deliberation, a diverse audience is often required. The challenge for deliberative practitioners is to attract the best possible audience, and then take maximum advantage of that audience.

Group communication research shows that group discussion generally privileges the majority view, resulting in minority views either not being aired at all, or being quickly dismissed or shunned.²⁸ If a group of like-minded individuals gather to deliberate and believe they are challenging their views when they are not, the event could lead to more polarized learning, rather than less. On the other hand, if a very diverse audience is drawn

to the event, but then the conflict is not handled well, again increased polarization could result. At CPD we have labeled this phenomenon the “diversity dilemma,” and it will apply to many of the goals of deliberation. The dilemma is based on the notion that diversity is critical for deliberation to work as it should, but also that increased diversity makes the deliberative event more difficult to facilitate and increases the potential for backfire. Diversity, in other words, is a high-risk/high-reward endeavor for deliberation.

A final key challenge involves the potential criticism of deliberative background material from certain academic perspectives. The flip side of deliberation potentially serving as an ideal mean between extremes of positivism and postmodernism is that it is likely open to criticism from both perspectives as well. Scientists will criticize the manner in which material for deliberation simplifies issues, whereas

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CPD has been struggling with attracting diverse audiences in Fort Collins. To this point, our “usual suspects” are basically older, white, progressive women. To attract audiences beyond this demographic, we have to work for them. We’ve been working to develop relationships with relevant community organizations that can help broaden our audiences, and for key projects, we make special efforts to connect to relevant but difficult to attract audiences. In our Pathways Past Poverty project, for example, we realized it would be difficult to expect low-income residents to attend our community forums for a variety of reasons. With our partners, the United Way, we worked with three service providers to arrange small group discussions among low-income residents to respond to the goals developed during the project. We also arranged for another meeting with a group of businesspeople once we realized they would also be underrepresented at the public meetings. Ideally, of course, we would have mixed the audiences all together so they could learn directly from each other, but being able to incorporate those different voices in the report as we move forward with the project was nonetheless valuable.

cynical postmodernists would question the very notion of fair, impartial, or balanced information, as well as the ability of deliberative practitioners to overcome the forces of hegemony and the inherent power imbalances that dominate modern life. Due to these power imbalances, such scholars would argue that information that appears neutral to the mainstream would actually be rather biased. The choices deliberative practitioners provide, they would argue, are too limited, and would lock out important views that are not considered mainstream. They may even argue that deliberative practitioners could do more hegemonic damage than the politicians and interest-group lobbyists, because our work is done in the name of impartiality, whereas people know to be skeptical of information from partisan sources.

Linking back to the second challenge, diversity scholars would add concerns about the ability of deliberative practitioners to understand and appropriately incorporate diverse views. Whereas we certainly believe that no information can be entirely neutral and accept that these challenges merit more consideration, we simply argue that information can be of higher quality and more balanced than others, and deliberative practitioners have an advantage over others developing material because of the incentive processes discussed earlier. This leads us to a typical issue concerning the theoretical criticism of deliberation. Many of the critics of deliberation criticize deliberation as not being able to meet its lofty ideals (of fair information, impartial facilitation, and coverage of multiple perspectives, for example). These charges are warranted, we can't meet those ideals. Our response, however, is that deliberation can't simply be judged against its ideals, it should be judged against its competitors. The question is not whether deliberative practitioners can produce material that is purely impartial and that fairly depicts all perspectives—such a standard could never be met—but rather whether we can improve the discussion of issues due to our use of material that is *more* impartial and includes *more* perspectives than the present discussions. Clearly, this issue needs more discussion than can be provided here. Nonetheless, developing good material and developing a reputation for fairness are critical and difficult parts of task. Such a reputation is difficult to develop and can be easily challenged and lost.

1.4 Suggestions for Deliberative Practitioners Concerning the Goal of Issue Learning

We now move to the identification of what deliberative practitioners could do to best achieve the potential benefits of deliberation as they relate to the goal of issue learning. The idea here is to provide suggestions of actions to take before, during, and after deliberative events, as well as actions beyond the scope of a specific project, that will improve the manner in which a deliberative organization can improve the understanding of issues within its community. This section is simply a starting point, and we hope other deliberative practitioners help add to the information present here in future versions of this theory. Many of these actions are already well known and part of what most deliberative practitioners do, and some may be new ideas.

Issue selection for increased issue learning would primarily focus on issues where a significant gap exists between public assumptions and more substantive policy information. Another consideration if issue learning is the focus would be to choose an issue that the facilitators would be familiar enough with to be able to deal with misinformation and understand the terminology tied to the issue. Facilitators need not be experts, and should actually avoid playing that role during a forum, but nonetheless if a key goal of the forum is to increase understanding of the issue, facilitator understanding of the issue becomes more critical than normal.

Once an issue is selected, practitioners should research the issue from as many perspectives as possible, with a particular eye for key tensions, underlying values, areas of common ground, and important fact questions that could potentially be answered. The NIF issue-framing process primarily involves working with the public to capture their concerns and suggestions and develop the material from those. Of particular value can be the identification of misconceptions or other key differences between opposing perspectives. Due to the low quality of current public debate, misconceptions often abound. A skilled deliberative practitioner can help identify and overcome these misconceptions, which in itself can have an important impact on the quality of public debate and issue learning. Thankfully, the art of deliberative issue analysis seems to be growing in importance within the policy research discipline. The work of Frank Fischer, John Forrester, and Deborah Stone may be particularly useful for deliberative practitioners to be exposed to. Such scholars are still certainly in the minority in the policy sciences—an empirical, positivistic perspective still reigns—but signs of progress are evident. Additional help may also come from within communication departments, which often also include scholars that have the skills to help with this sort of issue analysis. Deliberative practitioners should also search local universities to see if there are scholars working in these areas that could become a resource at this stage. Lastly, deliberative practitioners should certainly rely on each other. The NIF Web site has a number of examples of issue books, including the national books and a large collection of local books that have been developed.²⁹ NCDD also has a wonderful resource page to find material that has

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One of our major forums in the fall of 2007 was focused on several health-care reform proposals being examined by the Colorado state legislature. As we prepped for the project and considered how best to improve the quality of conversations about health care in our community, we realized that many people simply did not understand much of the terminology used. One of our primary goals for the project therefore became helping our community understand the various concepts and technical aspects of the various proposals (i.e. issue learning). Though we designed the background information to help the public deal with the tough choices inherent to the issue and not get bogged down in the terminology, we also knew that we needed to provide some specific instruction on the terms. We held a specific preforum training for our facilitators to ensure that they could handle questions that arose during the forum. We also developed a glossary of terms to provide to all participants during the forum, which the facilitators could refer to as necessary. With our goal of providing issue learning, we made specific choices and plans throughout to best achieve that goal.

been developed on a number of topics.³⁰ In many cases, individual deliberative practitioners need not reinvent the wheel.

As discussed in the previous section on challenges, the other critical action to focus on before the meeting is to work to ensure a good deliberative audience. At times, ensuring such an audience may require meeting with individuals or organizations to consider their concerns and ideas. One overall constant concern for deliberative practitioners is to build a network of diverse interests that can be called upon to deliver a good audience on a broad range of topics.

During forums or other deliberative events, a number of specific actions can help ensure quality issue learning. Perhaps the most important skill is asking good questions, which is one of the skills that is certainly already a major part of the NIF training process. If focused on developing issue learning, questions that focus on common ground, key tensions, misconceptions, and so on, are particularly important. Moderators also need to counter negative group processes that favor the majority voice and silence minority perspectives. Moderators must work to ensure that those with minority perspectives are comfortable to speak and are listened to by others. If important minority voices are absent, moderators need to consider introducing them, essentially playing devil's advocate. Some NIF trainers, for example, suggest the use of an empty chair placed in the middle of the room to signify voices that are not present. This technique, explained to the room at the beginning of a forum, not only allows individuals to introduce perspectives literally not in the room, but also may allow individuals uncomfortable with providing a dissenting voice to provide it indirectly and safely. In other words, a minority voice may feel more comfortable introducing his or her own perspective through the vehicle of the empty chair, rather than attributing the viewpoint to themselves. Regardless, the overall idea is that to capture the potential of issue learning, various measures must be taken to allow alternative voices to be aired, particularly before and during the forum. While doing so is a challenge—minority voices are difficult to attract to open forums and if in attendance are more likely to remain silent—deliberative practitioners can certainly do a number of things to overcome that challenge. Greater attention to this issue and the usefulness of various techniques certainly should be one of the key focus areas of deliberative practice moving forward, especially considering the importance of diversity will be repeated throughout this report, tied to essentially every goal.

Deliberative practitioners can also help facilitate issue learning after individual forums by working to ensure that a broader audience is exposed to the hard work done before and during the forum. A strong connection to local media and the proper use of a Web site (or multiple Web sites) are critical to tapping into the potential of broader issue learning, as they will be for the other goals as well. Indeed, simply publicizing the discussion guide or backgrounder, if it was done well and represented solid deliberative analysis of the issue, could serve to improve issue learning in the community by having more

individuals focus on the issue from a more deliberative perspective (i.e. focused on the key tensions and common ground). Completing a report on the forum itself is also critical, as it could bring attention to the issue, highlight key points of progress and insight on the issue, and provide an additional opportunity for publicity.

A number of other potential actions should be considered after the forums. If the forum audience was not particularly diverse, for example, it may also be useful to seek a specific response to the forum from key audiences, and incorporate their reaction within the report. Other key stakeholders or institutional voices could also be consulted for a response to include. If particular factual questions arose in a forum, experts could be consulted to provide an answer to include in the report. If key tensions surfaced that were unclear before or generally missing from the broader public discussion, a more focused follow-up forum could be developed. Overall, we would argue that the importance of reports on local deliberative forums is underestimated, and reporting should become more of a focus of training for new deliberative practitioners as well as a key subject of study and collaboration between practitioners.

Lastly, deliberative practitioners should consider their ability to spark issue learning even beyond the specific forums they develop. As discussed in section 1.1, the media often focuses on conflict and passes on negative examples of political communication. Deliberative practitioners should provide counters to such rhetoric by writing editorials, letters to the editor, and otherwise responding to poor examples of political communication. If a key issue arises that due to other commitments a broader response—i.e. developing and running forums—is impractical, deliberative practitioners could still nonetheless improve the quality of the community’s knowledge on the issue by other means. In particular, identifying key points of common ground, key fact questions that need answering, and key tensions that need to be worked through could change the typical trajectory of how the community engages the issue.

Overall, deliberative practitioners should consider a very broad scope of activities that connect to improved issue learning. The idea is for the deliberative organization to establish themselves as an impartial, and essential, voice for democracy in their communities. We would argue, primarily from our own experiences, that far too often the full potential impact of forums is not tapped and much more could be done, not only to improve the issue learning that occurs during forums, but also to utilize whatever learning takes place more broadly. Tapping that potential takes hard work and able planning, but is nonetheless critical. Admittedly, we have fallen short in this area at CPD. When we complete a forum, we often must shift our focus to the next event to ensure that event is successful, to the point that we do a poor job of appropriate follow through and reporting on the initial event. As a result, we are essentially squandering the full potential of all the work we did preparing and running the event in the first place, but primarily limiting the issue learning to those that were in the room. As CPD moves forward, this is one of the key areas we will focus on to improve.

2.0 Democratic Attitudes

In section 2, we focus on the impact deliberation has on what we term *democratic attitudes*. There is a fine line between democratic attitudes and democratic skills, which are the focus of section 3. They are essentially complementary issues, with the first focusing on the overall views individuals have about community decision making/problem solving, and the second focusing on the skills individuals have to actually be involved productively in such activities. Individuals must have both positive democratic attitudes and skills in order to fully function as democratic citizens, and communities must have individuals with both in order to function well. These two consequences of deliberation are considered separately from the others, such as issue learning or action, because with these two, the issue itself is secondary. The issue under discussion is merely a means to arrive at the end of improving democratic attitudes and skills. Some issues would certainly work better than others, perhaps, but nonetheless individuals could improve their attitudes and skills regardless of whether they actually learn much about the issue itself or ever think or act on the issue again. This point is emphasized primarily to remind deliberative practitioners of the value of deliberation regardless of what direct action or impact that deliberation may or may not have on the issue addressed. Local deliberative forums on the national debt or the Social Security system—two recent NIF books—are unlikely to have much of an impact on national policies, but they could certainly have positive impacts on the participants' democratic attitudes and skills.

2.1 The Current Situation Concerning Democratic Attitudes

A full review of the literature concerning the state of democratic attitudes clearly cannot be provided here, but suffice it to say that many scholars have researched and written, often quite pessimistically, on the current state of democracy and the attitudes toward it in the 21st century. A connection also certainly exists between the poor state of knowledge concerning public issues reviewed in section 1.1 and the poor state of democratic attitudes to be discussed here. Due in part to the low quality of opinions concerning issues, particularly the low level of understanding concerning opposing views, attitudes toward democracy are often described with a plethora of negative terms such as *apathetic*, *disengaged*, *polarized*, *cynical*, *powerless*, *distrustful of government*, and *angry*. Additional research shows that college students in particular—some would argue a critical audience for democracy—seem to be disheartened. The conclusion of the 1993 Harwood Group study entitled *College Students Talk Politics*, depicted that “most everything they see and hear involving politics, makes them believe it is not about solving problems; instead, it is individualistic, divisive, negative, and often counterproductive to acting on the ills of society.”³¹

The current situation concerning attitudes toward democracy can be conceptualized in several ways. McMillan and Harriger, for example, identified three key sources for student alienation: low efficacy, lack of political knowledge, and the feeling that politics are irrelevant.³² For many, the key issue is apathy or disengagement. Zukin, et al., argue that nearly half of the adult population can be characterized as “disengaged from both the civic and political realm.”³³ Individuals are simply not concerned about being involved in politics or community problem solving. The sources for the disengagement are broad, and Kettering research in particular has focused on the overall feeling of powerlessness or lack of efficacy as a key cause for citizen apathy. As explained by David Mathews, “Citizens believe there is little chance that they or ‘people like them’ can do anything to act effectively on their concerns. They blame professional politicians and moneyed interests. They also blame their fellow citizens for being too self-serving.”³⁴ Politics and citizenship, Mathews argues, have become a “spectator sport.”³⁵ For far too many individuals, their only political involvement is to place blame on others—the government, the media, corporations, lobbyists, or their fellow citizens—for the poor state of democracy.

Another aspect of the sense of apathy or powerlessness relevant to deliberative practitioners is that it may have developed based on previous direct experiences with government or even pseudo-deliberative events. Many government agencies are required to hold public hearings, and school boards, city councils, and county commissioners host public meetings often across the country. A high majority of these meetings are not deliberative, but nonetheless may be advertised as allowing “public participation” in community decision making. The degree to which the public participation was genuine, however, is questionable. As a result, for many their direct experience with democracy may have resulted in a feeling of being listened to but not heard. Two minutes at a microphone to address institutional decision makers on a key issue may provide short-term feelings of democratic citizenship, but if in the long run that participation was deemed ineffective, feelings of frustration and powerlessness can take over. The same charge could perhaps be made for specifically deliberative events. In the short term, participating in an NIF event, or an event sponsored by another deliberative organization like Study Circles, *AmericaSpeaks*, or Deliberative Polling, may provide a renewed feeling of efficacy, but if in the long run nothing seems to come from the event, once again feelings of frustration and powerlessness could ensue. These points will translate into two key points for deliberative practitioners. They will need to focus on undoing negative views of public meetings that many may hold, and they must be sure not to contribute to such feelings by overpromising or not following through appropriately with their own events.

A second key relevant issue is simply individualism. American culture has always been particularly individualistic, but some would argue that the typical American individualism has grown stronger and out of balance in recent years. The focus on individualism and its impact on democracy has even been bolstered in recent decades by the growing role of economic theories of politics and democracy and the dominance of free-market perspectives that assume self-interest as the primary, if not the only, human motivation. From this perspective, citizens are merely consumers or taxpayers, rather than political actors or problem solvers. The role of government is thus to serve its “consumers” as efficiently as possible. This perspective is strong within many local governments and public administration programs. Political decision making within this point of view is simply an aggregation of votes or preferences, a process that does not require citizens to work together or even understand each other. Democracy is reduced to competition, bargaining, and perhaps compromise, with little or no view of the public good, common ground, or community. Rational choice theory literally assumes that individual preferences are fixed—i.e. individuals do not change their minds or adjust their beliefs—so the business of government is to simply distribute goods based on preset individual preferences. As we will see in section 2.2, deliberative theories of democracy reject many of these assumptions, but are nonetheless often the minority in university political science or public administration departments.³⁶

A third key issue is in some ways the opposite of the first. Rather than being apathetic, many are angry and polarized. The source in some ways may be the same—lack of efficacy with the current political system—but the reaction is very different. While some take their ball and go home, others seek out other ways to play the game. Some stay within institutional politics and play “hard ball.” Within a two-party system, the strategies that often work well—such as the demonization of

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One of the controversial issues currently facing Fort Collins involves proposals for uranium mining in northern Colorado. The Fort Collins Public Library developed a panel discussion between the company seeking the rights for the mining, and opponents of the new mine. Paul Alexander of the Institute on the Common Good served as the moderator for the discussion and Martín Carcasson from CPD assisted him. To help achieve our goals of helping to improve the community conversation concerning this issue, we took questions from the public on index cards, and Martín went through the questions and developed new questions that still addressed public concerns but in a more productive way (such as avoiding inciting language). Overall, the evening—which was played for the next several weeks on public access television—was productive and presented the community with a positive example of a civil public discussion on a difficult issue. During a break, however, one of the activists against the mine began to strongly address the mine supporters. As Martín stepped in to reinforce the ground rules that had been established, the activist angrily rejected the notion of backing down, arguing that hosting the forum was legitimizing the mine supporters, which in his mind did not deserve that legitimacy. He expressed clearly negative motives for the mine operators and accused them of lying for the sake of profit. For that activist, deliberation was not an appropriate tool, and he attempted to derail the overall process. Fortunately, with assistance from security, the activist did leave the premises, and the forum continued. We believe we still provided a valuable service to our community by allowing them to consider all different sides of this issue and actually hear from the mine proponents, but to do so, we had to essentially silence one protester, which was certainly a difficult choice to make and one that we did not make lightly. The overall situation has become an important part of our training process, as we consider the intersections between deliberation and controversial issues.

enemies, exaggeration of dangers, the strategic simplification of difficult issues, and the misrepresentation of opposing views—are unfortunately those that do not support democracy very well and often lead to more negative views of democracy in general. Such strategies, in other words, fuel the apathy, polarization, and cynicism that lead to people disengaging. Others go outside of institutional politics, which they view as corrupt or ineffective, and become activists or protesters. Unfortunately, their tactics are often very similar to those of the politicians, and sometimes even more drastic. As explained by conflict resolution scholars Barnett Pearce and Stephen Littlejohn, protestors and activists often “derive important aspects of their self-identity from being warriors or opponents of the enemy . . . [and] the continuation of conflicts offers highly desirable roles to some participants.”³⁷ Compromise or working with opponents in any way is seen as selling out, leading to a rather drastic form of polarization wherein anyone who is not a part of the movement is inherently seen as an opponent of it. The goals of those from a protest perspective are often to gain publicity and attention, and ultimately to win at all costs, which, similar to the goals of the political partisans, often cause collateral damage to democracy.

As a result of these various factors, very few citizens remain who focus on solving problems based on the democratic ideal of collaboration and notions of balancing individual interests with the common good. Individuals are either checked out, are playing the political game, or see themselves as champions for a particular cause. Unfortunately, our education system does not have a strong response to this situation. Civic education is not emphasized overall, and the civic education that exists tends not to tackle these issues. As Mathews has argued:

Traditional citizenship education focuses on giving people expert information, preparing them to evaluate critically what they are told, instructing them in voting practices, informing them on the structures of government, and inculcating a sense of duty. Traditional leadership programs also prepare a select few to be the “producers of solutions” that formal politics requires. The training concentrates on ways leaders can sell the public on their solutions and persuade people to vote for them.³⁸

Overall, students likely receive a bulk of their “real” political education from the media, and that education, once again, emphasizes tactics focused on winning elections, gaining votes, gaining attention, demonizing opponents, and so on, not solving problems as a community.

2.2 The Potential Positive Impact of Deliberation on Deliberative Attitudes

Once again, deliberative practitioners have been given quite a task to address the current deficiencies of deliberative attitudes. Indeed, many deliberative practitioners likely began their journey in this field, based somewhat on their personal reaction to and frustration with the problems discussed in section 2.1. Fortunately, research and experience has shown that deliberative events can work as a

powerful counter to the negative attitudes toward democracy that are instilled as a byproduct of politics-as-usual. Deliberation, argued Paul Waldman, “engenders a transformation among the participants” and “has the potential to transform individuals into citizens.”³⁹ Robert Luskin and James Fishkin, who have been empirically examining deliberation for many years, explained the impact of deliberation on individuals as follows:

What matters for democracy is not just the authenticity of citizen preferences, but their attitudinal and behavioral engagement, their attitudes and behaviors toward the democratic system and their antagonists within in, and their appreciation of interests other than or beyond their own. The results from Deliberative Polling . . . suggest that the more citizens deliberate, the more informed, interested, participatory, efficacious, trusting, supportive of democracy, and sociotropic they become.⁴⁰

This section will outline three primary ways in which deliberation can improve democratic attitudes. We should note as well that these impacts are not mutually exclusive, and are likely interconnected, with each positively supporting the other. The impacts can also be conceptualized individually, or in terms of a community. In other words, as more and more individuals develop positive democratic attitudes, a community can then become more likely to develop a habit of relying on deliberation when faced with difficult issues.

Perhaps the most important attitudinal effect of deliberation 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. Support for this point is broad. Lars Torres included empowerment as one of the six primary rationales for deliberation.⁴¹ Empirical research has shown that efficacy does tend to increase with participation in deliberative events.⁴² The reasons discussed as to why deliberation increases efficacy vary. From our own CPD experiences, we would argue that the simple fact that participants experience a respectful

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During the spring of 2008, CPD and the local chapter of the United Way began a project to mobilize the community to address a steep rise in poverty levels in our county. The process was specifically designed to spark a community response to the issue. Martín’s dissertation had focused on the politics of poverty policy, and while certain policy changes are likely warranted, we felt that there were a number of things communities could do under current policies to positively affect low-income residents. The design of the process, therefore, was focused on sparking community action, as well as improving the community’s perceptions of their potential impact on the issue. We wanted to move away from the typical polarized discussions on poverty (alternatively blaming individuals or the structure of society), and focus on what the community could do. The very act of bringing together community members passionate about this issue and having the frame focused on what we could do ourselves, rather than what we want our legislators to do, created a sense of excitement. One of the tasks groups were assigned was to find examples of best practices, which were connected to poverty, developed by other communities. Surely some of the participants were wary, thinking that this process was like others that offered much promise but never made a real difference, but for most it seemed to have a clear impact on their sense of efficacy as a community. The project is still ongoing, and we have a heavy burden of coming through with some significant action, or else the next time we mobilize, the arguments will likely not be nearly as effective.

political conversation concerning a difficult issue increases their sense of efficacy, or perhaps even more likely, having a positive example of political discussion undoes some of the efficacy-sapping power of past political conversations. Deliberation can also, as Mathews has explained, provide a new “sense of possibility” and engagement as people realize that people around them are concerned with similar issues and are willing to act.⁴³ Harry Boyte’s work in particular focuses on how communities can develop a strong sense of responsibility when they come together in productive ways.⁴⁴ Rather than fostering the blame game as other political events tend to do, deliberative activities are designed to create a different form of interaction that avoids simply pointing fingers and spouting cynical frustrations. “Deliberation prompts people to realize that they have contributed to many of their communities’ problems,” wrote Mathews, “And that leads them to conclude that they must also have the power to help solve those problems.”⁴⁵ As a result, citizens are more likely to take ownership of the issue and decide to act. Empowerment is also partly a result from some of the other potential impacts of deliberation, such as issue learning, improved perspectives concerning opponent’s motives, and increased democratic skills.

A second key impact of deliberation on attitudes involves the *improvement of community relationships, particularly between individuals with opposing perspectives*. This process can be critical to democracy, especially in diverse communities because of the importance of mutual respect. One of the primary fields of study that is connected to deliberation is conflict resolution, and conflict resolution is one of the four “dialogue and deliberation streams” identified by the National Coalition of Dialogue and Deliberation. Whereas many of the specific techniques utilized within conflict resolution are particularly useful for deliberative practitioners—such as ground rules, impartial facilitators, and establishing a respectful environment—deliberation also tends to improve conflictual 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 the conversations often degenerate quickly. As discussed in 1.1., the lack of direct contact between sides fosters misunderstanding, which then is exacerbated by the natural human

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During the spring of 2007, CPD was called upon by the local school district to host a series of six public meetings on the question of whether the school district should adjust their grade configuration (they currently use three-year high schools, whereas the rest of the state primarily uses four-year high schools). Many parents who attended were strongly for or against the change, depending on how they perceived the impact of the change for their children. Of all our projects, this is perhaps the one that we most clearly observed deliberation working exactly as it is designed to work in terms of transforming opinions. Many parents came to argue a particular perspective and actually assumed they would be arguing with administrators, as is the norm for most public meetings. But when they were put in small, facilitated breakout groups with other parents, the dynamics of deliberation took over. The situation required they listen to other parents explain why they supported or were against the change, and, we believe, they were much more apt to listen because it was another parent, rather than an administrator. It was clear that opinions were transformed during those meetings, as parents who had only focused on the pros *or* the cons of switching were exposed to the other side, presented by parents very much like them, focused on what they felt was best for their children.

impulse toward “egoism,” which leads individuals to seek out information that confirms their own point of view and to reject opposing points of view. This natural process is aided by media that can now provide “narrowcasting,” which caters to an individual’s preset preferences.

Deliberative processes can work to undo much of this separation by broadening individual’s conversation networks and allowing people to discuss key issues in an environment that fosters listening and true understanding. One of the primary findings of Kettering’s research on National Issues Forums over the years has been that individuals do not necessarily change their own opinions, but rather their opinions of others change. They come to better understand those that think differently than they do.⁴⁶ Luskin and Fishkin term this impact as an increase in political respect, which they define as, “a willingness to regard one’s opponents as misguided rather than evil, petty, or corrupt.”⁴⁷ If those that think differently are believed to have understandable reasons for what they believe, then conversation, compromise, and collaboration are all possible. Many of the typical political tactics work, often purposefully, to divide people, to make them believe that those who think differently are irrational or ignorant or possess negative ulterior motives. Deliberation can help undo these assumptions, which are often very exaggerated and always damaging to democracy. The point cannot be emphasized enough. We would argue a significant portion of the conflict on issues between opposing views is based on misconceptions. As Noëlle McAfee put it, “The reality is that we are really not so different as we imagine. And even when we hold rather different values, someone else’s values, if one hears them out, can be remarkably appealing.”⁴⁸ When citizens get together, cut through the false assumptions, and focus both on the common ground they share and on the actual differences they have, attitudes toward democracy can significantly improve. Such arguments are bolstered by research that shows that the general public is much less polarized than most assume, and less polarized than legislators and the media.⁴⁹ Deliberation, which puts more emphasis on the general public engaging problems rather than just politicians and the media, once again inherently works to decrease polarization and conflict, and thus improve attitudes toward democracy.

A third important impact of deliberation on individual attitudes is the *broadening of perspective*. Often termed as *preference formation*, it is a feature of deliberation that is particularly important to theoretical advocates of deliberation. Simone Chambers, for example, has argued that the notion that deliberation “can change minds and transform opinions” is a central tenant of deliberative theory.⁵⁰ Deliberation, from this perspective, is seen as an alternative to the simple aggregation of votes or bargaining among competing interests, other key forms of political decision making. Of the three, deliberation is the only form that assumes individual preferences or interests are transformed as part of the process itself. Deliberation, therefore, allows for participants to adjust their views, and, proponents argue, often those views are changed in ways that tend to decrease that individual’s degree of self-interest and

increase their open-mindedness and empathy.⁵¹ This process can be critical to a democratic community, as it essentially allows room for concepts like the common good, which are theoretically absent from alternative forms of decision making, such as aggregation or bargaining. That preferences do change, and often move away from self-interest, works against the theoretical assumptions of rational choice theory. As a result, proponents of deliberative democracy can argue that deliberative theories of democracy actually have a stronger connection to human nature than rational choice theory. Overall, deliberation helps individuals identify and embrace a much broader sense of citizenship that includes both rights and responsibilities, as well as a concern for others and the common good.

In summary, deliberation can counteract many of the negative aspects of current democratic attitudes that were outlined in section 2.1. Just as the negative attitudinal aspects are connected and self-reinforcing, so are the positive impacts of deliberation. 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.”⁵² Moving from individual impact to community impact, deliberation can essentially help build social capital. As individual social networks expand and trust develops, communities simply have more capacity to address issues as they arise. Rather than wasting time pointing fingers and assuming the worst of their opponents, perhaps due to their improved democratic attitudes, they turn to deliberation.

2.3 The Challenges to Deliberation Positively Impacting Democratic Attitudes

Whereas proponents of deliberation focus on its positive impacts on attitudes, skeptics are less optimistic, and can point to a number of arguments that can bring the value of deliberation into question. One of the difficulties of expecting deliberation to have a considerable impact on participants’ attitudes is that different participants are likely to have different attitudes coming in. Participants that are apathetic are different than those that are cynical or polarized, and tactics that may work to decrease apathy may not also decrease cynicism or polarization. As discussed in 2.1, many of the most politically active citizens—those most likely to attend open forums—are either activists or political partisans, and they are less likely to simply play by the rules in a deliberative event. They may see more political value in the problem than a solution, and may actually prefer the continuation of misconceptions and polarizations. Forums can be coopted for political gain if groups advocating a particular position decide to mobilize. As deliberation becomes more and more relevant to a community, the likelihood of interest groups finding ways to influence forums increases. Such coopted forums are unlikely to have a positive impact on attitudes.

Deliberation can also potentially lead to a decreased sense of efficacy. With certain issues, moving from assuming there is only one viable perspective to the realization that there are many viable

perspectives may have the unintended consequence that the issue is too difficult or complicated to address. Participants may suffer from information overload, or may find the tough choices that deliberative practitioners tend to focus upon simply too tough. This negative potential can be particularly relevant with broad national or international issues, which seem out of reach to individuals. In such cases, learning more about the issue may have the opposite effect, as they realize they are more powerless than they previously imagined.

A third challenge is based on the possibility that deliberative events could backfire, depending on the audience that attends and the quality of the deliberation itself. If the “impartial” deliberation seems unbalanced or unfair, it could cause increased cynicism. If participants from opposing perspectives take the opportunity to attack each other, further polarization could occur. If the participants express more extreme positions than the general public, misconceptions about opposing sides could increase. Overall, one of the key tensions for convenors of deliberation is dealing with the question of the ideal amount of diversity (i.e. the diversity dilemma described in section 1.3). Without diversity, there is a danger of “enclave deliberation,” or deliberation among the like-minded—and often privileged—which can cause more polarization and lead to more extreme positions.⁵³ Without diversity, deliberation loses much of its potential to decrease misunderstanding, increase trust and respect between perspectives and to have opposing views find common ground and identify true key tensions and tough choices. A key question for deliberative practitioners, for example, is whether they work to get committed opponents in the same room or whether they target the “moderate middle.” Getting committed opponents to see the light and work together can lead to significant progress on an issue, but, as discussed in 2.1, many activists and political actors are strongly committed to their position, and may even be more interested in political victories or publicity for their cause rather than moving forward on an issue. With national issues, an effort to address the issue locally could even receive push back from activists dedicated to making a national policy change.⁵⁴ Deliberative forums can easily become a vehicle for opposing sides to simply spout their respective “talking points” to a different audience. Deliberative practitioners may work hard to attract a broad audience that gets beyond the usual suspects, but if the usual suspects also attend and dominate, it could very well create a chilling effect that makes it even more unlikely that the unusual suspects return to future events. In sum, the diversity dilemma will arise again and again throughout the discussion of the six goals and consequences of deliberation. Overall, this challenge heightens the importance of deliberative practitioners having the facilitation skills to deal with numerous situations that can arise during an event.

One last challenge to discuss relevant to the development of more democratic attitudes is the question of whether deliberation leads to inherently progressive or liberal attitudes and thus is subject to charges of partisanship. Deliberative practitioners often explicitly claim they are impartial or nonpartisan,

but some of the claimed consequences of deliberation are that individuals become less self-interested and more tolerant of opposing views, two characteristics that are primarily viewed as progressive. In important ways, the collaborative efforts that deliberation often sparks are opposed to conservative free-market perspectives that focus on the value of competition and individualism. Efforts to attract diverse audiences and provide them “voice,” particularly audiences that do not frequent public forums, such as low-income and ethnic minorities, can also be framed as progressive. Similar challenges will be relevant to some of the later goals as well. The challenge here is how do deliberative practitioners maintain the critical image of impartiality when the consequences of deliberative events may inherently be ideologically partisan. More on this discussion later.

2.4 Suggestions for Deliberative Practitioners Concerning the Goal of Improving Democratic Attitudes

As we did for issue learning, in this section we will offer some practical suggestions to help deliberative practitioners better achieve the positive potential consequences of deliberation as they relate to developing improved democratic attitudes. Before forums, deliberative practitioners must once again strive for an ideal deliberative audience. The ideal audience to develop better democratic attitudes is perhaps the toughest audience to attract, because those with the worst democratic attitudes are either not likely to attend (the apathetic), or if they do attend, they are not as likely to participate deliberatively (the polarized partisans). In such cases, if the goal is to focus on improving democratic attitudes, deliberative practitioners may need to work with audiences beforehand. Deliberation requires at least some understanding and trust between sides, so if a situation presents itself in which the sides are strongly polarized, a preliminary event more focused on dialogue may be warranted, or perhaps separate initial meetings to ensure that the participants will be able to take full advantage of the deliberative opportunity. In highly contentious issues, alternative forms of deliberation, such as Citizen Juries, may be more useful.⁵⁵ If the polarization is present but not extreme, practitioners may want to simply provide extra time for introductions and discussion of personal stakes. Practitioners may also want to specifically target audiences that are normally not heard, as they perhaps have the greatest potential for positive change. Apathy and the belief that you are powerless and not being heard is actually not that difficult to overcome, especially when someone receives a personal invitation to have their voice heard.

Issue selection is also clearly relevant for democratic attitude adjustments. Issues that have a significant degree of misunderstanding are “ripe” for deliberation, and one high-quality conversation could clear up much of that misunderstanding and improve attitudes. Issues that have strong local connections would help with apathetic audiences, whereas issues that are primarily national may actually decrease engagement. Issues that have strong local activist groups would be particularly high risk/high

reward. Issues that are currently relevant to decision makers, especially if those decision makers are undecided, may be strong selections as they could increase the usefulness and potential impact of the deliberation, and thus positively affect attitudes (while also potentially improving the reputation of the deliberative organization, as we will discuss in section 5.2). All in all, issue selection will prove a key issue among all the goals, and one that likely will prove difficult as certain issues will work well with some goals but not others.

Another potential key issue for organizers is to start “upstream” in the process, which may be particularly critical for public participation processes hosted by institutional decision makers. Far too often, the public is not involved until the decision has already been made, or only one alternative is presented for public consideration. As a result, democratic attitudes are negatively affected. Starting upstream—earlier in the decision-making process—will likely allow the public more range in their response, and thus likely more positively impact democratic attitudes. If anything, the public will be more aware of the problem itself, rather than simply focus on the advantages and disadvantages of one specific solution.

If the goal of an upcoming forum is specifically to improve democratic attitudes, the framing of the material could be specifically designed to contribute to this end. One of the overall purposes for deliberative framing is to move audiences away from preset and tracked positions. Once again, however, the multilayered deficiencies of democratic attitudes can pose a problem. Framing the issue to increase a sense of efficacy (by highlighting success stories and “best practices”) is different than framing the issue to decrease polarization (by attacking misconceptions between perspectives and highlighting common ground). Nonetheless, the framing of the issue can be used as an important tool to pursue this goal.

During forums, there are a number of things facilitators can do to enhance democratic attitudes. Many of the typical steps taken at the beginning of forums are critical, such as explaining what deliberation is and reviewing the goals for the forum, establishing ground rules, and allowing participants to explain their personal stake. Throughout the forum, facilitators must take advantage of the moments that present themselves to help either the apathetic or polarized to challenge their views and to help opposing perspectives clarify their views of each other. Some training in conflict management or intercultural communication techniques would certainly be useful for deliberative practitioners. Conflict should never be seen as something to be avoided or stopped, but rather as an opportunity to be mined. The extent to which a facilitator spends time on a conflict between participants, however, should be dependent on the goals of the event. If improving democratic attitudes and skills are key goals, then it may be important to spend the time to work through the conflict. If the goal is more tied to community or institutional action, on the other hand, and the conflict is not directly relevant to those goals, it may be more important for the facilitator to move on.

A related lesson that was learned during CPD's first two years is that unless disagreement is specifically welcomed or drawn out by questions, often audiences will avoid any disagreement, and the comments from a deliberative forum may simply become laundry lists of disconnected opinions on the issue. There is a danger of this particularly with a talkative audience, one in which five participants tend to have their hand up to talk at each chance. If a facilitator simply stacks the questioners ("You first, then you, and then you"), it is unlikely that individual statements will receive a response, because each new speaker already has a specific point to make before they even heard the previous statement. The typical NIF process of discussing "appreciations" and then "concerns" tied to various approaches can have a similar effect of avoiding direct conflict and disagreement. Participants may have an objection to a point, but due to the process feel they should wait until later to express it, if at all. As a result of these two factors, we adjusted our training to move away from a strict "appreciations/concerns" format, and to specifically have the facilitator seek out agreement or disagreement with statements before moving on to the next speaker in order to ensure engagement on these issues. In order to further encourage such exchanges, one of the ground rules that CPD events typically employ is "It's okay to disagree, but do so with curiosity, not hostility." The bottom line here is this: we believe that to create understanding between sides—and thus enhance democratic attitudes—the opposing sides must actually converse with each other, not just separately provide statements to a third party. One sign that the deliberation is actually working well occurs when participants are asking each other good clarification questions—i.e. disagreeing with curiosity.

Similarly, facilitators can use other strategies during forums to help enhance democratic attitudes. Storytelling should be encouraged, because it works to increase understanding between sides. Facilitators can model and encourage appropriate behavior, such as listening and asking good questions. Facilitators can focus on follow-up questions that have participants dig a little deeper on their views, and in particular gets to core values that are often shared broadly by others. Facilitators can also specifically ask questions about misconceptions between views to bring them out into the open. If the participants are imbalanced, facilitators may need to intervene more often in order to ensure that those with minority views are comfortable speaking or that those views are somehow expressed. As mentioned earlier, enclave deliberation can increase polarization, so facilitators must work to avoid the natural tendency for similar thinking groups to display convergent thinking.⁵⁶

If the key issue is apathy rather than polarization, facilitators will want to encourage the participants to realize the power they have. They should clearly explain at the beginning of the forum how the information will be used and what impact it may have (and, of course, they should actually be prepared to do something constructive with the information). They should never, however, overpromise, because while that may temporarily inspire apathetic participants, in the long run that will likely

strengthen the apathy when they realize nothing came from their deliberation. Questions, particularly during reflections time, can focus on what local actions could be taken. Facilitators could provide information on handouts about local initiatives or organizations that are working on the issue, again bringing it down to scale.

After forums, a number of actions remain that could positively impact democratic attitudes. Most important, practitioners must follow up on their promises as to what will be done with the information. If answerable fact questions arose during the forum and were not answered, they should try to provide answers. Secondly, a report should be completed that allows others to be exposed to the hard work completed during the forum by the participants. A forum report could focus on aspects of the event that are connected to democratic attitudes. For example, a productive exchange between opposing views could be detailed. If participants discussed how their views changed about opponents or about their own efficacy, those statements could also be highlighted. If the group helped uncover key tensions or points of common ground that have the potential to improve the broader discussion, those could certainly be highlighted. If the results were to be presented to decision makers, do so, and perhaps seek an official response to include in the report itself. An important point to emphasize here is how preplanning can improve the report. Forums in part should be designed with the report, and the intended audiences for the report, in mind (and, of course, the goals the report is hoping to impact). Questions asked during the forum, and questions asked in a survey if one is used, will become the basic information that can be highlighted in the report.

Beyond actual forums, deliberative practitioners should think through a variety of other activities they could do to improve democratic attitudes in their community, such as writing editorials, being involved with civic education, and otherwise reacting to events that positively or negatively impact democratic attitudes. We hope CPD, for example, becomes a respected institution in northern Colorado, known for its support of democracy. That reputation will be built through our events, but once established, we should be able to respond to other events and be heard. In other words, we hope to become a local key voice for democracy, working to improve democratic attitudes at all times.

3.0 Democratic Skills

This section is a key counterpart to section 2. As we wrote in 2.0, individuals must have both positive democratic attitudes and skills to fully function as democratic citizens, and communities must have individuals with both in order to function well. Whereas democratic attitudes provide the “want to,” democratic skills can provide the “how to.” The two are clearly interrelated, as individuals with healthy democratic attitudes are more likely to get involved and use their democratic skills, and those with strong democratic skills are more likely to have better experiences, and thus develop better attitudes. As we did

in sections 1 and 2, we will review the current state of democratic skills, the potential impact of deliberation, the key challenges, and finally provide some related suggestions for deliberative practitioners.

3.1 The Current Situation with Democratic Skills

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, even Thomas Jefferson, democratic skills are not necessarily innate and 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 ensure that the population had the requisite skills for democracy. Unfortunately the overall quality of civic education is considerably lacking in the 21st century, despite noble efforts by many for its revival.⁵⁷ Today's schools seem 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 we will simply review four key points.

First, perhaps the primary issue is that individuals tend to have much stronger skills for adversarial democracy rather than for deliberative democracy. As Littlejohn and Domenici have written, we “know intuitively how to fight, be defensive, clam up, blame, and persuade.”⁵⁸ Such intuitive skills, we would argue, may not necessarily be formally taught, but they are certainly rewarded and often celebrated in our culture. Individuals tend to have much more exposure to competitive debate rather than dialogue or deliberation. 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. Individuals see that the best argument does not necessarily win, but rather the argument with the more persuasive or powerful advocate or tactic. The media focuses on the game of politics, rather than the substance, which leads to a situation where the partisan strategies are more noticed. Hundreds of self-help books and corporate seminars are available to help people improve their persuasive skills with titles like *How to Win Every Argument*. As a result, most are at least somewhat skilled at developing and attacking arguments, and even perhaps how to manipulate and deceive, but do not have other critical democratic needs.

A related key issue is simply the lack of listening skills. Listening is not a critical aspect of education or individual success in our society. Too often, listening is seen at most as strategic audience analysis to better develop a persuasive appeal, but in most cases listening is simply turn taking. One quote we often use at CPD to explain the current culture concerning listening has been attributed to former New York governor Nathan Miller: “The art of listening in the United States is a competitive exercise in which the first person to draw a breath is deemed the listener.”⁵⁹ The importance of listening is often particularly

disregarded because of the degree of polarization and distrust between perspectives. When motives are assumed to be corrupt, listening is easily dismissed as unnecessary. The bottom line is that far too many people have an inability to converse with those that think differently than they do. 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.”⁶⁰

A third key deficiency involves a lack of judgment, decision-making, or critical-thinking skills. Such skills—also conceptualized as practical wisdom, or by the Greek word *phronesis*—is critical, but is difficult to develop or teach.⁶¹ Daniel Yankelovich’s work has been particularly focused on the development of judgment, both for individuals and for communities. He wrote, “The single most important reason people have for failing to accept the consequences of their opinions is their difficulty in resolving their own conflicting values and ambivalences. The ability to resolve internal conflicts of values is the foundation of good-quality public opinion. . . . Resolving conflicts of values takes time; it is painful work, and people avoid it as much and as long as they can.”⁶² This inherent deficiency is exacerbated by an education system that focuses primarily on the acquisition of knowledge rather than the development of wisdom, as discussed in section 1.1. There are many reasons for this, including the difficulty of testing wisdom rather than knowledge, the specialization of the disciplines, and a focus on value neutrality. The compartmentalization of information often creates a disconnect between knowledge and judgment that is often difficult to overcome. As Paulo Freire has written, our education system focuses on a banking concept of education rather than a problem-posing perspective. It creates, Freire argues, individuals that are not prepared to address society’s difficult problems.⁶³ Consider popular everyday assumptions like “you shouldn’t talk about politics at the dinner table” or that values are individual so they cannot be debated or discussed. People assume such subjects are not to be part of the public conversation at the same time that a diverse democracy such as the United States requires that they be. Unfortunately, most Americans do not have the tools with which to discuss the tough choices and value dilemmas that are inherent to democracy. They know how to analyze issues scientifically, but often they do not know how to uncover key underlying values and tensions embedded in issues that need to be worked through. Indeed, the natural impulse is to avoid such tensions, and too often political communication, due to the perverse incentives of our political system, encourages such avoidance.

A last deficiency is a bit more specific, but nonetheless important. Our education is primarily focused on individual skills, and thus leaves us deficient in skills of collaboration, cooperation, and group decision making. In *School and Society*, John Dewey wrote:

The mere absorption of facts and truths is so exclusively individual an affair that it tends very naturally to pass into selfishness. There is no obvious social motive for the acquirement of mere learning, there is no clear social gain in success thereat. Indeed,

almost the only measure of success is a competitive one, in the bad sense of the term—a comparison of results in the recitation or the examination to see which child has succeeded in getting ahead of others in storing up, in accumulating the maximum of information. So thoroughly is this the prevalent atmosphere that for one child to help another in his task has become a school crime.⁶⁴

Students simply do not see themselves as future leaders who are collectively exploring how to better society for all people, rather they see themselves as individuals seeking to ensure their own betterment, often at the expense of society and other people.

One last point to make concerns the quality of civic education, which is supposed to be providing the democratic skills that seem to be so lacking. Similar to education in general, civic education often relies too much on learning facts about the structure and official processes of government, rather than gaining the tools necessary to be a part of governance itself. A recent upsurge in attention to civic education has improved things, but much of the new energy is focused on service learning and volunteerism, which are certainly important to communities but usually are not sufficiently tied to politics, decision making, or problem solving to truly be considered significant.

As a result of these various factors, citizenship skills are practically in a state of crisis. The skills match the limited conception of citizenship in general. Citizens are often conceptualized as consumers, clients, or spectators, or perhaps as constituents or voters, but rarely as collaborative problem solvers, which, to deliberative practitioners, is the broader vision. The people often have the skills to consume, demand services, criticize, complain, and advocate, but they often do not have the skills to work with their neighbors on a common problem.

3.2 The Potential Positive Impact of Deliberation on Democratic Skills

Often viewed as a side effect rather than a primary goal, the impact of deliberation on democratic skills is nonetheless critical. Its importance stems not only because the skills are critical for a healthy democracy, but also from the fact that they are simply not offered otherwise. As mentioned in 3.1, the skills are not innate, and must be developed within humans, but when people are exposed to deliberation, they can become a key habit. Here we review four key areas of skill development linked to deliberation: listening skills, interaction skills, judgment, and local decision making.

Perhaps the most important individual impact of deliberation is that people can learn 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. Developing listening skills is a primary

concern of dialogue perspectives, but is nonetheless a key aspect of deliberation as well. Whether conceptualized as deep listening, reflective listening, or active listening, the combined impact of the deliberative event—with its ground rules, trained facilitators, and process all somewhat focused on sparking true listening—is to provide individuals with a new experience where they are truly listened to, and, due to reciprocity,⁶⁵ strongly expected to listen to others as well. Ideally, the experience causes several “a-ha” moments that provide future incentives for individuals to practice such listening in other situations.

We term a second related impact as interaction skills. These are essentially communication skills that focus on interactions between individuals with different perspectives. Listening is obviously a key interaction skill, but its importance justified it being listed separately. Here we focus more on the ability to interact with others on difficult issues through other productive means. This includes, for example, the ability to express one’s interests and values in a manner that facilitates understanding and welcomes comments and questions, or as Littlejohn and Domenici put it, “helping people talk so others will listen.”⁶⁶ One of the key theoretical aspects of deliberation—or of the public discussion of issues in general—is that individuals learn to rely on something other than self-interest to justify their position. In explaining their position to a group, they need to frame it in a way that the group will understand and support if they hope to gain sympathy. 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. This becomes one of the key issues facilitators of public deliberation must help participants discover. By paraphrasing and asking clarification questions, facilitators can help individuals move from a stark and seemingly unmovable statement of their position (“You will do this over my dead body”) to an understandable expression of what is important to them (“if this mine is built, I fear that my children’s health would be in danger”). With time and deliberative experience, participants can learn to express themselves deliberatively without the necessary prodding and prompting of the facilitator. They can also learn to better balance speaking and listening in order to contribute to the broader overall goal of addressing the common problem or striving for the common goal.

Another key interaction skill is asking good questions that help develop understanding and spark connections. The natural impulse is to ask leading or attacking questions to those with whom you disagree. You ask questions to expose inconsistencies or make them look foolish, dishonest, or unintelligent. Those, after all, are the types of questions that are asked during debates and political talk shows. Deliberative questions, however, seek a different end. They seek to help questioners truly understand and to help questionees better explain themselves. Once again, facilitators can be critical to the development of this skill. They model this behavior for the participants to emulate. At times, facilitators may actually observe the skill being recognized and then utilized within one deliberative

event. At the beginning of the event, the facilitator may be the only person asking deliberative questions, but by the end, the participants are asking themselves the questions and, hopefully learning the usefulness of such questions, particularly when compared to the types of questions they generally ask or are asked.

A third key skill that can develop as the result of deliberation is tied to judgment, wisdom, and group decision making. In some ways, deliberation can be described as group critical-thinking, and the best way to learn such a skill is simply to practice it. As explained in 1.2, deliberative events are often framed with a particular focus on the tough choices and trade-offs inherent to the issue, as well as the key points of common ground across perspectives. 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. Once issues are considered in this way, moving away from individual perspectives is much easier. Participants in deliberative forums therefore can also develop the group skills (i.e. brainstorming, group decision making, collaborative problem solving) that are critical to democracy in their own right.

Another important skill that often develops as a result of deliberative events involves the development of practical knowledge concerning the realities of decision-making processes, particularly for local issues. As we discussed earlier, one of the reasons for the lack of efficacy for many is that politics is considered from a national perspective, thus individuals seem powerless to effect change. Deliberative events, however, are often designed with a local focus. This local focus often can serve a significant educational function for residents as they learn about their local decision-making processes and how to get involved, either with the public, private, or nonprofit sector. Deliberative background material often includes local connections to the issue, for example. These skills will directly relate to the sparking of individual or organizational action (section 4.2) or institutional action (5.2), but is represented here because having knowledge of local sites of politics and how they function is a democratic skill that is lacking but that deliberative events can provide.

One final point to make here shifts the focus from the participants of forums to the convenors and facilitators. Another critical result of deliberative events is that the individuals putting on the event sharpen their skills as well. Each event CPD hosts is a learning opportunity. We learn lessons about attracting audiences, explaining deliberation, facilitating discussions, capturing and reporting the information, and so on. The development and expansion of these skills should not be underestimated. Indeed, we would argue that one of the most critical needs of our communities is the development of impartial groups with the knowledge, skills, motivation, and resources to serve as hosts and nurturers of deliberation. This is perhaps one of the strongest justifications for small deliberative events that perhaps have no clear impact on their communities in the short run, for each deliberative event increases the

capacity of those hosting the event. This, we strongly believe, is the reason organizations like the National Issues Forums are so valuable, as they help create new deliberative practitioners that slowly and surely can increase their capacity and reproduce themselves to the point that they can make significant impacts on their communities.

In sum, deliberation has the potential to provide a number of key democratic skills that are currently deficient, and that are not currently a significant part of the educational curriculum. Deliberation develops citizens in a broader sense of the term, citizens that go beyond being merely consumers, clients, spectators, and voters.

3.3 The Challenges to Deliberation Positively Impacting Democratic Skills

The challenges here are not as clear as with the others, though many similarities exist. The primary issues are that human nature in some ways works against these skills, and the broader culture simply does not seem to focus on or reward them. Humans want to talk and be heard, while not necessarily having to listen. Humans want things to be simple and “black and white,” and do not want to deal with tough choices and value dilemmas. Deliberative events can create an environment in which these deliberative skills are favored, but the extent to which that environment becomes a broader norm is questionable. When deliberative techniques are pitted against adversarial tactics outside situations with ground rules and facilitators to enforce them, the adversarial tactics are likely to dominate. For example, if one side is conciliatory and framing themselves openly in order to invite discussion and disagreement (“speaking so others will listen”), and the other side is confidently expressing their views as if there is no doubt as to their validity, the rhetorical consequence is that one side seems clear and assertive and the other seems wishy-washy. Persuasion scholars label such conciliatory talk “powerless speech” because of its inability to persuade.⁶⁷ In a game perceived to be zero-sum, anything appearing to be a concession or tentativeness will be deemed a retreat. The idea, of course, is that once exposed to the deliberative alternative to politics, more and more individuals will recognize its merit, and begin to demand more politics adopt its procedures, but that road will be a long one, and one that will require not only developing individual democratic skills, but also changing the broader political culture altogether. At this point, deliberative tactics work within the context of deliberative forums with all their trappings, but not necessarily outside those settings.

Another challenge here is that adversarial politics can simply be more interesting, and certainly more entertaining. A debate between rival factions and the fireworks it is certain to send off can draw crowds and be worthy of prime-time viewing, whereas as a deliberation is often difficult to watch for spectators, even spectators that strongly believe in the value of deliberation. As a result, it will be difficult

to overcome the media focus on adversarial politics, so the media will likely continue to teach and support such methods.

A last challenge will be finding ways to incorporate these sorts of skills into the education system. Doing so would not only involve expanding the time and resources spent on civic education, but changing the nature of civic education. When practical, hands-on deliberative skills are currently taught, such as with student government, mock trials, and academic debate, they are often more closely related to adversarial politics. Many have identified the recent increase in volunteerism and service learning, but such activities do not generally provide these skills either. The problem is that such skills are difficult to assess, which is becoming more and more a critical part of education. The educational curriculum is also already so full that expecting school districts or universities to increase the time spent on civic education will be difficult. Nonetheless, local deliberative practitioners could play a key role in working with school districts to improve the manner in which democratic skills are taught, particularly by incorporating more deliberation.

3.4 Suggestions for Deliberative Practitioners Concerning the Goal of Improving Democratic Skills

If deliberative practitioners seek to focus on the development of democratic skills in their events, there are a number of specific strategies they could use to increase their chances of success. The factor that deliberative practitioners have the most control over in this situation is the moderating skills of facilitators. As discussed in 3.2, the facilitator is critical to the development of democratic skills because the facilitator is essentially modeling those skills for the participants during the forum. Facilitators should set the tone of the deliberation through their overall introduction to the event and their explanation of the ground rules, and explain what is expected of the participants in terms of listening. Often, because truly listening may be an oddity for participants, facilitators may need to spend extra time at the beginning establishing its importance for the event. Facilitators must also exhibit superior listening skills, help participants articulate themselves in productive ways, and ask high-quality deliberative questions. Facilitators can use paraphrasing to model how participants can “talk so others will listen.”

Facilitators must also be prepared to praise the proper use of democratic skills by participants, as well as

CPD in Focus

One of CPD’s signature events each semester is our Community Issues Forum, an event tied to a class of graduating seniors at CSU. The event gives us a chance to bring campus and community together for what is usually a set of five to seven different topics. The primary goal for the event is actually to develop the skills of our student facilitators, while secondary goals involve exposing the graduating seniors and community attendees to a taste of deliberative practice. In most cases, the topics chosen for the event by the student facilitators will not become major projects, thus the forums are not strongly tied to action or institutional decision making. CPD students get a chance to practice all aspects of deliberation, including designing the process for their breakout, working with stakeholders to develop the background information, attracting a diverse audience, facilitating the actual event, and reporting on it afterwards. The experience they gain with that project helps immensely as they work on CPD’s major projects their second semester.

react well to the use of adversarial tactics. Indeed, the teaching moments that may arise during the course of the forum may be the best opportunities to exhibit and highlight strong democratic skills.

Considering the importance of facilitator skills overall to the goal of improving democratic skills through deliberation, the primary activity deliberative practitioners can do before forums for this goal is to practice facilitating and otherwise improve their facilitation skills. There are a number of useful resources to refer to,⁶⁸ plus simply providing opportunities for facilitators to receive more practice can be helpful. Before forums, facilitators can also properly prepare so they are more able to respond to different situations. In particular, facilitators should develop a clear understanding of the tensions and trade offs with the issue, so they can more naturally help the participants identify and work through those tensions, and thus sharpen their judgment skills. To help develop local action skills, practitioners could also be sure to develop locally specific information for the forum to provide as handouts to facilitate that skill development.

As with the other goals, if improving democratic skills is the primary goal, the reflections period at the end of the forum should focus somewhat on the skills developed or observed during the forum. The facilitator can highlight and have people speak about the process itself and how it felt to truly listen and focus on the need for judgment and wisdom. Participants could be asked to discuss the difference between the tactics and skills they used during the forum and those they typically observe being used in other political contexts. Questions in written surveys could also focus on these issues.

After forums, as with the other goals, deliberative practitioners can focus on the issues connected to this goal in their reporting of the event. Reporters can highlight how participants exhibited listening, interacting, or judgment skills, perhaps including quotes from participants on such issues. Even including an extended discussion of the ground rules in a report may expose new audiences to the specific skills of deliberation and their connection to democracy.

The goal of improving democracy skills can also be pursued by deliberative practitioners outside the context of a specific issue forum. Perhaps the most important potential task here would be taking on the challenge of improving the quality of civic education in their local community. This can happen at the K-12 level, in higher education, and in adult educational opportunities.

Lastly, deliberative practitioners must be proactive and intentional in terms of improving their own skills. Practitioners need to make time to debrief events and take careful notes of how things went

CPD in Focus

Improving local civic education programs are a particular focus of CPD. We hosted a public meeting in conjunction with the school district and a state-level Civic Mission of Schools project in the fall of 2006, and from that meeting developed some action steps we hope to engage in the coming years. We have developed a relationship with the district's Social Studies Coordinator and have begun plans to develop summer institutes specifically for civics teachers. The process has been slow to develop, but we know in the long run that the more we can expose students to deliberative practice while in school and provide an alternative to politics-as-usual, the more likely they will support such processes as adults.

and how their skills can be improved. Surveys or postevent interviews with participants focused on all the various aspects of the event should be completed. In addition, valuable trainings are available in numerous connected fields—conflict management, group communication, facilitation, public participation, collaborative decision making, and so on.⁶⁹ Deliberative practitioners need a very broad skill set, thus should always be looking for ways in which to improve and expand their capabilities.

Intermission: Summary of Goals 1-3 and Looking Ahead to Goals 4-6

Before we move on to section 4, a brief interlude is warranted. The first three goals of deliberation that we have examined—issue learning and the improvement of democratic attitudes and democratic skills—work together in a way the later goals do not. They also represent different kinds of goals in general. In a way, these three goals could be categorized as educational goals. These three goals do not necessarily have a direct impact on communities. They serve primarily to build up the capacity of individuals to be stronger, more involved citizens. These first three have primarily been described in terms of their effect on individuals, but when enough individuals in a community develop these capacities, the community itself can see the consequences. The combination of various aspects from these first three goals, in other words, works to improve the ability for communities to address the problems they face. Just as deliberation can create a positive habit with individuals, and help expand individual's notions of citizenship, these impacts in the aggregate can transform communities and develop broader democratic habits within them as well. As individuals in a community learn more about issues and improve their democratic attitudes and skills, they increase their community's overall social capital, which is another of the five rationales for deliberation identified by Lars Torres.⁷⁰ Indeed, these first three goals could collectively be termed the social capital consequences of deliberation.

As we move into the next section, we will be examining more direct impacts on communities. Many readers are likely focused on the connection between deliberation and action, and for good reason. Nonetheless, the importance of the goals discussed thus far should not be underestimated. They serve as the foundation for any sort of deliberative action, whether that involves community action (goal 4), institutional change (goal 5), or overall community problem solving (goal 6). There are many ways to spark such actions in communities, but without the basis provided by the first three goals reviewed here, it is more likely that the actions taken will be detrimental to democracy in some ways. Remember we are dealing with opposing feedback loops. Too often the tactics of politics-as-usual indirectly cause many of the problems we reviewed in sections 1.1, 2.1, and 3.1. Adversarial politics may lead to results in terms of changes, but they also lead to misunderstandings, polarization, apathy, and a low quality of citizenship skills. Deliberative politics, on the other hand, can not only lead to change—and we will argue in the

following three sections that the change can be more effective, legitimate, and sustaining—but its “side effects” are also positive.

In summary, we simply want to emphasize again the importance of these first three goals. Practitioners understandably want to make a clear impact and see the results of their work, and the results of these first three goals will not be as self-evident as the results of later goals. However, targeting and achieving these initial goals well are a much more manageable task than the latter goals. One of the conclusions of this report is focused on the point that using deliberative politics in your community to affect change requires a significant investment of time and energy (and in most cases, money). Deliberative practitioners, especially those just starting out or those with limited resources must realize that projects that accomplish these initial goals have strong value and are critically necessary to our democracy.

4.0 Individual/Community Action

We move now to our fourth primary goal and consequence of deliberation, individual/community action. The distinctions between goals 4 and 5 are important, but the two also certainly work in tandem. As discussed in the previous section, with goal 4 we move away from primarily educational consequences into the realm of action and more tangible consequences. This section focuses on how deliberation can spark individuals and groups to action, whereas the following section will examine how deliberation can impact policy and institutional decision-making processes (such as decisions made by city councils, county governments, school boards, on up to the state and national legislatures). The distinction is similar to the distinction David Mathews makes between community and electoral politics. Such actions should be considered complementary, and indeed one of the strongest implications of the growing deliberation perspective is the manner in which it works to incorporate a broader, more inclusive view of “political action” that works in both realms. Too often political discussions focus solely on government action, or are polarized between assumptions for the need for individual action or government action, with little consideration of the possibilities in between. Deliberation helps broaden those conversations.

Clearly “action” is a critical consequence to deliberation. As David Mathews has explained, “No question about the use of deliberation is asked more often than this one: Does deliberation lead to action?”⁷¹ Later, he summarized Kettering research by explaining, “The citizens . . . have made it clear that, unless deliberation enables them to make a difference in overcoming the problems they face, it will have little claim on their time.”⁷² There is no doubt, therefore, that while the initial goals are critical for the long-term development of democratic communities, deliberation that is not ultimately connected to action in important ways will be difficult to maintain.

4.1 The Current Situation with Individual/Community Action

There are currently many ways individuals and communities can act on issues that impact them. As de 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 nonprofit sector are strong in the United States and are critical for helping communities deal with a vast array of issues. Advocacy organizations and groups abound as well. Social movements, which essentially all begin outside the confines of government, have made immeasurable impacts on the American landscape. Margaret Mead’s famous quote, “A small group of thoughtful people could 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. In most communities, the problems outlined in 1.1, 2.1, and 3.1 have an impact on these organizations and their ability to effect change in their communities. The lack of trust and understanding between perspectives acts as a barrier to broader actions. Many of the nonprofits are fighting for financial support from the same governmental or philanthropic sources, thus a culture of competition rather than cooperation may dominate. As a result, too often 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. The lack of coordination also causes situations where individuals with a passion for a community issue may essentially reinvent the wheel rather than join with other like-minded individuals to make a broader impact.

Robert Putnam’s work has also shown that these critical third-sector institutions have been declining in recent years. Membership in service organizations, such as Optimist Clubs and Lions Clubs, have decreased, not to mention Putnam’s bowling leagues. Americans have always been known for their individualism, but for a variety of reasons that individualism has seemingly grown lately, resulting in fewer critical connections within communities.⁷³

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 the types of

CPD in Focus

One ongoing example of activist politics in Fort Collins involves anti-war and “pro-troops” activists situated across from each other at a major intersection near downtown. Each side hoists signs for their viewpoint and asks motorists to honk in support. The protestors establish a dichotomy that offers no middle ground, and no possibility for discussion. Most of the motorists are likely somewhere in the middle, but are forced to pick a side, or simply remove themselves from the discussion altogether. We have yet to sponsor a forum on the war, primarily because we tend to focus on local issues that can be more easily connected to local action. But the Mulberry Street protestors, who are faithfully out there essentially every weekend, are emblematic of the “us vs. them” protest perspective, which often dominates public discourse. The activists likely believe they are making a difference and standing up for their beliefs, but do their actions move the discussion forward?

techniques that push people apart rather than bring them together. Research on social movement rhetoric, for example, focuses specifically on the polarizing “us vs. them” techniques that are often used with such organizations.⁷⁴ Many of the most active individuals in the community, particularly those tied to single issues, such as the environment, abortion, or anti-war, likely take on an activist mentality. Such a mentality may work directly against more collaborative approaches, for instance working with those who disagree with them may be perceived as “selling out.”

Moving away from the specific actions of community organizations and considering the broader public discourse concerning action, we would argue that the conversation is rather limited. The conversation typically focuses on either government action or individual responsibility for problems, with opposing sides simply talking past each other. This phenomenon is particularly evident in discussions about poverty issues, for example. Many argue for the need for major policy changes, such as better income redistribution, educational overhauls, and safety net improvements, whereas others focus primarily on the need for individuals to make better decisions, particularly about their education, family, and behaviors. The result of these opposing arguments is that the conversation is too narrow, tough choices are not considered, and the common ground that does exist concerning poverty is not explored.⁷⁵

Another relevant aspect of the current situation is that many of the most active individuals and community organizations are focused more on addressing symptoms of community problems, rather than root causes. These community organizations are doing wonderful and necessary work in many ways, but their work is nonetheless limited in that it is often not political in the broad sense of being tied to community problem solving/decision making. Nonprofits are often, in other words, in a reactive rather than a proactive mode of operation, trying their best to keep up with community needs. The growth of service learning in education is connected to this idea. Research shows that more and more youth are volunteering and connecting to their communities, but they are doing so in ways that involve them in advocacy or service organizations. These students are not necessarily learning how to address problems in their community in collaborative ways, but rather are working to reduce the impact of the problems while working with like-minded others. Once again, such work is critical, but nonetheless is unlikely to lead to long-term systemic change.

One last point to make here, which is also certainly relevant to many of the goals and consequences of deliberation but particularly an issue here, is the lack of public places for the community to come together, especially with people from different perspectives. Again, community organizations are generally collections of like-minded people. Indeed, that is likely why people joined the organization in the first place. David Mathews spoke on this issue and explained, “There are a great many places where people can go to complain and to advocate, to be uplifted and persuaded, but not so many places where they can talk together with those who may have different experiences and perspectives.”⁷⁶

In summary, the current situation with how individuals and communities get involved in the issues that affect them is complicated by a number of factors. The rich American tradition in community involvement remains, though many are concerned that it is eroding. The impact of many of those organizations, however, is limited because of competition, a narrow one-issue view, an adversarial mindset, or a focus (often necessary) on treating symptoms rather than addressing causes. Beyond these organizations, community action can be limited by a focus on governmental solutions on one hand and assumptions of individual responsibility on the other.

4.2 The Potential Positive Impact of Deliberation on Individual/Community Action

The bottom line to be explored in this section is that deliberation not only can lead to *more* individual/community action on common problems, but also to a *more collaborative and inclusive* kind of individual/community action. Such action, we argue, is critical to the health of a democracy. Deliberation's ability to spark action is connected to a number of key aspects of the first three positive consequences of deliberation we've reviewed, in particular the ability of deliberation to spark a broader understanding and ownership of problems, an increased sense of efficacy, and increased democratic skills. The result of this sort of mix can often lead to more collaborative action, as the growing number of case studies connected to deliberative practice is showing.

Although large communitywide collaborative projects are certainly the best examples of deliberation sparking real change, even smaller, individual forums can spark positive action. Individuals who participate in forums may decide to get involved in any number of ways, such as volunteering, donating to or joining a community organization, starting a community organization, writing an editorial or a letter to the editor, or even more traditional actions tied to representative democracy, such as contacting their representatives. As discussed during the review of the previous goals, experience with deliberation tends to help develop a more robust sense of citizenship in individuals, and that sense of citizenship—citizen as community problem solver—is more likely to lead to a wide variety of action. As the number of individuals embracing this broader notion of citizenship and getting involved in local issues increases, the capacity of that community to address its problems also increases.

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. In 2006, David Mathews labeled this realization that "great eye-opener" of the past two decades of Kettering research:

The story we are writing places citizens—the greatest untapped resource for meeting the challenges of the 21st century—on center stage. Of course, government remains important, but the great eye-opener of the past two decades of Kettering research has been this: 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.⁷⁷

Kettering associate Randy Nielsen made a similar argument, writing that “Communities are increasingly recognizing the challenge of dealing with issues that, by their nature, require multiple levels of complementary action by a variety of actors.”⁷⁸ Institutional sources are also coming to the same realization. The term *democratic governance*, used in particular by organizations like the Institute for Local Government, emphasizes the need for action beyond governmental action to address 21st-century community issues.⁷⁹ This perspective is strongly complementary to deliberative democracy and is rapidly growing in popularity. As more and more institutions seek better ways to engage the public and get them more involved in decision making and problem solving in innovative ways, deliberative practitioners are poised to be at the forefront to provide their crucial services.

This increasing focus on multiple levels of complementary action led us at CPD to the social ecology model, which has now become a base of our work when examining potential action spawned by deliberation.⁸⁰ The social ecology model, developed by health scholars, focuses on ways in which to make broad changes in behavior in communities. The model lays out five levels where action can take place: the individual, the individual’s network (family, friends, and work associates), the agency, the community, and policy. As advocates develop programs, they consider options at all five of the levels. For example, if the project is focused on improving diet, the program directors would consider (1) what changes the individual would need to make; (2) what changes would need to be made within the individual’s network (it would be difficult for individuals to change their habits if those around them did not support those changes); (3) what changes could be made at the agency level, meaning changes within governmental and nonprofit agencies and organizations under the current policy; (4) what changes the community can make as a whole; and, finally, (5) what policy changes would be necessary. Once again, we would argue that most political discussions primarily focus on the policy level and secondarily on the individual level, but the social ecology model helps participants think through all the various levels that may be necessary to effect significant change on issues. CPD is currently using this model in a major project developing a community response to the rise in poverty in our county.⁸¹

One last important point to make here is that the sort of community action that deliberation can spark is often self-reinforcing. Ideally, as citizens come together to address a common problem, trust develops across boundaries, new relationships are formed, efficacy increases, collaborative techniques and processes are learned, and collaborative leaders are developed. In sum, social capital increases and a habit of relying on deliberation and collaborative action develops. Each successful project increases the capacity for the next project.

4.3 The Challenges to Deliberation Positively Impacting Individual/Community Action

The positive potential of deliberation sparking action is significant, but also difficult to attain for a variety of reasons. The fact remains that our communities have many more resources for partisan or adversarial political action rather than collaborative action, and those resources may work against any deliberative project rather than for it. The “politics of protest” has a strong connection to many, and overcoming the polarization and distrust that dominates the minds of many will not be an easy task. Here again is why the initial three goals are important in their own right, because they help lay the necessary groundwork to sustain collaborative action.

Another concern is that as the deliberative perspective grows in importance in individual communities, they become more of a target for adversarial politics. They could be targeted directly (as in challenges to their legitimacy) or indirectly (in terms of attempts of coopting them or corrupting them in some way). Partisan organizations could, for example, mobilize their supporters, openly or covertly, to attend deliberative events armed with talking points and instructions to direct conversations in particular ways. Deliberation works best when individuals attend with open minds and a willingness to listen to opposing views, and an influx of clandestine participants focused on supporting one particular viewpoint could easily derail the effort. During one of

CPD’s first major projects, for example, it became clear that an opposition group did mobilize behind the scenes in an attempt to influence the conversations. Doug Sarno, Martin’s trainer with IAP2, warned of similar situations where activists “parachute” into a public participation process as it nears its completion, intent on derailing the progress or pushing results toward their preset perspectives, which is particularly problematic because they were not a part of the process as relationships were built and common understandings between perspectives were developed.

CPD IN FOCUS

During [the grade configuration project \(see CPD in Focus, page 26\)](#) ~~the, a spring of 2007, CPD was called upon by the local school district to host a series of six public meetings on the question of whether the school district should adjust their grade configuration (they currently use three year high schools, whereas the rest of the state primarily uses four year high schools).~~ A group of parents against the change mobilized for the forums. They developed talking points, attended each meeting, and split up into different break-out groups to be sure to be involved in each separate discussion. They certainly did influence the overall process somewhat, but due to the design of the process—which allowed set time for discussions of pros and cons of each option being considered—and because we always had at least some proponents for the change in each room, the discussions were not overly biased toward their perspective. We were, however, compelled to mention the organized group in the report. On a side note, at those meetings we also used “dot voting” at the end of each discussion to allow the participants in each room to identify which statements from the easel notes they most strongly

The danger of cooptation by adversarial organizations brings forth another key challenge for deliberative practitioners concerning deliberation’s link to action: the challenge of maintaining neutrality or impartiality. That challenge is inherently difficult for any deliberative activity, but it is clearly heightened when a primary goal of deliberative events is action. Deliberative practitioners face a number of difficult questions when the conversation turns to addressing tangible action steps. What is the ongoing

role of the deliberative organization? Ideally, the participants take ownership of the process and lead the community to action on their own, but such action must often be nurtured on an ongoing basis to be sustainable. Is that a legitimate role of impartial deliberative organizations? If not them, who? Most other organizations or individuals that could play that role would likely be tied to a specific perspective. Would ongoing leadership by the deliberative organization on one issue compromise its ability to serve in an impartial manner on the next issue it addresses? Or would the lack of ongoing leadership on the issue impede the impact of the project, thus compromising the organization's ability to mobilize the community for the next issue due to the lack of results for the prior project? Such dilemmas are particularly problematic if the initial audiences for the deliberations were not broad.

CPD IN FOCUS

Within our Pathways Past Poverty project, health care became a key issue. When we collected public feedback on the goals that had been developed, however, we essentially received "warnings" from some advocates concerned that our ideas to improve the health-care situation locally for low-income residents could negatively impact current efforts geared toward developing a national health-care system. Similarly, we also received some criticism concerning the project because some believed in the need for an overall change to our economic system rather than the "band-aid" approach our community mobilization effort was seeking.

If a project, for example, primarily attracts advocates for a particular position, their move to action may be quite removed from the ideal of broad-based collaborative action that brings together community members from many perspectives. Ongoing leadership in such a project could easily be seen as partisan. No easy answers can be found here. In sum, as deliberative practitioners work to increase their impact and connect their work to community politics and action, they will need to confront and work through their own set of tough choices.

Another way to consider the challenges of realizing this goal for deliberative practitioners is that supporting community action requires a different skill set than that necessary for developing and hosting deliberative events. Knowledge of community networking, coalition building, collaborative planning, consensus building, stakeholder negotiations, strategic planning, social change and social movement theory, and so on may all be useful to developing and sustaining community action. Some of these areas are inherently connected to the skills of fostering deliberation, but all range beyond them in important ways. This point will become a key conclusion of this report. One of the strengths of the deliberative perspective is its interdisciplinary nature. Deliberative practitioners come to deliberation from a great number of different homes--communication studies, political science, public administration, education, community organizing, nonprofit management, conflict resolution, cooperative extension, public health, leadership studies, sociology, to name a few. Each perspective brings its own particular insights into deliberation, but the reality is that, ideally, deliberative organizations can incorporate the insights from *all* these perspectives in their work. As deliberative practitioners consider their long-term plans and work to more directly impact their communities in tangible ways, expanding their capacity should include

developing stronger connections to individuals with skill sets that contribute to these various connected areas.

One final challenge to reemphasize, as it's been mentioned often before, is the importance of attracting a broad, diverse audience. Many of the key challenges to moving deliberation to action are reduced if the audiences for deliberative events are broad and representative of the community as a whole. Concerns about partisanship, for example, are clearly decreased if action steps were developed by a broad audience. Both the importance and the difficulty of drawing an ideal audience are heightened when action is a key goal. Individuals and organizations already connected to the issue may be particularly difficult to work with, as they may resent or distrust the role of the deliberative organization, or may be more invested in maintaining a narrow framing of the issue. Advocacy organizations may even actively resist local action on an issue, particularly if it is a national issue, such as health care or poverty, because they feel change must come at a broader level, and that action at the local level may compromise those broader efforts.

The combination of skill set issues and audience issues brings forth another key tension between notions of processes that engage a broad public and those that focus on key stakeholders. Deliberative democracy has a particular affinity for involving “everyday” citizens in these processes, but when focused on sparking community action, deliberative practitioners will likely need to engage stakeholders already involved in the issue, whether they are “experts” on the issue or are otherwise connected to relevant advocacy organizations, nonprofits, or government agencies. This tension is also evident in the distinctions between democratic governance and collaborative governance in public administration programs.⁸² The former assumes a broader tent that includes the public, while the latter focuses on bringing together stakeholders. Much work has been done on collaborative stakeholder processes, particularly with environmental issues, and that work is certainly connected in many ways to deliberative perspectives.⁸³ Both seek to bring groups together that normally do not work together, and both realize the need for broad engagement and collaboration from multiple sectors in order address community problems. They also differ, however, in important ways, particularly in terms of the target audiences as already mentioned and outputs (stakeholder processes often seek “consensus” and officially negotiated agreements, whereas deliberation processes tend to avoid the need for consensus). More attention to the connections and differences between these areas will be vital as deliberative practitioners seek to connect their work more to community action. Indeed, we would argue that the two perspectives should merge in important ways. Both perspectives could learn from each other. To lead to significant action, deliberative processes will require stakeholder involvement, but to reap the numerous indirect benefits of deliberation that have been discussed throughout this report—and to maintain a strong connection to democracy—stakeholder processes will require broader public involvement.

4.4 Suggestions for Deliberative Practitioners Concerning the Goal Impacting Individual/Community Action

Like many of the other goals of deliberation, both the positive potentials and the challenges are significant. As we've done before, in this section we consider the potentials and challenges, and offer some practical suggestions to help deliberative practitioners improve their ability to accomplish this goal. With the final three goals, the suggestions become more hypothetical than concrete as the knowledge of deliberation's impact in these areas is certainly still developing, particularly with our experiences with CPD. The exercise should nonetheless be valuable, if nothing but to help develop better questions about how to improve our work in these areas. Once again, we organize our comments by considering potential actions before, during, and after deliberative forums.

To best achieve the goal of positive individual/community action stemming from deliberative forums and in particular, to lessen some of the key challenges, a number of pre-forum activities are critical. Community networking and audience development are perhaps the most important. The tension just discussed between public and stakeholder processes becomes relevant here. Deliberative practitioners must both work to attract the non-usual suspects to events while also working with key community actors and organizations previously connected to the issue. If key stakeholders are not engaged early, the process may never gain necessary legitimacy or capacity or may be susceptible to cooptation later. If the general public is not engaged, then the process may differ little from other processes and loses democratic legitimacy. Involving key stakeholders, however, requires particular skills, considering the distrust or competitiveness that may exist between them. In addition, mixing stakeholders and the general public will have its own challenges, with less information available on how to do so well.

Audience development for processes focused on sparking action will likely need to go beyond simply convincing a broad audience to attend. It is more important to involve broad audiences in a variety of ways from the beginning of the process, so they take ownership of the process itself and so that conflicts are addressed at their early stages. One of the dilemmas that will arise, however, is determining how broad a net to cast in terms of working with established groups. Would you work with an advocacy organization if they are known for more extreme views and less than deliberative tactics? Working with such groups beforehand to explain and gain buy-in on the processes and ground rules may be essential to ultimate success. Working directly with individuals or organizations that may be particularly emotionally connected to the issue is likely necessary. Avoiding them gives up control as to when they get engaged, and the very act of avoiding them may increase their likelihood of attacking the process. Two public participation training workshops that Martín has attended, one sponsored by IAP2 and one taught by Hans and Annemarie Bleiker of the Institute for Participatory Management and Planning, both emphasized the

need to directly engage the most difficult audiences as early as possible in the process and warned of the perils of hoping to avoid them. Developing the skills to do such engagement well is important.

This leads us to one potential way of merging the stakeholder and public processes discussed at the end of 3.3. Moving back and forth between stakeholder and public processes may represent the best option. Stakeholders may be used primarily before an event, to help sharpen the background materials, develop broad audiences, and lend credibility to the project. Imagine the message sent to the community if a meeting on a critical issue is cosponsored by organizations typically seen as bitter opponents and anchored by a deliberative organization with a reputation for impartiality. Stakeholders could then again be engaged after events, to work together in response to the conclusions drawn from the broader public processes.

Here is a separate point concerning actions to consider before forums, work to incorporate specific examples of potential individual/community actions. As mentioned earlier, too often policy discussions focus primarily on government actions and policy change or simply on individual responsibility. By incorporating examples of community best practices and successful community initiatives, participants will be more likely to make such connections in their deliberations.

Moving on to strategies to consider *during* forums. Once again we return to the simple point of focusing on this goal with moderator discussion questions and reflections time. More than usual, the conversations should be directed toward specific potential actions, and the various consequences that could result. Reflection questions should focus on asking participants what *their* role should be in addressing this issue. At CPD, for example, if we are focused on sparking action, we utilize the social ecology model discussed in 4.2, which leads to discussions of action at numerous levels (individual, network, agency, community, and policy).

Perhaps the most important point to make concerning strategies to use in developing forums geared toward action, however, is that single-event forums would likely be insufficient. True community mobilization efforts would probably necessitate not only multiple meetings in various locations in order to engage a broad audience, they would also require multiple meetings over time to develop enough trust and understanding among audiences before moving to direct consideration of action steps. As a result, on its own the basic NIF forum—a one-time event lasting two hours with an audience of 15-30—is simply not a realistic tool for sparking significant community action. Of course, the NIF format can certainly be adapted for such broader processes, as the Study Circles (now Everyday Democracy) process has shown.⁸⁴

Moving to consider strategies relevant after forums, follow-up clearly becomes more important when focused on sparking action. The first three consequences of deliberation primarily involved consequences to individuals, thus while follow-up could help expand those consequences to more

individuals, the primary impact would nonetheless be centered on the participants themselves. When the goal is action, however, increasing the impact beyond the participants becomes much more important, which brings up the impartiality challenge discussed in section 4.3. Deliberative practitioners must consider to what extent they can legitimately become advocates for the action steps that were developed during their forums. Certain steps would not be that controversial, such as reporting on the results of the forums and even highlighting proposed action steps. Specifically exposing key stakeholders to the results of forums and seeking official responses may also be useful. Taking actions to help initiate or sustain actions originally developed during forums starts moving into more controversial areas, but may be necessary for the action to be consequential. For example, borrowing from the Study Circles model, deliberative practitioners may develop follow-up forums focused on action planning to build on prior forums. Once again, we see the line between deliberative practice and community organizing begin to blur.⁸⁵

Moving beyond specific forums and projects, there are a number of activities deliberative practitioners could utilize to further the likelihood that deliberative events will lead to individual or community action. Working with local community organizations and developing a strong network are perhaps most important. The more deliberative practitioners are familiar with and respected by key stakeholders in the community, the more likely they could develop processes that result in action. Deliberative practitioners can become important boundary spanners in their community, helping overcome the natural tendency for organizations and agencies to serve as independent silos. Deliberative organizations can also become key sources of training and skill development *within* preexisting community organizations. Efforts could be expended to identify and train individuals within advocacy organizations, for example. Those individuals could become embedded champions who will advocate for more collaborative processes within their organizations. Deliberative practitioners should also continuously work to support and praise collaborative processes publicly, whether or not they are involved.

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We have been working hard at CPD to develop “champions” of deliberation within key local institutions. In the summer of 2006, Martín arranged for a local state representative and a local school board member to accompany him to the Kettering Foundation’s Public Policy Workshops in Dayton. In the fall of 2007, Martín was awarded a grant that provided the funds for him and a Fort Collins city administrator to attend the IAP2 workshops. The CPD advisory board also includes representatives from several local institutions. One of the difficult choices we have when developing relationships is whether to target institutional decision makers, such as city councilmembers, or administrative figures, such as public information officers. We have tended to focus on the latter, assuming they would be more interested in learning new public participation techniques, would likely be in their position for a longer period of time, and they would inherently be less political than the elected officials. Whether those choices were accurate remains to be seen.

In summary, focusing on action certainly brings forth a number of difficult questions and dilemmas, but deliberative practitioners should not be deterred. As the deliberative democracy and collaborative governance movement continues to expand, the connection between deliberative processes and community action will become more and more important. Deliberative practitioners must be proactive in working together to expand their capacity to address these dilemmas and develop the necessary skill sets to move deliberation to action in legitimate ways.

5.0 Improved Institutional Action

We now focus on how deliberative practice can improve institutional decision making should ideally work in concert with individual/community action, particularly within the growing collaborative governance or democratic governance paradigms. 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, it is certainly a growing perspective. The work of public administration scholars, such as Matt Leighninger, Archon Fung, John Nalbandian, Lisa Bingham, and Tina Nabatchi,⁸⁶ as well as organizations like the Institute for Local Government, the National League of Cities (NLC), the National Civic League, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and the School Board Association, clearly reveals that there is a movement within institutional structures that is realizing the poor quality of much existing public participation and are seeking new and more productive ways of interacting with the public.⁸⁷ Deliberative practitioners working in their local communities, therefore, should either be able to find willing institutional partners, or at least should be able to expose their local institutions to resources from within their own fields that argue for the importance and positive consequences of deliberative processes. I would argue, for example, that the NLC's *Changing the Way We Govern: Building Democratic Governance in Your Community*, is a must read for deliberative practitioners; copies of that document could be provided to local decision makers.⁸⁸

Institutional action can be considered from a variety of scopes, both in terms of the level of government—city, county, school board, state, national—as well as the degree of institutionalization of deliberation. In this section, we focus primarily on local government, but the points can certainly range beyond them as the use of deliberation expands. We also assume a broad range of potential connections between deliberative practitioners and institutional decision making. On one extreme, projects may be completely designed and performed by deliberative practitioners without any official connection to institutional decision makers, but nonetheless developed with the specific goal of providing those decision makers with valuable information. At the opposite extreme, a deliberative project could be completely institutional, funded, designed and performed by a governmental institution. In between, any

number of connections are possible that have deliberative practitioners and institutional decision makers working in partnership. Overall, we focus here on improving and expanding the use of deliberation within institutional decision-making processes.

5.1 The Current Situation with Institutional Decision Making

Clearly many books have already been written detailing the current situation with institutional decision making in the United States, so our goal here is merely to highlight a few of the particularly relevant points that others have made. This review proceeds in two parts, first looking at some of the overall issues with institutional politics and then examining the problems on a local level.

The most common criticism expressed concerning institutional politics involves the dominance of either money or power in decision-making processes that, to be considered democratically legitimate, should have significant public input. A common reframe in David Mathews' writings is that people are said to be "disconnected and estranged, they talk angrily about being pushed out of politics; cynicism comes easily."⁸⁹ The millions that are spent on political campaigns make fund-raising and political contributions far too critical an aspect of politics. Critics also argue that we essentially now exist under a "perpetual campaign," sparked by media coverage that tends to focus on the strategy and game of politics rather than the substantive decision making that is critical to a healthy democratic society.

Others focus on the dominance of the political parties, and how they affect the nature of our political decision making. From a deliberative perspective, the two-party system has clear negative impacts on the quality of public discussion, essentially supporting a zero-sum game. With just two primary parties, any success from one party can be considered a negative for the other party. As a result, the incentive process for political talk and action is simply out of whack. The common goal of solving problems too often takes a back seat to the need for short-term political victories. Political rhetoric is now dominated by consumer marketing tactics that sell candidates and ideas like boxes of cereal and that treat citizens as merely consumers or spectators in the process. Unfortunately, the adversarial tactics that "work" in this context are often the very tactics that divide people, simplify issues, and create misconceptions and misunderstanding, the exact opposite of what is necessary for democracy to thrive. As explained by journalist E.J. Dionne Jr. in *Why Americans Hate Politics*: "Democratic politics is supposed to be about making public arguments and persuading fellow citizens. Instead, it has become an elaborate insider industry in which those skilled at fund-raising, polling, media relations, and advertising have the upper hand. . . . Politics these days is not about finding solutions. It is about discovering postures that offer short-term political benefits."⁹⁰

These various factors have contributed to historical lows in the public trust of government institutions. In a June 2008 Gallup poll, for example, only 6 percent of those polled expressed a "great

deal” of confidence in the U.S. Congress, and only another 6 percent answered “quite a lot.” Congress scored the lowest of 16 institutions; the lowest it had scored in the 35 years that the question had been asked. The presidency did not fare much better, receiving only 13 percent for “great deal” of confidence and 13 percent “quite a lot” in the same poll.⁹¹ Clearly, regardless of the institution and the party, the American people are very dissatisfied with their institutional decision makers. Consider, for example, all the antipolitical “fix Washington” themes in the various political election campaigns. Lack of political experience is considered positive evidence.

When local forms of democracy are examined, the story is not as dire, but is nonetheless clearly in need of improvement. The 2006 National Leadership Index report prepared by Center for Public Leadership at the Kennedy School at Harvard University reported that confidence in local government is at a crisis too and did not score much higher than Congress or the presidency.⁹² The 2008 Gallup poll mentioned above also showed confidence in public schools, while again higher than the national institutions, were nonetheless low and dropping.

The problems relevant to local institutional decision making are often of a different nature than those of national politics. Money and power may still certainly be key factors, as well as political partisanship, but the inherent closeness of decision makers and the public in local decision making brings up other issues that are critical to the situation. Most relevant to our discussion is the quality of local public discussion, and the processes typically used to engage the public in local decision making. Both, we argue, are connected, generally of low quality, and often counterproductive. 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 either tied to advocacy groups or are official public meetings or hearings that are ill-designed to spark productive conversation, much less deliberation. Most conversations, therefore, are either among the like-minded or favor the extreme voices. “In our communities today,” writes Michael Briand, “we lack readily usable public forums where citizens can meet each other (and policymakers can meet with them), not to complain, criticize, and assign blame, but to deliberate together. An effective decision-making process must therefore enable a large number of people to carry on a sustained, informed discussion. It must also create a truly public, neutral space where all citizens will feel welcome, safe, respected, and hence inclined to talk, think, and work together.” Unfortunately, he adds, “Neutral public spaces simply do not exist in most communities today.”⁹³

Most interactions between local decision makers and the public take place in meetings with a number of specific rules in place. Public hearings, school board meetings, and city council sessions are particularly common forms of “public engagement” often mandated by law. Whereas they do allow space for the public to hear from decision makers and to express their opinion to them, they are nonetheless

often poor conduits for democracy for a number of reasons. David Mathews describes the standard public hearing as “probably the most counterproductive mechanism of all. . . . Officials usually make presentations or get lectured to by some outraged individual. Little two-way communication occurs.”⁹⁴ In most of these meetings, citizens literally must rise up, turn their back to their fellow citizens, and are given three minutes at a microphone to state their case. Citizens, in other words, rarely interact with fellow citizens, but rather one by one are allowed to deliver individual statements. As discussed earlier, decision makers are primarily provided with a collection of often disconnected individual points of view. Due in part to the format, the meetings are many times only attended by those with the most intense feelings, and as a result, the public, the decision makers, and the experts involved in the decision grow to despise the meetings.

Local public meetings also suffer from the fact that they typically engage the public 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. In this environment, local decision makers often take what is termed the “fatherly” approach to public participation: “decide, announce, and defend.”⁹⁵ Public participation therefore equates to public relations.⁹⁶ Indeed, far too often in our local communities, lack of attendance at a public meeting is deemed a success, even a goal, since high attendance for many simply means more complainers and conflict.

Interestingly, the frustration at the local levels goes both ways. The public is dissatisfied with their leadership, and the leadership is dissatisfied with the public. Matt Leighninger’s work has been particularly focused on what occurs as public officials move from hopeful candidates, often eager to give back to their community and help their neighbors solve problems, to disillusioned officeholders targeted for criticism from all directions.⁹⁷ Hans Bleiker’s work similarly focuses on the difficulties local governments face when trying to get significant projects approved by the public, even when a large majority supports the project and the experts agree on the need for it.⁹⁸ From their perspective, it is easy to understand why local decision makers may be reticent about expanding the role of the public. “Public administrators feel they work hard,” explain Phil Lurie and Alice Diebel, “but are ‘personally abused and maligned’ by self-interested citizens.”⁹⁹ Stated differently, the public they typically interact with is rarely deliberative, and they observe few positives from public participation.

These various factors combine at both the national and local levels to create a chronic inability to deal with difficult questions and tough problems. As captured by Doug Henton and John Melville:

Traditional government structures, designed for an earlier era, are simply not adequate for the complex challenges of our modern economy and society. Too often, community

challenges and conflicts result in gridlock because of this lack of effective problem-solving capacity. Business-as-usual, top-down approaches and interest-group bargaining often fail to deliver effective responses to our more pressing problems. Citizens are increasingly frustrated with the inability of government to function effectively.¹⁰⁰

Democracy, especially in a diverse society, requires people with opposing viewpoints to work together to find common ground and the right balance between their values. It requires them to work through the tough choices and trade-offs that are inherent to public decisions. In the U.S. democracy, we are currently faced with a situation where the political leadership of opposing parties rarely seems willing to work together on difficult issues, and the public has little opportunity to participate in productive ways as well.

5.2 The Potential Positive Impact of Deliberation on Institutional Decision Making

Once again, deliberative practitioners are faced with a daunting task. The problems outlined in 5.1 are extensive and multidimensional. Nonetheless, there is reason for optimism. First of all, many of the potential positive consequences of deliberation already discussed in this report naturally work toward improving the situation. When citizens' opinions, attitudes, and skills are sharpened by deliberation, the manner in which they work with decision makers and fellow citizens should also improve. They should be more resistant to falling prey to the politics of polarization and more likely to seek collaborative solutions across boundaries. As communities take ownership of problems and learn to act on them collaboratively, the role of government fundamentally changes from primary problem solver to key community partner, and with the change in role hopefully comes a change in perspective on both sides. So as the deliberative democracy movement expands—even without the institutionalization of deliberative practices—inherently some of the key flaws of public participation will improve simply due to the changing nature of the citizenry.

As we discussed in 1.2, deliberation helps create a citizenry with a particular kind of political knowledge and can even create new knowledge through discussion and interaction. The perspectives citizens often have after deliberation—focused, for example, on key points of common ground and critical tough choices that must be confronted—is particularly valuable to decision makers, especially early in the process when issues are being explored and initial options being considered. It represents information they often do not receive otherwise when they are bombarded by multiple yet disconnected individual opinions. David Mathews, for example, argued that, “Officeholders seldom hear people exploring the nature of a problem among themselves—citizens struggling with a range of options or trying to find common ground for action.”¹⁰¹ This point is the primary argument we use at CPD when convincing decision makers to support or attend our events. We explain that rather than simply hearing individual

complaints and concerns, at our events they will get the chance to listen to citizens talking to other citizens, focusing on uncovering and working through the difficult choices inherent to any public decision.

The most significant potential impacts, however, arise when deliberative practice is actually “embedded” or institutionalized by decision makers themselves. Once again, significant progress has been made in this area, as either due to pragmatic or philosophical reasons, more and more institutional decision makers have turned to deliberative processes. Perhaps most relevant here is the IAP2 public participation spectrum.¹⁰² The spectrum lays out five viewpoints on how decision makers can work with the public, including informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering. Additional IAP2 material, which is part of their well-known training program taught all over the world, provides institutional decision makers with a “toolbox” of processes that can be used within each category to improve the manner in which they work with the public. Martín attended a weeklong series of IAP2 workshops in September 2007, and the toolbox essentially represented a collection of deliberative practices. The theme of the week was the need to move public participation away from public relations and toward deliberative democracy. Citizens, again for either philosophical or pragmatic reasons, cannot simply be considered consumers or customers, they must be considered partners and potential collaborators, and problem solvers. Such perspectives require new processes, and institutional decision makers are likely to turn more and more to those processes. As they do, they will need community partners with the process knowledge and skill sets to be able to support these processes.

Another potential positive impact of deliberation on institutional decision making is an increased ability for officeholders to take on difficult issues. The current political climate can be so poisonous that key issues are often avoided. With deliberative processes, institutional decision makers may be more apt to address

issues that otherwise they would not. Not only are community discussions on such issues likely more productive, but when the public is genuinely involved in the process early the decisions ultimately made are likely to be considered more legitimate. By “legitimate,” we refer to the notion that even if key audiences disagree with the decision, if they believe they were heard and the process was fair, they are

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CPD primarily focuses on local issues, but it also has a growing network of partners in Denver, such as the Institute on the Common Good at Regis University (ICG), that could be called upon to run a statewide project. There have been discussions, for example, of potentially running multiple forums across the state on referendum issues, and developing our own “deliberative blue book” for voters to get information on those issues. CPD, ICG, and an organization called the Colorado Civic Canopy have also helped run a statewide series of forums developed by the Donnell-Kay Foundation to gather citizen input of the purpose of education to provide to the governor’s office and a special task force formed to develop education policy. Indeed, Colorado is becoming somewhat of a hotbed for collaborative processes, and hopefully as our capacity continues to grow and we continue to provide useful information to policymakers, they will learn to rely on us more and more.

less likely to obstruct implementation. This is a key aspect of both the IAP2 and IPMP training. Deliberative processes, unlike traditional government processes that rely on public hearings and hope for small crowds, tend to result in smoother implementation. For local governments struggling to tackle key issues or get controversial projects approved, deliberative processes should become a more of a critical aspect of their public participation program. Deliberative practitioners who are willing and able to work with local government institutions, particularly with certain controversial issues that may benefit from the involvement of an outside organization, may be considered a godsend.

Whereas connecting with local institutions, such as city and county government and school boards, are naturally more of a fit for deliberative practice, there are certainly ways in which to also positively impact state and national government as well. Similar to the growing interest in collaborative or democratic governance, there is a growing interest in the role of legislators as conveners of deliberative events. *Legislators at a Crossroads*, a joint publication by Kettering Foundation and the Policy Consensus Initiative, makes the case and presents examples of state and national legislators taking on this role.¹⁰³ Though perhaps in its infancy, the notion of “deliberative leadership” will hopefully continue to grow in importance.

5.3 The Challenges to Deliberation Positively Impacting Institutional Action

Similar to the situation with goal 4, the potential positive consequences of deliberation focused on institutional action has both high rewards and high risks. The burden put on deliberative practitioners when they develop events to directly impact policy is high. Many of the difficulties and potential negative consequences of deliberation discussed in the context of earlier goals become magnified. Doing deliberation well enough to comfortably target institutional change requires significant time, skill, and resources. That being said, the rewards are also significant, and if we are to improve our democracy and help communities address the problems they face, institutional change will need to be a part of the process.

This section will focus on three key points. The first is a familiar one: the difficulty of drawing a broad, diverse, representative audience. When deliberative events target issue learning or developing democratic skills or attitudes, diverse audiences are important, but not essential. When deliberative events are tied to institutional policy change, however, they are. One of the strongest criticisms of deliberative democracy stem from arguments made that democracy by public forum will inherently leave out too many voices. Too many people, critics argue, will either not be able to attend, would not be comfortable attending, or would not be taken seriously if they attended.¹⁰⁴ Critics also argue that deliberative forums inherently limit the scope of argument and can prematurely cut off certain perspective or privilege certain manners of expression. These are serious charges with enough validity to warrant serious attention.

Government officials or new practitioners who begin to experiment with more deliberative processes may not be strongly concerned with the makeup of the audience early in their learning curve, but ultimately if the events are designed to impact policy, strong steps must be taken to develop better stronger audiences and overcome or at least lessen the impact of some of these challenges. Conveners must work to get beyond the usual suspects. Stated differently, if deliberative practitioners promise to deliver the public voice to decision makers, they bear a heavy burden to deliver, as much as possible, a more representative public voice (or, at least, a more representative voice than usual).

Second, as deliberation gains favor, the tension between these processes and the more power-based political maneuvering could become problematic in a number of ways. One of Martín's professors at Texas A&M once referred to deliberative perspectives as "speaking nice to power," and certainly deliberation has its critics who argue that politics is about power and to think otherwise is folly.¹⁰⁵ These criticisms must be considered. Whereas the call for more deliberative processes is growing, it certainly is not yet the norm, so in many cases deliberative practitioners may receive significant push back from institutional decision makers. Decision-makers may turn to deliberation only when it particularly suits them. Such "venue" or "forum" shopping harms the potential of deliberation, as it could become just another tool in a political environment that does not connect legitimately with the people.¹⁰⁶ Decision makers may also utilize deliberative processes for "political cover," as a way to avoid taking on the tough issues themselves.¹⁰⁷ Advocates and power brokers may also develop ways in which to co-opt or manipulate deliberative processes as they become more important to community politics. "As soon as the stakes increase," explained the very respected trio of deliberation scholars, Peter Levine, Archon Fung, and John Gastil, "organized interests will dispatch their own foot soldiers."¹⁰⁸ Decision makers may reject the need or wisdom of including the public more in decision making or may believe they are adequately representing the public view in their work. Politically, they may assume that involving the public would mean losing some of their power, or they may realize that their favored views would not be supported by a broader public. Certainly cases will arise where the usual suspects are actually preferred by decision makers, for example. The heightened stakes for deliberation when explicitly connected to institutional decision making could also result in a chilling effect on deliberation if the decision makers ultimately do go against the results of the processes. If the people are promised the process will have direct impact, but that promise is not kept, it will become more difficult to attract broad participation for the next process.

The final key challenge simply relates to the cost of doing deliberation well when the goal is to influence institutional action. Costs can be considered in terms of time and resources. Deliberation takes time, and the public is most useful when brought in early in the process to be a part of the problem identification and the initial consideration of alternatives. Ideal processes would thus require a significant time frame to move from problem identification to policy change. The diversity challenge highlighted

above would require significant effort to develop a community network that is capable of bringing in a broad, representative audience. With key issues, multiple forums may be necessary to sufficiently deliver a high-quality deliberative report to decision makers. Forums may be necessary at different geographical locations to ensure broad engagement, and forums may be necessary at different stages in the process. The overall number can quickly expand exponentially. Lastly, if the process is an official government project, the stakes in terms of impartiality also increase, which may require the conveners to work with multiple stakeholders to vet the material and process choices, again requiring time and resources.

5.4 Suggestions for Deliberative Practitioners Concerning the Goal of Improving Institutional Action

If indeed the “deliberative turn” has occurred and more and more institutional decision makers will be turning in multiple ways to more deliberative and collaborative processes to engage the public, communities across the country will need to develop the capacity to support these processes. The growing network of centers and institutes devoted to this work will need not only to grow, but also to replicate themselves. Whether the recent focus on deliberative democracy becomes a passing phase or a fundamental shift will depend partly on the quality of the work completely, particularly when the work is tied to institutional decision making. Once again, the theme of high risk/high reward is repeated. In this section, we begin to lay out some practical suggestions for deliberative practitioners to consider when their events target institutional decision making.

First and foremost, deliberative practitioners must develop strong relationships with local decision makers. The good news is that we do have a strong product to present them, and our work can actually make their work easier and more productive. In addition, our motives, at least theoretically, should be refreshing to them. As deliberative practitioners, our intent is not to push a particular agenda, but rather to improve democracy. As a result, our goals should easily connect with the goals of most institutional decision makers, at least theoretically. The case for deliberative processes can be made both philosophically and pragmatically, and as mentioned earlier, materials are available from sources trusted by institutional decision makers that make the case for more deliberative practices. These could be used as a way to introduce deliberation to local officials.

Once relationships have developed and projects are being considered, great care must be taken concerning which issues should be addressed. Public participation works better when it is targeted earlier in the overall process, so projects involving issues that are already focused on particular alternatives or at the decision-making stage should be avoided or at least addressed with caution. Projects that officeholders have already likely made a decision but are seeking either public support or the appearance of public engagement should also be avoided. Complete transparency must be the primary order of business in order to avoid concerns over partisanship. From the beginning, deliberative practitioners must work with the decision makers to clearly agree on what role the public will play in the process and what will be done with the information from the project.

Here again the IAP2 spectrum is helpful to consider the possibilities, and the spectrum is structured to lead to conversations concerning what is being promised to the people and how will those promises be fulfilled. Rare—and rightly so in most cases—are situations where officeholders agree to fully to implement the conclusions reached in any public process, but nonetheless expectations should be clear concerning what the officeholders will do with the information.

Once a project is selected and expectations clarified, deliberative practitioners must continue to work with the officeholders to make sure they understand their role in the process and have input to increase the likelihood that the information will be useful to them. Deliberative processes are often new to both the public and decision makers, and both have new roles to play compared to the typical roles played during typical meetings and public hearings. Officeholders may be tempted to revert back to their expert or defensive postures, rather than focusing on their roles as convener and listener. Deliberative practitioners should also work closely with the decision makers in process design, particularly on specific discussion questions to ask or survey questions to include. Officeholders likely have strong insights into the tough questions relevant to the issue—primarily from receiving disconnected messages from individuals on different sides—and thus may prefer to have some direct engagement of particular issues.

CPD IN FOCUS

At CPD, from the beginning we have sought to develop strong ties with local decision makers. As Martín developed the original plans for the center, he met with many local officeholders, and he even procured a number of letters from them encouraging the university to support the center. An advisory board was developed, which included individuals from the city and county government, as well as the school board. CPD staff was explicitly made available to these various institutions to help with projects of any scale. All the while, we were careful to frame ourselves as a nonpartisan public service, focused on helping improve the quality of political discussion and community problem solving. CPD material offers three key goals for the organization, the first two of which are to improve the civic culture and expand collaborative decision making. At every CPD event, those two goals are discussed in tandem, as we explain that we hope to increase the capacity of the public to engage community issues, while also working with the institutions to be more willing and more able to utilize the public. In pursuing the second goal, Martín wrote a grant that sent him and a city employee to the IAP2 training, and he also recently attended a three-day workshop, sponsored by the city of Fort Collins, that brought in Hans Bleiker, whom the city has used for many years to train city employees on how to work with the public. Slowly and surely, local officials are seeing the potential of deliberative processes and beginning to imagine ways and issues that could utilize the processes CPD has been advocating.

Indeed, we would suggest specifically asking decision makers which particular aspects of the issue they are struggling with that they would like to hear citizens work through.

Practitioners may also consider working more closely with the media before forums focused on institutional action. Officeholders will certainly be interested in the publicity, and future projects will be easier to develop if a record of positive publicity can be built. Practitioners may need to work with media to explain the goals and design of the meeting, since, again, the forum will look different than most public meetings. Critics maintain that the media is more interested in covering conflict than cooperation, so it may be necessary to work with them to understand the value of the process and how the reporting of it could be framed.

During forums, deliberative practitioners merely have to follow through on the planning that was made in the For example, we tend to conclude CPD events that have a particular focus on institutional action by asking participants to choose a specific message they would like to send to decision makers. Considering the focus will often be capturing information for use after the forum rather than simply running a successful forum for the benefits of the participants, practitioners may take additional steps to ensure high-quality reporting—utilizing additional note-takers and observers, using more quantitative methods like having participants use “dots” to identify key points from the discussion, or arranging for audio or video recording.

Similar to forums focused on community action, actions taken after the forums are critical to realizing their potential. The hard work completed at the forums must be captured and reported on, and those reports must be provided to decision makers. The stakes of the reporting are higher, so practitioners must be particularly careful in this process to avoid possible charges of bias. If forums uncover key issues that were not part of prior conversations, then additional forums may need to be planned. If early forums are missing key audiences, additional targeted forums or other alternative means to include those voices may be developed. Reports may be provided to key stakeholders for responses to be included and forwarded to decision makers. Practitioners should continue to work with decision makers to ensure that the material is considered and to update participants and the public in general concerning what impact the forums had. Follow-up reports should also be considered, to examine and report a year later, for example, what was done with the information.

Beyond specific forums, deliberative practitioners have much to consider if they hope to connect their work directly to institutional decision making. Similar to the other goals, there is an entire literature that specifically addresses public participation, citizen engagement, and democratic governance. Practitioners should also be familiar with the criticisms of deliberation, so they can better design and perform events to avoid key concerns. Lastly, practitioners also need to understand the realities of politics in their local community to be able to connect effectively and avoid pitfalls that may arise.

6.0 Improved Community Decision Making/Problem Solving

We have now arrived at the point where we can focus on the ultimate goal of deliberation: improved community decision making/problem solving. As Figure 1 shows, all the goals are interrelated and impact each other, and all ultimately flow into this final goal. The overarching point of this entire report is that as communities come to rely more on high-quality deliberative practice, their decision making and problem solving will improve. This section is based on the premise already discussed in 4.0 and 5.0 that, ideally, 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, nonprofits, businesses, and so on. Again, the concept of democratic governance is particularly relevant here. Harry Boyte described the move to governance as a particularly 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.* (Emphasis added.)

Whereas goals 4 and 5 considered community and institutional action separately—and in important ways deliberative events that seek to specifically address one or the other would likely differ in design and implementation—here in goal 6 they collapse into two components of the broader conception of community decision making/problem solving.

Deliberation must be considered a key tool along multiple points to help communities strive for the vision of deliberative democracy. We specifically used the phrase *strive for* rather than *realize* because deliberative democracy and democratic governance are ideals that will never be fully realized. Communities will never be able to rely on deliberation for all the issues they confront, nor should they. Deliberation takes significant time and resources, and a community and its citizens would quickly become overwhelmed if deliberation was utilized too often. The point is not that all community decisions should be based on deliberation, but rather that *more* of them should be. Deliberation should not be the only tool, but it is a tool that should be used more often than it currently does. Perhaps our ultimate goal is to have deliberation *routinely* become a key tool used as part of our community decision-making process,

particularly for the most difficult, “wicked” problems that confront us, problems that “cannot be solved without governments, but that governments alone cannot solve.”

6.1 The Current Situation with Community Decision Making/Problem Solving

In many ways, the discussion of this final goal is simply a combination of all the discussions of goals before it. Many of the current problems with community decision making/problem solving were discussed in sections 4.1 and 5.1. In this section, we will put some of those concerns in a different context, primarily by examining some of the alternative means of community decision-making that are utilized. This review is part of a critical overall point that we believe needs to become more a part of the broader discussion of deliberation’s advantages and disadvantages. Too often, we would argue, deliberation is judged against its ideal, rather than in comparison to the product of its “competitors” in terms of community decision-making/problem-solving processes. Many of the theoretical critics of deliberation focus on the inability for deliberation to live up to its grand ideas of inclusion and reasonableness, for example. As we just mentioned in 6.0, however, deliberation need not realize its ideals to be useful to communities, and indeed it will never be able to. However, deliberation has and will continue, in many communities, to provide a better alternative in a growing number of cases.

So what are the alternatives to deliberation as a means of community decision making/problem solving? Once again, a full consideration is not possible here, but some broad points are warranted. Perhaps the basic alternative is simple democracy or the aggregation of votes. As a process of decision making, it is certainly more efficient and cost effective, at least in the short term. The problems with aggregation, however, are also significant. A key distinction between deliberative and majority democracy, for example, is that deliberation allows for, perhaps even relies on, the adjustment and hopefully improvement of individual opinions, whereas aggregation is simply the counting up of individual opinions, which would typically be focused solely on self-interest. Considering the problems with the quality of public opinion, as discussed in 1.1, utilizing aggregated individual opinions as the basis for community decision making/problem solving is likely problematic. Yankelovich’s work is again relevant here, as he has shown the flaws in public opinion data.¹⁰⁹ The negative experiences of states like California and Colorado that have relied heavily on referenda for state policy decisions also serve as evidence of the dangers of direct democracy.¹¹⁰

Another key alternative is adversarial politics, whether based on party politics or interest-group politics. Whereas the problem with direct democracy is that it requires no interaction between members of the community, adversarial politics typically concentrates primarily on interaction between the like-minded. Interest-group politics, for example, is focused on building coalitions of primarily like-minded groups in order to significantly impact decisions. Because the primary goal of coalitions is to gain 51

percent of the vote, they have little incentive to interact with opponents and have heavy incentives to misrepresent opposing views and values. As reviewed throughout this report, such adversarial politics has a number of negative impacts on democracy, particularly due to the communication tactics often relied upon that simplify issues, demonize opponents, and create polarization, cynicism, and apathy. “The higher the stakes, the more companies invest in your miseducation,” wrote John Gastil. “Sure, some advertising might really provide useful input into your deliberative process, but more often, the goal is to shift your preferences and build your appetite through guile.”¹¹¹ In addition, due to their zero-sum nature, adversarial politics tend to result in actions that are not sustainable, as the “losers” are generally devoted to ensuring that the “winner’s” ideas are unsuccessful. As Steven Hill wrote in his *National Civic Review* article, “winner-take-all is making most of us losers.”¹¹² Overall, adversarial politics puts too much of a focus on the game of politics, rather than the problems of a community.

A third alternative is the consumerist politics that often dominates local government. Here the government is run as a business that views the citizenry as its customers. While such a perspective can increase government efficiency, it has far too thin a role for the public. Solutions to problems must be “sold” to the public, which makes it difficult to address complex issues that require the public to deal with tough choices or to make sacrifices. Who would “buy” a “product” with tangible individual costs and unclear individual benefits? A last alternative, often connected to the consumerist view, is decision making based primarily on administrative science. Here city engineers and other experts, trained in rigorous technical problem-solving processes, are given the responsibility to develop and implement solutions to community problems. This view first gained favor during the Progressive era and was seen as a significant improvement over the “political machines” that dominated local politics before them. The city-council/city-manager form of government, for example, seeks to take advantage of the professional, nonpolitical administrative role played by the city manager in implementing solid, scientifically based solutions. With many issues, this form of decision making can work well, but once again, it falls short in the ability to address difficult issues.

The deficiencies of the expert form of government were a particular focus on the IPMP workshops Martín attended. Hans Bleiker, the trainer, was an engineer by trade and was educated to become a city planner. He soon realized, however, that no amount of science was enough to help communities make tough decisions and implement controversial projects. Not only did the expert perspective too often leave out critical parts of the problem and consider too few potential alternatives, the veto power of the public proved so substantial that Bleiker soon found himself dedicated to improving public processes and finding better ways to have the experts interact with the public and vice-versa. Bleiker, the engineer, admitted that high-quality communication, not science, was the key to successful community decision making/problem solving.

Whereas all these alternatives have their advantages, they also share disadvantages, which must be considered when comparing them to the use of more deliberative processes. Again we must emphasize that the goal is not to use deliberation for all decisions and abandon any alternatives, but rather to increase the use of deliberation in cases where it is particularly well suited and necessary. The bottom line for many of the alternatives is that they do not work well in addressing difficult issues. This inability is manifested at multiple stages. Difficult issues are first generally avoided altogether. Second, if they are discussed, the discussions are often unproductive (i.e. simplified, polarized, focused on placing blame). Last, if decisions are ever made, they are likely limited in scope, apt to face significant implementation hurdles, and therefore generally not sustainable. Many scholars have commented on the basic inability for many communities to address tough problems under politics-as-usual. Philosopher Robert Beiner, for example, wrote in the introduction to his insightful *Political Judgment*, that it is “a fact today that absolutely fundamental questions of human existence go undiscussed and unspoken, are not subject to deliberation or debate, are simply absent from the realm of general public discourse and speech.”¹¹³ Public administration scholars Archon Fung and Erik Wright struck a similar chord, writing, “As the tasks of the state have become more complex and the size of polities larger and more heterogeneous, the institutional forms of liberal democracy developed in the 19th century—representative democracy plus technobureaucratic administration—seem increasingly ill suited to the novel problems we face in the 21st century.”¹¹⁴

These alternatives all also have generally low expectations for citizenship. They are based on limited notions of citizenship focused on citizens as voters, customers, or activists. They also, particularly those based on adversarial politics, tend to have negative side effects for the health of democratic communities. Whereas deliberation, as we argued during the discussion of goals 1-3, tends to improve democratic attitudes and skills and the understanding of issues, adversarial politics tend to work in the opposite direction in each of those areas. Indeed, the argument could be made that the consequences of politics-as-usual negatively impact each of the six consequences (lead to poor issue learning, diminished democratic attitudes and skills, negative actions, bad policy, and poor decision-making processes). Such consequences could thus create a negative feedback loop within the system depicted in Figure 1.

6.2 The Potential Positive Impact of Deliberation on Community Decision Making/Problem Solving

It should not be surprising to readers that the most significant, and fatal, flaw of the alternative community decision-making processes—the inability to address difficult issues well—represents one of the strengths of the deliberative perspective. Indeed, this entire report is built on that premise. Many of the positive impacts deliberation can have on community decision making have already been discussed in earlier sections, thus we will simply attempt to bring those all together here. Overall, deliberation’s

impact on community decision making can be supported both normatively and pragmatically. The normative justifications are primarily based on deliberation's link to democratic legitimacy, equality, and inclusion. As explained by Button and Ryfe, "Deliberative democracy takes seriously the idea that the exercise of collective political authority must be capable of being justified to all those who will be bound by it."¹¹⁵ Such points are the primary focus of numerous philosophical defenses of deliberation from the likes of Jurgen Habermas, John Rawls, Joshua Cohen, and James Bohman.¹¹⁶

The point of this report, however, is tied more to the pragmatic argument that deliberation results in better community decisions and can address problems better. This is what Lars Torres identified as the substantive rationale for deliberation: that it "can lead to better, longer lasting, wiser policy choices with better outcomes."¹¹⁷ As discussed earlier in this report, deliberation can have this impact because, among many other impacts, it tends to remain focused on solving problems (rather than be distracted by other political goals); it specifically addresses, rather than avoids, the tough choices inherent to community problem solving and provides the means to work through those choices; and it involves a broader range of people and institutions which can spark the innovation, accountability, and collaboration necessary to address issues in the 21st century. In addition, as just mentioned, deliberative processes also tend to have other positive side effects for democracy along the way.

6.3 The Challenges to Deliberation Positively Impacting Community Decision Making/Problem Solving

Our discussions throughout this report surfaced many challenges for deliberative practitioners to consider, and all those challenges are inherently tied to community decision making/problem solving. Our task here, then, is simply to summarize. In this section we want to emphasize four primary challenges to deliberative practitioners reaching their goals that range across all the goals. The first we term *the cultural challenge*. As many deliberative practitioners are well aware, many aspects of our broader political culture work against the deliberative perspective. Deliberative practice certainly works in part to improve this culture (the focus of the first three goals of deliberation), but nonetheless must exist within it. Of particular importance for deliberative practitioners is the fact that the tactics that "work" politically are often directly opposed to the deliberative perspective. The culture, in other words, rewards the very tactics that harm democracy, and puts pro-democracy tactics at a disadvantage. The poor current state of our political culture in particular justifies deliberative events focused primarily on the initial goals (issue learning and the development of democratic attitudes and skills). Deliberative practitioners can thus play a key role in the communities to begin to turn the tide, and attempt to reverse the flow of the feedback loops from negative to positive. The more forums that are held focused on the first three goals, the more the culture of our individual communities will improve.

The second key overall challenge is *the institutional challenge*. In recent years, the deliberative democracy movement has begun to focus more on impacting institutional decision making. Concepts like embedded deliberation, collaborative governance, and institutionalizing deliberation point toward the need for deliberative practices to go beyond the work of individual civic entrepreneurs and academics and become part of more official decision-making processes. The challenge here is that if we want to impact policy and community politics more broadly, the bar for our work is significantly raised. For example, we would have to work hard to ensure broad representative audiences, work closely with institutional decision makers before and after our events, and would most likely have to run multiple events on one subject. We would need to move away from nationally framed issues and focus on issues that can tie to local decision makers. Centers may have to significantly increase their capacities and funding, and take on the challenges to deliberation more seriously. The resistance we will receive will be different than the resistance we currently receive when running more civic-minded or educational events. The danger of an institutional focus is that if we promise more than we can deliver (either to decision makers or the public), we could cause a chilling effect on deliberation as a result. The good news, nonetheless, is that institutional decision makers themselves are starting to see the value of deliberative practices, and many of them are seeking out help to make their practices more deliberative. In sum, impacting policy is certainly a worthy goal, and one that should be pursued in certain cases, but we should also not underestimate the work that would be required to do so, as well as the value of deliberative events that do not focus directly on policy change.

A third key challenge is *the diversity challenge*. This is perhaps one of the most important issues for deliberative practitioners to consider, and it represents one of the strongest criticisms of the deliberative perspective from academics. If deliberation is to grow in stature and impact in communities, this challenge must be met and addressed. The challenge revolves around concerns that if decisions impacting the community are made in deliberative forums by the public, they are inherently biased against certain audiences. Ironically, this challenge comes from two opposing directions. From the left, critics argue that marginalized audiences, such as low-income and minority populations, are too often left out of deliberative processes for a wide variety of reasons. Critics coming from a protest perspective also argue that deliberation is too limited in many contexts that suffer from severe inequality and power imbalances, and thus inherently limit the means by which these audiences can engage politically. For many activists, deliberation is simply too polite, or works to legitimize opposing perspectives they feel are not legitimate. From the right, conservatives argue that deliberation favors progressive or liberal agendas, and often the audiences who are drawn to deliberative events—as well as the practitioners themselves—are predominately from the left (NCDD has been struggling with this issue in particular). The tension is clear, because if we make deliberation work better for marginalized audiences, we support

the stereotype of deliberation as progressive, whereas if we make deliberation more attractive to conservatives, we may support the stereotype of deliberation as talk amongst the privileged. While this challenge is substantial, significant progress has been made in this area, and additional improvements are possible. Many of the criticisms of deliberation from diversity scholars are based on misconceptions about our practices, and we do have strong responses to those that are more legitimate.¹¹⁸ Nonetheless, deliberative practitioners need to be aware of these criticisms and work to respond to them more effectively. At this point, NIF training material simply does not include much engagement with this critical issue, which will only become more important as we expand our efforts.¹¹⁹

The fourth and last overall challenge is *the impartiality challenge*. This challenge is also well known by many deliberative practitioners, especially in terms of the difficulty of framing issues and then facilitating discussions fairly. This traditional challenge is heightened as deliberative practitioners connect more strongly to action or take on the institutional and diversity challenges. To connect our work to institutional practices may require addressing partisan conflict more directly, and deciding how to respond when some legislators become connected to deliberative work and others avoid it. If there is a clear public voice emanating from our events, do we become advocates for their conclusions? How do we best negotiate the line between deliberative practice and community organizing? Similarly, if we take the diversity challenge seriously and work to get previously unconnected audiences connected, such actions could also be seen as less than impartial. As we increase the impact of our work, deliberative practitioners will be faced with more and more tough choices of our own in terms of the extent of our impartiality. Deliberative practice, after all, is not neutral or value free. We must be passionate and impartial about democracy and its necessary processes.

The purpose of identifying these challenges is to direct attention to them so it is more likely that they can be overcome and transformed into opportunities. Throughout this report we have emphasized that deliberation is a high-risk/high-reward endeavor, and we sincerely hope this report motivates others based on the rewards, rather than discourages them due to the risks and hurdles. Certainly our experiences in the first two years of CPD have invigorated us much more than they have fatigued us. Nonetheless, the challenges are significant, and the more deliberative practitioners take them on and work together to overcome them or minimize their impact, the stronger our deliberative democracy will become. That being said, we reemphasize that deliberation must be judged not simply on its ability to live up to its ideals, but rather its product compared to its alternatives. The challenges highlighted here are certainly drawbacks to deliberation, but all community decision-making/problem-solving methods have advantages and disadvantages. The key to improving the decisions our communities make is first choosing the appropriate process for the situation, and then maximizing the advantages and minimizing the

disadvantages. We hope this report is a resource for deliberative practitioners to do just that in their own work.

6.4 Suggestions for Deliberative Practitioners Concerning the Goal of Improving Community Decision Making/Problem Solving

Table 2 provides an overview of all the suggestions that have been provided throughout this report. Considering goal 6 as a culmination of all the other goals, the suggestions for goal 6 simply include all the points that have come before. Such a list is surely rather daunting, particularly to a newly inspired deliberative practitioner just starting out. Deliberative practitioners must understand, however, that sparking more deliberation in their communities would rarely involve all the goals. The thousands of traditional National Issues Forums that have been run across the country for three decades play a key role in the improvement of our democracy, often likely focusing inherently on the first three goals. In many cases the organizers and supporters of such forums need only minimal training and resources, and can nonetheless do valuable work. The interdisciplinary nature of deliberative work means there will always be hundreds of books and articles to read and trainings to attend that could improve the quality and impact of our events, but the simple fact is that due to resources such as NIF discussion guides and Public Policy Institutes, doing basic deliberative work is relatively straightforward. Suggestions provided in this report simply represent ideas for deliberative practitioners to consider as they grow their institutions and centers and seek to increase their impact. A summary of our most important suggestions is provided in the conclusion.

Conclusion

To conclude this report, we highlight four key points we believe are particularly critical. The first is that *the consequences of deliberation are all interrelated, and improving community decision making/problem solving serves well as the ultimate goal for deliberation practitioners*. As shown in Figure 1, the six positive consequences of deliberation are connected as a system, with each potentially positively or negatively impacting the other. Deliberation can thus be self-reinforcing due to these positive feedback loops. We argue that the ultimate goal of deliberative practice is best conceptualized as improved community decision making/problem solving. Such an ultimate goal matches the general impartial status that many deliberative organizations seek to cultivate. Despite the ultimate focus on improved community decision making/problem solving, the five antecedents should be considered as valuable goals in themselves. An important aspect of this key conclusion is that institutional action (i.e. policy decisions made by official decision-making bodies, such as school boards or city, county, state, or national governments) is purposefully *not* the ultimate goal of deliberative practice. Institutional action,

rather, is deemed as one of the potential elements of community decision making. These points connect with notions of democratic governance that assume that community problems can best be addressed at multiple levels, including the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

We also believe that conceptualizing the goal as improving community decision making/problem solving, rather than the more abstract and theoretical goal of creating a “deliberative democracy,” is likely advantageous. Changing the very structure of our democratic system is rather daunting, but improving how our local communities make decisions and address problems is much more tangible and achievable. Our vision is that the number of organizations dedicated to expanding the use of deliberation to improve decision making/problem solving in their communities will continue to increase in the coming years. By serving as impartial advocates for democracy dedicated to improving democratic processes, these organizations will serve a critical role that currently is not being filled. From a communication perspective, it seems clear that the forms of communication that democracy relies on do not come naturally. The adversarial structure of our current democracy encourages bad communication. Democracy, in other words, needs impartial advocates focused on improving our conversations, which is exactly what deliberative practitioners do.

Our second key conclusion is that *individual deliberative projects should be planned with particular goals in mind*. We believe that those involved in deliberative practice should consider the multiple goals and consequences of deliberation in their planning and make decisions concerning individual events and long-term objectives based on the six interrelated goals. In many cases, an individual event or project should focus on a particular goal or subset of goals in order to achieve success. The goals and consequences of deliberation, in other words, should be considered both systematically *and* individually. A forum that focuses primarily on issue learning or the development of democratic skills, for example, has considerable value, despite the lack of clear connection to action or policy.

One of the reasons we believe this point is so critical is because pursuing different goals requires distinctive techniques, brings up different challenges, and necessitates various amounts of time and resources. Attempting to connect to all goals with an individual event would likely result in less of an overall impact than addressing one or two goals in particular. New deliberative organizations likely need to run events that focus on the initial goals while developing their capacity and reputation before taking on the more significant later goals.

Table 2 provides a long list of suggestions concerning how to design, run, and follow up on forums in order to achieve the goals, and in some cases the suggestions are mutually exclusive. Suggestions that would help with some goals may not with others, and the fact of the matter is that deliberative practitioners only have a limited amount of time with their participants. Consider, for example, the act of choosing a topic for a deliberative project. Each goal may dictate a different type of

issue, or at least a different framing. Broad national issues may work best for issue learning or improving democratic skills—they would likely draw more attention and provide more opportunity for people to interact on an issue they at least think they understand—while those would not work well for impacting community or institutional action. National issues could also work against deliberative attitudes because of the difficulty of instilling feelings of efficacy on such issues. Local issues with significant misunderstandings and polarization will work particularly well for improving democratic attitudes, assuming the deliberative practitioners have the requisite skills to transform the conflict. Issues with significant common ground, particularly concerning the scope of the problem, may work best for sparking community action. Choosing issues for projects tied to institutional action can be difficult, because issues currently being addressed may already be too narrowly focused on particular solutions, whereas issues not currently being examined may not be of enough interest to the institutional decision makers.

Another way to think about the differences between the pursuit of the various goals concerns what to do at the end of the forum, commonly referred to as the “reflection” time for NIF practitioners. Each goal would call for a different line of questions, but clearly there is not enough time to ask all potential questions. Should practitioners ask about what was learned (issue learning), how their attitudes may have changed about fellow participants or their responsibility for the issue (democratic attitudes), whether they changed the way they listen or speak or analyze difficult issues (democratic skills), what action steps they believe they or their community should take on (individual/community action), or what they now believe their officeholders should do about the issue (institutional action)? Once again, we argue that trying to do too much will spread practitioners too thin, but focusing on particular goals from the beginning through the end will make it much more likely that those goals will be realized.

Our third key conclusion is that *deliberative practitioners should focus on the overall process to achieve their goals, of which deliberative forums are only a part*. In order to achieve these various goals, especially those of impacting institutional actions and improving community decision making/problem solving, deliberative practitioners must take a broad view of deliberative practice, of which actual events and forums are only one part. Once again, this is the primary lesson we have learned in our first two years with CPD. When we began, we anticipated that our primary function was to train facilitators and run events, but we quickly discovered that our actions before and after the forums were just as critical to achieving our goals.

This report outlined some of the various actions deliberative practitioners can employ before, during, and after deliberative events, as well as actions unconnected to specific deliberative projects, that contribute to the achievement of the six goals (again, both individually and systematically). This conclusion in particular will likely require adjustments in how deliberative practitioners are trained. The structure and training around running forums will not change much, but, if we hope to increase our

impact, the training concerning what occurs before and after forums likely will. In a separate study, we examined the training workbooks of five NIF Public Policy Institutes. Because many of the NIF institutes share ideas, much of the material in the five workbooks was similar. It was also clear that the workshops primarily focused on moderator skills, which are certainly critical to the success of a deliberative event, but nonetheless just one part of a much broader whole. One PPI, the Oklahoma Partnership for Public Deliberation, did stand out. Their training ranged far beyond moderator skills, and provided instruction in a much broader picture of deliberative work. Our training workshops at CPD have now followed Oklahoma's lead. We recently changed the title of our workshops from "Moderator Training" to "Deliberative Democracy" workshops (and may now change again to connect to the more tangible notion of democratic governance).¹²⁰

Our fourth and perhaps our strongest overall suggestion for practitioners is to *continuously seek to improve and expand their capacity*. Learn new tools, be sure to self-reflect, and take advantage of the training opportunities that may arise. Learn from other practitioners and share with them what you know they can learn from. Last, increase your capacity by strategically adding practitioners with particular skill sets different than yours. Different people have different strengths, and while some may have the makeup to become excellent facilitators, deliberative work requires a number of roles to be filled beyond facilitators. These final points are also critical to the Kettering Foundation and National Issues Forums Institute to consider, as well as the key challenges outlined in section 6.3. As Kettering and NIFI continues to pursue its study of helping democracy work as it should, the training NIF provides through its PPIs should also be reexamined, particularly if strengthening the connection between deliberative forums and community politics is a goal. Currently, most PPIs offer moderator training, and some offer training in issue framing. An endless number of additional training programs are possible, and even helping existing institutes learn from each other in terms of some of the specialized skills could be impactful.

In closing, we return to the excitement that should be felt by those involved in this work. The art of public deliberation is as old as democracy itself, but it has nonetheless enjoyed a major renaissance in recent years. Dubbed by some as the "Deliberative Democracy Movement," this resurgence has made a significant impact both within and outside academia. Philosophers now speak of the "deliberative turn in democratic theory" and "the coming of age of deliberative democracy."¹²¹ Scholars in a variety of fields are focused on understanding and furthering the scope and impact of public deliberation efforts. Within the academy, scholars in political science, philosophy, communication, policy studies, sociology, education, public administration, natural resources, environmental studies, information technology, and international studies are active in the movement. Depending on the primary perspective of study, the terms or labels may change—*deliberative democracy, public deliberation, democratic or collaborative*

| *governance, empowered participation, multi-stakeholder conflict resolution, and public participation*, among others—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 forums. The better we do our work, and the more we achieve the goals we target, the stronger our democracy will be.

¹ For more information on the Center for Public Deliberation, visit their Web site at www.cpd.colostate.edu.

² During that time, Martín was the director and Elinor was one of the original undergraduates participating in CPD's student associate program. Elinor is currently serving as Martín's research assistant while she completes her master's degree.

³ 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*, eds. John Gastil and Peter Levine (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 278.

⁴ John Gastil's new textbook is a very useful resource for those new to the field: John Gastil, *Political Communication and Deliberation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008). The model presented here also has some conceptual connections to the model Gastil and his colleagues introduced in 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.

⁵ The NCDD streams of engagement document is available at: <http://www.thataway.org/exchange/resources.php?action=view&rid=2142>.

⁶ Lars Hasselblad Torres, "Deliberative Democracy: A Survey of the Field" (Washington, DC: *AmericaSpeaks*, 2003).

⁷ For information on these trainings, go to <http://www.ipmp.com/> and www.iap2.org.

⁸ Michael K. Briand, *Practical Politics: Five Principles for a Community that Works* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 42.

⁹ Daniel Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

¹⁰ Michael Halloran, "On the End of Rhetoric, Classical and Modern," *College English* 36 (1975): 623.

¹¹ The growth of the deliberative democracy movement itself is evidence of the push back on the compartmentalization of information on campuses. Organizations like the University Network for Collaborative Governance, the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, and the Democracy Imperative are all working to bring together scholars from a variety of fields to work together on issues tied to deliberative democracy. Many on-campus centers and institutes working in deliberative democracy are also typically interdisciplinary.

¹² Sharon Crowley, "A Plea for the Revival of Sophistry," *Rhetoric Review* 7 (1989): 318-334; Nicholas Maxwell, *From Knowledge to Wisdom: A Revolution in the Aims and Methods of Science* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

¹³ W. Barnett Pearce and Stephen W. Littlejohn, *Moral Conflict: When Social Worlds Collide* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 86.

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- ¹⁴ Briand, *Practical Politics*, 3.
- ¹⁵ We would argue that, typically, public opinion polls are not even able to accurately capture public opinion due to a number of reasons. See Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment*.
- ¹⁶ See, for example, Jean Stefancic, *No Mercy: How Conservative Think Tanks and Foundations Changed America's Social Agenda* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); and Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- ¹⁷ See, for example, Joseph N. Cappella, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Larry Sabato, *Feeding Frenzy: How Attack Journalism has Transformed American Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1991).
- ¹⁸ John Gastil, "Communication as Deliberation: A Non-deliberative Polemic on Communication Theory," in *Communication as . . . : Stances on theory*, eds. G.J. Shepherd, J. St. John, and T. Striphas (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 169.
- ¹⁹ See Celeste Condit, "The Rhetor as Empath," *Western Journal of Communication* 57 (1993): 178-190 for an interesting examination of the concept of hegemony from this perspective.
- ²⁰ Kevin Mattson, "Do Americans Really Want Deliberative Democracy?" *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 5 (2002): 328.
- ²¹ For information on attributional egoism, see Melvin L. Snyder, Walter G. Stephan, and David Rosenfield, "Attributional Egoism," in *New Directions in Attribution Research*, Vol. 2. eds. J. H. Harvey, W. Ickes, and R. F. Kidd (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1978); and Melvin L., Snyder, Walter G. Stephan, and David Rosenfield, "Egoism and Attribution," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 33 (1976): 435-441.
- ²² For information on the NIF style, visit www.nifi.org, or see Keith Melville, Taylor L. Willingham, and John Dedrick, "National Issues Forums: A Network of Communities Promoting Public Deliberation," in *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the 21st Century*, eds. John Gastil and Peter Levine (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 37-58.
- ²³ Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 9.
- ²⁴ *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.
- ²⁵ David Mathews, *Politics for People: Finding a Responsible Public Voice*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: U of Illinois Press, 1999), 235.
- ²⁶ Stephen W. Littlejohn and Kathy Domenici, *Engaging Communication in Conflict: Systemic Practice* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001), 48.
- ²⁷ This was a phrase used by trainer Doug Sarno during IAP2 training workshops Martin attended in September 2007.
- ²⁸ See Charlan J. Nemeth and Jack A. Goncalo, "Influence and Persuasion in Small Groups," in *Persuasion: Psychological Insights and Perspectives*, eds. T. C. Brook and M. C. Green (New York: Sage Publications, 2005), 171-195.

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- ²⁹ Information on NIF issue books is available through www.nifi.org.
- ³⁰ Visit the NCDD resource exchange page at <http://www.thataway.org/exchange/>.
- ³¹ The Harwood Group, *College Students Talk Politics* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 1993), 5.
- ³² Jill J. McMillan and Katy J. Harriger, "College Students and Deliberation: A Benchmark Study," *Communication Education* 513 (2002): 239.
- ³³ Cliff Zukin, Scott Keeter, Molly Andolina, Krista Jenkins, Michael X. Delli Carpini, *A New Engagement: Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 188. They also wrote, "A consistent theme of social and political analysis over the past four decades has been the gradual disengagement of the American citizenry from public life, and especially from traditional political participation," (3).
- ³⁴ David Mathews, "Politics from the Perspective of Citizens," *Connections* (2007), 4.
- ³⁵ Mathews, *Politics for People*, 35.
- ³⁶ For an interesting review of the "market" versus the "polis" perspectives on politics, see Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002).
- ³⁷ Pearce and Littlejohn, *Moral Conflict*, 70.
- ³⁸ Mathews, *Politics for People*, 154.
- ³⁹ Paul Waldman, "Deliberation in Practice: Connecting Theory to the Lives of Citizens," in *Politics, Discourse, and American Society: New Agendas*, eds. R. Hart and B. H. Sparrow (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 153.
- ⁴⁰ Robert C. Luskin and James S. Fishkin, "Deliberation and 'Better Citizens'" (2002), 10. Paper available online at <http://cdd.stanford.edu/research/papers/2002/bettercitizens.pdf>.
- ⁴¹ Torres, "Deliberative Democracy: A Survey of the Field," 13.
- ⁴² Much of the work on deliberative polling, which lends itself well to social scientific analysis, has provided evident of this impact. See, for example, Luskin and Fishkin, "Deliberation and 'Better Citizens,'" and Tina Nabatchi, *Deliberative Democracy: The Effects of Participation on Political Efficacy* (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2007).
- ⁴³ Mathews, *Politics for People*, 36.
- ⁴⁴ See Harry Boyte, *Everyday Politics: Reconnecting Citizens and Public Life* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
- ⁴⁵ David Mathews, *For Communities to Work* (Dayton, OH: Charles F. Kettering Foundation, 2002), 38.
- ⁴⁶ See Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick, "National Issues Forums," and David Mathews and Noëlle McAfee, *Making Choices Together: The Power of Public Deliberation* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 2003).
- ⁴⁷ Luskin & Fishkin, "Deliberation and 'Better Citizens,'" 3.

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- ⁴⁸ Noëlle McAfee, "The Problem of Moral Disagreement and the Necessity of Democratic Politics," *Connections* (Summer 2006): 10-12.
- ⁴⁹ See, for example, Keith Melville and John Dedrick, "Polarization and Political Gridlock," *Connections* (Winter 2002): 7-8; Juliet Potter and John Doble, "Below the Ice: How Polarized Is Americans' Thinking?" *Connections* (Winter 2005): 10-12.
- ⁵⁰ Simone Chambers, "Deliberative Democratic Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6 (2003): 318.
- ⁵¹ See, for example, David M. Ryfe, "Does Deliberative Democracy Work?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 8 (2005): 52; Samuel Freeman, "Deliberative Democracy: A Sympathetic Comment," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 29 (2000): 371-419; and Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick, "National Issues Forums."
- ⁵² Gastil, "Communication as Deliberation," 171.
- ⁵³ Cass R. Sunstein, *Designing Democracy: What Constitutions Do* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 45-47.
- ⁵⁴ For example, a local effort to alleviate some of the difficulties tied to lack of health care coverage was questioned by an activist group seeking a national single payer plan. Local "band aid" efforts were seen as detrimental to the national campaign.
- ⁵⁵ Ned Crosby and Doug Nethercut, "Citizens Juries: Creating a Trustworthy Voice of the People," in *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook*, 111-119.
- ⁵⁶ Nemeth and Goncalo, "Influence and Persuasion in Small Groups," 171-195.
- ⁵⁷ See, for example, the Civic Mission of Schools campaign: <http://www.civicmissionofschoools.org/>.
- ⁵⁸ Littlejohn and Domenici, *Engaging Communication*, 28.
- ⁵⁹ This quote was used during Martin's IAP2 training and struck a particular chord.
- ⁶⁰ Gerald Graff, *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), viii.
- ⁶¹ A great number of sources could be cited here, but we will highlight these in particular: Michael K. Briand, "Knowledge, Judgment, and Deliberative Politics," *Higher Education Exchange* (2006): 5-11; Robert Beiner, *Political Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); and Eugene Garver, *Aristotle's Rhetoric: The Art of Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- ⁶² Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment*, 30.
- ⁶³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (1970; reprint, New York: Continuum, 1993).
- ⁶⁴ John Dewey, *The School and Society: Being Three Lectures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900), 29.

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- ⁶⁵ Reciprocity is a key aspect of the defense of deliberative democracy by Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson. See Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement*; Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).
- ⁶⁶ Littlejohn and Domenici, *Engaging Communication*, 76.
- ⁶⁷ C. Johnson and L. Vinson, "Placement and Frequency of Powerless Talk and Impression Formation," *Communication Quarterly* 38 (1990): 325-333.
- ⁶⁸ Two particularly useful sources include: Sam Kaner, *Facilitators Guide to Participatory Decision-Making*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons/Jossey-Bass, 2007); and Roger M. Schwarz, *The Skilled Facilitator: A Comprehensive Resource for Consultants, Facilitators, Managers, Trainers, and Coaches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).
- ⁶⁹ Membership in the NCDD, for example, provides discounts on 18 different dialogue- or deliberation-related training programs. The list is available at: http://www.thataway.org/?page_id=785.
- ⁷⁰ Torres, "Deliberative Democracy: A Survey of the Field."
- ⁷¹ Mathews, *Politics for People*, 244.
- ⁷² David Mathews, ". . . afterthoughts," *Kettering Review* (Fall 2006): 68.
- ⁷³ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
- ⁷⁴ See, for example, John W. Bowers, Donovan Ochs, and Richard J. Jensen, *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control*, 2nd ed., (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1993); Charles J. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith, Robert E. Denton Jr., *Persuasion and Social Movements*, 5th ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2007).
- ⁷⁵ For more information on this issue, see Martín Carcasson, "The Four Paradoxes of Poverty Politics: The Case for Rhetorical Mediation" (paper presented at the National Communication Association Conference, San Antonio, TX, 2006).
- ⁷⁶ Mathews, *Politics for People*, 46.
- ⁷⁷ David Mathews, "Community Politics: A Lens for Seeing the Whole Story of Kettering Research," *Connections* (Winter 2006): 4.
- ⁷⁸ Randy Nielsen, "Dealing with the Problems Communities Face," *Connections* (Winter 2005): 15.
- ⁷⁹ For an introduction to the concept of democratic governance, see Harry C. Boyte, "Reframing Democracy: Governance, Civic Agency, and Politics," *Public Administration Review* 65 (2005): 536-546; or National League of Cities, *Building Democratic Governance: Tools and Structures for Engaging Citizens* (Washington, DC: National League of Cities Center for Research & Municipal Programs, 2005). The National League of Cities Democratic Governance project has a number of resources available online at http://www.nlc.org/topics/index.aspx?SectionID=governance_structure.
- ⁸⁰ Kenneth R. McLeroy, Daniel Bibeau, Allan Steckler, and Karen Glanz, "An Ecological Perspective on Health Promotion Programs," *Health Education Quarterly* 15 (1988): 351-377.

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- ⁸¹ Visit www.pathwayspastpoverty.org for more information.
- ⁸² Insights into this distinction were derived from early drafts of Matt Leighninger's paper written for a project sponsored by the Democracy Imperative and connected to the *Journal of Public Deliberation*, which Martin is involved with.
- ⁸³ See, for example, the work done by the Policy Consensus Initiative: <http://www.policyconsensus.org/>.
- ⁸⁴ For more information on Study Circles/Everyday Democracy, see www.everyday-democracy.org.
- ⁸⁵ Matt Leighninger uses the term *democratic organizing* to describe the work being done in communities that essentially combined deliberative democracy and community organizing. 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), 3. Martha McCoy and Patrick Scully also discuss the important connections between deliberation and community organizing in "Deliberative Dialogue to Expand Civic Engagement: What Kind of Talk Does Democracy Need?" *National Civic Review* 91 (2002): 117-135.
- ⁸⁶ See Leighninger, *Next Form of Democracy*; Archon Fung, *Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Tina Nabatchi, "Deliberative Democracy: The Effects of Participation on Political Efficacy"; John Nalbandian, "Facilitating Community, Enabling Democracy: New Roles for Local Government Managers," *Public Administration Review*, 59.3 (1999): 187-197. Rosemary O'Leary, Catherine Gerard, and Lisa Blomgren Bingham also edited a special December 2006 issue of *Public Administration Review* that focused on Collaborative Public Management.
- ⁸⁷ Steve Burkholder, Bruce Feustel, Miles Rapoport, and Curt Wenson, "The Real World of Deliberative Democracy: A Roundtable Discussion," *National Civic Review* 93.4 (2004): 28-32.
- ⁸⁸ For copies of the report and related material from the National League of Cities, visit http://www.nlc.org/resources_for_cities/programs_services/697.aspx.
- ⁸⁹ Mathews, *Politics for People*, 2.
- ⁹⁰ E.J. Dionne Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 332.
- ⁹¹ Information pulled from: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/108142/Confidence-Congress-Lowest-Ever-Any-US-Institution.aspx>.
- ⁹² Information pulled from: <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/leadership/images/CPLpdf/172508%20nli%20index%202007.pdf>.
- ⁹³ Briand, *Practical Politics*, 82, 196.
- ⁹⁴ Mathews, *Politics for People*, 22-23.
- ⁹⁵ Abby Williamson and Archon Fung, "Public Deliberation: Where We Are and Where We Can Go?" *National Civic Review* 93.4 (2004): 9.
- ⁹⁶ This claim was a primary argument advanced by trainer Doug Sarno at the IAP2 workshops Martin attended.
- ⁹⁷ Leighninger, *Next Form of Democracy*.

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- ⁹⁸ Hans Bleiker is the lead instructor for the Institute for Participatory Management and Planning, whose training Martín attended in April 2008.
- ⁹⁹ Phillip Lurie and Alice Diebel, “Bridging the Divide between the Public and Government,” *Connections* (Summer 2006): 25.
- ¹⁰⁰ Doug Henton and John Melville, *Collaborative Governance: A Guide for Grantmakers* (Menlo Park, CA: William and Flora Hewitt Foundation, 2005), 6. This document is available online at:
<http://www.hewlett.org/news/collaborative-governance-a-guide-for-grantmakers>
<http://www.hewlett.org/NR/rdonlyres/7D7A7C78-9B9B-421D-91BB-D92351CD2F30/0/HewlettCGWeb4.pdf>
- ¹⁰¹ Mathews, *Politics for People*, 89.
- ¹⁰² The IAP2 spectrum is available at: http://www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/IAP2%20Spectrum_vertical.pdf.
- ¹⁰³ This report is available online at: <http://www.policyconsensus.org/publications/reports/docs/Crossroads.pdf>.
- ¹⁰⁴ Some of the most important criticism of deliberation, which should be read by all deliberative practitioners, include L. M. Sanders, “Against Deliberation,” *Political Theory* 25 (1997): 347-376; Iris M. Young, “Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy,” *Political Theory* 29.5 (2001): 670-690; and Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. C. Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 109-142. Also see Archon Fung, “Deliberation’s Darker Side: Six Questions for Iris Marion Young and Jane Mansbridge,” *National Civic Review* 93.4 (2004): 47-54.
- ¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Ian Shapiro, “Enough of Deliberation: Politics Is about Interests and Power,” in *Deliberative Politics: Essays on Democracy and Disagreement*, ed. Stephen Macedo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- ¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of “forum shopping” as a danger for deliberation, see Archon Fung and E.O. Wright, “Deepening Democracy: Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance,” *Politics & Society* 29.1 (2001): 5-41.
- ¹⁰⁷ This particular point was made by Terry Amsler, program director of the Institute for Local Government’s Collaborative Governance Initiative, at a Policy Consensus Initiative conference attended by Martín.
- ¹⁰⁸ Levine, Fung, and Gastil, “Future Directions for Public Deliberation,” 278.
- ¹⁰⁹ See Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment*.
- ¹¹⁰ In Colorado, for example, the “people” have approved a number of contradictory fiscal policy measures that have caused a significant crisis in the ability of the state to address issues. In addition, most referendum campaigns represent the worst of political communication and are designed, like candidate campaigns, not to enlighten the citizenry and help them address tough choices, but rather to win votes at any cost.
- ¹¹¹ Gastil, “Deliberation as Communication,” 169.
- ¹¹² Steven Hill, “Divided We Stand: The Polarizing of American Politics,” *National Civic Review* 94.4 (2005): 3.
- ¹¹³ Beiner, *Political Judgment*, xiv.

¹¹⁴ Fung and Wright, “Deepening Democracy,” 5.

¹¹⁵ Mark Button and David Ryfe, “What Can We Learn from the Practice of Deliberative Democracy in *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the 21st Century*, eds. John Gastil and Peter Levine (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 27.

¹¹⁶ For some of the key philosophical defenses of deliberation, see Joshua Cohen, “Deliberation and democratic Legitimacy,” In *The Good Policy: Normative Analysis of the State*, eds. A. Hamlin and P. Pettit (Cambridge, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 17-34; John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1993); James Bohman, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

¹¹⁷ Torres, “Deliberative Democracy: A Survey of the Field,” 13.

¹¹⁸ Martín is currently developing a paper focused on the misconceptions of “on the ground” deliberation. [See also Alison Kadlec and Will Friedman, “Deliberative democracy and the Problem of Power.” *Journal of Public Deliberation* 3\(2007\): 1-26., to be delivered at the 2008 National Communication Association convention in November 2008.](#)

¹¹⁹ See Martín Carcasson and Elinor Christopher’s separate report to the Kettering Foundation analyzing five current NIF Public Policy Institutes training material.

¹²⁰ Feel free to contact Martín Carcasson for information on their workshops and the material that has been developed for them. Martín’s email is cpd@colostate.edu.

¹²¹ Australian philosopher John S. Dryzek has used the phrase *the deliberative turn in democracy theory* in his work. See, for example, *Discursive Democracy: Politics, Policy, and Political Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990); James Bohman, “Survey Article: The Coming of Age of Deliberative Democracy,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 6.4 (1998): 400-425.